

**The Paradoxical Presentation of the Uncanny: The Path of ‘Failure’
as a Dialectical Method in Conceptual Art Practice**

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PhD Thesis

Abstract

This practice-based research and this thesis aims to explore and validate a practical method that evokes the uncanny in the ontological sense in the practice of conceptual art. Much prior visual-art practice on the uncanny has largely remained at the level of affect and phenomenal appearance. While such work has substantially expanded the presentation of the uncanny feeling beyond linguistic structures, it has still fallen short of giving adequate form to the ontological conception of the uncanny or uncanniness. In many cases, practices centered on the uncanny have relied on horror, eeriness, or alienated appearances at the level of the work's surface in order to agitate the "familiar/strange" binary within the cognitive structure. By contrast, this thesis defines the uncanny as the collapse of the grounds of judgment and the instability of the subject-position, rather than as an object-level effect of defamiliarization. Based on Heidegger and Lacan's ontological positioning on related issues, the study contends that the oscillation presented by the work should be situated "between both familiar and unfamiliar / neither familiar nor unfamiliar," that is, compared with the uncertainty in the cognitive content in past practices, this study contends that the occurrence of the uncanny depends on creating the uncertainty of the cognitive structure. Accordingly, the research utilizes "failure" as the internal driving force of negative practice (rather than as an unsuccessful outcome) to construct a pathway of conceptual representation that leads toward the uncanny, and ultimately proposes a creative strategy centered on a double-structural paradoxical propositional model. Methodologically, given the project's parallel development of theory and practice, the study adopts an iterative cycle of "theoretical reflection — practical verification — theoretical critique — re-making" to enact a dialectic research method of know-that, know-how, and know-what. Within several case studies, paradoxical propositions are designed and tested, and a set of operational evaluation indicators is proposed.

Keyword: the uncanny, paradox, non-truth, Conceptual art, self-reference, failure

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Introduction

In numerous works of philosophy, literature, and art, a unique mode of emotional experience and cognitive recognition has always deeply attracted me. It is difficult to define this experience with a precise name—neither in Chinese nor in English can it be adequately captured by a single word. Yet, across different historical contexts, we can observe various terms attempting to gesture toward it, approach it, and name it. Just as *Daoist* philosophy uses “wu (无)” (non-being) as a method to guide people to follow nature and experience the unnameable “*Dao* (道),” representing an answer to the ultimate question about being and nothingness; and just as Buddhist philosophy employs “emptiness” as a negative method to dissolve the dispute between being and nothingness; just as the “thing-in-itself” constructs a compromise boundary for the finitude of existence and the possibility of nothingness, thus postponing the encounter with the answer to the question (avoiding the traumatic confrontation with truth) (Žižek, 2008, pp.215-216); and just as the “Absolute Spirit” transforms the response to the question or the traumatic confrontation with truth, into the fundamental driving force of the dialectical movement of self-sublation in the realm of appearances; just as *Dasein* and *Sisyphus*, whether in a posture of anxiety or of rebellion, face the loss of connection between the “being-in-the-world” of all things and people themselves—a loss that becomes a cognitive structure, the negative foundation or original coordinate of symbolic structure, which psychoanalytic theory captures with the term “the Real.” These formulations, from various fields and perspectives, articulate human understanding of the world and of the self. But there is a commonality hidden behind all of these expressions: they all seem like constantly attempting various detours around a gap in cognition; or it is because these discourses consistently fail to touch a certain position that can be revealed as a gap. This position, indirectly disclosed by its very existence or brought into being by the inability to disclose it, is the persistent questioning of the metaphysical ultimate question of being and nothingness. What has always profoundly drawn me in my research, practice, and creation is not so much these concrete answers, nor entirely the logical processes that give rise to them, but rather the emotional experience or cognitive pattern that operates similarly within these processes of answering—the negative experience of “failure” in attempting to respond to the question, which seems to universally underlie the appearances of these ultimate-answer attempts. Therefore, this experience of “failure,” concealed within metaphysical modes of thinking, constitutes the first thread of this research.

However, it must be clarified firstly that the “failure” discussed in this text cannot be simply equated with a static, unsuccessful outcome in the everyday sense, nor is it merely an operational setback in attempting to respond to the question of truth. Rather, it refers to the paradoxical utility of the incompleteness of the structure of the ultimate questions’ answers. In other words, the term “failure” as advocated in this thesis does not refer to a definite outcome that has not occurred, or has not been successful, but

instead designates a generative path constituted by its negative force. Whether it functions as the result of the structural finitude of the question itself, thereby preserving the openness of that structure through its very existence, or as the immanent negative force of the question that drives the movement of retention and sublation beyond the question, this “failure” cannot be regarded as an epistemological incapacity nor as a transcendent endpoint of nihilism. Rather, it is emphasized here as a marker of negative praxis—it marks both the structural rupture encountered when one attempts to cross the ontological boundary, and the fundamental driving force behind the very attempt to traverse the limitation of the question. It is at once the reason for the beginning of this path, the result at its end, and the foundational coordinate of the process that constitutes the path itself.

Thus, in light of this paradoxical character, the “failure” path discussed in this text, on the one hand, serves as a revelation of the essence of ultimate questions or questions of truth through a negative perspective. As Heidegger pointed out, truth, in its essence governed by negativity, reveals itself through its *non-truth*, that is, through *unconcealment* (Heidegger, 2002, p.31). It is through its role as the embodiment of negativity, rather than as the representation of a negated, definite result, that it transcends the limitations of the epistemological structure which provides us with a so-called “limit of truth” or “finite truth” derived from the failure of answering¹. That is to say, along this path, through the experience of the failure of language in addressing the question and the collapse of the subject’s cognitive structure, what is revealed is both the negative essence of truth, relative to the finitude of the human, as the cause of “failure,” and also reveals the unconcealed result due to this “failure” process, or the possibilities opened up by the differences and misplacements between language and objects caused by “failure” are the result of the issue of truth². Therefore, in this research, the term “failure” used to describe this path will be carefully enclosed in quotation marks to distinguish it from a mere unsuccessful result in the conventional sense.

On the other hand, this path of “failure” not only reveals the inherent structural foundation and openness of the question of truth, through its paradoxical mode of unconcealing by concealment; at the same time, through the experience of this

¹ The “limit of truth” seems to imply in itself that there is something else beyond truth, or that truth has come to an end. Derrida, J. (1993). *Aporias: dying--awaiting (one another at) the "limits of truth"* (*mourir--s' attendre aux "limites de la vérité"*). Stanford University Press. pp.1-2

² “as if truth were a pure unconcealment that has rid itself of everything concealed. If truth could accomplish this it would no longer be itself. Denial, by way of the twofold concealing, belongs to the essence of truth as unconcealment. Truth, in its essence, is un-truth.” Heidegger, M. (2002). *Off the beaten track*.p.31

“This does not mean that the *differance* that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified-in-differentpresent. *Differance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences.” Derrida, J. (1982). *differance*,p.11.

paradoxical “failure” as the negative basis of the cognitive problem, it also allows the questioner, in the collapse of the originally stable, definite and daily cognitive structure, retrospectively realizes that this “failure” which leads to the collapse of the structure is the fundamental driving force and cause for its cognitive structure. In other words, within this path of “failure,” the negativity that constitutes the answer to the question becomes the basis on which we construct a response through negativity itself. Just as the uncertainty of things becomes the ground for the possibility of Dasein’s existence, thus Dasein is *being-towards-death*³ (Heidegger, 1962, p.294) ; just as it is the silent world that makes the loss of meaning into an absurd nothingness, thereby making human praxis the guarantor of meaning⁴(Camus, 1991, p.15); just as the “*Dao*,” manifest in nature, resists any form of subjective and definite grasp, thereby allowing “non-action (无为),” a mode of grasping grounded in negativity, to become the method by which one merges with nature and the *Dao* (Zhang, 1982, p.303); and just as only in the transition from epistemological impotence to ontological impossibility can we, through this negativity as a core, organize a movement of sublation toward phenomena as the minimal epistemic foundation (Žižek, 2008, p.201). This negativity as the ground of cognition can be regarded as the function of “failure” from the subject’s perspective, and it is similarly revealed in a paradoxical form through the path of “failure”—namely, that the path of understanding and clarifying the question, constructed on the negative basis of the failure to respond to it, discloses the groundlessness of our original epistemic foundation for knowing and grasping the question. And this cognitive uncertainty is retroactively affirmed, in the course of this process, as our most primordial state of being—before the construction of any linguistic structure—our “thrownness,” the essential condition of Dasein, that is, the uncanniness⁵. Thus, the path of “failure” is not only one that clarifies, through the impossibility of answering ultimate questions, the paradoxical nature of concealment-as-unconcealment; it also elucidates the paradoxical character of the subject’s retroactive construction of its essential uncertainty through the impossibility of arriving at a determinate result , from the perspective of the questioner’s impotence to respond.

³ “As potentiality-for-Being, Dasein cannot outstrip the possibility of death. Death is the possibility of the absolute impossibility of Dasein.” Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1927) p.294

⁴ “...what is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart. The absurd depends as much on man as on the world.” Camus, A. (1991). *The myth of Sisyphus and other essays* (J. O’Brien, Trans.). Vintage International. (Original work published 1942)p.15

⁵ “...to be the Uncanniest is the basic trait of the human essence, into which every other trait must always be drawn.” Heidegger, M. (2014). *Introduction to metaphysics*. Yale University Press. p.174

“When Dasein “understands” uncanniness in the everyday manner, it does so by turning away from it in falling; in this turning-away, the “not-at-home” gets ‘dimmed down’.” Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1927) p.234

In order to construct the conceptual art practice pathway centered on “failure” that this research aims to establish, namely, to present a fundamental destabilization and threat directed at the very foundation of the viewer’s cognitive structure. I selected, as the expressive core of the conceptual art practice, the deconstructive tool most closely aligned with this aim and most widely discussed in the postmodern context in relation to the structure of subjectivity: the uncanny. In this study, the positioning of this concept begins with *The Uncanny* by Sigmund Freud. As the most widely circulated modern interpretation of the concept, Freud defines it as a particular emotional experience elicited by specific aesthetic objects, namely a conflict of judgment concerning an aesthetic object that simultaneously appears familiar and unfamiliar. However, in this study, drawing on the ontological account of uncanniness proposed by Martin Heidegger, in which uncanniness is understood as the most primordial essence of Dasein, as well as the supplementary discussions of the concept from the perspective of structural paradox by philosophers such as Jacques Derrida and Nicholas Royle, I do not treat the uncanny merely as an emotional response to a particular aesthetic object in accordance with Freud’s definition. Rather, I regard the uncanny as a paradoxical form of self-questioning that occurs at the level of the subject’s position, produced through the disruption of the basic coordinates of the cognitive structure. In other words, it is precisely the destabilization of the subject’s position caused by a paradoxical judgment of the object, where the viewer, through the experience of engaging with the artwork and through questioning the identity of the structure of judgment itself via the act of judgment, that enables the viewer to reveal the internal Other within themselves and to lose the previously unquestioned identity of the subject. It is this dual destabilization occurring at the level of the subject that unsettles the foundation of the cognitive structure and causes the individual to fall into the most fundamental condition of uncertainty through the destabilization of belief.

Therefore, in this study, the uncanny does not refer to an emotional response elicited by unknown, unfamiliar, or self-contradictory experiences of objects. Rather, it refers to an experience, triggered by external objects, in which the subject encounters the failure of their own cognitive structure. “Failure,” as a method that reveals the negative foundation of cognition (uncertainty or indeterminacy) through the construction of paradoxical propositions, functions within the process of conceptual art practice by establishing such paradoxical propositions and thereby inviting the aesthetic subject into a condition in which their symbolic grasp of the artwork coexists with the negation of that very grasp. Through this coexistence, the subject’s experience of uncertainty is evoked. This constitutes the pathway through which the uncanny occurs spontaneously when the viewer begins to question their own acts of judgment in confronting the artwork. In other words, through the method of “failure,” and through the threat posed to the cognitive structure constructed by the aesthetic subject, the uncanny is able to escape the fate of being represented or objectified, and to obtain the possibility of unconcealment in the form of “non-truth” within a state of epistemic uncertainty. Therefore, strictly speaking, the uncanny here should not be

understood as a representable or objectifiable concept endowed with materiality or visual form. The relationship between the uncanny and “failure” should instead be understood in the following way: on the one hand, the uncanny is the phenomenological manifestation of the structural rupture or negative drive exposed through “failure”; on the other hand, “failure” constitutes the structural condition through which the central void of the uncanny itself which is the essence of the human that precedes linguistic structure can be revealed.

In response to this negative structural relation of mutual conditions of manifestation, namely, providing the viewer with a continuous paradoxical experience arising from a coexistence between the symbolic grasp of the aesthetic object and the questioning of that grasp (or the provision of an alternative grasp of equal status), I propose a conceptual art practice based on a double paradoxical proposition. More specifically, on the one hand, propositions are established to disrupt the certainty of the artwork’s symbolic reference to the existence of things in the external world, thereby disturbing the viewer’s understanding of “what the artwork is talking about.” On the other hand, propositions are also established to disrupt the certainty produced by the artwork’s reference to and guarantee of its own identity within the context of contemporary art, thereby disturbing the viewer’s understanding of “what the artwork truly is.” Through the coexistence or gradual presentation of these paradoxical propositions of external reference and self-reference, I will ultimately combine theoretical analysis with the presentation of practical results in order to demonstrate the positive role of the method of “failure” in realizing the uncertainty of the subject position implied by the uncanny, as well as to clarify the uncanny as the internal driving force that enables the pathway of “failure” to emerge. Specifically, this thesis is mainly divided into four chapters to address two central questions:

1. How does the path of practicing and experiencing “failure” in art locate the pure uncertainty of the uncanny as the essence of human being?

This question is primarily addressed in Chapters One and Two. The first part of the study draws upon my pre-doctoral artistic practice to explain the motivation and origins of this research’s focus on “failure” as its core, while also identifying the research problem and its ontological connection with *the uncanny*, specifically, why the representation of *the uncanny* can serve as a concentrated manifestation of the path of “failure.”

More specifically, Chapter One aims to clarify the origin of the research problem, namely, why I take “failure” and the uncanny as the core of the artistic practice in this project. This discussion primarily revolves around several earlier artistic works that proved formative for this doctoral project—Yin and Yang, Three Produced All Things, and Struggle and Harmony—through which I examine my attempt to give form to a

metaphysical understanding of “failure,” as well as how these attempts at formalization proved unsuccessful. In this chapter, I emphasize that in the first two artworks, which respond to Daoist philosophy’s understanding of “failure” as a negative driving force, the works fall into a “successful” diagrammatic explanation. In doing so, they objectify the transcendent and generative concept of the Dao, turning it into a conceptual object. As a result, the works fail to present the problem itself and instead distance themselves from it. This constitutes a conceptual failure in responding to the problem. In the later group of works responding to existentialist philosophy’s interpretation of “failure,” I draw on the subject matter of the artwork through an interpretation of the story of Laocoön in the Homeric epics to illustrate how the representation of struggle successfully re-presented “failure” as a form of non-truth, understood as a negative conception of truth. However, by solidifying the process of failure into a result of failure, the work once again enclosed an open conception of truth within a determinate proposition. In doing so, it deprived the viewer of interpretative freedom and reduced “failure” from an extraordinary method of practice to an everyday object of aesthetic contemplation. This constitutes a methodological failure in responding to the problem. Through a reinterpretation of these two groups of works, this chapter argues that within the domain of the ultimate question concerning being and nothingness, the failure of method is equivalent to the failure of the idea itself. Reflecting on these two unsuccessful attempts, I therefore propose two prerequisites for realizing “failure”: the de-objectification of the result of the response, and a dependence on the path of the response itself. The outcome of this reflection clarifies the reason for this study’s pursuit of uncertainty, namely, that by pursuing the indeterminacy of propositional outcomes in artistic practice, the pathway of “failure” can be re-presented. The uncanny, as an experience of uncertainty produced by a contradiction within the subject’s cognition and by a doubt directed toward the structure of one’s own judgment, corresponds precisely to this pursuit and therefore becomes the central problem of the doctoral research.

The central task of Chapter Two is to clarify misunderstandings surrounding the representation of the uncanny through a critical analysis of the early failed practices, and to locate the proper condition for its occurrence, namely, the position of the subject. This chapter begins with a brief literature review of the uncanny. By outlining the analyses of the concept in modern scholarship by Sigmund Freud, Ernst Jentsch, Martin Heidegger, Thomas Nagel, and Nicholas Royle, I first distinguish the uncanny from phenomena such as horror or the grotesque at the level of appearance. Through a comparison between the representation of “fear” (aroused by a determinately unfamiliar object) in *Test-Portrait*, and the “panic” experienced by Gregor in *The Metamorphosis* by Franz Kafka, which is triggered by the failure of the structure of judgment, I argue that the essence of the uncanny does not lie in the uncertainty of external objects. Rather, it lies in the uncertainty of the structure upon which the subject relies in order to make judgments; it is the pure uncertainty that confronts the subject after being driven away from the “familiar home.” In the subsequent analyses of the works *Reflection* and *Uncertain Self*, the critique of the shortcomings of these

two projects further deepens this ontological position, which locates the essence of the uncanny in the uncertainty of the subject's position. Accordingly, in this chapter which focuses on clarifying the definition of the uncanny as it is used in this study, I emphasize that any attempt to represent the uncanny must return to its subjective position. The uncanny emerges when a person, confronted with the condition of being thrown into the world, simultaneously attempts to construct a "home" while repeatedly being driven away from it. This requires that artistic practice attend to two central points: 1. the non-objectified position of the subject; 2. a paradoxical mode of operation, in which "home" and "non-home" appear in a condition of paradoxical coexistence.

2. How can the practice of conceptual art evoke the uncertain experience of the uncanny through the construction of paradoxical propositions?

This question is primarily addressed in Chapters Three and Four. Building upon the clarification in the previous chapters of the conditions under which the uncertainty produced by an artwork can genuinely correspond to the representational requirements of the uncanny, this section focuses on identifying a repeatable path or practical paradigm that enables a successful "failure", namely, the use of paradoxical propositions to lead to the occurrence of uncertainty in the subjective position.

In Chapter Three, building upon the prerequisite conditions for locating the uncanny established in Chapter Two, the discussion begins to explore the first concrete pathway for realizing the representation of the uncanny: the paradox of a single structure. The central method is to shape the artwork into an "alien object" within the symbolic order to which it belongs. I first clarify the subject position in which the uncanny occurs through a distinction between Martin Heidegger's concepts of fear and *angst*(anxiety), and Jacques Lacan's concepts of desire and anxiety. Anxiety arises when the structure through which the subject "knows" and grasps things collapses, causing everything in the world to appear strange before the subject, and thereby rendering the subject's own situation unfamiliar as well. Such anxiety is triggered by an object that is "present yet absent," refusing to be symbolized. This object occupies the position of lack that ordinarily drives the operation of desire, and through its paradoxical status within the cognitive structure, it places the subject in a condition of uncertainty. Taking this understanding as its conceptual core, the chapter reflects upon and critiques the artistic practices of this stage. Through analyses of works such as *WoodWight* and the *Digital Sculpture* series, I explain the practical method for constructing the paradoxical proposition of an "alien object." The key lies in allowing the artwork to both belong to the structural order of its environment (or context) and yet stand outside of it (or even contradict it); it must remain related to the environment while simultaneously refusing to establish a determinate relation with it. In this way, a rupture of meaning is produced within the structure. This rupture turns the work into a paradoxical existence that cannot be reduced. However, the final part

of this chapter also points out a major challenge revealed through the practice and analysis of works such as *Alien Object–Fissure*. The contemporary art context provides the artwork with the identity of “artwork,” forming a self-referential closed structure. This guarantee of identity sublimates and solidifies the essential emptiness exposed by the work’s paradoxical nature into a “sublime object” that can be safely contemplated. As a result, the work slips once again from a hard-won condition of uncertainty back into a stubborn form of certainty, thereby obstructing the genuine occurrence of the uncanny. In order to avoid this interference, I experimented with more deceptive figurative forms (such as *The Watching Green* and *Through the Window*). Although these approaches can, to some extent, evoke a form of self-questioning, they still fail to fully resolve the problem of the artwork’s self-referential identity. This realization lays the groundwork for the introduction of a “double structural paradox” in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four, as the final chapter of this thesis, aims to address the problem raised at the end of Chapter Three, namely, how to overcome the interference of certainty produced by the artwork’s self-referential identity, while continuing the paradoxical propositional structure established in the previous chapter. To this end, I propose the final practical strategy of this research: the double structural paradox. The core of this strategy is the construction of a “deception of deception.” Its inspiration derives from Jacques Lacan’s discussion of the anecdote concerning the painting contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius. If the artwork’s symbolic reference to external existing things constitutes the first deception (the work pretends to be the representation of something), then the guarantee of its self-referential identity constitutes the second deception (the work pretends to “honestly” present itself, elevating appearance into essence). The goal of the double structural paradox is to simultaneously expose both forms of deception through paradoxical propositional operations. In doing so, the failure of referring to the other and the failure of referring to itself occur at the same time, placing the viewer as far as possible into a state of uncertainty—one that arises because the cognitive structure no longer provides an objectively stable support for their judgments about things. Through successive testing and revision across a series of practical projects (such as the “headless figure” in fig.23, the “falling glass cup” in fig.30–31, “introduction” in fig.32, and the “alienated figure” in fig.33), I ultimately realized a more ideal form of the double structural paradox in works such as *The Paradox of the Waiting Figure* (fig.34) and *The Paradox of the Falling Glass Cup* (fig.31). In these works, the reference to external things fails, and the reference to the work itself also fails, thereby blocking the viewer’s ability to obtain any form of certainty so far as possible. Ultimately, through the coexistence and mutual negation of these two paradoxes, the “essential lack” of the artwork and the “inner lack” that drives the viewer’s search converge in a form of negative identity. The work thus becomes the embodiment of the subject’s internal uncertainty, successfully evoking in the viewer an experience of the negative ground of their own essence or cognitive structure—the uncanny.

Methodology

As previously outlined, this practice-based research project is grounded in the medium of conceptual art. Its ultimate aim is to transform an abstract, knowledge-driven philosophical idea into a sensuous, intuitive experience provided by an artwork—through a dialectical process that operates via paradox. In other words, the central aim of this research method is to experiment, through conceptual art practice, with an artistic methodology based on a “double paradoxical structure,” in order to explore how such a structure can maintain the viewer’s experience of judgment in a state of uncertainty during the act of viewing, namely, the return through the pathway of “failure” to the ontological position of the uncanny discussed in this thesis. More specifically, at the theoretical level, the objective of this research method is to investigate, through a dialectical structural approach, whether the uncanny can be generated through structural mechanisms, rather than merely through narrative strategies or psychological explanations. At the practical level, the objective is to examine whether a method that enables an artwork to simultaneously realize the paradoxical dissolution of its reference to external objects and the paradoxical dissolution of its reference to its own identity as an artwork can possess a degree of replicability and operational feasibility. Therefore, to avoid falling into the trap of merely interpreting theory and literature, this study adopts a theoretical thinking–practice test–theoretical correction method, designed to balance the intellectual and sensory dimensions of experience within conceptual art.

The structure of this research mirrors the aesthetic model proposed by Sol LeWitt. In his essay *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* (LeWitt, 1967, pp.79-83), LeWitt emphasizes that in conceptual art, the conception of the work (the pre-established idea) and the realization of the work (the post-facto perception of the piece) exist in a complementary relationship that is often marked by loose or even contradictory logic. Using Robin Nelson’s terminology, this can be understood as the displacement and misalignment between “know-that” and “know-how” being brought into critical reflection and synthesis through “know-what” (Nelson, 2013, pp.23-47). Nelson defines “know-that” as propositional knowledge (Nelson, 2013, p.32), i.e., factual or theoretical knowledge derived from reading and research, often referred to as “declarative” or “theoretical” knowledge. “Know-how” (Nelson, 2013, p.43, p.50), on the other hand, is procedural knowledge, namely acquired through a “source–path–goal” structure of embodied practice. It involves implicit, tacit knowledge developed through the repetition of complex task-based actions, essentially, the ability to do something. “Know-what”, as a form of critical reflexivity, is defined as “what can be gleaned through an informed reflexivity about the processes of making and its modes of knowing” (Nelson, 2013, p.52). It denotes the ability to discern *how* and *why* certain kinds of knowledge are relevant (or irrelevant) to specific research goals, and how to resolve or strategically deploy the tensions between them.

In my conceptual art practice and research, the propositional formulation of ideas prior to creation serves as a reflective engagement with the explicit “know-that” knowledge gained from textual readings on the uncanny and paradox. These explicit forms of knowledge provide the conceptual, philosophical, cultural, and historical foundations for the artwork. However, in terms of research methods, it merely occupies the position of thesis, providing a starting point for critical reflection. In the conceptual art practice, the process of organizing these ideas into paradoxical propositions through logical contradiction and rendering them into tangible, sensuous visual experiences constructs the research’s path of “failure” from concept to artwork. This is where the recessive “know-how” emerges: the experiential knowledge gained through the manipulation of material, medium, form, and technique in the realization of these paradoxes. However, the outcomes of practice often deviate from the idealized conceptual formulations; the work’s actualization tends to fall short of the intended expression, or, as LeWitt might argue, it *should* fall short. “Know-what” functions here as the critical reconciliatory force between these two poles: it seeks a balance between concept and material expression across varying contexts. In other words, it adopts a dialectical approach to the contradiction between conception and execution, i.e., by reflecting on the coexistence of negativity between the former two, the abandonment of the abstraction of explicit knowledge and the retention of negative power are achieved in the limitations of the expression of “know-that” by “know-how”. In this sense, the study departs from Joseph Kosuth’s aesthetic model, which defines conceptual art as the complete expression of an idea (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p.xx), implying that the artist should correct any deviations of “know-how” from “know-that.” Instead, it aligns more closely with Sol LeWitt’s aesthetic vision, that is, to recognize and magnify the positive role of the contradiction between pre-conception and post-reflection on practice, and to achieve the construction of a loose or contradictory logical structure of the work through the misalignment between these two experiences (LeWitt, 1967, pp.79-83). It is through exposing the internal contradictions of the concept that the artwork escapes being a crystallization of the artist’s private discourse, thus transferring the interpretive agency to each viewer who engages in a form of negative praxis. Therefore, in the framework of “know-what,” the exposure or amplification of the contradiction between different forms of knowledge is more aligned with the theme of representing the uncanny than any attempt to reconcile or obscure that contradiction. The search for paradox within the conceptual proposition and the tension between theory and practice within the research structure together form the dialectical foundation of this study’s methodological approach.

In this research, the process of theoretical reflection (conceptual formulation) – practical exploration – theoretical correction corresponds to the methodological framework of know-that, know-how, and know-what. More specifically, know-that, as a form of prior explicit knowledge and theoretical reflection, includes both the relevant theoretical research concerning the uncanny as related to “failure,” and the formulation of conceptual propositions in the pre-practice stage. The latter, in

particular, occupies a crucial position within this dialectical methodological structure: as the starting point of the artist's practice, the conceptual proposition simultaneously becomes the object through which the material artwork negates the artist's subjective design. Beyond the knowledge provided by theoretical literature, this stage primarily manifests in the structural design of concepts during the early phase of artistic practice. Each artwork is organized around the same structural objective: to construct a paradoxical proposition at the level of the object while simultaneously constructing a paradoxical proposition concerning the artwork's self-referential identity. For example, this may involve the displacement between the expected reference of the work and its actual presentation, and the way in which this displacement provokes both a guarantee of self-referential identity and a lack of meaning that negates that very identity. The theoretical analysis of this propositional structure, together with the specific contexts or representational objects attached to it through choices made from the artist's perspective, jointly constitute the know-that that functions as the point of departure.

In the subsequent know-how stage, that is, during the concrete process of practice, I mainly rely on the real-time generative system of the artwork and the continuously changing real-time feedback available to the viewer as the principal means of realizing the practical objectives. Accordingly, the primary practical method in this stage is to use the visual programming software TouchDesigner to conduct real-time editing of pre-recorded or live-captured video images in order to produce immediate feedback to the viewer's behavior. This software is a node-based visual programming development platform widely used in interactive media and real-time visual generation. It allows artists to construct dynamic system logics by connecting different functional modules (nodes) rather than writing traditional linear code. As a result, it enables relatively straightforward manipulation — such as interference, substitution, and transformation—of real-time captured images of viewers or external objects according to predesigned processes and systems, while simultaneously interacting with output devices. Within this research, the typical workflow can be summarized as follows: capturing camera input or importing video footage → applying a series of effect nodes (distortion, delay, particleization, and video compositing) to introduce interference → outputting the result through a projector to interact with the physical environment. Most of the works are exhibited in a real-time operational mode rather than through pre-rendered media. In this stage, the integration of digital imagery with physical space becomes a crucial practical strategy. Specifically, most of the artworks project digitally generated imagery onto surfaces of objects within the real environment (such as tree trunks, bushes, or translucent fabrics) using projectors. In this way, the artwork is not merely treated as a film displayed on a screen, but rather as the creation of a spatial field in which viewers can actively participate. By inviting viewers to engage in the interaction between the physical and the digital that unfolds within the real environment, the work can move beyond the status of a visual image that maintains a safe psychological distance and can be fully grasped by the viewer. Instead, the viewer's experience of the artwork becomes part

of the viewer's own lived experience. This experience of one's own experience constitutes an important practical realization of a key feature of the uncanny, namely, the double.

From another perspective, when the familiar and safe distance that viewers normally maintain from an artwork is threatened or even removed—either by the artwork's intrusion into reality (the appearance of digital images within the physical world) or by the inclusion of the viewer's own image within the representational content of the work—the identity of the viewer (as a detached observer or voyeur) is forcibly transformed into that of a participant. Under such conditions, the boundaries between the structure of the artwork, the real environment, and the viewer's illusion of a coherent subjectivity become blurred. This occurs because digital images or video are typically understood as content isolated from reality within a screen. However, once the work enters physical space, the real spatial occupation of light effects and the material support upon which the projection rests alter the viewer's mode of engagement by obscuring the work's status as a displayed object. In other words, the viewer is no longer simply presented with an object; instead, they are invited to enter a situation that remains connected to the everyday environment yet is rendered unfamiliar through the presence of the artwork's imagery. This unfamiliarity disrupts the viewer's habitual and effortless ability, which is typical of conventional modes of viewing to clearly distinguish between their own identity (as a viewer separated from the artwork), the structure of the artwork (as a constructed and experienced object), and the environment in which it appears (such as a gallery or exhibition space). The ambiguity produced by these shifting relations excludes the clear and familiar points of judgment upon which everyday certainty relies. Consequently, this method is far more effective in evoking uncertainty than approaches that rely solely on traditional exhibition formats.

It should also be noted that, except for the first work, *Test-Portrait*, the practical works in this project avoid the use of pre-produced sound or music as auxiliary expressive elements. Early practical experience in this research revealed that music and sound effects in visually dominated artistic practices can evoke and intensify the viewer's emotional experience, create suggestive atmospheres, and provide supplementary cues that guide the viewer's interpretation of a work's narrative. However, within the context of this research, relying on emotional stimulation or embedding the experience of the uncanny within a fixed narrative structure is a practice that must be carefully avoided. Reinforcing emotional or narrative dimensions would divert the viewer's attention away from the intended focus of this study, namely, the viewer's perception of inconsistencies within the structure of judgment. Therefore, since this research does not involve constructing structural paradoxes through the pure transformation of sound or music, I chose instead to retain the environmental sounds of the natural setting, introduce only minimal sound elements, or maintain complete silence in the presentation of the works. This

approach helps to avoid interfering with the viewer's judgment regarding the visual propositions and to minimize extraneous elements in the presentation of the conceptual propositions within the real environment. Moreover, in practical operation, the research intends to evoke the threat to the certainty of the judgment structure through what remains invisible or absent. Only in this way can the viewer's experience avoid shifting from anxiety arising from a threat that appears "everywhere but nowhere" back to fear directed toward a specific threatening object. The introduction of music during the practical process would inevitably direct part of the viewer's attention toward concrete issues such as the source of the sound or the rhythm of the music. This would alter the perceptual focus of the work. For this reason, the heightened sensitivity of visual perception produced through silence is more consistent with the aims of this research.

Finally, in the know-what stage, most of the practical results (except the final three groups of works) functioned as a negative critique of the preceding theoretical assumptions and conceptual propositions. This demonstrates that the practical works in this research are not supplementary illustrations of concepts or simple formal translations of theory. Rather, the works operate as a process in which theoretical and conceptual hypotheses are tested through artistic practice, producing practical outcomes and viewing experiences that reveal the insufficiencies, excesses, or displacements between the results and the initial assumptions. These negative outcomes then become the basis for generating the theoretical foundations and conceptual premises of a new round of practice. Through this process of mutual negation between theory and practice, the research is able to develop through continuous cycles of generation and refinement. At the same time, it provides a translation of abstract and terminological theoretical structures and textual conceptual interpretations (such as the double paradoxical proposition) into the visual art that operates through non-linguistic structural forms (for example, the paradoxical coexistence between the visual subject and its environmental context). Ultimately, through the reciprocal critique between these two dimensions, and through the continuous "failure" inherent in an artistic research method aimed precisely at constructing failure, the displacements and excesses revealed during the process become the driving force for the production of new knowledge. Therefore, within the methodology of this research, the practical works are not illustrations of theoretical analysis, nor is the written dissertation a prior determination or subsequent explanation of the artistic practice. Rather, the two constitute parallel yet complementary processes of reflection operating through different media. And within this ongoing process of negation, the "failure" method and the concepts of the uncanny remain protected from being fixed within a determinate object position, thereby preserving their fundamental conceptual orientation.

Chapter 1 The Uncanny as The Beginning of Failure

a greater omen, far more terrible, fatal, shakes our senses, blind to what was coming...(twin, giant serpents) Like troops on attack they're heading straight for Laocoön— first each serpent seizes one of his small young sons, constricting, twisting around him, sinks its fangs in the tortured limbs, and gorges...Only the twin snakes escape, sliding off and away to the heights of Troy where the ruthless goddess holds her shrine, and there at her feet they hide, vanishing under Minerva's great round shield...

—Virgil. *The Aeneid*, 2009, pp.56-57

Pérez seemed very far away now, almost hidden by the heat haze; then, abruptly, he disappeared altogether. ... I guessed he had turned off the road into the fields. ... Pérez, who knew the district well, had taken a short cut to catch up with us. He rejoined us soon after we rounded the bend; then began to lose ground again. He took another short cut and met us farther on; in fact, this happened several times... Some other memories of the funeral have stuck in my mind. The old boy's face, for instance, when he caught up with us for the last time, just outside the village. His eyes were streaming with tears ... And I can remember the look of the church, the villagers in the street, the red geraniums on the graves, Pérez's fainting fit—he crumpled up like a rag doll—the tawny-red earth pattering on Mother's coffin ...

—Camus, Albert. *The Stranger*, 1946, p.12

The experience of “failure” as addressed in this paper is by no means a novel topic. In fact, it could be said that this emotional experience expressed as a tension between the subject's expectation and persistence, and the silence of transcendent entities such as the cosmos or existence, has been repeatedly evoked throughout history: in the tragedies of ancient Greece, in Roman poetry, and in the metaphysical speculations of ancient China. Yet, when we encounter this emotional resonance in tragedy, in absurd comedy, or in philosophical reflection at the limits of knowledge, what exactly is this indirectly evoked, sensuous experience of failure? Is it merely the result of frustration born from our inability to articulate or investigate fully? Or is it a revelation of a fundamental condition of existence exposed by the limits of expression? From an ontological perspective, the question of what this “failure” truly is ultimately lies beyond the scope of this study. This is not a theoretical paper that seeks to make a substantive breakthrough on the ultimate questions of ontology. Instead, the focus here is situated alongside those texts and theories that approach this most abstract concept from a shared position of emotional experience, attempting to seek a visual language that integrates the concept of the uncanny for this fascinating experience. Accordingly, this chapter begins with my earliest encounters with the experience and

practice of “failure.” Through an analysis of two bodies of work from before the doctoral research stage, this study outlines the genesis of its core question: how the construction of a “failure” pathway through conceptual art can present the uncanny as the representational form of this negative force on the essential level of human being. In doing so, this chapter draws upon Heidegger’s concept of *non-truth*, Lacan’s *split subject*, and the perpetually failing structures of response found in the literary works of Virgil, Camus, and others. These serve to articulate the dialectical movement between explicit knowledge (as found in theory and text) and tacit knowledge (as generated through artistic practice). Through this movement, it becomes clear that it is precisely in the collapse of judgment structures, the inadequacy of language, and the defamiliarization of sensory experience that truth reveals itself in its form of concealment, and being emerges in its irreducibility. This “failure” is not the end of meaning; on the contrary, it is both the point of departure for the generation of meaning and the embodiment of the uncanniness, the original essence of human beings that creates problems and meanings.

1.1 The Failing Origin or the Original Failure

At the initial stage of this research, I continued the interest developed throughout my undergraduate and master’s studies in the fundamental metaphysical question of existence and nothingness. However, merely engaging with the conceptual elaborations and logical arguments of past philosophers, which reveal the ontological tensions of this question, could not truly satisfy my pursuit of representing it. Metaphysical debates do, indeed, encircle the question and render it clearer through various paths. Yet, within this clarity, the most primordial existential feeling that the question evokes (the affective awareness of our very existence) or what might be called the “tremor” of our existence (confronting the irreducibility of nothingness), is easily replaced and castrated by the reductive force of textual exposition. Moreover, such interpretations are inevitably grounded in the prejudices of our limited perspective⁶. Therefore, this research’s aim is by no means to offer any novel or constructive answer to the question, nor to attempt to resolve it, but rather to seek a path—through the artistic practice (by organising visual, temporal, and spatial experience)—that can provide the viewer with a field in which to experience the

⁶ “...for Merleau-Ponty the discovery and exploration of the world not such as everyday and scientific discourse describe it, but of the “pre-objective” world which it presupposes.” Kullman, M., Taylor, C. (1966). *The Pre-Objective World*. In: Natanson, M. (eds) *Essays in Phenomenology*. Springer, Dordrecht, p.116

“...whether in the experience of art or elsewhere, that such involvement cannot but remain subjective simply on the grounds that it is always determined by our particular dispositions to experience things in certain ways rather than others—our involvement, one might say, is thus always based on subjective prejudice. Such an objection can be seen as a simple reiteration of the basic tendency towards subjectivism that Gadamer rejects” Malpas, J. (2022, August 22). *Hans-Georg Gadamer*. In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (E. N. Zalta, Ed.). Retrieved August 10, 2025, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/gadamer/>

question itself. This field precedes the interpretive and substitutive operations of language and symbol, and it sustains the ineffability of any possible answer. Thus, the purpose of the research is to employ artistic practice to explore a path toward “why the question cannot, or must not, be answered,” that is the “failure” path.

For the initial response to this question, I turned to *Yin and Yang* and *Three Produced All Things* (fig 1), employing the *Daoist* philosophical notion of a generative transformation between being and nothingness to address the ineffability of the “*Dao*” as origin. In these works, I used figurative representations of humans, animals, clouds, and rocks to symbolise actual being, and abstract, rigid geometries to symbolise the unreadable law of all things—the *Dao*—structuring their alternation and separation to present the cyclical generative process. On the level of *Daoist* existential philosophy, this symbolic configuration successfully provided a sensuous experiential counterpart to the textual description of the dialectical unity of life and death, becoming and perishing. However, this early practice ultimately left me unsatisfied: on the one hand, I found the *Daoist* generative resolution to the problem of nothingness unconvincing; on the other hand, a diagrammatic explication of another’s philosophical thought can only serve as a substitute for their answer, rather than a presentation of the question itself.



Yin and Yang



Three produced All Things

Fig 1

First, in terms of how *Daoist* philosophy responds to the problem of existence, the so-called *Dao*—which is said to give birth to all things while itself appearing as nothingness—has a transcendent characteristic. It is a substantialized form of “nothing,” or, more precisely, a determinable and generative nothingness. This becomes apparent in the very first sentence of the *Dao De Jing*:

The *Dao* that can be described is not the eternal *Dao*. The Name that can be named is not the eternal name. Nothingness can be named as the initiator of heaven and earth (i.e., Nature); having can be named as the mother of myriad objects. (“道可道，非常道，名可名，非常名。无，名万物之始，有，名万物之母”) (Laozi, 2018,p.3)

Here, the *Dao* functions as a paradoxical, generative mode of principle—it is a totalizing entity that must be assigned a concrete name in order to be spoken of, yet it is not any particular concrete thing. Therefore, it appears as emptiness. And yet, it is also the origin of all things, and thus cannot be understood merely as emptiness. In other words, the *Dao* is set in a position where the finite individual compromises with an ultimate answer that transcends the limits of his language. Many later interpretations have reinforced this perspective. For example: “The Great *Dao* does not have sound and is without odor and has no color and no emptiness. (Then), what can we say about it? It is because there is yin and yang hidden within this no sound and no odor. And there is a creation and derivations contained in this no color and no emptiness. (Wei Boyang, c. 2nd century, p.4)” This interpretation treats the *Dao* as a vague, undifferentiated totality—a principle that governs the operation of all things, yet transcends the constraints of any particular mode of expression. It was precisely this vagueness—and the openness that arises from it—that drew me to *Daoist* philosophy as a medium through which to reflect on the question of nothingness. Within this line of thought, the subject’s response to the undifferentiated totality is to attune itself to the natural flux of things through experience rather than to approach it through static and partial speculation. In doing so, the subject draws closer to the principles of transformation and becoming — a stance that corresponds to the *Daoist* principle of *wu wei* (non-action). In other words, this mode of thinking transforms the typically static opposition between being and nothingness into a dialectical unity characterized by cyclical complementarity. Such a perspective appears to ingeniously resolve the dilemma posed by the insurmountable limits of ultimate truth. For the nothingness, which arises from the complete truth’s refusal to yield itself to the inquirer, under the guarantee of the *Dao*, becomes internalized as the ground for the generative processes and transformations of things. Put differently, the finitude of entity and the absoluteness of nothingness are both reinterpreted as necessary preconditions for the generativity of the *Dao*. As expressed in Chapter 11 of the *Dao De Jing*:

Thirty spokes to make a wheel, with emptiness (in its axle), there is a usage of the wheel. Using clay to mold a vessel, when there is nothing inside, then it can be used as a container. To cut open the door and window to make a room, when it is empty, there is the usage of the room. Therefore, when it is occupied, there is a benefit (of using), when it is empty, then it can be useful. (Laozi, 2018, p.73)

This is analogous to Heidegger’s exposition in his essay “The Thing,” where he employs the image of the jug to articulate the fluidity and wholeness between being

and nothingness: “the potter who forms sides and bottom on his wheel does not, strictly speaking, make the jug. He only shapes the clay. No—he shapes the void (Heidegger, 2001, p.167).” Here, the void and entity no longer occupy two sides of a binary opposition in a static manner, but are instead integrated within the ceaseless process of transformation and flow. However, although both seem to discuss this dialectical relationship in a similar form, there lies a subtle yet crucial difference between them: the generative and transformative nature of the *Dao* dissolves the position of nothingness (Liu, 1997). In other words, the truly radical, purely negative, and entity-opposing nothingness is regulated into fundamental generativity under the guarantee of the *Dao*’s generative character. The void between the spokes of a wheel is not true nothingness, nor is the absence perceived beyond the grasp of entities an emptiness. The manifest and its negation are parts of the *Dao*’s generative unfolding. In Heidegger’s *jug*, emptiness is not reconciled by any assurance of determinacy; it is a concrete absence—human beings, thrown into the world, confronted with the overwhelming silence of “being as a whole,” are compelled to face their thrownness and estrangement from the world. The emptiness in the jug does not acquire a graspable determinacy by virtue of being; on the contrary, it operates through its relative negativity to reveal to us the determinacy of nothingness. Moreover, through this emptiness, humans and things are no longer separated by subjectivity but are joined in a relation in which things disclose their possibilities to human beings (Howe, 1993, p.11). In contrast, *Daoist* philosophy does not treat nothingness as a negative efficacy shaped by and acting upon human beings, but instead takes nothingness as the ontological ground upon which a generative symbolic structure is built⁷. Nothingness is not a concrete absence but a presence that is always absent; as expressed in the *Dao De Jing*, “无之以用” (when it is empty, then it can be useful)⁸, nothingness is the intrinsic condition of existence, permeating every movement of being. In this way, through its quality as a “productive void” (Francescato, 2022), it transcends the ontological binary opposition between existence and nothingness, treating it instead as the intrinsic drive of all being. Accordingly, “wu wei” (non-action) as a practical method is able to reduce the challenge posed by nothingness, which is located in a transcendental position subjectively internalised as one’s immanent motive, into what appears to be a “positive” answer to the problem. However, this approach neither directly confronts the predicament of nothingness nor accepts the possibility of failure in answering the question, but instead appeals to a moral practice grounded in a subjectively posited transcendental guarantee. From my perspective, this cannot be considered a satisfactory response to this ultimate question.

⁷ “Presence grows out of and returns to Absence and is therefore always a manifestation of it” Hinton, D. (2019). *Awakened cosmos: the mind of classical Chinese Poetry*. Shambhala Publications.p.13

⁸ “...when it is empty, then it can be useful.” Jwing-Ming, Yang, and Tzu Lao. *The Dao De Jing : A Qigong Interpretation*, YMAA Publication Center, 2018. *ProQuest Ebook Central*

From another perspective—from the practical standpoint—the work is also unsuccessful. From either Heidegger’s or *Daoist* perspectives, regardless of the role that nothingness ought to assume when addressing the question of existence and nothingness, an artwork’s representation of the position of nothingness should precede any representation of people’s answers to that question. Just as a work, in relation to the thing, is merely the spokes of a wheel or the clay that shapes a jug, artistic creation is the construction of emptiness by avoiding the constructions of language—allowing emptiness to be revealed through the contours and intervals of the work, and to bear the *Dao* or unfold Being. Therefore, if nothingness is the intended aim of creation, the last thing one should do is offer a direct exposition of the concept. As LeWitt states in his thesis *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art*, the philosophy of the work should be inherent within the work itself, rather than serving as an articulation of any philosophical system (LeWitt, 1967, p.12). Only in this way can the work avoid degenerating into a form of descriptive analysis (Alberro, 1999, p.xxi), and avoid becoming a crystallization of the artist’s subjective, deterministic, and private reflection. However, this work evidently falls into the trap of narration. The fluid process between natural things in *Daoist* philosophy and abstract nothingness is rendered successfully and in meticulous detail. The palm-sized copperplate *ex-libris* becomes densely filled with visualized philosophical statements. This successful articulation marks the true failure of the work’s intention, as the conceptual narration stands in contradiction to the *Dao*’s transcendence of language and discursive articulation. Therefore, this work fails on both fronts: as a response to nothingness and as a practical embodiment of a philosophical idea. And it is because of this failure that it has become the initial driving force behind my inquiry into this question.

Subsequently, during the course of my Master’s research, and based on the failure of my previous responses to the problem—particularly the reliance on *Daoist* philosophy to address the question of being and nothingness through an external transcendent entity—I turned both my theoretical inquiry and artistic practice toward existentialism, as illustrated in fig 2. The series *Struggle and Harmony* is one of the *ex-libris* collections I created during my postgraduate studies. In comparison to earlier works such as *Yin and Yang* or *Three produced All Things*, this series marks a shift in two key aspects. From a philosophical standpoint, with the beginning of my graduate research, my growing distrust of *Daoist* interpretations of nothingness, and my critical reflection on the placement of a naturalistic transcendent ontology within traditional Chinese thought pushed me to reframe my approach through the lens of existentialist thought within the Continental philosophical lineage. In other words, I ceased to attribute the reconciliation between nothingness and being to any external transcendent object. Instead, I began to internalize nothingness, death, and absence as essential aspects of human existence itself. From the perspective of artistic practice, informed by a critical reflection on the earlier works’ conceptual articulation—or, rather, the reflection on the “successful” failure—I began to explore a more restrained mode of conceptual expression. This was an effort to allow the work to escape the fate of being a visualized diagram of concepts. These experiments collectively culminated

in works such as *Struggle and Harmony* (fig 2), which stand as representative of this phase of my practice.



Fig 2 *Struggle and Harmony*

This series of works seeks to give poetic and oblique form to the tension between life and death. The work on the left draws on the struggle of Laocoön before his death in the Roman epic tradition as a metaphor for the conflict between existence and nothingness. Yet this conflict does not concern Laocoön's personal death, but the death of the Trojans—and, by extension, the death of all mortals. Laocoön is not only a symbol of truth and resistance, but also a mirror reflecting the failure of mortal responses when confronted with truth: whether in unveiling truth or in the pursuit of meaning, one ultimately collides with the silent and unyielding wall of death. In the *Posthomerica*, Laocoön sees through the deception of the Trojan Horse and urges the Trojans to burn it, yet is struck unconscious by Athena and, together with his sons, killed by two serpents (Smyrnaeus, 1913). In Virgil's *Aeneid* (Virgil and Dryden, 2009, pp.56-57), he sacrifices a bull to Neptune, but the god commands two serpents to claim him and his sons as the offering; the Trojans misinterpret this as divine punishment for attacking the Horse. A parallel is found in Cassandra: she too exposes the truth, but, having rejected Apollo's advances, is cursed to retain her prophetic gift while never being believed. When she attempts to set the Horse aflame, the Trojans restrain her; after Troy's fall, she seeks refuge with Athena but is raped in her temple by Ajax the Lesser (Virgil and Dryden, 2009, p.67). Their fates echo that of Pérez in Camus's work—collapsing in front of a coffin while attempting to follow a funeral procession to mourn a loved one—sincerely and powerfully, the aspiration of a person, whether it is the revelation of truth or the realization of self-meaning, is ultimately defeated by the barriers of death and nothingness. In the moment of tragedy, the only tangible presence is the sharp note of mockery—the mockery of the wall of nothingness towards humankind. Ancient poets could direct their hatred toward the gods or fate; the characters in existentialist writing are denied this recourse, forced

instead to confront directly the absurdity and shared sorrow of mortal existence⁹—the sorrow of the Trojans. Thus, my depiction of Laocoön is not intended to stage a binary opposition between wisdom and ignorance, or between resistance and fate; such a reading would cast Laocoön as a tragic other, the Trojans as his antithesis, and ourselves as detached spectators. Yet Laocoön, as a priest, and Cassandra are both Trojans, their tragedy does not arise from the ignorance of the masses, but from the shared fate of all mortals: before the god who embodies ultimate negativity, wisdom and ignorance, revelation and faith, are equally powerless. Whether in the attempt to destroy the Horse or in the act of propitiating the gods, the fall of Troy and the failure of resistance are preordained. In the epic, the gods are placed behind the wall as mediators of mortal fear before nothingness; in Camus, Pérez strips away even this possibility of external blame, compelling us to confront directly the inevitable failure of our response to this ultimate question.

In the work on the left, Laocoön's struggle and death embody both the absurd and the sublime. The absurd lies in the fact that the prophet's revelation of truth simultaneously conceals truth itself—God not only granted him the prophecy of destruction but also ensured the inevitability of that destruction. From the mortal perspective, this partial truth, framed by subjective certainty, results in the essence of truth being further subjected to concealment; in other words, such revelation is merely a human response, bearing no real relation to truth itself. This is the very origin of the absurd. Yet, from the human viewpoint, this futile struggle manifests as a form of self-elevating sublimity: through his death, through the praxis of a negative movement, the prophet embodies the incomprehensibility and unchangeable negation that constitute truth. In Žižek's words, their positivistic body becomes the incarnation of nothingness (Žižek, 2008, p.234), thereby becoming a sublime object and achieving a silent harmony with the ultimate question in this absurd failure shared by the prophet and mortal. Therefore, in the presentation of this failure, there is no real difference between the prophet strangled by the serpent and the dove entangled in vines. The lines of the printmaking process in the artwork do not serve to capture a representative moment of tragic narrative; instead, through the material existence of these traces and with the help of the tragic form, they shape the void brought by the question itself. This void allows the work to await and bear the fate of mortals. Similarly, in the artwork on the right, just as the prophet strangled by the serpent crashes into the divine wall built by the gods, the dove entangled in vines crashes into the silent death of reality. Who guarantees what lies beyond the boundary between death and nothingness is not the answer to the question of truth, and the *accordance* between prophecy and fact is not the real truth either. We should rather say that in the failure

⁹ “The word absurd refers to the conflict between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life and the human inability to find any...” Arinze, A. T., & Onwuatuegwu, I. N. (2020). The Notion of Absurdity and Meaning of Life in Albert Camus Existentialism. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 10(04), p. 528.

“absurd does not mean ‘logically impossible’, but rather ‘humanly impossible’” Kierkegaard, S. (1991). *Fear and Trembling*. New York: Penguin Classics.

experienced by all beings or lives—caused by the dislocation between their limited understanding of fate and the essence of fate itself—truth manifests to us in a manner of non-truth, through its non-revelation. For *being as a whole*, relative to the limitations of mortals, is characterized by concealment; thus, the truth of *being as a whole* can only appear in the form of concealment in order to truly conform to its own essence (Heidegger, 1998, p.148). Therefore, in other words, this failure, which is at once disclosure and concealment—or rather, a concealment caused by disclosure—allows the truth of *being as a whole* to open itself appropriately to the finitude of mortals.

However, works created with this approach are not a representation of the ultimate question but rather an “over-interpretation” of it, which marks the very failure of this series in representing the question. In the epic, Laocoön’s death gives form to non-truth through the mortal’s “failure”; yet, when this “failure” in my artistic practice becomes the object representing “the non-truth presented as failure,” the non-truth that was originally opened by failure is once again enclosed within an explanatory proposition of “failure’s effective disclosure of truth.” Thus, although the work is titled *Struggle and Harmony*, and intends to offer an opportunity for the essence of truth’s non-truth¹⁰ to appear through the presentation of the non-oppositional relation between the two, in this process I have not truly achieved the aim implied in the title: because of their finitude, mortals—when disclosing truth on the premise of certainty—repeatedly fall into *errancy*¹¹, that is, in the pursuit of truth, within the praxis of truth’s negative movement, we compromise the understanding of the negative manifestation of truth’s essence (the mysterious) in favor of our habitual pursuit of certainty. This compromise is our everyday *dispose* (Vallega-Neu, 2017, p.55-69) of the question of being (the question of truth), that is, in handling the disclosure of truth, we again fall into the negative outcome of disposing truth, overlooking the fact that the process of disclosing the truth of being is itself the core of disclosing truth (Vallega-Neu, 2017, p.55-69). For the same reason, this work has also missed the appropriate way to dispose the truth of being. *Struggle and Harmony* should have required the work, in the negation of struggle and in the sublation of struggle’s result, to negate “the result of failure” while preserving “the process of failure.” Yet, whether it is Laocoön’s death or the dove’s death, the direct representation of such failed results turns the “process of failure”, which should have remained dynamic and unfinished, into a quotidian, certainty-graspable “result of failure.” In other words, the work has not realized the capacity for self-sublation in

¹⁰ “Indeed, in each of these significations the non-essence remains always in its own way essential to the essence and never becomes inessential in the sense of irrelevant.” Heidegger, M. (1998). *On the Essence of Truth, Pathmarks*. Cambridge University Press. p.148

¹¹ “Man’s flight from the mystery toward what is readily available, onward from one current thing to the next, passing the mystery by — this is erring” “The errancy through which man strays is not something which, as it were, extends alongside man like a ditch into which he occasionally stumbles; rather errancy belongs to the inner constitution of the Da-sein into which historical man is admitted.” Ibid., p.150

representing an idea, that is, it has failed to maintain its openness toward truth. Here, the work becomes the carrier of *the content expressed by its language* (Hamilton, 2012), rather than functioning as *a mute language* (Adorno, 1997, p.69) that avoids subjecting the truth of being to the insult of human language. Therefore, although the concept borne by *Struggle and Harmany* (a negative conception of truth) seems to me more in accord with the proper way of disclosing truth than the concept in works such as *Yin and Yang* (the ontology of *Daoist* philosophy), in essence, both attempts at representing concepts fail by their successful and complete expression. This is not an approach to truth through “failure,” but a distancing from the question through “success.” In other words, when we grasp any process of failure as a propositional statement of the work, what we obtain is merely a *tunnel version* distorted by the proposition, which becomes a visual obstruction to the manifestation of non-truth¹².

At the same time, from another perspective, this propositional view of non-truth not only obscures the manifestation of truth but also restricts the viewer’s freedom of interpretation. The work, taking its subject matter from an epic story and using logical continuity to point toward an answer to the mortal problem of existence, appears on the surface to be a smooth, quotidian, and literary mode of conceptual expression. Yet it compels the audience to interpret the work from the creator’s perspective—much like Kosuth’s division of viewers into those who “understand the idea” and those who “do not understand” (Norvell, 1999, p.xx)—reducing the work to a condensation of the artist’s thought and eliminating the audience’s potential space for interpretation. This division is a prior subjective choice by the artist, not a subjective selection of the audience as a group, but of the interpretive perspective toward the concept borne by the work. This is what Gadamer critiques in Kantian aesthetics as its thoroughgoing subjectivization: art should be grounded in critical negativity, or in the sublation of negativity (Gjesdal, 2008, p.286), rather than serving as a conceptual assertion of truth by the artist (Hamilton, 2012). This also accords with Heidegger’s claim that the manifestation of the truth of being necessarily excludes subjective, determinative judgments. Such a work offers the audience only an objectified platform for finite truth (the representation of the failed concept as a result) rather than a path toward failure and the question (the self-manifestation of the concept in the course of contention). By contrast, Lewitt’s paradoxical practice (LeWitt, 1967, p.12) —arising from the conflict between the artist’s conceptual design and the sensuous experience of the material work—disrupts or even dismantles the legibility of the work, enabling the audience to experience “failure” in the tension between a determinate grasp grounded in everyday experience and an experience of the work that resists both logic and the general knowledge. This makes it possible to approach the negative character of the non-truth of the truth of being. Such a negative experience preserves the coherence between the artist’s prior design and the post-factum presentation of the

¹² “Rather, each side suffers from tunnel vision imposed by a propositionally inflected theory of truth.”

Zuidervaart, L. (2004). *Artistic truth: aesthetics, discourse, and imaginative disclosure*. Cambridge University Press, p.151

finished work, while, through negativity as the core of individual critical capacity, it maximizes interpretive agency for the audience, giving rise to an “infinite audience” (Goldie and Schellekens, 2007, p.xx), that is, restoring to viewers the choice of perspective in interpreting the same object. Therefore, the failure of practice at this stage yields two key insights: first, one must guard against objectifying, conceptualizing, and propositionalizing both the response and its failure; second, the work should maintain, in its presentation, the continuity of “failure” and the possibility for the question to be elucidated, rather than fixing it into a result.

The tendency to respond to the question of being and nothingness through artistic practice has consistently constituted the core driving force behind my creative work. In the preceding stages, the outcome of my attempt to address this question revealed that the artistic representation of a transcendent object could not serve as an adequate manifestation of my critical reflection. Thus, this attempt may be considered a failure of the concept in responding to the problem. From the perspective offered by existentialist thought, the discourse on the nothingness and radical negativity—or non-essentiality—of this question, in my view, comes closer to a successful response. However, during the process of practice, the artwork as its outcome similarly led to the openness of truth into a closed, objectified language, which again failed to satisfy. Therefore, this, too was a failure of method in responding to the question. As discussed previously, within the framework of this question, the failure of the method is, to a certain extent, synonymous with the failure of the concept itself. As a result, prompted by reflection on these failures—and guided by two possible prerequisites for a successful “failed response” to the question: (1) the de-objectification of the result, and (2) the dependence on the pathway of the response—I have reoriented my approach toward uncertainty. That is to say, I pursue uncertainty in the outcome of the proposition or question within the process of artistic practice, in order to approximate the non-essential character of failure in response to the problem. And through the experience of non-essentiality or non-truth that emerges in the process of failure, I aim to transcend the limitations of finite truth and open toward the truth of being. This forms the fundamental starting point of my doctoral research: that artistic practice, through the expression of uncertainty, may realize the representation of the path of “failure,” and thus function as a method for responding to the question of being and nothingness.

This uncertainty does not lie in the ambiguity of the problem’s answer itself, but in the uncertainty of the process of answering; it is not a “result of being lost,” but a “process of getting lost.” It offers an indirect mode of response (failure) that elucidates the problem itself, rather than providing its answer. Therefore, this uncertainty, as the equivalent of a negative movement (rather than a negative result), targets the knowing subject’s doubt toward their cognitive structure: the certainty

provided by knowledge and language¹³, originally based on understanding and familiarity with the world, begins to sway and form a cognitive paradox¹⁴. This experience often goes unnoticed in daily life, but once it is perceived, it is usually accompanied by a dissonance that is difficult to ignore (Rhodes, 2021). My interest in a certain type of horror film stems from its ability to trigger this experience and drive me to seek and reproduce it under specific modes and environments. This experience does not rely on sudden scares or graphic violence to break through the defenses of familiar everyday order. Instead, it generates a slowly seeping sense of estrangement within the world of cognition through the disharmony and logical paradoxes within familiar things, thereby creating a distance between the viewer and the everyday world and provoking cognitive confusion. For example, *In the Mouth of Madness* (1994, directed by John Carpenter), based on the Cthulhu Mythos; *Event Horizon* (1997, directed by Paul Anderson), which uses the background of cosmic horror to portray the human sense of powerlessness when facing the primitive and unknowable; and Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), which attributes strangeness, irresistible force, and irrational phenomena to otherwise familiar and inconspicuous birds¹⁵. What these films evoke is not a reaction to "external horror," that is, although its occurrence still relies on some strange appearance of the object or some discordant atmosphere in the story, what causes panic is not the strange object, nor is it the originally familiar object becoming a strange one, but the original mechanism for judging whether the object is familiar or strange has failed. In other words, it is a tension caused by self-doubt toward the cognitive order itself. Horror brings about the collapse of the

¹³ 411. If I say "we assume that the earth has existed for many years past" (or something similar), then of course it sounds strange that we should assume such a thing. But in the entire system of our language-games it belongs to the foundations. The assumption, one might say, forms the basis of action, and therefore, naturally, of thought. Wittgenstein, L., Anscombe, G. E. M., & Wright, G. H. von. (1969). *On certainty*. Blackwell. p.52e

¹⁴ The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is, because from the ground up, it deals with and conserves the familiar only in order to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in. The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is because the ground up it deals with and conserves the familiar only in to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in. Heidegger, M. (2014). *Introduction to metaphysics*. Yale University Press. p.174

¹⁵ "In the Mouth of Madness likewise features a very specific and enclosed configuration of horror and pessimism, culminating in its protagonist's submission to mental fallibility" Thorn, M. (2017). "Ghosts and Shadows": *Epistemophobia and the Disintegration of the Subject in John Carpenter's Prince of Darkness* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Calgary).

"There is thus an epistemological deficit here, one that constantly makes narrative *events* the focus of audience and character hesitation rather than the 'discovery' of a clearly defined monstrous entity" Worrell, F. D. (2022). *Peeking Through Our Fingers: Theorizing Horror and Its Appeal Through Its Genres*. Tulane University. p.63

"...the birds in *The Birds*, ...This object has a massive, oppressive material presence" Žižek, S. (2008). *The sublime object of ideology*. London; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. P.208

"It seems to operate in a manner that Deleuze and Guattari might describe as decoding because while there is no obvious allegorical reading to be made of it; it nevertheless prepares us for what follows by relating the birds to the humans in a very particular way." Buchanan, I. (2002). Schizoanalysis and Hitchcock: Deleuze and The Birds. *Strategies: Journal of Theory, Culture & Politics*, 15(1), p.109

familiar, while this tension reveals the disintegration of the very subjective structure that constitutes familiarity. This epistemological self-contradiction has always drawn me to attempt its artistic re-presentation—a silent, indirect terror rooted in thought itself. This is a form of uneasiness that one only becomes aware of retrospectively upon reflecting on the object that produced confusion and, in doing so, re-examining the self who was engaging with that object. One suddenly realizes that from the very beginning of the narrative, the shadow of confusion had already fallen upon the subject—but was disguised. This is the sense in which “the beginning is already haunted” (Royle, 2003, p.1), and the uncertainty born from a process in which no stable ground can be found—an uncertainty rooted in what might be called a conflict of judgment (Freud, 2023, p.211), a contradiction within the act of knowing itself. This phenomenon is the uncanny. Based on the earlier series of failed responses (and failures of failure) to that ultimate matter, and based on a shift in focus from the uncertainty of results to the uncertainty of process, the phenomenon of the uncanny with its power to generate conflict and disrupt cognition from within the subject, has become the central concern of my doctoral practice and research.

Chapter 2 The Uncanny as Missed Lack

One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin...“How about if I sleep a little bit longer and forget all this nonsense”, he thought, but that was something he was unable to do because he was used to sleeping on his right, and in his present state couldn’t get into that position.

—Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, 2012, p.1

2.1 Uncertainty as a Lack Before the Beginning

The uncanny is typically understood as an emotional experience that is at once familiar and unfamiliar—an unsettling feeling that arises from the tension between the known and the unknown. This unease often stems from a discomfort or anxiety toward uncertainty or toward the impossibility of attaining certainty—that is, a tension between the subject’s attempt to grasp reality and the subject’s simultaneous negation of that grasp. Because this tension frequently manifests as a kind of panic or fear directed at the unfamiliar and the unknowable, the uncanny is often associated or conflated with phenomena involving horror, the strange, the bizarre, or the supernatural. While it is undeniable that the uncanny tends to arise alongside these phenomena, it would be reductive to equate them directly or to regard such associations as constitutive of the uncanny itself.

Although my interest in the uncanny originates from horror films, ghost stories, or supernatural fiction, and although most analyses of this phenomenon situate their discussions within contexts of the supernatural, such as horror, haunting, or the eerie. For instance, Freud’s analysis of the discomfort produced by the blurred boundary between the animate and the inanimate in *The Sandman* (Freud, 2023, pp.5-8); Masahiro Mori’s proposal of the uncanny valley effect, where humanoid robots trigger unease when they fall into the ambiguous space between human and not-quite-human (Mori, MacDorman and Kageki, 2012); and Mike Kelley’s curatorial and artistic exploration of the uncanny in both his exhibition *The Uncanny* and his essay *Playing with Dead Things: On the Uncanny*, where he attempts to evoke this unsettling feeling through figurative sculpture that blurs the line between life and death (Kelley, 2003, p.70-95)—all these situate their observations within seemingly supernatural or uncanny appearances. However, a crucial point must be made: the flickering presence of the supernatural—the mysterious, the strange, the eerie—is not the cause of the uncanny experience. In a certain sense, it is quite the opposite: it is because we are already within a state of the uncanny that we experience certain

external objects as the representation of the uncanny¹⁶. In Freud's analysis, for example, it is not the ambiguity of whether Olympia in *The Sandman* is alive or lifeless that causes the uncanny; nor is it the clash between rational reality and primitive belief (animism) in the repetition of coincidences. These oppositions might produce fear—because fear is directed at an external object, something alien: “what was once alive becomes dead,” or “what should be rational appears animated and soulful.” This conflict gives rise to fear as externality—in other words, it is a difficulty of classification, but the problem is projected onto a “originally certain, familiar, and everyday object.”¹⁷

What truly gives rise to the anxiety of uncertainty in the uncanny is the collapse of the basis of judgment itself—the blurring or erasure of binary structures on which we rely to categorize the world. When our frameworks for determining whether something is alive or not become unreliable, when the rational structures that once excluded primitive animism are themselves shaken by inexplicable, mysterious occurrences—we are thrown into a space where all things appear ambiguous, inscrutable, and suspended in a state of “seeming-alive yet not-alive.” This disorientation is primal. It is normally repressed beneath the symbolic and linguistic structures through which we make sense of the world. But when those structures suffer a kind of malfunction, when the foundation of judgment collapses, the mysterious—which had been externalized during childhood through compulsive repetition as a way of structuring understanding¹⁸—returns and begins to disturb us from within. It is this panic induced by the loss of structure, not the external strangeness of a ghost or a monster, that constitutes the condition for the uncanny. As Heidegger pointed out in his distinction between fear (*Furcht*) and anxiety (*Angst*), fear is directed at a specific, present thing that threatens us (Heidegger, 1962, p.176), while anxiety arises in the face of complete indeterminacy (Heidegger, 1962, p.231). Everything around us still exists, but it becomes uncanny precisely because of the overwhelming, ever-present potentiality contained in its incomprehensibility (Heidegger, 1962, p.231).

¹⁶ “The uncanny is the fantasized verification of a repressed fantasy... rather than a peculiarity of feeling that can be linked intrinsically to a specific category of experience.” Miyasaki, D. The Dissolution of the Ego in Freud's Resolution of the Uncanny. “The experience of uncanniness teaches us that the stranger is not someone who threatens us from outside; rather the stranger is inside us and our identity is always already contaminated from the beginning.” Masschelein, A. (2011). *The unconcept: the Freudian uncanny in late-twentieth-century theory* (1st ed.). State University of New York Press.p.138

¹⁷ “...this feeling can be generated by drawing attention to the ordinary, which is so close and familiar to fade out of focus.” Gineprini, L. (2023). The Uncanniness of the Ordinary: Aesthetic Implications of Stanley Cavell's Rethinking of *Das Unheimliche*. *Open Philosophy*, 6(1), 20220252. <https://doi.org/10.1515/opphil-2022-0252>

¹⁸ Freud, for example, utilizes the infant's fort-da game to suggest that such repetitions are likely to be an outward manifestation of the conflict between the mother's absence and the “power” she wields over her.

Freud, S. (2015). Beyond the pleasure principle. *Psychoanalysis and History*, 17(2), 151-204, chapter II.

As revealed in fig 3, this set of not entirely successful practical works represents my initial attempt at engaging with the uncanny through artistic practice. At this early stage, my perception and experience of the uncanny were most directly shaped by its representations in horror and mystery films and literature—where the uncanny often manifests as the repressed strangeness hidden beneath a seemingly familiar surface. Accordingly, this work sought to replicate that repressed emotional experience through similar means, and to test whether the process itself might facilitate the emergence of uncertainty¹⁹. The work presents a video based on an oil painting I created of a nude young woman. In the video, the woman's face undergoes a slow, blurred transformation from the initial (upper-left) serene and tranquil smile, imbued with classical aesthetic sensibility, to the final (lower-right) image of a distorted smile, hollowed cheeks, and sunken eye sockets. These changes focus on subtle adjustments of the smile and facial muscles, such as gradually prolonging the contraction of the eye muscles and amplifying the lift of the cheeks induced by the smile. In doing so, a once-familiar smile is gradually alienated within the very register of the familiar, exceeding the bounds of everyday experience. The choice of a nude female figure serves, on one hand, to formally reinforce the familiarity of classical figurative painting, such that the more firmly the work establishes this initial familiarity, the stronger the tension of its later estrangement becomes. On the other hand, in terms of content, the work seeks to evoke the most primal and immediate fear embedded within the repression of familiarity toward the maternal body (Foster, 1996, p.149). Ultimately, I aim to use this tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar to elicit in the viewer an emotional experience of the uncanny.

¹⁹ “some contemporary work refuses this age-old mandate to pacify the gaze, to unite the imaginary and the symbolic against the real. It is as if this art wanted the gaze to shine, the object to stand, the real to exist, in all the glory (or the horror) if its pulsatile desire, or at least to evoke this sublime condition” Foster, H. (1996). *The return of the real* (Vol. 7). Cambridge, MA: mit Press.P.140

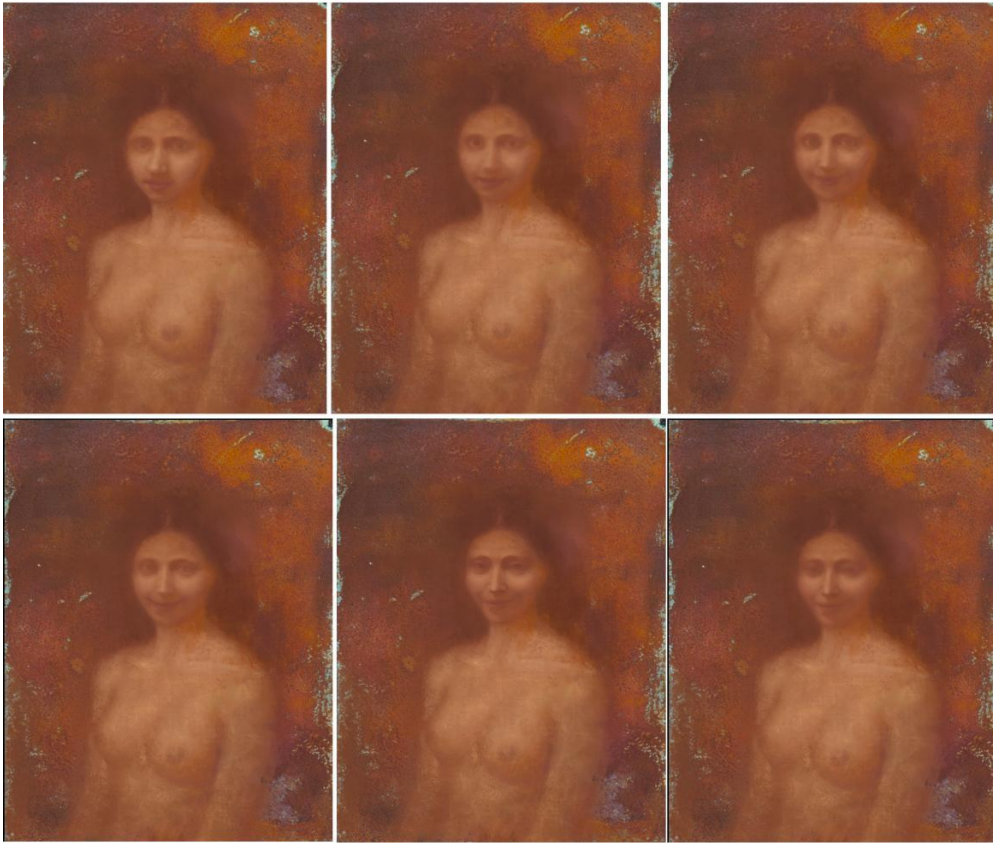


Fig 3 Test-Portrait

However, as it turned out, this work failed to realize its intended aim of re-presenting the uncanny—that is, the experiment resulted in an unsuccessful “failure.” While the piece did succeed in creating a tension between the familiar and the unfamiliar, the outcome of this tension was neither a difficulty in judgment between the two, nor a dissolution of the structural framework through which we make such judgments. In fact, the effect produced by the tension was merely one of *fear*, not panic²⁰. The former remains firmly within the cognitive framework through which we understand and grasp the world—wherein familiar, tangible, and manageable things become strange, ungraspable, and potentially harmful or threatening. This is indeed a confrontation between the familiar and the unfamiliar, but one that remains within the bounds of certainty²¹, because the binary structure that separates familiar from unfamiliar, knowable from unknowable, safe from threatening, remains intact. In other words, it is the stability of this binary framework that allows such opposition to occur, and the opposition within the framework and the failure of its construction

²⁰ “That in the face of which we fear, the ‘fearsome’, is in every case something which we encounter within-the-world and which may have either readiness-to-hand, presence-at-hand” Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1927) p.179

²¹ “The target of this detrimentality is a definite range of what can be affected by it;” Ibid.

keep the framework generating uncertain illusions during its opening process²². But when such opposition does occur, one side inevitably dominates, reinforcing and closing off the structural distinction between the familiar and the unfamiliar²³. By contrast, the revelation of the uncanny depends on the latter—panic, or the anxiety of uncertainty. This is not about the exclusion or negation of a specific threat, but rather an overwhelming anxiety in the face of total uncertainty²⁴. In such anxiety, everything appears unfamiliar. In fact, this unfamiliar goes beyond the semantics of the word unfamiliarity, it points toward an infinite potentiality, because the unfamiliar still exists within a structure, in opposition to the familiar. True uncanniness, however, emerges when no structure remains to mediate or support judgment. It is within this complete uncertainty that the boundary between the familiar and being disappears. In the case of this work, the process of gradually transforming a familiar image into a threatening and unfamiliar grotesque figure—relying on the visual horror or strangeness of form to invoke the uncanny—actually diverged from the true essence of the uncanny. Although numerous studies in the literature indicate that the evocation of the uncanny necessarily relies on a transformation of external objects, the fear triggered by these external objects is not its fundamental cause. Its core lies in the way the external stimulus evokes an underlying uncertainty that had previously been repressed within the subject²⁵.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, in Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (Kafka, 2012, p.1), Gregor awakens one morning to find himself transformed into a vermin. However, this transformation does not provoke a fear of the insect body in him. In Gregor's view, the transformed self is not, perceived as an objectified, alien other—he is not terrified by his reflection as a monstrous stranger, like so many protagonists in conventional horror films. In other words, the alienated self is not seen as an objectified subject that no longer corresponds to the "I"; rather, in his helplessness to roll over, in his failed attempts to grasp his body as his own, the alienated self becomes a representation of the collapse of subjectivity. The source of this uncanny discomfort is not the shock caused by the transformation into an insect's body, but rather the realization—through this contrast—of the most primal unease repressed by

²² "...the undecidable ambivalence, ... the endless exchange between the fantastic and the real, the 'symbolized' and the 'symbolizer.'" Derrida, J. (1981). *Dissemination* (B. Johnson, Trans.). The Athlone Press. (Original work published 1972), p.215

²³ "Fear closes off our endangered Being-in, and yet at the same time lets us see it, so that when the fear has subsided, Dasein must first find its way about again." Ibid., p.181

²⁴ "That in the face of which one is anxious is completely indefinite. Not only does this indefiniteness leave factually undecided which entity within-the-world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within-the-world are not 'relevant' at all." Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1927) p.231

²⁵ "...the foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious—that 'improper' facet of our impossible 'own and proper.'" Kristeva, J. (1991). *Strangers to ourselves*. Harvester Wheatsheaf, p.191

the formerly normal, everyday body: the groundlessness of daily life that is concealed by the familiar²⁶. That is to say, the fact of having become a vermin for no reason, and the failure to reconcile his transformed reality with his prior expectations of self, together constitute an intrusion of the unfamiliar into the familiar structure of self-positioning. Within this void of self-belonging—where it is no longer possible to determine what the self is—Gregor, as a symbolic structure’s reference point for certainty, completely loses efficacy. The symbolic certainty of being a “human,” a coherent and expected identity, becomes unattainable. And it is in facing this mysterious condition—why he has been thrown into the situation of being a vermin, what he is, and why he is—that he returns to the essential uncertainty of his own being.

In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor is the uncanny that returns to the essence of his being, rather than someone who has acquired a certain quality called the uncanny. This is because he is not terrified by the fact that he has become a vermin but rather panicked by the circumstances he finds himself in after becoming one. He is not trapped in a conflict between the familiar and the unfamiliar, but rather in a state where the familiar and the unfamiliar no longer exist in the face of an already-happened fact. In other words, the struggle between the familiar and the unfamiliar is a structural division, whereas their opposition in the face of the irrational event of turning into a vermin is a more fundamental conflict which between man’s understanding of himself as a ready-to-hand being belonging to the world and the fundamentally incomprehensible and uncertain essence of the world. This conflict is also a fundamental attribute of human existence²⁷, a more primordial failure of judgment than the failure to judge objects. Gregor’s metamorphosis negates his former sense of the familiar, yet what renders him strange is not the vermin body itself, but rather the way his former familiarity obstructs any possibility of achieving identity through the negation implied by his current vermin form (Manzar, Musawar, and Fayaz, 2024). In other words, the fear triggered by his “transformation” does not stem from the immediate threat of strangeness, but from the impossibility of reconciling the identity between the familiar environment and self-consciousness with the strange body and condition. In the coexistence of contradictions between the two, the subject loses the basis for determining whether it is familiar or strange. Put differently, the strange makes the familiar appear all the more familiar, while the familiar makes the strange even more alien—just as the appearance of illness renders the presence of health more visible. This effect, through the positioning function of negation, causes the very structures used to understand the world to appear in an unreliable, unstable form. In this sense, Gregor as a vermin is not uncanny in itself. However, through his

²⁶ “...something is missed just because obvious.” Cavell, S. (1988). The uncanniness of the ordinary. *In quest of the ordinary: lines of skepticism and romanticism*, p.99

²⁷ “We first press forward fully to the happening of un-canniness when we experience the power of seeming together with the struggle against seeming in its essential belonging to Dasein” Heidegger, M. (2014). *Introduction to metaphysics*. Yale University Press. p.161

persistent failure to unify his self-awareness with his existential reality, and through his experience of an absurd and utterly unreasonable situation, Gregor—as an object—embody the abstract human essence, the uncanniness: that the notion of “correspondence”²⁸, whether between bodily reality and self-consciousness, or between personal and social identity, is inherently groundless. Only when he truly realizes that the only question he faces is “What exactly is the self,” does he finally transform, returning to the most primordial state of his existence amidst the confrontation with pure uncertainty, namely, one that is both contained within the totality of being, and also in confrontation with the mystery of being as a whole, that is his original essence, the *uncanny* (Heidegger, 2014, p.161).

From this, we can see that whether in practice or in analyzing the appearances presented by an artwork, the positioning of the uncanny must not remain at the level of horror, weird, or other surface-level effects. Rather, it must point directly to the effect of the breakdown of the linguistic structure that such effects induce. It is only in the failure of structure that one may confront the unknowability of the world and the loss of connection between self and world, thereby arriving at a “failed” response to the ultimate question—a response that reveals one’s own undisguised nullity, which belongs to the possibility of its most potentiality-for-being (Heidegger, 1962, p.333). Likewise, the brief description of Pérez in *The Stranger* by Camus, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, succinctly illustrates such failure in the face of uncertainty: at the funeral, the limping Pérez repeatedly tries to keep up with the funeral procession, attempting to express his grief over the loss of his beloved through the formal structure of the burial ritual (Camus, 1946, p.12). Here, mourning becomes the old man’s attempt to grasp meaning—or rather, the condensation of a mortal’s understanding of truth within his finitude—mourning as a rebellion against the death that erases meaning. Yet his attempt to align his intention with the ritualized activity meets with constant failure. In this context, Pérez’s mourning becomes akin to Laocoön’s angry spear thrown at the Trojan horse (Virgil and Dryden, 2009, p.48). Just as the spear cannot harm the hidden Greeks, for it crashes against divine arrangement²⁹, so too does the mourning fail—because of his limping leg, the oppressive summer heat, and the funeral procession that will not wait for him, it crashes against the silent reality. These silent presences, when Pérez attempts to exert control over them through the intention of mourning, stubbornly withdraw—unchanged by his will—into an overwhelming being. The lame body no longer obeys but resists his intention; the sweltering summer day ceases to be familiar, impeding him by draining his strength; the hearse’s steady advance refuses to halt for

²⁸ “The mirror stage is a drama whose internal thrust is precipitated from insufficiency to anticipation – and which manufactures for the subject, caught up in the lure of spatial identification, the succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic...” Lacan, J. (2006). *Ecrits: The first complete edition in English*. WW Norton & Company. p.78

²⁹ “And, had not Heav’n the fall of Troy design’d, Or had not men been fated to be blind,” Virgil., & Dryden, J. (2009). *The Aeneid*. (1st ed.). The Floating Press.p.48

the funeral rite that should have awaited him. What was once a familiar body, weather, and ritual now turns strange, manifesting in silence an irresistible being. Before this overwhelming silence, mortal intention appears absurd and void in the face of its finitude. The old man's repeated attempts to take shortcuts, catching up with the hearse only to be left behind again, become the emblem of this approach without attainment. In the end, collapsing "crumpled up like a rag doll," while the "tawny-red earth" on the coffin congeals into the mortal's failed response to the overwhelming being and the ultimate question of existence and nothingness.

At this point, Pérez's fainting represents the culmination of his failure—a static conclusion to the tension between the mortal and the nothingness, an embodiment of Laocoön strangled by the serpent. However, this is not the "failure" discussed earlier, nor is his situation itself the uncanny. In other words, it is only when we grasp the oppressive manifestation of the silence of non-truth revealed in his failure and recognize his failure as a reference to failure itself that we gain the opportunity to disclose the uncanny. The old man ultimately remains suspended in the struggle between meaning and nothingness, caught within the collapse of a fragile structure of meaning. Yet we move beyond this collapse, progressing further toward an oscillation within our own relation to the structures of meaning. Through the old man's failure, Camus throws the problem back to us: the old man's failure reveals the fragility of the structure of meaning upon which we, like him, rely for existence and exposes the falsity of the linkage between our intentions and the world itself. However, when confronting the old man's failure, when facing the disclosure of truth that emerges through our shared experience of failure with him, this truth is inevitably obscured again³⁰ when we seize upon it as a graspable "absurd essence of man," or similar conceptualizations. This relates to the earlier discussion: humanity always returns to its *errancy*, but in this kind of *errancy* where "failure" is mistakenly regarded as something that can be grasped, we encounter the failure of grasping again. Thereby, through this perpetual oscillation, we can approach the full essence of truth, the non-essence³¹. In other words, in confronting the collapse of the structure of meaning, our attempt to grasp the disclosed truth—to comprehend the collapse as a failure—once again causes truth to retreat into concealment. Our understanding of the world's mysterious essence, of the non-truth as the truth's essence, and of the uncanniest dimension of our being occurs when we are expelled from the familiar "home" of structures by the consequence of failure and in our sway between the homely and the unhomely, between "failure" and "errancy," we catch a glimpse of that silent being-as-a-whole that encompasses both ourselves and things. Thus, it is

³⁰ "The disclosure of beings as such is simultaneously and intrinsically the concealing of being as a whole. In the simultaneity of disclosure and concealing errancy holds sway."

Heidegger, M. (1998). *On the Essence of Truth, Pathmarks*. Cambridge University Press, p.151

³¹ "...in the ek-sistence of his Dasein man is especially subjected to the rule of the mystery and the oppression of errancy...The full essence of truth, including its most proper non-essence, keeps Dasein in need by this perpetual turning to and fro." Ibid.

only after Pérez's failure, through our act of grasping the truth it reveals, that we enter into the process of opening toward the essence of our being.

Thus, it becomes evident that whether one grasps the world as a ready-made object or interprets the encounter with primordial mystery and uncertainty as failure, such acts of grasping both conceal the shared mystery of being and ourselves, and, through their limitations, simultaneously disclose it. In other words, through the certainty afforded by such grasping—and the failure of that certainty—that we are able to discern the structure by which things are apprehended as certain, a structure that had previously been overlooked³². Just as Heidegger mentioned, on the one hand, we attempting to domesticate the world into familiar home, and on the other, seeking to return to the overwhelming being through our efforts to transcend the home ³³. In other words, it is because concealment occurs—because the construction of the “home,” or, more fundamentally, because the act of grasping serves as the very basis of our understanding of the world—that we are able, through the sway between the success and failure of this grasping, and between failure and the failure of failure, to catch a glimpse of our essence, the uncanny.

“Home,” as a structure that provides assurance, guarantees the certainty of the “familiar, comfortable, safe, graspable, and determinate,” while simultaneously excluding the “unfamiliar, strange, incomprehensible, and indeterminate.” This structure sustains both our understanding and our lack of understanding; thus, experiences of the unknown and the strange cannot transcend this structure. It is only when this structure is shaken—when one breaks out of the “home” and exposes its structure from within a state of “un-home”—that the existence of “home” can appear through its very absence. And once the “home” as a source of certainty disappears, the environment that the “home” had once inhabited reveals itself in its state prior to being enclosed by that “home”, that is, being as a whole regains its openness (Heidegger, 2014, p.178), the uncertainty essence that existed before being fixed by “home.” Therefore, as beings who perpetually seek to grasp the world as something certain—as something ready-to-hand—we swing between the “home” and the “un-home,” moving toward the core of the uncanny. As the meaning of the uncanny suggests, its German origin *unheimlich* contains the root *heim-* meaning “home,” while its English translation *-canny* derives from “can-” in the obsolete sense of “know” (Heidegger, 2014, p.160; Withy, 2015, p.1). Both terms signify familiarity

³² “This is not because we renounce the certainties of common sense and of the natural attitude – on the contrary, these are the constant theme of philosophy – but rather because, precisely as the presuppositions of every thought, they are ‘taken for granted’ and they pass by unnoticed, and because we must abstain from them for a moment in order to awaken them and to make them appear.” Merleau-Ponty, M., & Landes, D. A. (2012). *Phenomenology of perception*. Routledge, p.72

³³ “The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is because the ground up it deals with and conserves the familiar only in to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in.” Heidegger, M. (2014). *Introduction to metaphysics*. Yale University Press. p.174

and the certainty of grasp. Yet, as Freud meticulously points out—just like the German word *Aufhebung* (sublation) with its inherent double meaning—*heimlich* and *unheimlich* are semantically overlapping in practice³⁴. While they express a sense of being “as familiar and comfortable as at home,” they also implicitly suggest that “beneath the familiar lies something hidden, repressed—a secret.” Thus, when the word is spoken, it simultaneously affirms the familiar, and strangeness descends behind it. It is something hidden because of its familiarity, or something previously perceived as familiar that seeps through in a distorted and unfamiliar way. This description of paradoxical emotional experience also carries within it a movement toward fundamental uncertainty, and achieves a transcendence of any singular, static, and determinate semantic or structural meaning through the mutual cancellation of opposing senses—or, more precisely, through the failure of interpretation within the realm of the everyday and the determinate. As Katherine Withy summarizes, the uncertainty of the uncanny does not lie between “is” and “is not”; its unsettling nature does not come from a structural ambiguity such as “is it familiar or is it unfamiliar?” but rather from the difficulty of judging something that appears to be “both familiar and unfamiliar” or “neither familiar nor unfamiliar” (Withy, 2015, p.25). It is a reflection on the very structure of knowing—a confrontation with the uncertainty of the world and the contradiction between our self-understanding of that structure and our expectations of it (Nagel, 1971, pp.718-719). This insight affirms Freud’s precise articulation of the uncanny—that it is a “conflict of judgment,” the conflict that stems from judgment, not from what is judged. Based on my understanding of the emergence and essential features of the uncanny, namely that the uncertainty of structure plays a crucial role in returning us to the uncanny, the practice at this stage also begins its representational efforts from this very point of departure.

2.2 Uncertainty of being “missed”

In the early stages of this phase, with the goal of utilizing artistic works to reproduce the experience of the uncanny as a response to the question of existence and nothingness, I initially set the objective of exploration as a return to original uncertainty, that is, to create an opportunity to experience the impossibility of certainty by breaking through the symbolic structure of the work. In other words, to return to the uncertainty that existed prior to the linguistic structures we use to understand the world, yet which was missed the moment those structures were established.

³⁴ “Thus heimlich is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, unheimlich. Unheimlich is in some way or other a sub-species of heimlich.” Freud, S. (2023) *The Uncanny*, Translated by David McLintock with an Introduction by Hugh Haughton, Penguin Books Ltd. p.4

However, this approach in fact risks plunging us into a paradoxical situation akin to “pull oneself up by one’s own bootstraps.” For the process by which our thinking and our primal responses to things, or the residual traces of things, are transformed into referential content understood through our linguistic structures (as paired signifiers) is a process of cancellation and substitution of that original uncertainty. In Lacanian terms, it is the empirical richness of *the Real* (Žižek, 2008, p.191), which exists outside of language; in Heideggerian terms, it is the overwhelming mystery of being as a whole as the source of existence and meaning. In other words, as Lacan points out, the symbolic order we use to grasp or refer to the world (the signifier chain) does not rely on the presence of things themselves, or the experiential residue they leave behind, but rather on their cancellation—on the gaps (the differences) between signifiers, as well as on the slippage of signifiers that extends from treating this gap as the guarantor of consistency³⁵. In short, it is the negation or cancellation of uncertainty that allows us to construct our grasp of the world through a negation of negation: the utility of the absence left by that negation is retained within the relationship between signifiers, thereby becoming the driving force behind the extension of the signifier chain, and thus producing a signifying structure that encircles the uncertainty of the thing as it appears in understanding. Hence arises the central contradiction: uncertainty—or what psychoanalytic theory refers to *as* the lack—is the foundational coordinate system upon which our cognition of the world is built. But how can values within a coordinate system articulate the system itself? Any attempt to reveal the foundation of representation through representational content appears to remain inherently incomplete. That is, any linguistic expression of “uncertainty” will always differ from the fundamental uncertainty of the uncanny—a self-referential impasse that seems inevitable.

However, the shift in perspective offered by “failure” provides us with a linguistic framework through which we may re-examine the problem from outside the very predicament it entails. Just as when numerical values within a coordinate system fall into internal logical contradiction, the coordinate axes appear to us in a kind of inertial, negative form—no longer reliable—so too does this self-referential impasse, this paradox of “pull oneself up by one’s own bootstraps,” or the failure of logic operating within a framework built upon the ontological void of its foundation, become a viable path toward overcoming the limits of language and cognition. That is, through the pursuit of certainty by language and thought, the very foundation of certainty may be undone. As Hegel famously exemplifies in the paradoxical proposition “The being of spirit is a bone” (Hegel, 2018, p.201), it is through the disjunction between subject and predicate—their radical non-alignment—that the proposition’s internal paradox

³⁵ “...is that just as after it is effaced, what remains, if there is a text, namely if this signifier is inscribed among other signifiers, what remains, is the place where it has been effaced, and it is indeed this place also which sustains the transmission, which is this essential thing thanks to which that which succeeds it in the passage takes on the consistency of something that can be trusted” Lacan, J. (2011). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book V: The formations of the unconscious: 1957-1958*. p.264

disorients the reader, dissolving the logic of linguistic identity. And it is in this process of rereading the proposition, after the failure of its initial interpretation, that the negational nature of spiritual subjectivity is revealed (Žižek, 2008, p.235). In other words, it is through the failure to interpret the proposition, just as through the dissonance in “pull oneself up by one’s own bootstraps,” that the closed nature of language as a framework for interpretation can be opened and can reject certainty. Only in this repetition driven by failure can we return again and again to the proposition and begin to perceive the inadequacy of the frame through which we interpret it. And within that opening—within the sway of meaning—we may experience a radical uncertainty³⁶. It must also be added that this familiar structure, or rather the intentionality that allows us to continue to grasp the world in our everyday, habitual mode as something determinate and ready-to-hand, is also the precondition for the revelation of the uncertainty of the uncanny. Without this object of repetition and reinterpretation, the uncanny does not appear in isolation to us. As Heidegger states: “The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is because the ground up it deals with and conserves the familiar only in to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in (Heidegger, 2014, p.174).” And as Nicholas Royle also notes: “There has to be a grounding in the rational in order to experience its trembling and breakup. There has to be a sense of home and homeliness within and beyond which to think the unhomely (Royle, 2003, p.25).”

Therefore, in an approach that seeks to transcend form through the representational results of practice, the creation of a failure in language becomes the most essential strategy, that is, the experiential path constructed through the failure of interpreting the work becomes more important than the representational content of the work itself. Only in this way can we avoid the kind of deviation from the essence of the uncanny, as seen in fig 3, *Test-Portrait*. At the same time, since my practice at this stage still remains rooted in visual art, the familiar and determinate framework constructed by the viewer in understanding the work is primarily shaped by the subject’s organization of visual experience. In Lacan’s terms, we organize our relation to *the thing* through the mediation of visual representations (Lacan, 1978, p.78)—that is, we order visual signals according to a certain model of the imaginary function, a mimetic function (Lacan, 1978, p.86). This mimetic function allows us to process the inverted image on the retina into an illusion possessing spatial geometry, from which perspective drawing emerged as a formalization of this visual mechanism. This also reveals a crucial insight: perspective places the human eye at the center of the world—it arranges the world as something structured for the viewer (Jay, 1993, p.14), or more

³⁶ “Reading effect——continually open to being re-read but re-read always strangely differently.” Felman, S. (1977). Turning the screw of interpretation. *Yale French Studies*, (55/56), 94-207. Cited by Royle, N. (2003). *The uncanny*. Manchester University Press. p.8. “We find ourselves constantly being brought back to that text by the paradoxes of the double and of repetition, the blurring of the boundary lines between ‘imagination’ and ‘reality’, between the ‘symbol’ and the ‘thing it symbolizes’...” Derrida, J. (1981). *Dissemination* (B. Johnson, Trans.). The Athlone Press. (Original work published 1972) p.220

precisely, the artwork is arranged for the gaze. This order is one of the most entrenched “familiar homes” we confront. Thus, in this stage of practice, my method for representing the uncertainty of *the uncanny* pointed toward two experiments: fig 4, *Reflection*, which disrupts the correspondence between the viewer and viewed object; and fig 5, *Indeterminate Self*, which undermines that relationship through the concept of scattered (nonlinear) perspective.



Fig 4 *Reflection*



Fig 4.1

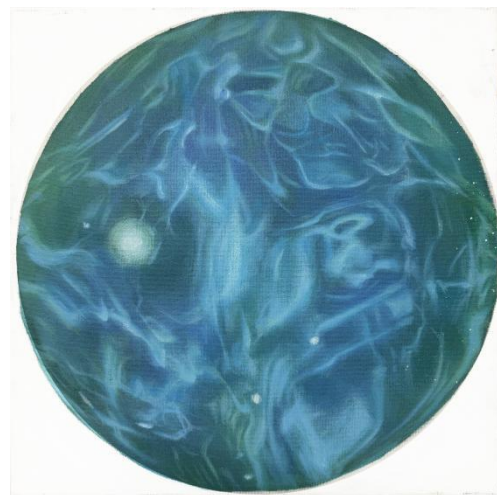


Fig 4.2

Reflection (fig 4) was one of the early experiments in the practice phase, focusing on enhancing the interactivity between the artwork and the viewer. Through this interaction, the work seeks to blur the boundary between the viewing subject and the

viewed object, thereby revealing a sense of uncertainty. The piece adopts a figurative and realistic visual style. When viewed from a distance, it invites the viewer to perceive it as an ordinary, painterly representation of water ripples—consistent with everyday expectations of representational painting (fig 4.2). As the viewer approaches, a camera installed above the work captures their image at a specific position and projects it onto the painting as a simulated water reflection. This process transforms the work from a passive object of observation into a medium for self-projection. However, this reflected image is unstable: the projection fluctuates between clarity and distortion, preventing the viewer from confirming the reflection as their own. This effect is achieved through the visual programming software TouchDesigner, which captures and processes the viewer's image in real time, distorting it and projecting it back onto the original painting surface (fig 4.1). It is through this real-time instability of the viewer's projected image that the work shifts not only from *other-directed* viewing to *self-mirroring*, but also introduces a deeper level of cognitive disorientation regarding the viewer's self-image. In this sense, the structure of the work undergoes two transformations—or two layers of deception: first, the displacement of the viewing relationship; second, the unsettling uncertainty surrounding the mirrored self.

The first layer of deception lies in how the work disguises itself as a landscape that exists for the viewer—a conventional representation of water ripples, a docile and silent object within the symbolic order. However, when the viewer, lured by the indistinct details that are unclear from a distance, approaches the work and is suddenly confronted with their image within it, the original structure—where the subject interprets the work as the representation of an object—begins to collapse. In other words, the initially understood artwork vanishes, and in its place, the viewer's reflection emerges as the new subject of scrutiny. Once the apparent object, the water surface is displaced from this position and becomes the concealed condition that allows the reflection to appear as the new object. When this deception is unveiled, the work, in a sense, escapes the viewer's objectifying grasp, leaving the viewer instead with the problem of their objectification. The second deception arises during the viewer's confrontation with their reflection. The viewer takes the mirror image presented in the work as a unified representation of the self and constructs an imaginary structure based on this perception. This structure is the process through which the viewer identifies with the mirror image, interpreting the image's resemblance as a representation of the self, and thereby relying on the structure of the Imaginary through the mechanism of identification (Lacan, 2006, p.76). In Lacanian terms, this structure is situated within the Imaginary order. During this process, individuals rely on a subjective belief or misrecognition in conformity, wholeness, and the identity of the human subject within the binary relation between themselves and the mirrored image. This belief conceals the fact that “a complete, unified self does not exist,” covering it beneath a seemingly unified structure between “my existence” and the appearance that corresponds to it (Evans, 2006, p.84, p.118). As Lacan pointed out, this stable structure of self-identification through the mirror is not

based on any certain empirical truth but rather on a misrecognition: the subject mistakes the mirror image for the *Ideal-I* (Lacan, 2006, p.76) and treats it as a representation of the self, thereby becoming alienated from the inner, authentic self (Evans, 2006, p.118). However, when the viewer pauses before the mirrored self provided by the work, the image oscillates between the familiar, Ideal-I-conforming reflection and the unfamiliar, distorted, and alienating reflection, thereby disrupting the stability of this structure of self-identification. This structural uncertainty leads to doubt about the foundation of identification. Therefore, in the process of this second deception being uncovered, the work creates the possibility for the viewer to experience a pendulum-like motion—moving into and out of a sense of structural “home.”

However, in the final realization of the work, it ultimately does not fully achieve this intended goal—or rather, the result of this line of practice may be described as an unsuccessful “failure.” On the one hand, through the tension generated between the two layers of deception and their subsequent unmasking, the chosen form does indeed allow the viewer to experience a kind of oscillation between structure and non-structure within a familiar framework. Yet on the other hand, neither of these oscillations is fully realized. As a result, the work fails to shed its identity as an object completely, nor does it fully accomplish the transformation from the familiar of the mirror image to the unfamiliar of a visual alienation. Thus, while the work does generate a degree of uncertainty—blurring its identity in the first deception and making mirroring increasingly difficult in the second—but it does not succeed in evoking the uncanny. Mere ambiguity is not sufficient to remove the work’s identity from its structural position, and mere difficulty is not enough to cause the failure of the mirror’s correspondence, such that it might truly become alien. In my view, a re-reading of the work requires that it first become unfamiliar, that it first accomplishes a rupture from structure and from “home.” Only then, in the process of returning to structure carrying with it the trace of estrangement, can the structure be perceived as the familiar that represses the unfamiliar rather than merely a space in which readability and unreadability are confused from within.

Thus, in this work, the two layers of deception and their unveiling merely serve to disrupt the structure in which the artwork is grasped as an object to be viewed, and the mirror image as a representation of the self. In the former structure, the work shifts from being understood as a representational realist artwork—depicting a shimmering, beautiful water surface—to the realization that “what I took to be an image of water ripples is not a representation of water, but a representation of myself.” Yet the result of this shift does not reestablish the work’s non-object status as *the thing*, but merely transforms it into another category of object. Thus, in the former case, the ambiguity produced is only the result of a transformation between two object-identities that remain confined within a familiar objectifying structure. It fails to allow the work to be apprehended as a truly independent unfamiliar entity that exceeds the

subject-object binary. The effect realized here is, therefore, not the ontological uncertainty of the uncanny but merely a psychological disorientation of judgment—what Ernst Jentsch described as the precondition for the uncanny: the subjective lack of orientation and uncertainty (Jentsch, 1997, pp.7-16), the difficulty of categorizing the object within the “ideational sphere.” However, this kind of categorical confusion is essentially different from the ontological uncertainty at the core of the uncanny. In the attempt to liberate the work from the constraints of the subject-object structure and return it to the status of the unfamiliar, Marcel Duchamp’s final piece, *Given: 1. The Waterfall, 2. The Illuminating Gas* (fig 5.1, fig 5.2), presents a more clearly articulated interpretation of this failed structure. When engaging with this artwork, the viewer must first peep through a small hole in the outer wooden door, and then through a second opening in an interior wall, only to be confronted—without warning—by the exposed genitals of a nude female figure. The work first entices the viewer with the keyhole, inviting them to treat the piece as an object that promises satisfaction for the voyeuristic gaze. This positions the viewer as a legitimate voyeur, anchored in a seemingly permissible structure of observation. Yet once the viewer does look inside, they are betrayed by what they see. What had appeared to be a passive object of voyeurism suddenly strikes back with an aggressive presence. The viewer is made to realize that, at the moment of looking, they are being seen—objectified by the work’s gaze. The raised gas lamp held by the model further intensifies this reversal, symbolically exposing the voyeur to the artwork’s own gaze. Thus, the piece radically frees itself from its objecthood by transforming the viewer’s identity from legitimate voyeur to the exposed, scrutinized subject, reclaiming its existence not as an object, but as an active, silent subject. From this work, it becomes evident that the transformation of the viewer’s identity causes the collapse of the structure the viewer has constructed for themselves. For the artwork itself, it has always maintained an honest, silent gaze upon all those who attempt to peep. In contrast, my work, *Reflection*, though similarly attempting to draw viewers closer, fails—once viewers approach—to produce a transformation strong enough to effectively shake off its status as an object apprehended as an “artwork.” Instead, what occurs is merely a shift of the signifier—from that of the artwork to that of the self. Yet in this shift, the work remains the absent void, the canceled-out placeholder of meaning. Therefore, in relation to the ontological uncertainty of the uncanny, the first deception in *Reflection* must be seen as a failure.



Fig 5.1 Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*

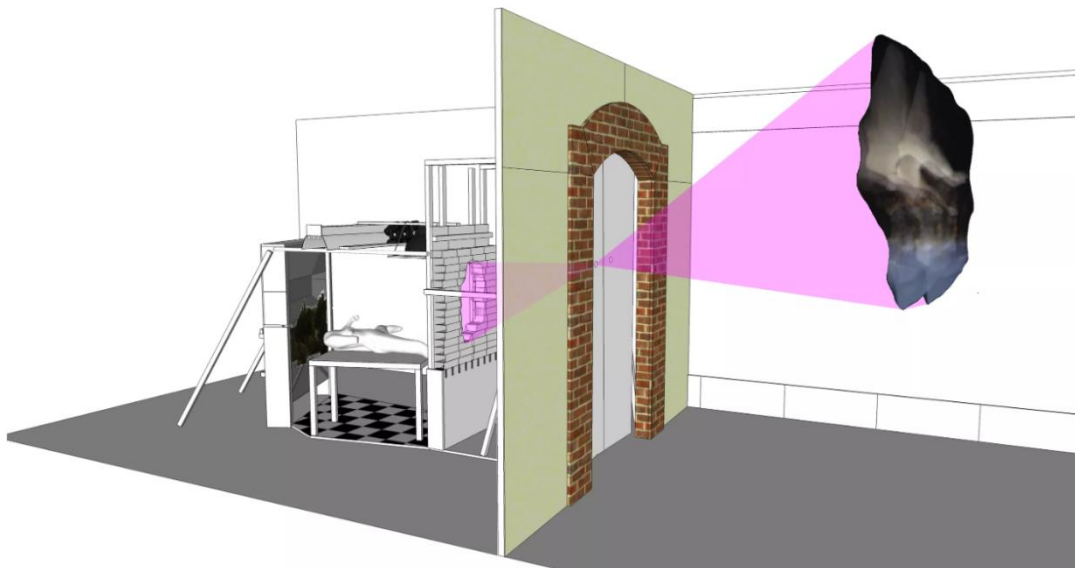


Fig 5.2 Given: 1. *The Waterfall*, 2. *The Illuminating Gas*, structure diagram

As for the second deception, it likewise reveals a similar inadequacy. The mere presence of an alienated mirror image is insufficient to genuinely challenge the identificatory relationship we have established with the mirrored self. On one hand, this stems from the failure of the first deception, because in the original conceptual framework, the unveiling of the second deception—namely, interpreting the distorted and alienated visual image as a disruption of the structure that identifies visual representation with the self-image—depends on the successful realization of the first deception. That is, it presupposes that the artwork has already escaped its status as an object to be apprehended. However, if the work cannot transcend its condition as a work-object, then all the efforts it undertakes will remain subordinated to its identity

as an “artwork,” and thereby lose their subversive potential. After all, the identity of the “artwork” in the contemporary context is endowed with a self-legitimizing privilege—a symbolic privilege that allows any form, content, contingency, or process to be interpreted as constitutive of its status as an “artwork.” This is because, when the artwork is apprehended as an object by the subject—or in Lacanian terms when the materiality of the artwork is erased (annulled) and replaced by its absence through signifiers as “art,” the signifier “artwork” no longer points to the empirical entity of the piece itself. Instead, it refers to a network of interpretations, meanings, definitions, and refutations that arise from the annulment of the artwork’s presence³⁷. In other words, all references to the work are anchored in signifiers that reveal its absence, and it is through this void that the signified gains consistency³⁸. Unlike the reference to general things, however, artworks are deliberately inserted into the symbolic order or the signifier chain. Especially since the emergence of modern art in the twentieth century, art has become a self-critical discipline, actively abandoning the traditional aesthetic parameters that once structured the experience of art (Binkley, 1977, p.256). Instead, it is constructed based on a subjective acknowledgment of its lack—an intentional suspension of meaning—thereby creating an open-ended signifying structure. In other words, the signifying structure of the artwork is inherently open, unlike that of ordinary objects in everyday life, whose closed signifying structures are shaped by their functionality, materiality, and other inert qualities. The inertia of everyday things ensures the slide of their signifiers within the signifier chain, thereby concealing their essential mystery and enabling the lack that drives signification. This openness, this mystery, is only revealed when the subject ruptures the structure of “home.” However, in the case of contemporary art, its openness is a veil that masks its essential mystery from the human subject’s limited perspective. The sliding of its signifiers is not intended to point back to a stable entity or presence but rather to guarantee a determinate uncertainty. Therefore, as long as a work is still interpreted under the signifier “artwork,” then no matter how radically it attempts to challenge its signifying structure, the openness it seeks to achieve will remain a represented openness—a contained openness within the structure of “home.” Thus, in the case of *Reflection*, without achieving the necessary precondition of escaping its object position, the distortion and disruption of the self-mirror image never truly escapes its position as the content of a “determinate” artwork. As such, it remains far from realizing the unsettling ambiguity of the uncanny.

³⁷ “It is from the moment that one effaces, where it has a meaning to efface it, that the something which is a trace is clearly constituted as signified.”“... is that just as after it is effaced, what remains, if there is a text, namely if this signifier is inscribed among other signifiers, what remains, is the place where it has been effaced, and it is indeed this place also which sustains the transmission, which is this essential thing thanks to which that which succeeds it in the passage takes on the consistency of something that can be trusted.” Lacan, J. (2011). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book V: The formations of the unconscious: 1957-1958*.p.263, p.264

³⁸ “The sense is always moving towards something, towards another meaning, towards the closure of meaning.” Lacan, J. (2013). *The psychoses: the seminar of Jacques Lacan*. Routledge.p.137

From another perspective, the distortion and alienation of the self-mirror image are also insufficient in effectively dislodging the viewer from their identificatory relationship with the mirrored self. On the one hand, as discussed above, this dislocation is constrained by the self-referential nature of the artwork as a signifier; on the other hand, it is due to the fact that the collapse of the imaginary structure of self-identification provided by the mirror stage depends on the intrusion of the Real, which Lacan refers to as *Tuché*—“an appointment to which we are always called with a real that eludes us (Lacan, 1978, p.53).” The imaginary order we construct through identification, providing unity and coherence to the self, is fundamentally a defense against the fragmentation of the body and the impossibility of total self-grasp. This mechanism structurally mirrors the symbolic order and the construction of signifiers, both organized around a core that is ungraspable, unsymbolizable, and irreducible—this core is *the Real*³⁹. To challenge the structure of mirror identification in order to return to the pre-identificatory uncertainty of the self is, in essence, to seek a renewed encounter with *the Real*—that foundational element which enabled the construction of this structure and became concealed as the structure's driving force once established. Because such an encounter with the very foundation of the structure—already effaced by the structure itself—undermines the stability of the structural order⁴⁰. Therefore, this encounter necessitates that the object with which we collide cannot remain within the domain of our structural logic—it must not conform to our cognitive or representational expectations. Perhaps the eruption of *the Real* can also occur through radical contingency or a compulsive formal repetition, but this work does not employ such operations. It thus becomes evident that, in the case of the second deception, the unveiling is also a failure. For when the work fails to escape its object-position, it simultaneously forfeits the opportunity to return to the space of *the Real* within the context of mirror-identification. As a result, this practical experiment represents an as-yet-unsuccessful “failure”—a work that merely generates a symbolic or identificatory oscillation within the structure, without achieving a rupture from it nor a return to it. However, it is through reflecting on these two failed deceptions that further insight emerges. In the case of the first, achieving the uncertainty of the uncanny should focus on a shift in the viewer’s subject-position. In the case of the second, building upon the first, one must maximize the illegibility of the mirror image. This illegibility directly opposes the subject’s symbolic impulse to grasp and identify. Guided by this reflection, I proceeded with the second experimental work in this practice phase: *Uncertain Self* (fig 6).

³⁹ “The Real is therefore simultaneously both the hard, impenetrable kernel resisting symbolization and a pure chimerical entity which has in itself no ontological consistency.” Žižek, S. (2008) *The sublime object of ideology*. London ; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. p.190

⁴⁰ “...the Real is a shock of a contingent encounter which disrupts the automatic circulation of the symbolic mechanism...” Žižek, S. (2008) *The sublime object of ideology*. London ; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. p.192

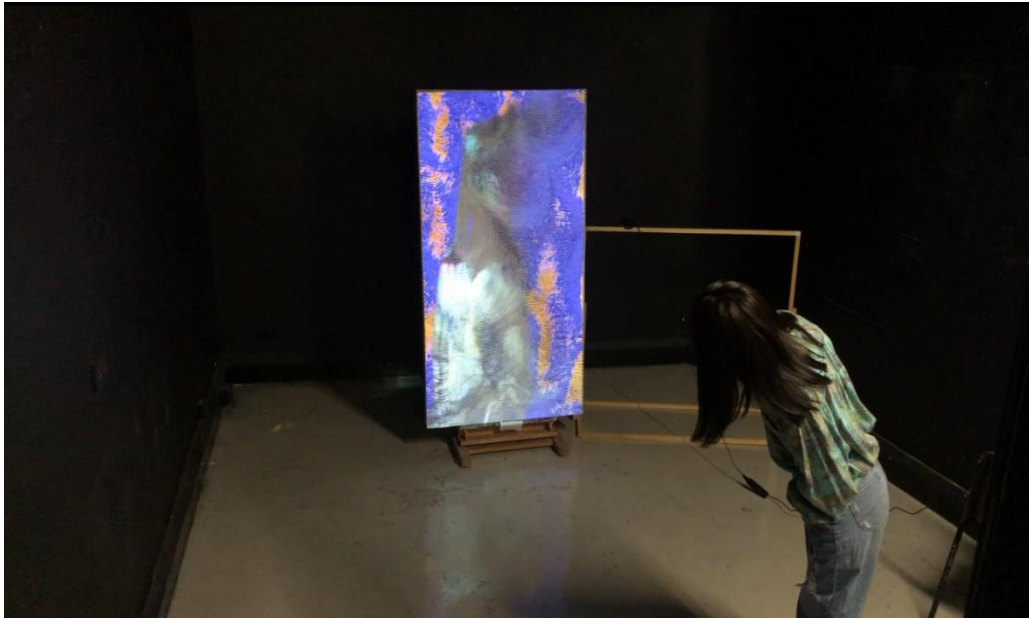


Fig 6 *Uncertain Self*

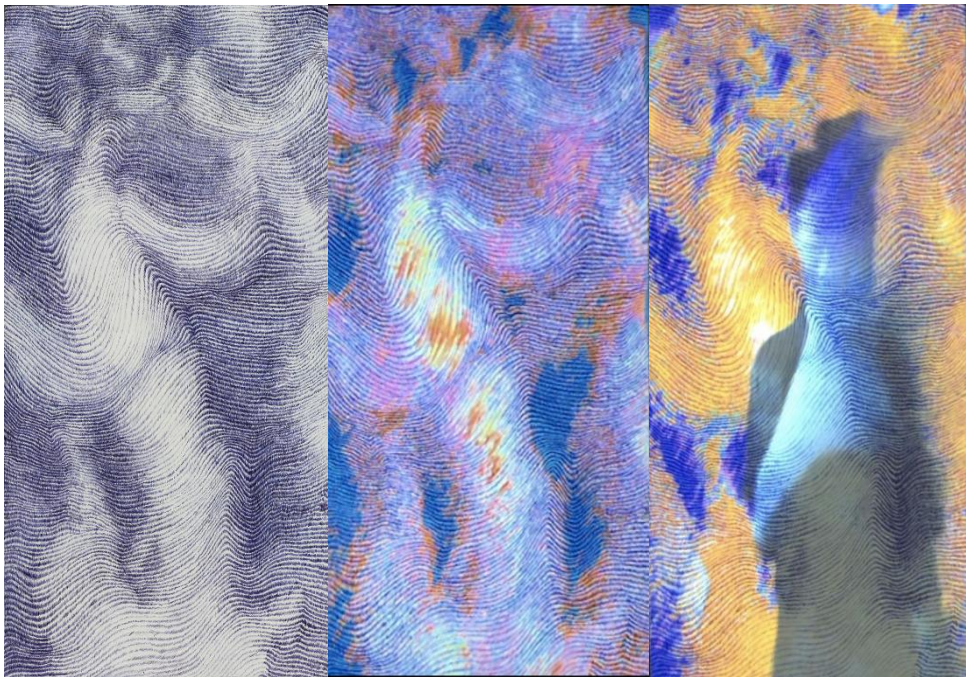


Fig 6.1

Fig 6.2

Fig 6.3

The basic structure of this work is largely consistent with *Reflection*, consisting of a painted base (fig 6.1) and a combination of real-time distortion and rendering of both the base and the viewer's captured image through the programming software TouchDesigner (fig 6.2, fig 6.3). In this piece, however, I shifted toward using an abstract expressionist style instead of figurative realism for the base painting, in an attempt to weaken the viewer's stable interpretative link between representational

content and the familiar symbolic order. The visual imagery in the background is an abstract expression of traditional Chinese landscape elements—mountains, mist, and flowing water. With the aid of digital tools, I introduced a process of continuous, random real-time distortion of the originally static, trembling-lined landscape painting. This further enhances the sense of flow, instability, and uncertainty central to classical Chinese landscape aesthetics, as seen in fig 6.2. This continuously shifting and elusive visual background, enabled by digital technology, is a key aspect of the work’s intended uncertainty. In this piece, I sought to compress the legibility of the base imagery as much as possible, placing it in a state that seems to possess features of Chinese landscape painting but cannot be definitively categorized as such. This represents a further challenge to the work’s status as a certain kind or category of “artwork.” On the other hand, in terms of viewer interaction, this work abandons the structure of deception and unveiling based on content transformation. Instead, it attempts to embed the doubt and difficulty of mirror identification from the outset, so that the moment viewers encounter their mirror image, they are directly confronted with a sense of unfamiliarity—or more precisely, with confusion about themselves through which they then experience the work’s ambiguity. This concept was inspired by the Chinese notion of scattered perspective, and in developing this path toward a dislocated relationship between viewer and mirrored image, I introduced not only spatial dislocation but also temporal disruption through delayed feedback. In this work, when the viewer is not within the camera’s frame, the piece continues to evolve on its own, as seen in fig 6.2—flowing along the paths of the lines, expressing indeterminate shapes of mountains and mist. But when the viewer enters the camera’s field, their reflection invades the image, blending and transforming with the colors and lines of the piece in real-time. This mirror image is not merely an ambiguous, flowing shadow that challenges identification—as fig 6.3 suggests—but also moves with a two-second delay compared to the viewer’s real-time actions. This creates a peculiar effect: nothing special seems to occur as the viewer walks past the work. Only after they have passed do they suddenly catch a glimpse of their figure entering the image from the corner of their eye. When they return to face the piece, this ghostly figure is already fading away, brushing past them. When viewers stop to engage with the work directly, they are met with a mirror image that is perpetually asynchronous with themselves in time. Moreover, as time progresses, this image melts uncontrollably into the background, merging with the shifting mountains, mist, and water.

Similar to *Reflection*, this work also attempts to disrupt the construction of the “familiar” and structurally stable in two ways. On the one hand, through the reimagining of abstract Chinese landscape painting as the visual base, the work positions its content in a space between legibility and non-referential ambiguity, maintaining an openness of potential meaning through the continuous interference of its flowing, shifting background—resisting the formation of a fixed image. On the other hand, the work utilizes the dual dislocation—spatial and temporal—between the viewing subject and their mirror image to guide the viewer in transforming the mirror,

which had been previously identified as unified with the self, into an estranged visual form that breaks away from this identificatory structure. These two approaches are both inspired by the difference in viewing perspectives and modalities between traditional Chinese landscape painting and Western perspectival landscape painting. If in Western painting, the symbolic “home” is constructed through linear perspective—anchoring the artwork as an object within the viewer’s grasp—then Chinese landscape painting, by contrast, builds its symbolic structure by intentionally abandoning the idea of the work as a representation of reality. Instead, the painting becomes a representation of the uncertainty of a limited person’s cognition rather than a fixed, external reality. Although the Chinese painting model does not offer a clear route beyond the subject-object binary, it presents a form of symbolic “home” in which the signified of the artwork-signifier is marked by instability, uncertainty, and limited openness. This more inclusive, broadly encompassing structure of “home” provides a more flexible space for the return and suppression of strange things—allowing the unfamiliar to coexist with the familiar within the same symbolic order. After all, within a rigid structure that corresponds precisely to reality, the clear division between the familiar and the unfamiliar also reduces the complexity of existence for both objects and humans. This simplification makes it easier to destroy or establish the structure, but it also makes it more difficult to allow the structure to remain in a state of oscillation of unbalanced uncertainty.

Specifically, this work draws on the concept of scattered perspective in traditional Chinese landscape painting. By contrast, Western landscape painting before the twentieth century largely adhered to the rules of linear perspective, constructing for the viewer a world of objects centered around and in service of their visual desire (Jay, 1993, p.14). This viewing structure can even be understood as an aesthetic manifestation of a deeper metaphysical structure in which the world is grasped as ready-to-hand from the perspective of a self-centered subject⁴¹. The elevation of the eye, or more broadly, the cognitive point of origin, to a privileged and quasi-divine status can be traced from Plato through Descartes, who contributed to the sacralization of vision (Jay, 1993, p.14). In this context, the transformation of the world’s original, indeterminate, overwhelming experiential reality into a stable, symbolized, and closed structure is carried out—within the visual realm—through the geometric system of perspective. Lacan refers to this structure as the structure of anamorphosis: the conversion of primal visual experience into spatial mapping (Lacan, 1978, p.87). Or, more mechanically put, our process of constructing and understanding the structure of the world through perspectival logic is one in which “the intellect inspects entities modeled on retinal images.” (Rorty, Williams, and

⁴¹ “all Western metaphysics has been peephole metaphysics...” Adorno, T. (1973). *Negative Dialectics* (New York. *Continuum*, 14. pp. 139–140

“The eyes are the organic prototype of philosophy... A good part of philosophical thinking is actually only eye reflex, eye dialectic, seeing-oneself-see.” Sloterdijk, P. (1987). *Critique of cynical reason* (Vol. 40). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. P.145

Bromwich, 1980, p.45). By reenacting this process, landscape painting provides viewers with an illusion—the reproduction of a familiar structure that aligns with the structures of everyday perceptual experience. In psychoanalytic terms, this alignment organizes a space of desire that mirrors the symbolic order of daily life. By mimicking the process of turning real presence into a symbolic object of vision, landscape painting creates the illusion that the artwork is a window onto a world opened just for us. The artwork as a material entity is carefully masked on the surface of exquisite artistic skill and spatial orchestration. And yet, this seemingly real, vivid, and seductive world can only be grasped from one predetermined position—it can never be truly approached. In this traditional form of landscape painting, the artist essentially binds the viewer to the point of perspective by creating the illusion that they are grasping the world within the painting just as they would the real world. At this point, the viewer is invited to indulge in a trap of desire they have helped construct, enjoy this kind of unhappiness they can't get, that is *jouissance*⁴². It thus becomes clear that, in traditional landscape painting, the rules of perspective—used by people to transform the raw visual experience of the world into an intelligible spatial structure—are employed by the artist to trap the viewer at the vanishing point, thereby inducing in them a desire for the painting that mirrors their desire for landscapes in the real world. The more realistic the mimetic painting, the stronger this desire structure becomes. And when this structure of desire is broken, when the organization and apprehension of the viewed object collapse, the force of the unfamiliar erupts with greater intensity. Or in Lacanian terms, it is the closer to *the Real*. As Lacan's example of this is Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, and the anamorphic skull within it (fig 7). Only when we return to the painting from a specific oblique angle do we suddenly realize that what had previously appeared as an incomprehensible smudge is a skull staring back at us. At that moment, we are struck by the realization that the symbolic order constructed by the painting—the comprehensible content, the spatial realism, the rich symbolism—is not objective reality but a distortion of our perceptual experience. What we had been viewing was not the painting itself but our attempt to grasp it, our desire, while overlooking a crucial fact: we are always being looked at (Lacan, 1978, pp.88-92). We simply have not realized that we are nothing more than self-assured voyeurs, constantly exposed under the light, unaware that even our presumed mastery over the structure of the world is built only upon our own belief.

⁴² “The pleasure principle functions as a limit to enjoyment; it is a law which commands the subject to ‘enjoy as little as possible’. At the same time, the subject constantly attempts to transgress the prohibitions imposed on his enjoyment, to go ‘beyond the pleasure principle’. However, the result of transgressing the pleasure principle is not more pleasure, but pain, since there is only a certain amount of pleasure that the subject can bear. Beyond this limit, pleasure becomes pain, and this ‘painful pleasure’ is what Lacan calls *jouissance*;” Evans, D. (2006). *An introductory dictionary of Lacanian psychoanalysis*. Routledge.p.93



Fig 7 Hans Holbein *The Ambassadors*

Lacan's approach has already demonstrated how a rupture in this structure can be effectively achieved. However, the problem is that the result of this method still does not constitute the uncanny—or rather, it falls short of a true representation of uncertainty. In truth, within such a violent disruption of the structure of desire, the invasion of the unfamiliar cannot coexist with the familiarity of the structure. The moment the skull in *The Ambassadors* is revealed, all of the symbolic coherence we had previously established—the interpretation of wealth, knowledge, history, and spatial depth—is completely dismantled. The eruption of *the Real*, or what Lacan calls the encounter with *the Real* (*Tuché*), is traumatic—it presents itself in a manner that is unassimilable (Lacan, 1978, p.55). In that moment, we are left with a choice: either retreat into the familiarity of the home we have constructed or confront the falsity of that home and the void upon which it is built. The viewer who lingers before *The Ambassadors* is not suspended in the space of uncertainty between “home” and “unhome” but rather is immersed in the intense experience of the construction and destruction of desire—a process that brings us beyond the pleasure principle. From a psychoanalytic perspective, artworks can reveal the uncanny by transforming themselves from ordinary objects representing visible phenomena into sublime objects attempting to represent the supersensible⁴³. However, this is not the approach adopted in this particular work, and will therefore be addressed in a later section. The question then arises: Is there a way to avoid this extreme, traumatic rupture, and instead allow for a limited emergence of indeterminate potential within the structured context of an artwork—one that does not force viewers to choose between existence and void? In other words, is it possible to observe the essential uncertainty even with just a limited perspective within the limitations of human beings? Motivated by this

⁴³ “The supersensible Holy is thus first an empty place, a space devoid of all positive content, and only subsequently is this emptiness filled out with some content...” Žižek, S. (2008) *The sublime object of ideology*. London ; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. p.220

line of inquiry, I turned my attention to a mode of organizing the visual world that differs fundamentally from the Western tradition of landscape painting: the method of “scattered perspective” in Chinese landscape painting.

Although both forms of landscape painting can be seen as artistic reenactments of the process by which neural signals on the retina are transformed into an intelligible world, and as appropriations of the frameworks we use to understand reality, they differ significantly in how they structure visual space. Unlike the strict adherence to geometrical rules in the Western linear perspective, Chinese methods of spatial representation do not rely on a single vanishing point to unify the visual world within a single pictorial frame. In terms of viewpoint construction, Chinese painting does not organize vision through the convergence of lines toward a vanishing point but rather employs an isometric perspective, where all lines remain parallel, and no single, fixed visual center or vanishing point is established (Wang, 1981). As a result, the “visible home” constructed in traditional Chinese landscape painting is fundamentally different in structure from that of Western landscape art. The spatial rendering and temporal concept embedded in Chinese paintings differ from the Western illusionistic realism produced by focal-point perspective. In modern aesthetic discourse, this theory of non-focal perspective in Chinese art has often been summarized as “scattered perspective,” but this is largely a retrospective construction developed in the 20th century under the influence of Western art theory. It was formulated to provide a framework that could serve as a counterpart to linear perspective in order to integrate Chinese aesthetics into a comparative system. However, the term “scattered perspective” cannot be taken as an exact equivalent to the visual logic of Chinese landscape painting. In other words, it describes only the form of the visual structure in Chinese art and serves as a formal analogy to Western aesthetic terminology. It reduces the difference in the purposes behind visual world construction to a difference in methods of visual construction. As previously discussed, the visual structure embedded in Western landscape painting guarantees that the visible world can be grasped as the object of the subject’s gaze—or more precisely, the object of the subject’s desire—thus reinforcing a rigid binary structure. In contrast, the Chinese visual framework does not prioritize grasping but rather emphasizes the subject’s integration into a finite world, a notion that is deeply tied to *Daoist* philosophy, the core of Chinese landscape aesthetics. In fact, as early as the 5th century, principles similar to those of focal-point perspective were already observed by Zong Bing (宗炳). In his seminal text *Preface of the Landscape Painting* (画山水序), he explicitly articulated how such spatial principles could be applied in painting:

The farther you walk, the smaller the object becomes. If you view remote scenery through the silk, the shape of Kunlang (the Kunlun Mountains) can be captured by the small piece of silk. The scenery of thousands of kilometers high and hundreds of miles wide can be expressed in the painting with a few inches high and several feet wide. (Zong, 2007)

However, this concept did not develop into a painting theory centered on a subject-oriented perspective similar to that of the West. Instead, it was deeply influenced by the author's engagement with Chinese *Daoist* philosophy, transforming into the aesthetic method of *woyou* (卧游) as its premise. *Woyou* originates from an aesthetic notion mentioned by Zong Bing in his writings, referring to "lying in bed and embarking on a spiritual journey through landscapes by means of various culturally aesthetic mediums (Zong, 2007)." In his early years, Zong Bing traveled extensively through China's mountains and rivers, but in his later years, he was physically constrained and unable to travel. Nevertheless, he realized that physical limitations should not restrict the freedom of the spirit. Thus, he lay in bed, contemplating while facing the wall, and through landscape paintings, he mentally revisited the sceneries he had once traveled through in his youth.⁴⁴ Since Zong Bing's aesthetic theory marks the earliest traceable beginning of Chinese landscape painting, this *Daoist* aesthetic notion has had a profound influence on later generations. In *woyou*, the artist is no longer confined to representing landscapes from a single static viewpoint. Instead, the experience of the landscape is integrated into the artist's historical and recollective engagement with it. The framework of the visible world offered by linear perspective is fragmented into every moment of the artist's memory. In other words, the picture organized through the method of *woyou* is a diachronic experience composed of multiple focal-perspective structures from different times. This deliberate blending of focal points introduces the possibility of confusion in the interpretive framework of the artwork, a confusion that aligns with the *Daoist* approach to addressing the ultimate questions of existence and non-being. This is the concept of *wuwei* (non-action) mentioned at the beginning of the essay—namely, not attempting to grasp the world within a framework based on human desire, but rather aligning with the world's chaos and transformation. From the notion of *woyou*, it becomes clear that the aim of Chinese landscape painting is not to create the illusion of mastering the world within a framework of visible representation, but rather to transcend these everyday structures through their amalgamation, seeking transcendence within human limitation. This transcendence is what ancient Chinese literati sought through the appreciation and creation of landscape painting—as a medium for a contemplative engagement with the *Dao*: regarding humans as but one small component within the flowing totality of nature, and through the uncertain experience of nature's transcendence, arriving at an understanding of— "Heaven is the ultimate source ... great indeed is the ultimate source...Ten thousand things receive life from it [Earth] when it is in harmonious union with heaven...(Chan, 1973, p.205)"

Specifically, driven by this conceptual framework, the integrated perspective system in Chinese landscape painting has been summarized as the "three-distance

⁴⁴ Liu, Y. (5th century). *Song Shu: Biography of Zong Bing.*; Law, S. S. mun. (2011). *Being in Traditional Chinese Landscape Painting. Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 32(4), 369–382.

perspective,” where the three distances refer to “high,” “level,” and “deep” (Guo, 2007). Take fig 8 as an example: in Guo Xi’s *Early Spring*, there is no unified or continuous sense of spatial coherence in the overall composition. Instead, the image is constructed through multiple vantage points— “high,” as in looking upward (the towering central mountain in the upper center of the composition, viewed from below); “level,” as in looking into the distance from a higher elevation (the distant mountain in the upper right, from a horizontal perspective); and “deep,” as in looking from front to back (the path in the mid-left foreground, from a near-ground perspective). This rendering of space leads the viewer’s gaze to wander and drift through the painting, producing a sense of movement in the act of viewing (Law, 2011). Simultaneously, it recreates the artist’s experience of traversing this landscape—or multiple landscapes—during the early spring season, each from a different visual perspective. In comparison with fig 10, a landscape oil painting by Rubens, whereas Rubens’ work can be seen as a representation of a specific scene—reproducing how people frame the visible world as landscape, Guo Xi’s landscape represents the artist’s conceptualization of “the landscape of early spring.” It becomes a deconstructive gesture toward everyday perceptual structures. Through this deconstruction, the subject loses fixed spatial orientation and thereby enters a vast, dynamically shifting world opened up by the worldview of *Daoist* philosophy—a generative world marked by uncertainty. Building upon this, as shown in fig 9, Fan Kuan’s *Autumn Travellers Dwelling in the Mountains* not only employs this altered spatial structure but also introduces temporal indeterminacy. In a single painting, the artist simultaneously presents visual elements that correspond to all four seasons—such as the characteristics of the mountains and mist throughout the year (Guo, 2007, p.67). This further expands the scope of the limited uncertain structure constructed by the artwork, enabling this dynamically generative system of uncertainty to more closely approximate the very concept the work aims to represent: nature as a perpetually changing entity.



Fig 8 Guo Xi, *Early Spring*



Fig 9 Fan Kuan, *Autumn Travellers Dwelling in the Mountains*



Fig 10 Peter Paul Rubens, *The Rainbow Landscape*

In fact, through this comparison, we can observe that although Chinese landscape painting appears to pursue uncertainty, this uncertainty always remains within the framework of finitude. The distinction lies in the nature of this framework: unlike the Western framework of the visible world, which reveals the metaphysical foundation of Western thought as one grounded in opposition and strife—that is, the binary construction of man and world, *Dasein* and *being*, presence and absence—formed through the concealment and revelation of strife. In other words, this approach, by

grasping the visible world as a familiar certainty, relegates the “cannot be determined” to the realm of the unfamiliar, thus concealing the essential uncertainty of being itself. In contrast, within the Chinese visual structure, the ultimate transcendental position is conceived as a generative nothingness. Therefore, the unfamiliar is not excluded from the structure but is instead indirectly affirmed within the gaps between structures, in the insufficiency of interpretation, or allowing “*wu*” (无, non-being) to erupt from the transformative shifts of “*you*” (有, being), and allowing presence to emerge out of absence (Hinton, 2019, pp.11-12). Just as Western landscape painting materializes the operation of desire into a structural form—preserving it and presenting it at a distance for viewers to repeatedly engage with, offering them a glimpse into the absence that constitutes the core and driving force of experience. Chinese landscape painting, by contrast, utilizes the ambiguity and contradiction between structures to provide viewers with an opportunity to experience the *Dao* as a generative void through the gaps and misalignments in experiential structures. Yet, even so, it becomes apparent that neither of these approaches has fully realized the uncertainty of the uncanny. In the Western model, strife remains confined within structural boundaries—the opposition between the familiar and the unfamiliar merely reveals the presence of structure and the lack behind it. But it does not achieve the strife between structure and non-structure and thus fails to disclose the mystery of being—the uncertainty of the uncanny. Similarly, the Chinese model does not fully realize the uncanny either, as the strife between structures is ultimately guaranteed by a larger transcendental framework. The emptiness disclosed through structural misalignment is once again assigned an open, generative role of “the unfamiliar” within this broader structure, thereby once more avoiding the uncertainty of the uncanny. Nevertheless, within this work, the Chinese visual structure still provides a possibility of practice that approaches the uncanny more closely than the Western framework. As previously discussed, the non-binary nature of the Chinese structure grants greater space for representational content in the artwork to challenge the fixity of structural determination. The void exposed through the rupture of structure is thus afforded the status of a “generative emptiness” (Hinton, 2019, p.13) rather than being relegated—as under the rules of linear perspective—to a static, lacking realm beyond the structure.

Thus, to a certain extent, this work can be said to approach the uncertainty of the uncanny, especially in how it disrupts the viewer’s inherent structures of certainty across both spatial and temporal dimensions—such as the subject-object relationship toward the artwork and the unified, simultaneous mirror-like structure that is subjectively affirmed. One reason this work more closely approximates the uncanny is that the internal textual content of the piece is inherently indeterminate: the interwoven and chaotic lines, forming shapes that resemble both mountains and clouds, become even more ambiguous under the interference of digital rendering. What the viewer can obtain before the work is only the bare minimum guarantee of legibility—namely, a visual form reminiscent of the aesthetic taste of Chinese landscape painting. Yet each time an image appears to solidify into a recognizable

form, it is once again dissolved into a state of chaotic and continuous transformation. Just as in Chinese landscape painting, where the layering of multiple perspectives or different visual structures creates a limited uncertainty, the fundamental cause of such uncertainty does not lie in the mere plurality of viewing angles. Rather, it lies in the fact that the unity of the structure permits the paradoxical coexistence of incompatible structures within itself. Similarly, this work's attempt to represent uncertainty does not rely on the overlapping of multiple perspectives, but on the sway between legibility and elusiveness in the image's visual structure; on the temporal misalignment between the subject and the mirrored image; on the tension between the failure to grasp the artwork through aesthetic paradigms and the re-inscription of this failure into a generative structure of determinacy.

The resulting perpetual transformation and overlapping of visual imagery aligns closely with my intuitive understanding of the ultimate question of being and non-being within Chinese *Daoist* philosophy. As in the earlier-mentioned story of Zhuangzi and the butterfly, neither Zhuangzi nor the butterfly is truly “me”; rather, “I” is found in the free flow between the names and identities of Zhuangzi and the butterfly. Though this identity-flux remains secured by the *Dao* as a determinately indeterminate generative void—and therefore, ontologically speaking, does not fully meet Heidegger's definition of the uncanny—on a formal level, the internal instability of such a structure indeed aligns with Freud's characterization of the uncanny as the paradoxical return of repressed primal uncertainty. Thus, the oscillation of structural elements within this work reveals the instability of structure itself, and this instability lays the groundwork for the emergence of non-structure. Just as in Guo Xi's *Early Spring*, any attempt to grasp the painting in totality or to symbolically systematize it only serves to alienate the viewer from the essence of the work. Yet it is through this estrangement that the viewer, in the failure to grasp what is ready-to-hand, gains access to an openness that gestures toward a primordial uncertainty, even if this openness ultimately retreats back into the determinate fluidity of nature as assured by the *Dao*. In this work, any attempt to grasp its content as a fixed and unified experiential structure runs counter to its core—flux and resistance to determinacy. Yet, it also cannot be understood as pure chaos or unfamiliarity, for the software-generated imagery constantly returns, in random moments, to a state that corresponds with the foundational hand-drawn base. Therefore, the work obstructs the viewer from establishing a static, complete, and familiar “home” within the work. But it does not aim to destroy it either, instead, it invites the viewer to accept the possibilities it offers in the space between failed grasping and imminent destruction. Though it may not directly challenge the subject's symbolic grasping of the artwork, it nonetheless requires the viewer to relinquish the intent of symbolic control in order to experience the essence of the piece—the flux of meaning and representation's uncertainty—as a response to the question of being and non-being.

The uncertainty brought about by the flux of meaning constitutes one aspect of this work's attempt to represent the uncanny; another lies in its effort to blur the structure of mirror-identification, namely, confronting the viewer with the temporal asynchrony of their mirrored image within the artwork. In this regard, it differs from perspectival transformation in the traditional sense. The appearance of projection serves, as in *Reflection*, to interact with the viewer and inadvertently reveal that the entity previously captured symbolically as an "artwork" has detached from its expected position. In other words, it shifts from being an aesthetic object of appreciation to becoming a reflection of the viewer's desire to see. At the same time, to avoid the issues present in *Reflection*, the introduction of temporal dislocation (delay) and spatial displacement (dissolution into the background) enables the reflected image in the work to further free itself from the object position of the subject's self-mapping, while also achieving a deeper fusion with the background content of the artwork. The shared aim of these two effects is to prevent the viewer from re-fixating their mirrored image into a symbolic position—either as the successful identification with a coherent self-image or as its failed, alienated counterpart. In other words, the goal is to avoid the mirror image being symbolized as the mirror self. For once the image becomes symbolically grasped—whether successfully or unsuccessfully—it obstructs the viewer from encountering the essence of the uncanny. Therefore, if we take the experience of oscillating uncertainty and the failure to symbolically master the work as a measure of success—what we might call a "successful failure" in representing the uncanny—then this piece succeeds. Whether it is the attempt to grasp the content of the work as a determinate ready-to-hand entity or the attempt to interpret the mirrored image as a reflection of the mirror-self, within the work's disturbance and identification, it can neither be completely denied nor completely constructed. Therefore, within the broader thematic framework of the piece, this uncertainty is effectively realized. However, this realization still cannot avoid—or disregard—a fundamental limitation: from Heidegger's perspective, namely from the ontological or pre-ontological angle through which the uncanny is most radically conceived, the work still does not achieve a true uncanniness. This is because the uncertainty achieved by this work through the failure of the insufficient grasp of the work remains, strictly speaking, an indeterminacy of the object—not the essential uncertainty of being human itself. On the other words, the uncertainty which is expressed by the object's appearance cannot really challenge the subject's stable cognitive structure.

This is, on the one hand, because the uncertainty in this work still necessarily derives its generative possibility from within a larger structure of determinacy—it is the generative void of the so-called *Dao* that guarantees the coexistence of conflicting structures. The uncertainty revealed through the oscillation between structures or the openness of becoming is not a representation of non-structure as opposed to structure but rather the larger structure (the transcendental object as bases) that guarantees the opposition of the smaller structure (the limited experience as bases). On the other hand, this uncertainty is revealed through the strife between representations and becomes a representation of the generative void of the *Dao*. Within this

representational framework, the subject's position remains essentially unchallenged, and thus, the work's identity as an object remains intact. Even within this context, where the object invites the subject to merge into it, what is ultimately achieved, in fact, even Taoist philosophy and the ancient Chinese artist realized nothing more than the failure of the viewing subject to savor the experience of the object's certainty in its travels through the viewed landscape, and to see this failure as the unfolding of the *Dao*. Hence, this failure is not a true disruption of the subject-object structure but rather a substitution of the object's certainty with an uncertainty of the object that is still guaranteed by *Dao*, i.e., a determinate uncertainty. Therefore, the kind of uncertainty presented in artworks that operate within this conceptual framework still does not meet the strict ontological definition of the uncanny. As such, the work *Uncertain Self* can only be considered as achieving a limited form of uncertainty or a constrained openness, it remains a "failed failure."

For the purposes of my practice and research, assigning a structural unity to this kind of uncertainty by transforming the object from an actual entity into a transcendent one is clearly not the intended aim. Thus, although *Uncertain Self* does, in formal terms, more closely embody the structural oscillation and representational uncertainty that characterize the uncanny in epistemological experience, it still remains bound by the structural order—because the subject-object relationship remains intact, or even reinforced through the transformation of the object's identity. The insight this practice offers is that while the creation of the uncanny may rely on the representational operation (as all artworks or symbolic forms do), the true mode of overcoming the concealment of its essence by the form that reveals its existence should be to focus on the position of subjectivity in which it occurs, and never to remain in the position of the object.

Whether it is the flux between legibility and illegibility in the landscapes presented by the work, or the mirror image that constantly misses the viewer's gaze at each seemingly corresponding moment, whenever these representations are engaged in interpretation, presentation, or exhibition before the viewer, they inevitably struggle to detach themselves from the status of an object serving desire. Unless such presentation operates through a silent, deceptive mode—through a form that does not self-reveal—which is not the operational mode adopted by this work. Therefore, for the purpose of realizing the embodiment of the uncanny within the artwork, returning to the subjective position of the uncanny must be a critical focus. Recalling Heidegger's original definition of the uncanny, as discussed earlier in the reflection on "home": the uncanny is the fundamental uncertainty of human existence, more precisely, the state in which humans confront their being-in-the-world as something that cannot be secured by themselves. The focus lies not merely in humans facing the uncertainty of the world, but rather in humans facing themselves when thrown into an incomprehensible world, confronting the overwhelming, latent possibilities of Being's primordial mystery. The former describes only the emotional experience that man has

when he returns to the uncertainty of his nature, what Heidegger calls anxiety. That is when a person realizes that they themselves are the uncanny, realizing that they have been indiscriminately thrown into the *potentiality-for-Being-in-the-world* (Heidegger, 1962, p.236), and that, in fact, they have no intrinsic connection to anything within the world (Heidegger, 1962, p.231). they experience a panic in the face of all things that could potentially pose a threat yet do not explicitly manifest that threat⁴⁵. This emotion of panic reveals the primordial uncertainty of human essence exposed when confronted with an utterly ungraspable world. However, it must not be mistaken that this emotional experience is identical to the essence of reason. Because another essential aspect of the uncanny lies in the opposite movement to the former—namely, the “invitation” that contrasts with being “expelled from the home of language to confront its causelessness”: the attempt to grasp the incomprehensible thing within a structure of understanding, thereby opening the overwhelming potentiality of Being within structure⁴⁶. In other words, as previously discussed, it is through the reflection on finitude, through the employment of failure, and through the presentation of non-truth that the truth of Being itself can be revealed. In this sense, it is because human beings can conduct negative thinking through the limitations of grasping certainty, apprehend themselves as the uncanny, and thus align with the mystery of Being itself as uncertainty that the issue of truth can be considered in this non-structure based on negation as the foundation of identity. This is what Heidegger, by invoking the Greek term *deinon*⁴⁷, points to: the essence of the human uncanny as a *double violence*—It violently resists the causality of the world in the overwhelming violence of being (Heidegger, 2014, p.160). Because humans belong to Being, their essence is part of this silence, and yet, at the same time, they face the silent threat of the world; in anxiety, they grasp everything as “home,” only to later, in questioning, leave “home” and return to the primordial silence. Thus, the uncanny is not so much a description of a characteristic as it is an indication of the inexpressible ambiguity of Dasein: humans simultaneously flee from their own essence by constructing “home,” and flee from “home” to return to the overwhelming indeterminacy shared with Being itself⁴⁸.

⁴⁵ “Anxiety ‘does not know’ what that in the face of which it is anxious is. ‘Nowhere’, however, does not signify nothing: this is where any region lies, and there too lies any disclosedness of the world for essentially spatial Being-in. Therefore that which threatens cannot bring itself close from a definite direction within what is close by; it is already ‘there’, and yet nowhere”, Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1927), p.231

⁴⁶ “The uncanniest (the human being) is what it is, because from the ground up, it deals with and conserves the familiar only in order to break out of it and to let what overwhelms it break in.” Heidegger, M. (2014). *Introduction to metaphysics*. Yale University Press. p.174

⁴⁷ “The Greek word demon has that uncanny ambiguity with which the saying of the Greek traverses the opposed con-frontations of Being” Ibid., p.159

⁴⁸ “Beings as a whole, as the sway, are the overwhelming, *deinon* in the first sense. But humanity is *deinon*, first, inasmuch as it remains exposed to this overwhelming sway, because it essentially belongs to Being.” Heidegger, M.

From this, two key aspects necessary for the proper revelation of the uncanny become evident. First is its non-objective position: the uncanny is not an attribute of objects but the essence of the human being, and simultaneously, the manifestation of the mystery of being in human beings—where human and world attain their uncertain, indecipherable, silent unity. Second is its paradoxical nature: whether it is the repression of the unfamiliar by the familiar, the anxiety toward possibilities that are “everywhere but nowhere,” or the act of constructing “home” only to dismantle it, it is only through the simultaneous coexistence of contradictions that the uncanny can, by way of failure, reveal its essence as the opposite of determinacy—unfolding the latent potential contained in the silence of negation⁴⁹. Thus, after passing through many early “failures” resulting from my initial attempts and misreadings of the uncanny’s uncertainty, I have, through subsequent practices and reflections, redirected the positioning of the uncanny within conceptual art toward its emergence at the subjective level and through paradoxical practices.

(2014). *Introduction to metaphysics*. Yale University Press. p.160

⁴⁹ “Uncanniness brings this entity face to face with its undisguised nullity, which belongs to the possibility of its own most potentiality-for-Being.” Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Blackwell Publishers. (Original work published 1927). p.333

Chapter 3 the Uncanny as an Alien Object

Uncanniness (*Unheimlichkeit*) is the basic kind of Being-in-the-world, even though it is covered up.

— Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 1962, p.32

...the interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it.

— Jacques Lacan, *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis*, 1978, p.83

this is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it.

— Jacques Derrida, *Writing and difference*, 1978, p.352

3.1 Fear and Anxiety — The Subject Position Where the uncanny Occurs

In terms of reproducing the uncanny, previous artistic practice stages have revealed several erroneous “failed” paths. *Test-Portrait* (Fig 3), as an initial attempt to engage with the uncanny, locates its occurrence in the ambiguity of eerie and unsettling appearances. It superficially equates the representations or objects that may trigger a regression toward the state of the uncanny with the uncanny itself. In fact, this confuses a subject’s panic over a complete disconnection from their existence and the world with the fear that arises when a particular object within the subject’s cognitive structure shifts from familiarity to strangeness. Furthermore, the threat created by the eeriness of the object presented in this work is different from the threat posed by the pure uncertainty that constitutes the essence of the uncanny. The latter is merely the uncertainty in judgment, whereas the former involves a deeper doubt about one’s own existential state. It is this uncertainty, born from self-doubt, that is the true origin of the uncanny. Subsequent works, such as *Reflection* (fig 4) and *Uncertain Self* (fig 6), also exhibit the same issue. When a work seeks to achieve the uncanny by presenting an image (whether landscapes or mirrors) that represents a certain kind of uncertainty, this approach moves the work further away from the essence of the uncanny. This is because the uncertainty represented in the artwork still constitutes a kind of certainty for the viewer. If the revelation of the uncanny requires the viewer to sway between structure and non-structure and to glimpse the void underlying structural construction through internal dislocations, then this kind of “certain uncertainty” remains trapped within the structure itself. This error echoes the criticism Freud and Katherine Withy directed at Ernst Jentsch: Jentsch defined the conditions for the occurrence of the uncanny as a psychological lack of orientation and uncertainty (Jentsch, 1997,

pp.7-16), i.e., the viewer's difficulty in assimilating the object of judgment into the "ideational sphere." In other words, it is the difficulty of integrating the object into a familiar cognitive framework. To illustrate this, Jentsch offers the example of a traveller:

someone sat down in an ancient forest on a tree trunk (presumably a fallen tree trunk, or a root or branch) and "to the horror of the traveller, this trunk suddenly began to move and showed itself to be a giant snake. (Jentsch, 1997, p.11)

Jentsch believed that when "The mass that at first seemed completely lifeless suddenly reveals an inherent energy because of its movement" (Jentsch, 1997, p.11), the feeling of the uncanny is triggered by people's original judgment of an inanimate object is broken by the living characteristics exhibited. He further pointed out that the closer this disruption is to the fundamental rules we use to organize the world (such as the distinction between living and non-living), the more intense the resulting uncertainty becomes. For example, he described how primitive people might panic upon first encountering machines or ships. The noises produced by machines resemble breathing, thereby shifting the boundary between life and non-life and causing fear (Jentsch, 1997, p.11). It is for the same reason that, in my work, I attribute the emergence of the uncanny to the intrusion of unfamiliar elements into the familiar world structured by cognition. However, this interpretation actually fails to distinguish between the uncanny, and the novel or the strange, and instead attributes the occurrence of the uncanny to intellectual factors, or, in other words, knowledge. In fact, the emergence of this uncanny uncertainty is rooted in cognition⁵⁰—or, more precisely, it occurs when our conviction in the certainty of grasping knowledge is confronted and challenged⁵¹. This reading leads to a problematic inference: that the emergence of the uncanny depends on our uncertainty about the environment, and that the more familiar we become with our surroundings, the less likely we are to experience the uncanny (Freud, 2023, p.2). However, Freud pointed out that in many cases, the outbreak of the uncanny is closely tied to familiar scenes. As revealed by the similarity between the German words *unheimlich* and *heimlich*, and as shown in many literary works, the emergence of the uncanny often occurs in familiar environments, contrary to what Jentsch proposed. Therefore, Freud believed that the uncanny does not merely stem from the uncertainty of the object but from the "repression and return" of personal experiences that are triggered by that uncertainty. This is also what Katherine Withy emphasized: that Freud treated the uncanny as a specific phenomenon of uncertainty (a species), whereas Jentsch did not differentiate

⁵⁰ "the difficulty in grasping what lies before our eyes is not a lack of knowledge but acknowledgment"

Gineprini, L. (2023). The Uncanniness of the Ordinary: Aesthetic Implications of Stanley Cavell's Rethinking of Das Unheimliche . Open Philosophy, 6(1), 20220252.

⁵¹ "if I say that such idea are the ground upon which any particular beliefs I may have about the world...this does not mean that I cannot find this ground to crack." Cavell, S. (1969). Must we mean what we say? A book of essays. Scribner, p.240

the uncanny feeling from other perceptual experiences such as fear. According to Withy, it is not simply the ambiguity between life and non-life that causes the uncanny, but rather the feeling arises when the essential ambiguity between life and non-life casts doubt on our judgment between life/non-life (Withy, 2015, pp.16-17).

In response to Freud's rebuttal to Jentsch, we might consider revising the example of the snake and the tree trunk: the moment the uncanny occurs is not when the traveller in the dark forest suddenly discovers that the tree trunk he is sitting on has turned into a snake. Rather, the uncanny should arise at the moment when the traveller, resting in the forest gloom, slowly begins to feel that he can no longer be certain of what exactly he is sitting on. What lies beneath him is neither hard nor soft, both rough and smooth—it feels like tree bark, yet the texture also resembles a snake's scales. In other words, what he is sitting on both like a snake and a tree trunk, but it is neither a snake at the same time. Crucially, the overwhelming panic does not stem from the sudden realization that he is sitting on something he shouldn't be but from the collapse of any stable basis for making that judgment in what he set. In other words, the locus of fear has shifted from the external object to the subject's position. This is precisely what is captured in one of Lovecraftian fiction's most commonly used terms: indescribable or unnameable. That fear arises not from confronting a horrifying thing but from being within an environment one can no longer cognitively or linguistically grasp. It is a panic born of impotence in the face of the unknowable. Out of this line of thought, and as a reflection on my previous stage of practice, that I began this new phase of exploration—anchored in the attempt to recreate the experience of confronting that which cannot be named or grasped. Also inspired by Jentsch's original example, I chose the forest at night as my canvas in the early stages of this phase, which culminated in the creation of the work *WoodWight* (fig 11).

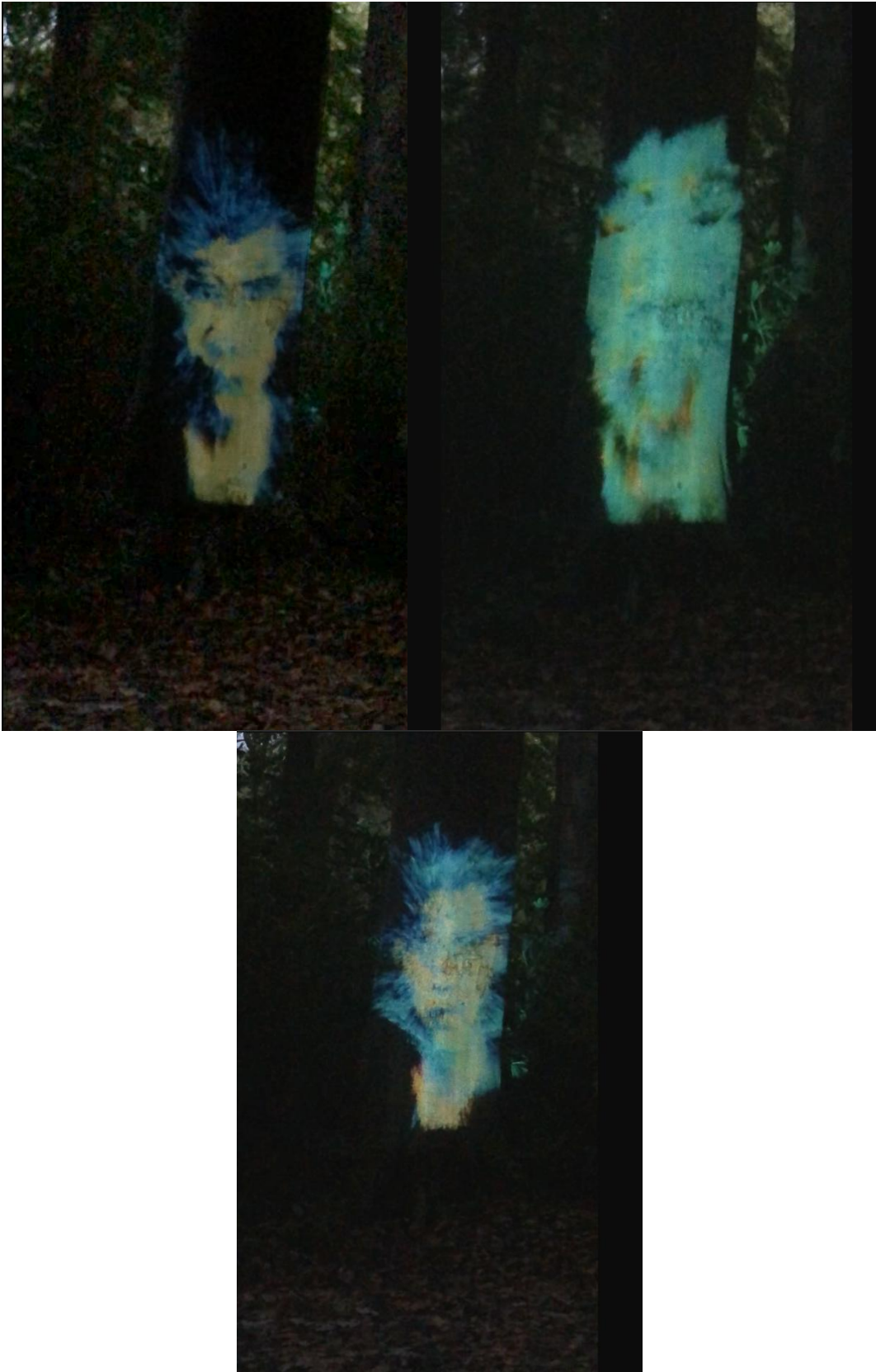


Fig 11.1 *WoodWight*



Fig 11.2

The term *wight* itself carries a complex and ambiguous multiplicity of meanings. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, its original definition refers simply to “a person” (regardless of gender), but in different contexts, it can also signify God (in theological discourse) or non-living entities (in linguistic contexts) (Farrell, 2015, p.182). Much like the term *heimlich*, *wight* blurs the boundaries between divinity, humanity, and non-humanity, thereby making it an inherently apt key to unlock the uncanny. In contemporary literature, such as Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* or George R. R. Martin’s *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *wights* are often depicted as ghostly entities—corpses brought back to life, possessing the awareness of the living while retaining the material body of the dead. This imagery of “living dead” is a quintessential literary manifestation of the uncanny, sharply contrasted with the figure of the zombie, which represents a fully unconscious, materially alienated being. Thus, when I attempted to recreate the uncanny within a dark forest using tree trunks and projection, the name *WoodWight* emerged organically. This work uses TouchDesigner to process real-time captures of the viewer’s facial image, transforming it into a particleized form that drifts between states of aggregation, diffusion, distortion, and morphing, then projecting these images onto the dim surfaces of tree trunks (fig 11.1). These particle images oscillate within a 20-second visual cycle, shifting between total illegibility and a momentary presence just before dispersal, embodying a blurred form of presence. Simultaneously, the viewer’s face reappears with a slight delay, intermittently woven into the process of disintegration and reassembly. Although the content—the viewer’s mirror image—remains consistent with earlier phases of the

project, the shift in presentation space (from gallery to forest) fundamentally alters the definitional frame of the work. In a gallery setting, no matter how much a work aims to convey uncertainty, its status as an “artwork” is institutionally guaranteed and stabilized. This renders even its ambiguity into a structured and manageable result. In other words, artworks displayed in galleries are always situated within the symbolic structure—as objects relative to the viewing subject—and thus struggle to realize the truly disruptive force of the uncanny.

In this group of works, I chose to conduct projection experiments in a dimly lit forest at dusk, aiming to treat the ghostly, unsettling, and untraceably ominous atmosphere of the forest as the extended field of the work. In other words, the work is not merely the visual image, but encompasses the time, space, and the total environment in which it is situated. Only by physically entering the forest does the work reveal itself to the viewer. Thus, the work is no longer an object awaiting observation, but an experiential structure that requires the viewer’s active entry and participation. This mode of viewing breaks the safe distance between subject and object characteristic of traditional gallery settings, and is no longer a meditative, distant “*woyou* (卧游)” type of engagement, but rather an immersive, psychologically uncertain experience. Fig 11.2, based on this concept, attempts to project the image into the gaps between trees, hoping to suspend the ghostly mirrored form between the visible trunks and the invisible darkness of night. However, this attempt was ultimately unsuccessful, due in part to the projection surface’s color not blending naturally into the night environment, and in part to the limitations of the UK’s outdoor winter conditions—frequent wind and rain preventing the proper display of the image. These practices were inspired, on the one hand, by Jentsch’s imprecise yet highly enlightening theoretical examples, and on the other, by my nightly walks through the forest. Though located within a familiar living environment and seemingly safe and knowable during the day, this small patch of woodland inevitably conveys a sense of latent threat once night falls. The diminishing light interrupts otherwise stable visual perception: the wind rustling through the trees, traces of animals, and the forms of trees and shrubs under faint illumination take on a qualitatively different presence than they do in daylight, where they appear as clearly graspable and defined entities. In such moments, when things remain visible but no longer fully identifiable, we are caught in an irreducible tension between the knowable and the unknowable, between our awareness of their presence and our doubt about the reliability of our knowing. This tear in the ordinary, safe, and familiar structure opens a moment of discomfort, allowing us a glimpse into the essence of our uncanniness. Thus, the fear of walking in the dim forest does not stem from any specific object, but from a deeper panic that arises when our judgment becomes unreliable. The entire forest begins to suggest the potential for an undefined threat. Or put another way, it is the moment when the subject loses its ability to clearly grasp the world, when our familiar, subjectively constructed sense of order retreats. We return to our essence as *Dasein* through the failure of reason and the silence of language.

Thus, in this work, the projection upon the tree trunks functions precisely as an intensification of uncertainty within a space that shifts from certainty to uncertainty. When the viewer is invited to walk into the forest, the subject's dominant position over the object of the artwork is gradually dissolved by the presence of nature in the dark. As the viewer becomes increasingly enveloped by a shared, primordial human panic toward the forest, the darkness, the uncertain, and the possible. In this panic, viewers would see a mirror-like image, vaguely resembling themselves yet transforming at the moment of recognition, beginning to surface on the tree trunks slowly. The use of the viewer's own mirrored image serves a dual purpose: on the one hand, it prevents the projected image from turning the unsettling uncertainty into a fear of the overtly strange or unfamiliar. In a forest already saturated with threat and unease, any element perceived as other or alien would risk shifting the experience from subtle anxiety about uncertainty to a direct fear of the explicitly unknowable. To avoid this slippage from anxiety to fear, I chose the personal mirror image, which, for most people, is the least likely to become entirely unfamiliar. On the other hand, the effective evocation of the uncanny requires a shift in perspective—from an inability to determine the external world to an unsettling uncertainty about the self. A dim forest, without being entirely dark, cannot consistently or reliably trigger this internalized transformation of perception. Even if the forest may provoke uncanny sensations through ambiguous stimuli—like the sound of wind, footsteps not one's own, or the rustling of unseen animals—these natural elements are too contingent, too reliant on randomness, to serve as a dependable medium for artistic practice. Therefore, I chose to embed the viewer's image into the tree trunks, allowing them to encounter a fragile connection to themselves through a distorted yet strangely familiar figure. In this way, as they attempt to impose a habitual framework of a certain grasp onto the spectral forest, what they receive instead is a vague echo from the forest itself, a reflection that suggests they have already become part of their uncertainty.

Similar to *woyou* and the work *Uncertain Self*, these projects share a common intention: to lead the viewer into a process of continuous transformation centered on uncertainty. However, the key distinction lies in how this uncertainty is approached. Both *woyou* and *Uncertain Self* place their hopes in the viewer's ability to enter a meditative state akin to that of the artist—a state in which the viewer “enters” the work and, through the artist's de-centered, de-subjectified perspective, experiences the dissolution of subjectivity within a destabilized structure provided by the artwork. Yet this expectation that the viewer will adopt the same experiential logic as the artist entails significant limitations. It is akin to asking a British viewer to engage with abstract Chinese philosophy through the linguistic and cognitive frameworks of a Chinese speaker. Even if the philosophical concepts in question may possess a certain universality that transcends language and culture, the experiential structures required to access them remain highly specific, and such demands on diverse viewers are ultimately unrealistic. By contrast, in *WoodWight*, the experience of uncertainty as a shared human condition does not require interpretation through any semantic or symbolic structure. Instead, the viewer is directly invited to feel and to physically and

emotionally encounter our fear and unease in the face of darkness, mysterious forests, spectral presences, and the alienation of the self. This sensuous engagement is a direct expression of the uncanny: not as a metaphysical abstraction, but as an embodied, affective posture toward the instability of the self.

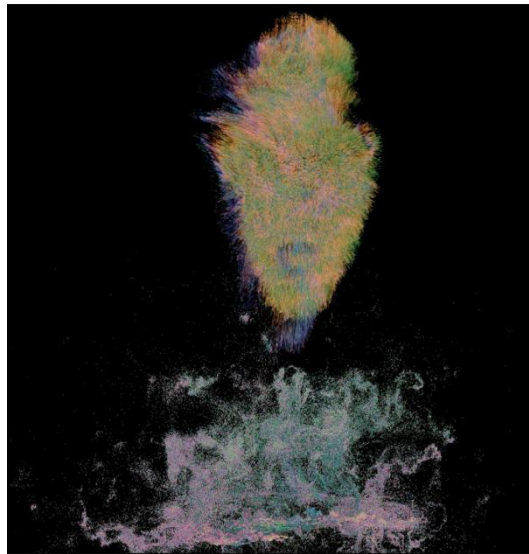
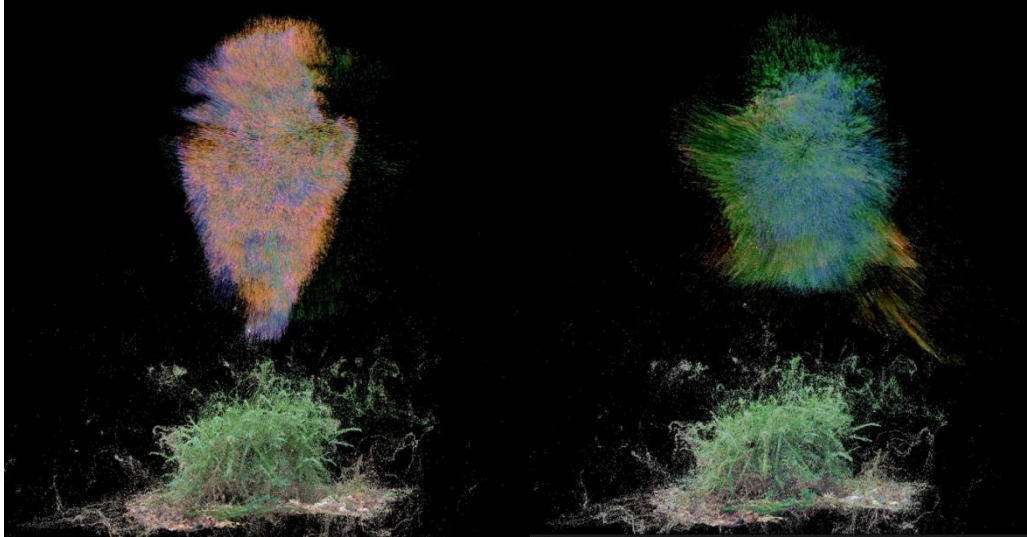


Fig 12.1 *Digital Sculpture – Shrub*

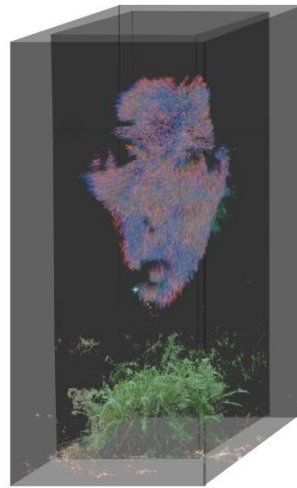


Fig 12.2

Alongside this phase of practice, I explored another direction within the forest environment through the work *Digital Sculpture — Shrub* (fig 12.1). This piece combines Cinema 4D modeling, Polycam 3D scanning, and TouchDesigner visual programming. The lower half of the video presents a 3D scan of a shrub from the forest, continuously rotating and shifting between a defined shrub form and a particle-based, disintegrated state. Above the shrub, the viewer’s real-time mirror image is projected, similar to what appears in *WoodWight*. As shown in fig 12.2, the video is projected onto the surface of an enclosed cube made of double-layered black chiffon, installed in a clearing between trees—similar to the setup in fig 11.2. The aim is to confront the viewer, in their search for certainty within a strange environment, with the alienating echo of both their image and the surrounding objects. Unlike the previous work, where the viewer’s mirrored image was integrated into the overall environment, this piece positions the alienated mirror image alongside the digitized shrub to form a kind of “alien object”—something simultaneously situated within the environment and yet fundamentally out of place. If the uncanny in the earlier work relied on the viewer realizing they had already merged into the uncertain field, here the focus shifts: the viewer seeks certainty within uncertainty, only to encounter a certainty that itself takes the form of a pure alien presence. This “alien object” originates from the environment (the mirror image is the viewer themselves, and the shrub physically grows near the installation), yet its estranged form prevents it from being absorbed back into the symbolic structure of the site. It becomes a disruptive point—something that cannot be reintegrated into the scene’s coherent system of meaning. To borrow Žižek’s term, it is a *phallic signifier*⁵²: an element embedded

⁵² “This is the way Lacan defines the phallic signifier, as a “signifier without signified” which, as such, renders possible the effects of the signified: the “phallic” element of a picture is a meaningless stain that “denatures” it, rendering all its constituents “suspicious,” and thus opens up the abyss of the search for a meaning—nothing is what it seems to be, everything is to be interpreted, everything is supposed to possess some supplementary meaning.” Žižek, S. (1992). *Looking awry: An introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular culture*. MIT

within the environment, yet fundamentally at odds with it. Viewed in isolation, it may seem no more than a meaningless blot. But once situated in context, its dissonance destabilizes the entire symbolic order around it. The presence of this signifier dislocates all surrounding signifying relations, forcing the environment to reorganize itself around this unresolved point. All meaning, in the face of the phallic signifier, demands supplemental reinterpretation. Thus, while the forest's original uncertainty could still be grasped as an external threat, the emergence of this phallic signifier renders even that understanding unstable. The forest no longer stands as a coherent unfamiliar object outside the subject—it becomes a field where the very mechanisms for distinguishing the familiar from the unfamiliar are put into question. The viewer is forced into a state of ambiguity: within the polysemic structure generated by the work, they are thrown into a panic of hidden meanings, unable to identify any stable ground for constructing identity. The forest, in turn, becomes saturated with the latent threat of presence born from absence—a field haunted by the collapse of interpretive certainty.

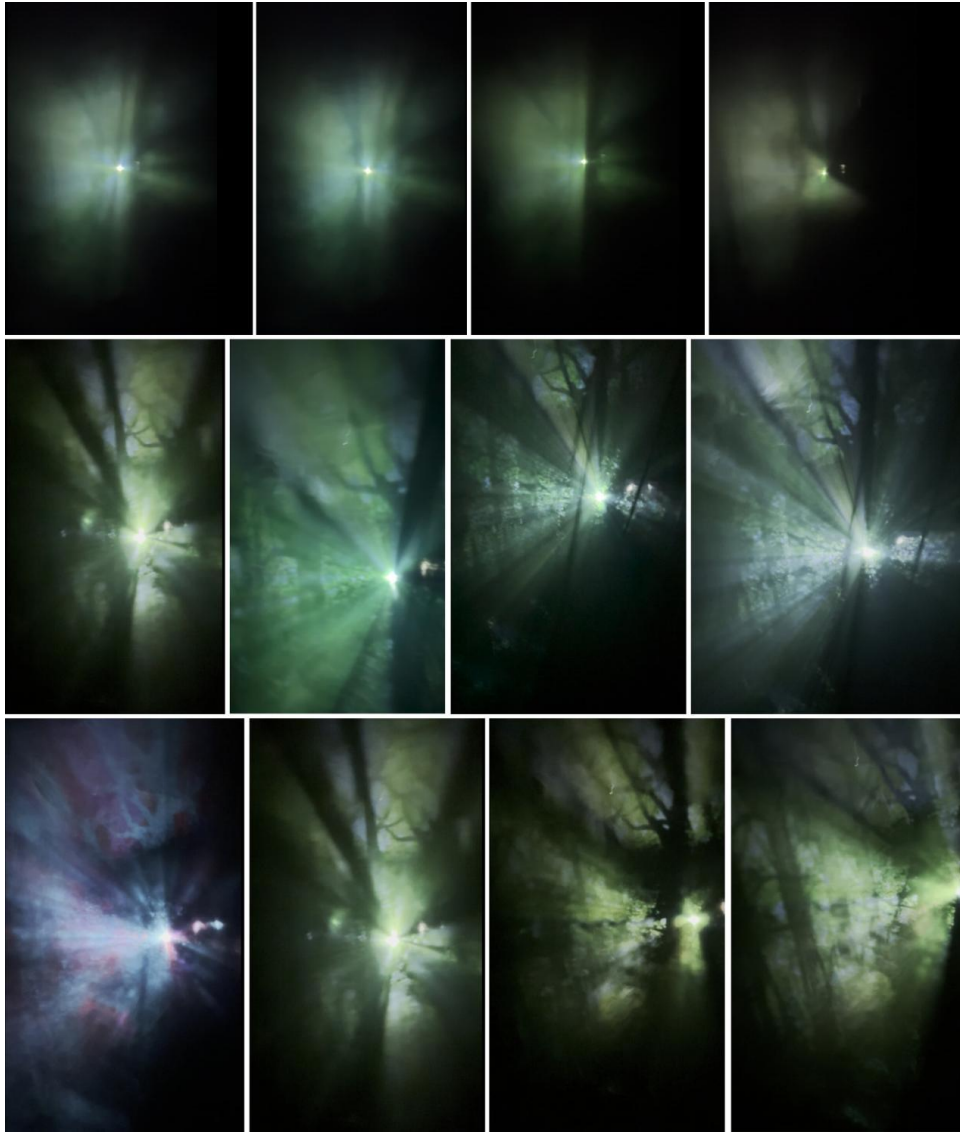


Fig 13.1 *Digital Sculpture – Woodland*

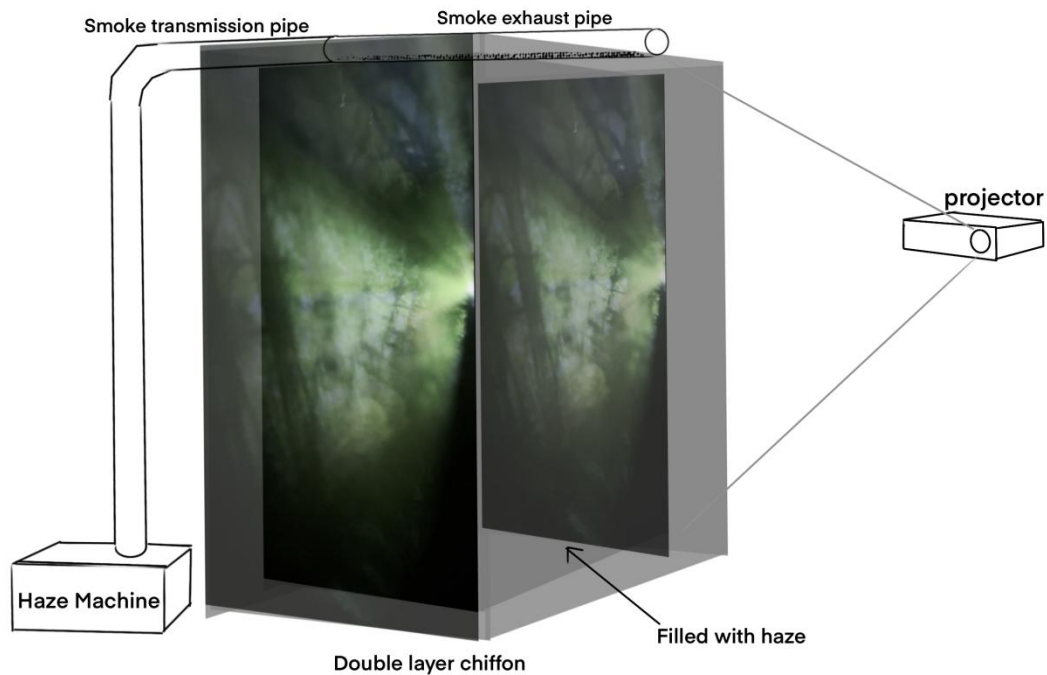


Fig 13.2

However, due to some practical difficulties—such as the challenge of setting up electrical equipment in the forest, the threat posed by frequent rain to such equipment, the difficulty of obtaining permission for electrical installations in the forest, and the obstruction caused by strong winds to the installation of projection screens—the work *Digital Sculpture – Shrub* was ultimately not tested within the forest. Based on the same conceptual approach, I created another piece, *Digital Sculpture – Woodland* (fig 13.1), to address these challenges. Unlike the former, this work does not introduce an alien object (*phallic object*) into the ghostly forest environment; instead, it brings the forest environment into our familiar, dark indoor space. Within the indoor setting, the work achieved greater stability in presentation. As shown in fig 13.2, the work is composed of a semi-enclosed nested space built from two layers of black chiffon. A haze machine on the left side fills the interior with white water vapor mist evenly through a porous smoke exhaust pipe. The mist is contained within the space by the double chiffon layers and does not leak out. At the same time, a projector placed at a distance casts programmed light and shadow effects—originally captured from the forest at dusk—into the mist-filled space. With the semi-transparency and fluidity of the haze, the image takes on a quasi-three-dimensional, realistic appearance, rendering a preserved, frozen fragment of a misty forest during sunrise or sunset inside a standard indoor setting. This piece also functions as a *phallic signifier* by being out of place with its surroundings—like inserting a fragment of space disconnected from the normal world into a familiar indoor environment. However, unlike *Digital Sculpture–Shrub*, this work relatively weakens the uncertainty of the

surrounding environment. Compared to the dim forest, the dark indoor exhibition space—while also uncertain to some extent—is a more familiar setting for video art presentation. Thus, the surrounding environment can still be interpreted either as a ghostly, indeterminate world or as a familiar, graspable space of certainty. The central fragment of forest space is intended to evoke, within us as viewers, a sense of self-doubt about our judgment of this space whether it is certain or uncertain.

Only when this kind of self-doubt occurs, that is, when the viewer shifts from fearing that the uncertain darkness surrounding them might conceal something threatening to suspect that the very existence of the artwork renders any judgment about that environment questionable, the work will draw closer to the experience of the uncanny. In other words, when the viewer enters the spatial domain of the artwork and confronts a forest fragment that strives for realism as premise but remains hazy and ultimately ungraspable at the same time, viewers' experience is no longer threatened by the darkness of the environment or the strangeness of the artwork's appearance. Rather, it is because the realistic projected images make the meaning of the environment in which the work is located no longer clear. That is to say, the viewer begins to question what was once a stable signified—the “dark space in which video artworks are exhibited”—as it shifts into something that could just as easily be a regular exhibition room, a part of the artwork itself, or even a space that might conceal other elements interpretable as part of the work. As these doubts about one's judgment accumulate, the viewer is dislodged from their fixed position as viewer and drawn into the work, experiencing the uncertainty brought on by the “failure” of their interpretive framework. Therefore, it is because this work appears as a fragment of light and shadow suspended in a dark exhibition space, yet seems to be projected from a distant forest, that it has the potential through challenging our entrenched structures of understanding to reveal the uncanny at the core of our being.

In other words, this process of challenging ourselves is not aimed at the success of such a challenge, but is instead focused on the experience of its failure. It is only on the basis of this failure, and through the experience of the failing process, that we can shift from a mode of evading and eliminating threats posed by specific entities to a state of overwhelming, inescapable panic brought by our cognitive incapacity, in which everything becomes potentially threatening but cannot be distinguished. This distinction, at the level of phenomenal experience, echoes Heidegger's differentiation between fear and anxiety. As previously mentioned, fear allows us to “discover that what is environmentally ready-to-hand is threatening (Heidegger, 1962, p.176)”; that is, fear originates from a specific region of the world, from a definite entity (Heidegger, 1962, p.230). Anxiety, on the other hand, is triggered by a non-existent, completely indefinite entity. “Not only does this indefiniteness leave factually undecided which entity within-the-world is threatening us, but it also tells us that entities within-the-world are not ‘relevant’ at all” (Heidegger, 1962, p.231). This is why fear equates with the strange: it is the threat excluded from the “home” that

drives us back into it, a grasp of the ungraspable entities that emerge from within the linguistic or symbolic structures we are immersed in. Thus, within fear, there is ultimately nothing uncertain, everything is either grasped as the familiar, which is already determinately known, or as the unfamiliar, which is determinately grasped as not yet known. The weird figures in *Test-Portrait* push us away from the unfamiliar by constructing fear; this is not an invitation to return to an original state of uncertainty, but rather a process that reinforces the structure of the “home” through the experience of fear, driving us to remain even more firmly within the familiarity of “home.” At the same time, this mode of fixing things into the position of the “unfamiliar” incorporates what originally exceeded structural comprehension back into a binary model of unfamiliarity versus familiarity, thereby reabsorbing it into the structure. As a result, any genuine experience of the non-structural becomes impossible. This is the reason for the failure of *Reflection* and *Uncertain Self*: the possibility of the emergence of uncertainty is eliminated by fixing it within the structure as an objectified position.

Anxiety, as the emotional experience of the uncanny, is fundamentally different from the fear previously discussed. Anxiety is not triggered by any tangible threat posed by a concrete entity or object; rather, its source is unknowable, yet the potential possibility of its existence cannot be ignored. The subject experiences anxiety because they are aware that all things possess the potential to become threatening, yet they cannot locate or identify what exactly poses the threat. In other words, the anxious subject is gripped by the inability to know which specific entity might relate to them in the mode of threat and, therefore, concludes that everything carries a potential threat. In this state of anxiety, “not knowing” does not mean that the threatening entity lies outside the subject’s field of vision but that the very structure through which the subject knows and grasps things has lost its efficacy. In this structural failure, one confronts the raw presence of things, confronts the thing’s existential potentiality, yet is unable to comprehend or position them. Like the unfamiliar entity that causes fear, this potentiality presses in from all sides, but remains elusive and untraceable. This is why anxiety is *already there and yet nowhere* (Heidegger, 1962, p.231). The fear of the uncanny arises not from a strange object threatening my world but from the fact that everything in my world has suddenly become strange. Clearly, the unfamiliar in this context surpasses the object-position within the subject’s cognitive structure in the form of a totality of things. It is not merely the strangeness of the sum of things that induces the panic of anxiety, but rather the strangeness of the subject’s condition when confronted by this totality. Thus, the emergence of the uncanny is a kind of forced awakening of the subject to their condition—it is the moment the subject becomes aware of their thrownness into the world. This also means that the effectiveness of the artwork must begin with a challenge to its objectified position as something determinately grasped. Only through the breakdown of the object position can the other pole of the binary—the subject— be challenged. This is the core focus of my practice at this stage: by exploiting the contradictory relationship between the artwork and its environment—at once integrated and incompatible—the work forcibly

pulls the viewer out of their position as a stable viewing subject and into the work itself, thereby challenging the subject-object structure between viewer and artwork. At the same time, within this contradiction, the oscillation of meaning and reference between the work and the environment is amplified, shifting the threat source from the artwork to the viewer. In other words, the experience transitions from fear to anxiety.

In psychoanalysis, Lacan offers a more nuanced account of how anxiety operates by describing it as *the lack of a lack* (Evans, 2006, p.12). Within the operation of desire, the lack, as represented by the object of desire (*objet petit a*), drives the subject's pursuit of objects. However, when this lack disappears, or more precisely, when the symbolic object of desire, which is grasped as lack, is replaced by something incomprehensible, something that resists entry into the symbolic order and cannot be assimilated by the structure of language, our desire operation would be disrupted. At this point, when the empty position of the driven force of the desire is no longer empty, anxiety arises. Here, anxiety does not stem from the absence of an object; rather, it stems from the object, which originally functioned as a signifier that substituted for and referred to the lack, loses the lack it was meant to signify. Furthermore, it transforms into an object that can no longer be incorporated into the symbolic order structured around lack—a *thing* that cannot be symbolized like other objects (Lacan, 2016, p.131). If the common object of desire is *a lack that is represented*, then the object of anxiety is *a representation that manifests as a lack*.

This logic is reflected in several works at this stage of my practice. The typical operation aligned with the structure of desire would be for the artwork, situated within a ghostly environment, to serve as a representation of the ghostly. In that case, the viewer could relate to the work as the object of their desire—keeping a distance while attempting to understand the cause behind the ghostliness. However, the work in question chooses to challenge this pre-structured operation of desire. This challenge is not enacted by simply offering a sense of safety or familiarity in contrast to the ghostly environment because such a binary, mirror-like reversal would only continue to drive the mechanism of desire from the opposite end. In other words, once the artwork becomes an object whether familiar or strange, it retains a certain distance from the viewing subject, a distance that fuels the subject's pursuit of *jouissance*. This distance is inherent to our cognitive structure, an irreducible gap between the knower and the known. However, this work disrupts that structure by introducing a *phallic signifier* that cannot—or can barely—be integrated into the symbolic framework: for instance, encountering multiple versions of oneself within a haunted forest, or witnessing light from a forest projected into an indoor exhibition space with no relation to the environment. At this point of rupture in meaning, the signifier can no longer find its preceding or succeeding signifier within the signifying chain, and thus, it appears before us not as a meaningful symbol but as a *thing*, a material presence. Yet within our symbolic structure, this *thing* manifests as lack.

Although the operation of desire is driven by the lack, the object of anxiety occupies the place of this lack in a fundamentally different way: not by symbolizing it, but by refusing to be symbolized. It presents itself as a representation that appears as a void, thereby substituting for and blocking the position that *objet petit a* would otherwise occupy, and thus disrupting the continuous movement of desire. If the absence of the mother's breast serves as the foundational lack that drives the infant's formation of desire—and as the basic coordinate for the symbolic order constructed to mask that lack—then an object that represents this absence (such as the reel in Freud's *Fort-Da* game⁵³) becomes the object of desire in the infant's structure: the *objet petit a*. Anxiety, however, arises not from this symbolic absence, but from the *presence* of the breast as an entity when we are confronted with its existential reality and yet do not know what we mean about it. In other words, the breast is present in a way that cannot be desired or interpreted; it occupies the place of lack but refuses to function as a signifier within desire. If the object of desire can act as the signifier of lack to drive the operation of the structure because it always maintains an irreducible distance from the subject. Then, the object of anxiety is the overwhelming "breast" that comes too close. It can no longer be interpreted as a symbol that either delivers pleasure or *jouissance*. Instead, it confronts us with its pure material existence—its sheer thingness, a lump of flesh that intrudes upon us—producing unease. We are supposed to desire, yet we have lost the object of our desire. The artwork is supposed to be an object representing something, but because it is out of place in the environment, it represents something that we cannot interpret.

The unreadable breast and the artwork in this context become objects of anxiety because the entity they refer to fully occupies the position of their signified, resulting in anxiety. In other words, the object of desire is present through its absence, while the object of anxiety is absent through its presence. Or, more precisely, anxiety is the minimal mode by which one maintains a relation to things at the moment when desire fails, whereas desire is compensation for the irreducible lack revealed by anxiety⁵⁴. In other words, to use Heidegger's terms, this anxiety is what drives us to sway between structure and non-structure, rather than something that destroys us or throws us into the abyss of pure nothingness. Thus, what gives rise to anxiety is not pure nothingness, nor the lack that drives desire, but rather the authentic mode of being of things in relation to a limited human subject. Or the subject's experience of its limitation when confronted with what lies beyond the grasp of human cognitive structures. This is

⁵³ Freud, for example, utilizes the infant's fort-da game to suggest that such repetitions are likely to be an outward manifestation of the conflict between the mother's absence and the "power" she wields over her.

Freud, S. (2015). Beyond the pleasure principle. *Psychoanalysis and History*, 17(2), 151-204, chapter II.

⁵⁴ "...the elements whose compass I have just sketched out, it is that, if anxiety is what I told you it was, this relationship of sustaining desire where the object is missing, we rediscover this other thing of which we have experience, the fact is that, to reverse the formula - this is constantly seen in practice - desire is a remedy for anxiety." Lacan, J. (2015). *Transference: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VIII* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; B. Fink, Trans.). Polity Press.p.349

what Lacan emphasizes: that there is no lack in the real (Lacan, 2015, p.132); lack only appears through symbolic mediation. This lack has no relation to the entity but depends on whether the subject chooses to recognize a certain truth, namely, the limitations of its cognitive structure and its disavowal of those limitations. The lack expressed by the object is the lack within the subject. In other words, from the human perspective, lack remains constant in the transition between desire and anxiety, but the subject's position about that lack shifts with each change in perspective—between the pursuit of lack as an object within the symbolic structure of desire, and the confrontation with the subject's essential lack in the breakdown of that structure. From this, we can see that the uncanny, as the most primal essence of the human, as pure uncertainty, arises in the transition from desire to anxiety. That is, in the process through which one moves from experiencing lack in the object to experiencing lack in the self. This shift in perspective is crucial to the presentation of the uncanny, and it also reveals a key feature in tracing its emergence: the viewer's internal, subjective position.

3.2 The Alien Object and Paradoxicality

The first three practical projects of this stage revealed an important dimension for tracing the uncanny: namely, the necessity of returning to the subject position of the viewer, and of retracing the concealed essence of uncanniness through the viewer's experience of their own uncertainty. However, in fact, these works cannot yet be said to have successfully presented the uncanny; rather, the pathway and method leading toward the uncanny remained unclear. Transforming the artwork from an object that could originally be readily grasped within the cognitive structure into a seemingly familiar yet fundamentally strange “alien object,” or shifting the work from functioning as a signifier referring to some entity into a phallic signifier that threatens the signifier chain, emerged in the earlier practices as an important method for producing uncertainty. Yet the conditions for constructing such a phallic signifier are both simple and complex. On the one hand, in a simple sense, a signifier can be regarded as a representation of lack once it detaches from the signifier chain to which it originally belongs and produces a rupture in the sliding of meaning. On the other hand, the difficulty lies in the fact that, in order to become a phallic signifier, the signifier must resist its own origin. A *thing* becomes a signifier through the erasure of the subject's original experiential reference to it⁵⁵; the relationship between signifier and signified can only be located in the sliding movement from one signifier to another, or in other words, the meaning (signified) attributed to a signifier depends on a chain of other signifiers and potential signifieds⁵⁶. In Lacan's theory, the signifier

⁵⁵ “What man leaves behind him is a signifier, it is a cross, it is a bar, qua barred, qua overlaid by another bar which indicates on the one hand that as such it has been effaced” Lacan, J. (2019). The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book VI: Desire and its interpretation: 1958-1959. p.56

⁵⁶ “The sense is always moving towards something, towards another meaning, towards the closure of meaning. It

forms a structure or network through this sliding along the signifier chain⁵⁷. However, for a signifier to function as a phallic signifier, it must negate the relationality with the other signifiers that anchor its position while still being situated within that network. In other words, this does not require the artwork to use its appearance to illustrate uncertainty (as in *Reflection* and *Uncertain Self*), which would simply make the work cease to function as a signifier of something. Nor does it require the work to become merely the opposite of the represented object (as in *Test-Portrait*), since this would again incorporate the work (as another alienated signifier) into a determinate binary structure of judgment. Rather, the work must become a signifier that resists its own position within the structure of reference. That is, it must become an object that presents itself as graspable within the viewer's cognitive structure while simultaneously negating that very act of grasping. Only in this way can the artwork, as a phallic signifier or alien object, avoid being fixed within any determinate object identity, and also avoid being excluded (under the guise of strangeness) into the opposite pole of the familiar within a binary structure. Instead, it reveals, through a paradoxical stance, the cost that subjects pay in entering the symbolic order: the void in the subject's position produced by the symbolic castration through which the world becomes structured and intelligible.

By this standard, the previous three works do not accurately embody the function of *the alien object*. Faces emerging on tree trunks, light-and-shadow sculptures of uncertainty suspended in the forest, and forest fragments floating indoors, all of these works indeed display a visual dissonance with their environments, and their appearance does enhance the overall atmosphere of uncertainty. However, because the works themselves lack a strong connection to their environments or because the connection is relatively weak, the paradoxical experience they offer to viewers is correspondingly limited. The weakest among them is *Digital Sculpture – Woodland*. If the realization of the uncanny relies on prompting the viewer to question their long-held certainties and the structure of the “familiar home” when placed within an uncertain environment, then this work succeeds in using its stark incompatibility with its surroundings to render the entire environment ambiguous and hard to define. However, from the perspective of evoking the viewer's return to their own subject-position through self-doubt, it fails to do so effectively—this return that lies at the core of the uncanny as the essential uncertainty of human subjectivity. *Digital Sculpture – Shrub* and *WoodWight*, by contrast, maintain a certain degree of

always refers to something that is out ahead or that turns back upon itself, but there is a direction.” Lacan, J., & Miller, J.-A. (1993). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan. - Book 3: The psychoses, 1955-1956*. Routledge.p.137

⁵⁷ “The first network, that of the signifier, is the synchronic structure of the material of language...The second network, that of the signified, is the diachronic set of concretely pronounced discourses, which historically affects the first network, just as the structure of the first governs the pathways of the second.”

Lacan, J., Fink, H., & Grigg, R. (2006). *Écrits: the first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Tran.). W. W. Norton.p.354

connection with their environment: the human faces match the texture of tree bark, the image corresponds with literary motifs of ghostly trees bearing human features, and the digitally modeled shrub echoes the form of actual underbrush. These all suggest to the viewer that the artwork belongs to the surrounding forest—that it is part of the environment’s signifier network. For works along this path, the ideal presentation would involve both a seamless integration into the signifier network and a simultaneous manifestation of estrangement—something that destabilizes the viewer’s trust in the structure and the coherence of the network itself. For example, in an array of windmills spinning with the breeze, one windmill rotates in the opposite direction (Žižek, 1992, p.55). In this case, the signifier “windmill” detaches from its regular signifier chain. Although it still appears to be a windmill, it has lost its signified in the network through its abnormal reference. This lacking signifier renders the entire environment suspect—not because the object itself is inherently odd (on its own, it remains entirely normal), but because its untimely or out-of-place presence disrupts the logic of the whole. One begins to question whether the problem lies in the singular windmill or in the rest of the environment. Both become equally viable as explanations, and yet the viewer is left with no ground upon which to establish any identity. In other words, the windmill becomes a *phallic signifier* because it activates a paradoxical coexistence of failed identity, it undermines the coherence of the environment while still belonging to it. However, in the two works mentioned above, the artworks as alien objects fail to activate this paradox. Though they appear abrupt and inappropriate within the field, they do not render the environment absurd or questionable through their presence. Seeing one’s mirrored image in a dark forest—whether on a tree trunk or suspended in the air—is already an abnormal experience. When such an experience is placed within an equally abnormal woodland setting, it only reinforces the sense of strangeness and uncertainty but struggles to produce a self-contradictory experience or provoke self-doubt. The paradoxical dissonance might be stronger if a pair of ordinary children’s shoes were placed on the ground or if a plain hat were suspended in midair. Therefore, while these three works succeed in pushing the artwork beyond the position of an object-to-be-viewed, they remain insufficient in effectively representing the uncanny.

In response to this issue, namely, how an artwork, as an *alien object*, might function as a *phallic signifier*, I extended my inquiry through further practice, focusing on what kind of artistic work can effectively serve as a trigger for paradox. Following the idea that the artwork’s presence within the symbolic order of its environment can obstruct the operation of that very order, I conducted a series of experiments titled *Alien Object-1* (fig 14), *Alien Object-2* (fig 15), and *Alien Object-3* (fig 16). These three projects continued the core methodological approach developed in earlier practice: on the one hand, incorporating both the exhibition environment and the viewer’s experience into the work’s conceptual framework; on the other hand, requiring the work, based on conforming to the symbolic order in the environment, interfere with the stability of the structure or cut off the fluidity of the signifier. Ultimately, the aim was to explore how the artwork’s presentation might dismantle

the signifier order's identity and offer the viewer an irreducible, paradoxical experience.



Fig 14 *Alien object-1*

In the work *Alien Object-1*, once again situated within a forest setting, I selected a fragment of a clearing and subjected it to distortion and transformation using TouchDesigner software. This altered fragment was then projected back onto the

corresponding section of the actual landscape. The intention of this work was to offer the viewer an experience wherein the tranquil, familiar, and readable act of walking through an ordinary forest is disrupted by the encounter with an anomalous scene situated in one corner of that forest. At first, this anomalous image appears nearly indistinguishable from the real scenery behind it. It is merely a subtly distorted and fluid version of the original image. Due to the high transparency of the projection surface, the moving image and the real background remain fully overlapped and difficult to distinguish. However, when the viewer is drawn in and stops to observe, this initially mild disturbance gradually transforms into a more radical process of estrangement. The contours and edges of background forms in the projected image begin to warp and blur more aggressively over time, and the color palette shifts from a naturalistic match with the real forest to a highly saturated, abstract, and unnatural visual composition. Yet, it still benefits from the semi-transparent projection material, this intensified process of visual alienation remains persistently layered over the real landscape. In other words, this overlap of alienation and reality not only ensures that this abstract visual image that has become irrational cannot be separated from the world in which it exists, but also makes it difficult to interpret as an alien object and, in a way that cannot accurately correspond to its signified, against the backdrop of reality and within the symbolic order we have constructed of the forest.

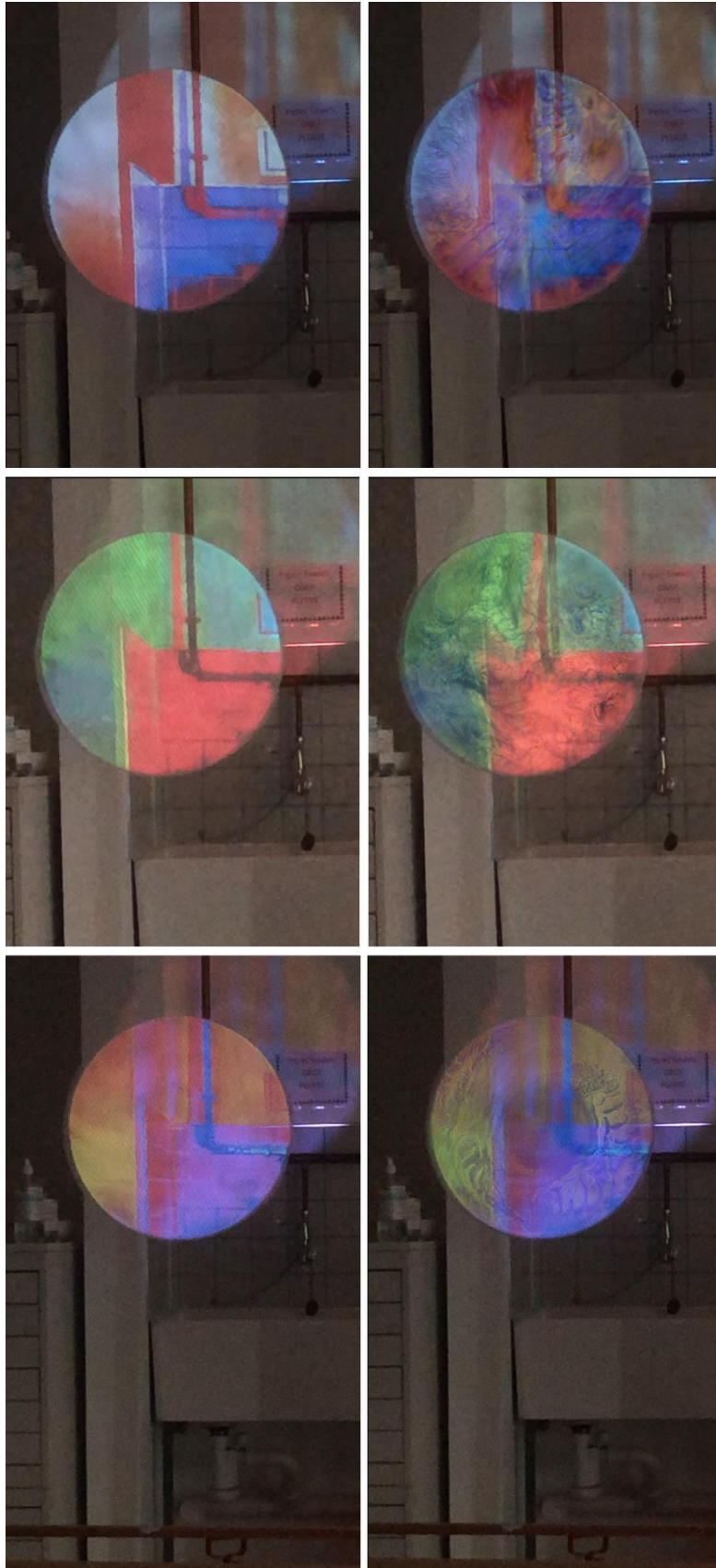


Fig 15 *Alien object-2*

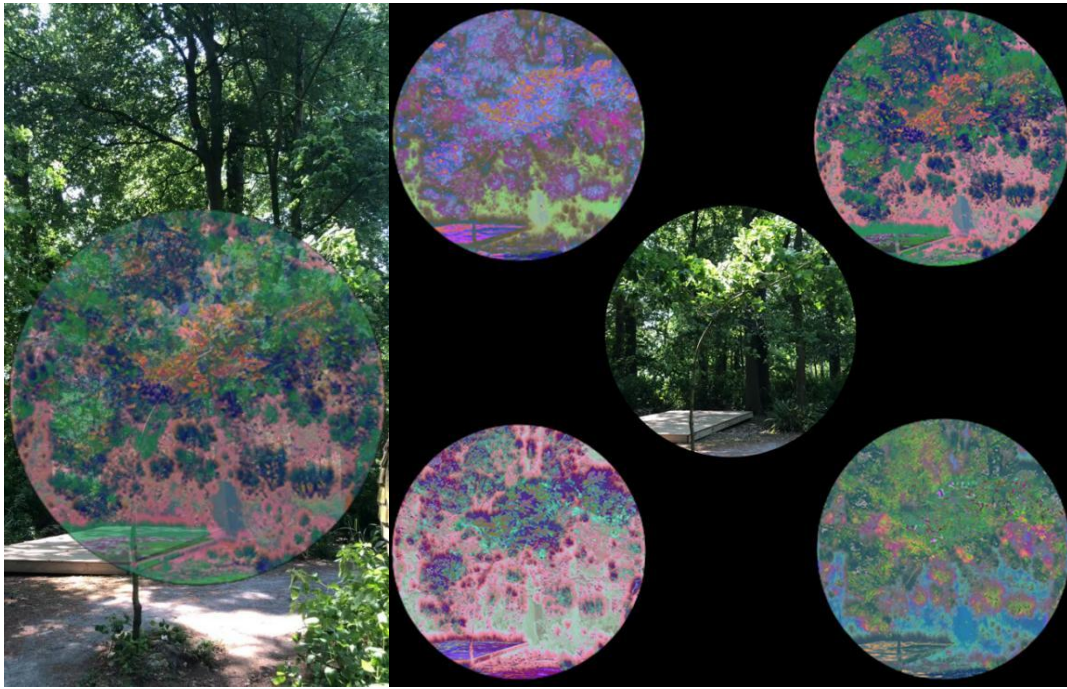


Fig 16 *Alien object-3*

Alien object-2 (fig 15) and *Alien object-3* (fig 16) continue the conceptual trajectory of *Alien object-1*, with adjustments to spatial context and object selection: fig 15 relocates the installation from the forest to a familiar indoor environment, while fig 16 shifts the object being replaced from a near-ground element to a distant landscape. Compared to *Alien object-1*, both works are reduced in physical scale to lessen the sense of visual oppression and immersive identification with the object’s representation. This downsizing allows viewers, at a normal viewing distance, to perceive not only the internal content of the work but also its disruptive relationship to the surrounding space, thereby enhancing the perceived tension between the “alien object” and its environment. Additionally, the projection screen in these two works has been changed from a rectangle to a circle. This circular format corresponds to the radial visual interference structure used in the video, where image distortions emanate outward from the center. Combined with a mild spherical perspective distortion applied to the video content, the image produces an ambiguous spatial illusion—one that oscillates between a two-dimensional circular surface and a three-dimensional spherical form. This visual ambiguity further destabilizes the viewer’s perceptual framework and sense of self-recognition. In *Alien object-2*, the work is suspended within a familiar classroom space, gradually replacing the background of pipes and walls. The everydayness of this setting is crucial to the work, for its familiar appearance—seemingly “ordinary and unremarkable”—serves as a symbol of the “familiar, unquestionable, immediate, and readily accessible” conviction (Cavell, 1984, p.81). Over time, the background shifts from subtle color distortions to increasingly unstable, symbolically suggestive imagery—evoking the *planet Jupiter-like* turbulence, rippling water surfaces, and iris-like forms—while still

retaining traces of the original background. The result is a transformation of a fragment of the familiar space into an *alien object*, one that occupies a paradoxical position: simultaneously within the structural system (as a representation of the background) and outside of it (as content that evolves toward incomprehensibility).

Alien object-3 applies the same visual interference strategy to a mid-range scene with pronounced depth, exploring how this mechanism functions when substituting not foreground but spatially layered background content. Unlike the previous work, it does not attempt to construct a legible symbolic image, but instead further develops the logic of *Alien object-1* by weakening the representational correspondence with the original object. Only faint traces of the original color palette and contours remain. The final result is a suspended visual form that overlaps with the real environment but resists coherent identification, offering a viewing experience of “seeming familiarity yet persistent ambiguity.” However, due to limitations with power infrastructure, *Alien object-3* could not be tested in an outdoor setting. Overall, the *Alien object* series more precisely positions the “alien” within a paradoxical structural role than the previous forest-based experiments. In contrast to the forest-face motif, whose inherent ambiguity makes it difficult to anchor within a determinate symbolic order, *Alien object* achieves greater clarity by replacing a well-defined background, allowing the work to be initially embedded within an existing signifying system and then gradually dislocated from it. This shift—from clearly positioned to increasingly unrecognizable—more effectively evokes the viewer’s experience of structural instability and interpretive uncertainty.

Building upon the continued exploration of this approach, namely, constructing the artwork as an alien object within the symbolic order in order to provoke the viewer’s self-doubt regarding their grasp of the surrounding environment and to test the paradoxical potential of encountering a normal deviation within a normal setting. In other words, as the normal and ordinary scene shifts, the paradoxical interplay between contradiction and incongruity reveals the strangeness and richness latent within it, thereby exposing the fragility of our conviction in apprehending objects as familiar when confronted with its own inherent negativity. At the same time, however, we can also perceive that it is through the challenge and exposure of this fragility that what was once “ordinary and familiar” is freed from the “familiar” perspective and allowed to disclose its truth⁵⁸. I created *Alien Object–Fissure* (fig 17) as a practical investigation into the representation of such uncertainty. In this work, I attempted to open a visible, irreconcilable fissure within the framework of the familiar, everyday world, constructing a scenario in which one, while walking through an ordinary, recognizable school building, suddenly discovers a fissure suspended in a classroom,

⁵⁸ “So *vulnerability defines ordinariness* and the development of the concept of vulnerability provides new resources for a re-evaluation of the ordinary.” Laugier, S. (2016). Politics of Vulnerability and Responsibility for Ordinary Others. *Critical Horizons: Journal of Social & Critical Theory*, 17(2), p.207–223.

in which implies at the falsity of our daily reality. It is akin to discovering a glitch in the world of the movie *The Matrix*: a glitch in the system that, while inert and non-threatening, nonetheless destabilizes our sense of reality. It prompts us to question the truth of the familiar world and to reinterpret the ordinary as a possible deception—a latent threat⁵⁹. Even though the surrounding environment remains unchanged from the familiar world, when the glitch is involved, the more normal the environment is, the more it seems like some so-called “truth” is hidden behind it.

⁵⁹ “the phenomenological epoché necessarily implies a (non-pathological) uncanniness undermining everyday trust in the world” Griffero, T. (2021). Weak monstrosity. Schelling’s uncanny and atmospheres of uncanniness. *Studi di estetica*, (20).

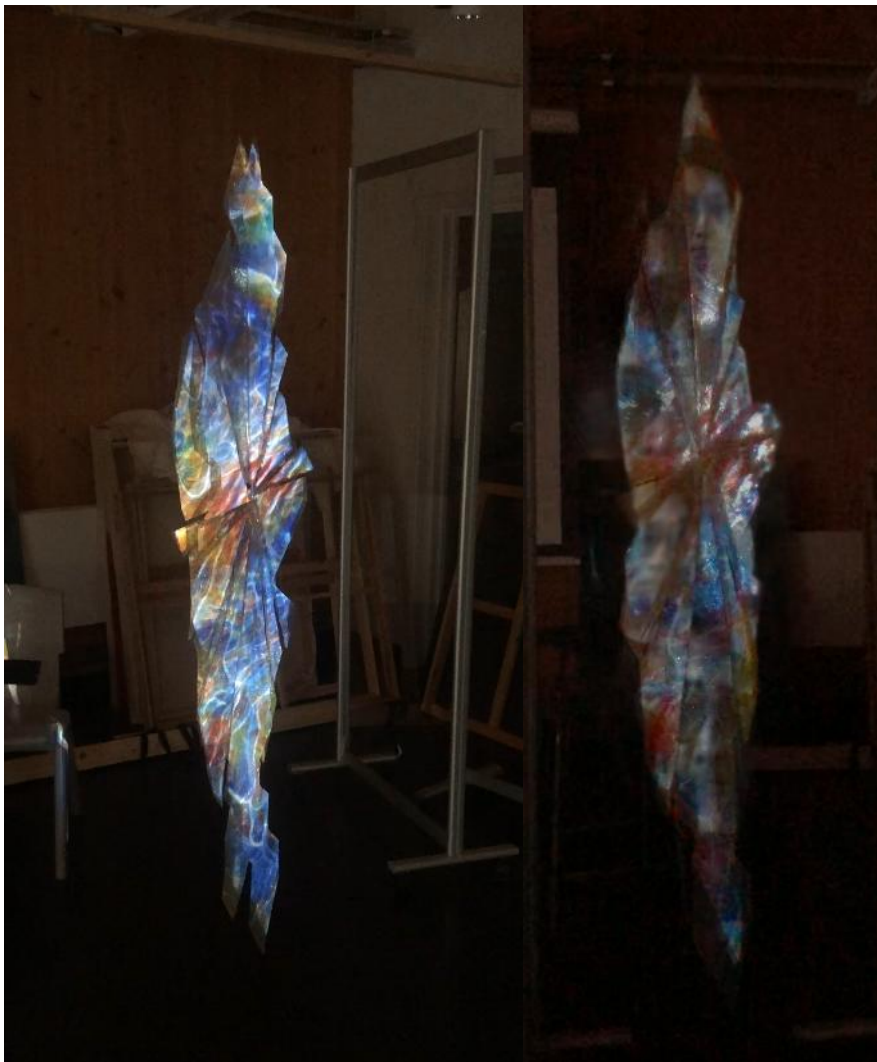
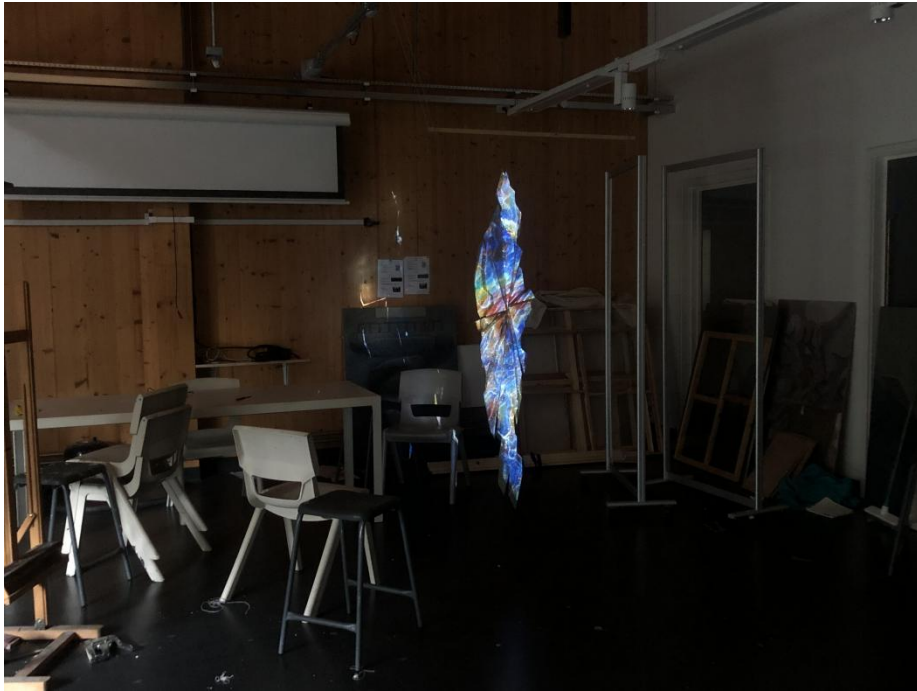


Fig 17.1 *Alien object-fissure*



Front view



Side view

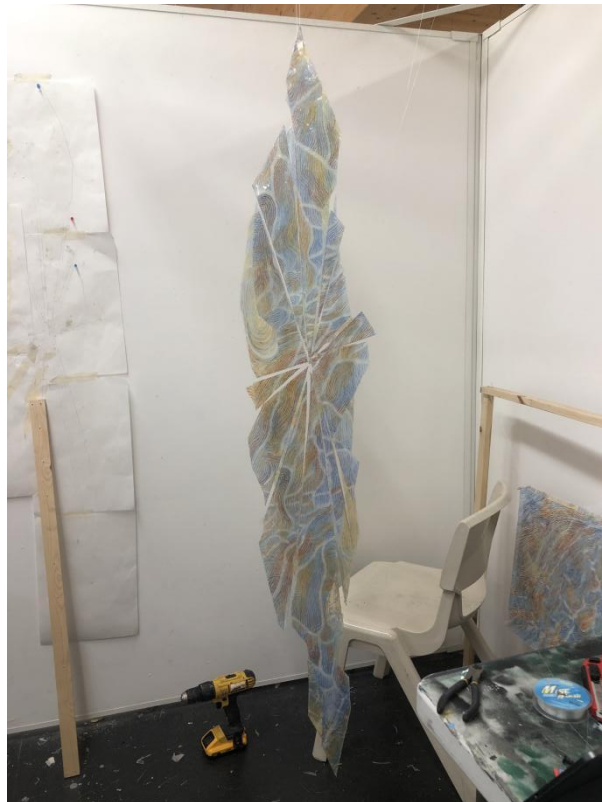


Fig 17.2 *Alien object-fissure* structure chart

Positioning the artwork as an *alien object* within the structure represents one of the most accurate interpretive approaches to the uncanny or *heimlich*, that is, allowing unease to seep outward from within the familiar, leading the viewer to sway between feeling the world is being honest and feeling it is deceiving them, and rendering what was once ordinary as something filled with latent threat under a veil of suspicion. Like the first three works in the *Alien Object* series, this piece is not entirely disconnected from its environment. In *Alien Object–Fissure*, I employed two main strategies to establish a link and dialogue between the work and its environment (including the viewer). On the one hand, the suspended sculpture is composed of two overlapping layers of transparent epoxy resin (fig 17.2). To enable it to receive projected imagery and provide a visual basis for the dynamic, shifting images, I embedded gauze fabric inside the resin, painted with brushstrokes that resemble rippling water patterns. This semi-transparent material not only enables the work to carry projected visuals but also allows it to transmit information from the background. Additionally, each front and back resin panel is assembled from 18 small fractured plates, with deliberate gaps of 1–2 centimeters between them. These fissures permit the surrounding background to penetrate the work, visually breaking the continuity and wholeness of its surface, thereby preventing the work from detaching entirely from its environment. On the other hand, when a viewer approaches the piece, their head is captured by a hidden camera on one side. As they move closer, they begin to see their own mirrored image reflected in a fragmented manner, with varying sizes and distortions scattered across the fractured surfaces (as shown in fig 17.1, right image). This transformation further establishes a loosely constructed referential relationship between the viewer and the work. Its purpose is to ensure that when the viewer becomes too absorbed or immersed in the work and begins to overlook the work’s relationship with its environment, they are instead drawn into a signifier structure involving their own mirrored image.

The influence of these two aspects prevents the viewer from ever completely relegating the work to the position of a strange, alien, and disconnected external object that does not require interpretation. Instead, the work maintains a connection with the viewer: whether as a piece that remains within the symbolic structure of the external environment, or as one situated within the symbolic relationship corresponding to the viewer’s mirror image. However, at the same time, the work cannot be entirely subsumed into that structure: in the referential relationship with the external environment, the work acts like a rupture between reality and illusion. While it departs from real space through highly saturated abstract imagery, the background revealed through fissures and textures anchors it, to some extent, back into reality. In the referential relationship of the mirror image, the work is like a shattered mirror that has lost spatial coherence—its reflections vary in distance, size, and completeness—constantly obstructing the viewer’s intention to locate a complete image of themselves in the mirror. Therefore, in this practice, I attempt to preserve the work in a state between symbolic apprehension and the transcendence of the symbolic structure. This paradoxical malfunction, both within and outside, results in the

viewer's failure to arrive at a definitive judgment. In other words, my intention in the design of this work is to provide the viewer with a dilemma born from self-questioning:

A fissure suspended within a familiar space both disrupts the viewer's firm belief in the symbolic order of the overall environment through its disturbance of the background and distortion of the mirror image. It simultaneously maintains the viewer's connection to the established symbolic order through the partial emergence of the background within the semi-transparent work and the partial correspondence between the mirror image and the viewer. In the former case, the work is constantly on the verge of revealing to the viewer a certain truth that is concealed beneath the false surface of reality, while in the latter, it always emphasizes the priority of reality and order, refuting that the revelation of the former is merely the irrational illusion of the subject. In other words, the former and the latter represent the paradoxical coexistence of revelation and repression both within and outside a singular cognitive structure. Thus, in this context, the work can be regarded as an *alien object* within the cognitive structure, which is an entity that evokes the viewer's anxiety over the loss of the foundational basis of cognition or the destabilization of the grounds for judgment by its movement of intrusion into and eruption out of the structure.

The result of this anxiety is that, on the one hand, the viewer, in experiencing the work as an alien presence, begins to question the integrity of the surrounding environment. Namely, a work situated within a real-world setting becomes a glitch within the symbolic framework that is used to understand reality. It transforms the familiar classroom in which it resides into a familiar shell that conceals and represses a certain unfamiliarity. In this sense, what the work evokes is not a clearly defined otherness but an uncertainty repressed by the viewers themselves. It points in a negative way to our attachment and insistence on meaning—and the premise of this insistence is the integrity of the symbolic structure. On the other hand, the viewer may also adopt an external, rational perspective that transcends direct sensory experience that what they are experiencing is merely the result of a consciously constructed artistic mechanism. The setup of the work, the suspicious environment it generates, and the sense of alienation perceived can all be understood as strategies deliberately designed by the artist. From this point of view, the anxiety does not stem from real instability but from an aesthetic illusion that can be undone.

These two contradictory modes of perception cannot truly cancel out each other's legitimacy because they are both grounded in a shared presupposition—a tacit, self-evident belief in the certainty of knowledge as a premise⁶⁰—a belief that is

⁶⁰ “Yet when we consider human knowledge as a whole, we find that it rests on a set of unjustified beliefs or assumptions. Everyday knowledge works by excluding certain possibilities (such as evil demons) and taking certain things for granted (such as the veracity of our senses)” Withy, K. (2015) *Heidegger on being uncanny*.

shaken by the perceptual and semiotic uncertainties presented by the work. The work not only ruptures the symbolic structure that guarantees meaning but also questions the very preconditions upon which the viewer's judgment of the work is based. In other words, this is the paradox of cognition or judgment that the work evokes in the viewer through its representational uncertainty. This irreconcilable paradox reveals the fundamental uncertainty internal to the viewer's subjective position, namely, our essential uncanniness condition. Regarding this uncertainty caused by the internal collapse of the subject's basis for judgment, Thomas Nagel, in his thesis *The Absurd*, expresses this contradiction from a skeptical perspective as a dislocation between pretension or aspiration and reality (Nagel, 2012, p.13), and, like Camus, names its manifestation in phenomena as the absurd. For example, he points out moments in life when this essential human uncertainty becomes operative: "a notorious criminal is made president of a major philanthropic foundation; you declare your love over the telephone to a recorded announcement; as you are being knighted, your pants fall down(Nagel, 2012, p.13)."

Here, the absurdity as a manifestation of the uncanny in everyday life does not imply that these actions or events are uncanny. Rather, it refers to how, when we are confronted with these events, our expectations and the possibility of unexpected occurrences coexist in equally reasonable ways, and this coexistence interferes with our judgment. That is a discrepancy between our ordinary, everyday self-understanding and a skeptical self-understanding (Withy, 2015, p.39). In other words, it is a gap between our expectation to grasp things with certainty, and our doubt toward the arbitrariness of that expectation. For example, I believe that the "me" (with the uncertain possibilities) attending a knighting ceremony is identical, in terms of serious significance, with the ritual itself (with clear expected results and eliminate uncertainties); that the chairperson of a charity foundation is morally identical with the institutional role of the chairperson; that love and the rituals of love are identical within the solemn symbolic order of love. Or, in the case of facing an artwork, we assume the identity between the truth as presented in the work and the work as the object expressing that truth.

However, it is equally undeniable that any unexpected event may possess the same degree of legitimacy as the identities we firmly believe in. On one hand, we persistently project our expectations of identity upon the world through a framework of certainty; on the other hand, we can rationally recognize that, because our relation to things is imaginary, the randomness of contingency is just as reasonable. Here, what is referred to as "rationality", or thinking that operates within the symbolic order and cognitive structure, does not imply a rebuttal of sensibility through the content of

Harvard University Press.p.39

"The things we do or want without reasons, and without requiring reasons—the things that define what is a reason for us and what is not—are the starting points of our skepticism." Nagel, T. (2012). *Mortal questions (canto classics)*. Cambridge university press.p.15

thought itself. Rather, it is a critique from an external perspective of knowledge structure⁶¹ targeting the internal perspective's self-evident beliefs within the structure. This holds regardless of whether such content of this firm belief is the determination of sensory experience (e.g., the suspicion toward the environment of the work) or stems from the presumptuous expectations shaped by everyday structural judgments (e.g., the belief that the work reveals some kind of truth). Therefore, as an *alien object*, the artwork occupies the gap left by the misalignment of these two modes of cognition—the space between the work as merely a work of conception and the work as a possible revelation of some truth.

When faced with these two equally valid yet logically irreconcilable experiences, we find ourselves, on the one hand, faithfully adhering to our expectations and responding to things with seriousness, but at the same time unable to suppress the challenge posed by the accidental to this very seriousness. On the other hand, we are aware that we cannot eliminate or ignore the legitimacy of the accidental, yet we still habitually persist in approaching the artwork with a serious attitude⁶². And within this condition—where our criteria for judgment and fundamental coordinates can no longer be relied upon as guarantees of structural identity—the only thing that remains certain is our doubt and reaction to our nature's uncanniness. In other words, this Cartesian-like skeptical stance of the *cogito* reveals the subject-position from which the uncanny emerges⁶³: the subject is neither merely the bearer of uncanny experience nor simply the site where uncertainty unfolds. The subject position revealed by paradoxicality, simultaneously, is the fundamental cause that leads to paradoxicality. This is because the subject-position is not a foundation for making determinate judgments about uncertainty. Instead, it is the manifestation of paradoxical points in its judgment structure. In other words, the subject is both the object of the doubt produced by paradox and the reason why such paradoxical doubt occurs in the first place. This paradoxical nature of the subject-position means that it can no longer be simply regarded as the center of the cognitive structure. Instead, due to its paradoxical essence—being both within and beyond the structure—and through its self-revelation within the uncertainty of judgment based on its own uncertainty, the subject itself

⁶¹ "Skepticism begins when we include ourselves in the world about which we claim knowledge. We notice that certain types of evidence convince us, that we are content to allow justifications of belief to come to an end at certain points, that we feel we know many things even without knowing or having grounds for believing the denial of others which, if true, would make what we claim to know false." Nagel, T. (2012). *Mortal questions (canto classics)*. Cambridge university press.p.18

⁶² "It is absurd because we ignore the doubts that we know cannot be settled, continuing to live with nearly undiminished seriousness in spite of them." Ibid., p.14

⁶³ "in the term subject ...I am not designating the living substratum needed by this phenomenon of the subject, nor any sort of substance, nor any being possessing knowledge in his pathos...nor even some incarnated logos, but the Cartesian subject, who appears at the moment when doubt is recognised as certainty." Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; A. Sheridan, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1973). p.126

becomes the structural precondition for the uncanny. In other words, the paradoxical position of the subject is the uncanny.

3.3 The Paradox of a Singular Structure in Revealing the Uncanny

Alien object-fissure still presents certain limitations in its attempt to reveal the problem of *the uncanny*. Although the work successfully evokes its paradoxical effect through a referential structure toward an external other: on the one hand, as an entity, the work constitutes the core of meaning and referential structure that generates the entire field including itself; as an alien object within space, it reassigns a new referential structure to the everyday space in which it is situated⁶⁴. At the same time, on the other hand, the work, through the uncertainty of its representational content, challenges the structural stability, coherence, and identity of this referential framework via the effect of its appearance. This may equally be seen as a kind of *defamiliarization* (Shklovsky, 2015), that is, a mechanism whereby the work or object is rendered as the unfamiliar within the familiar, thereby disrupting the viewer's habitual process of perception and undermining the tendency to ignore the essential strangeness of things. However, in this case, the work is not configured as the object of defamiliarization, but rather its presence renders everything surrounding it defamiliarized. Just as within the work itself, the effect of an anomalous entity that appears to stand apart from its surrounding space coexists paradoxically with its semi-transparent qualities and reflective connections to the viewer and the space, thereby transforming the work into both a threat that reveals "the substitutive and imaginary nature of our understanding of everyday spatial reality." And, simultaneously, it also suppresses the former by "making itself a hazy bridge connecting the environment and the viewer." This tension of contradictory coexistence gives the uncanny the potential to be evoked under ideal conditions.

However, in actual operation, this intended effect of the work encounters a negative force arising from within itself. That is, while on the one hand, the work can be understood as a paradoxical *alien object*, on the other hand, it can also be understood as an art object with a self-explanatory identity. In other words, the indeterminate appearance of a work that is difficult to interpret is merely a reference to its own identity as an artwork—no more, no less. This self-enclosed explanatory structure stems from the great degree of tolerance within the context of contemporary art toward the identity of the artwork (especially conceptual art), as exemplified by Arthur Danto's notion of the "artworld (Danto, 1964, p.580)". That is a prior

⁶⁴ "An installation of art is secondary in importance to the individual works it contains, while in a work of installation art, the space, and the ensemble of elements within it, are regarded in their entirety as a singular entity. Installation art creates a situation into which the viewer physically enters, and insists that you regard this as a singular totality." Bishop, C. (2005). *Installation art: a critical history*. Tate.p.6

knowledge structure that guarantees for the viewer the incorporation of any presented object into the signifier of “artwork.” It also aligns with Timothy Binkley’s observation regarding the *self-critical* (Binkley, 1977, p.265) function granted to contemporary art. Perhaps, contrary to LeWitt’s ideal, although the interpretive authority of the work is indeed returned to an “infinite viewer (LeWitt, 1967, p.12)”, it is in fact a broader structure of the big Other that has already foreclosed the viewer’s interpretive agency. Once the designation “artwork” is conferred upon the viewed entity by this prior knowledge structure, then regardless of the content of its representation—be it certainty or uncertainty—its certainty relative to the viewer’s judgment strips it of the conditions necessary to evoke the uncanny. This is what Baudrillard refers to when he speaks of the “circulation of reference” (when a knowledge structure guarantees the appearance of the artwork as the representation of its essence), the artwork within its system becomes a *simulacrum*, no longer revealing the real behind it, nor serving as the non-truth of truth, but falling into a loop in which it endlessly substitutes itself due to the loss of reference or circumference (Baudrillard, 1994, pp.5-6).

In other words, this self-explanation renders the work understood as: The fissure in the work is merely an artistic presentation of a fissure-shaped appearance; it neither reveals nor conceals—what it represents as essence is only its appearance. Such an understanding sublimates what was originally the void of essence (the non-essential nature of essence) exposed through the paradoxical process of failure, into a kind of *sublime object*⁶⁵. That is to say, this sublime object provides a safe retreat for the viewer to distance themselves again from the “failed” truth that had been exposed by the paradoxical presentation of the work’s inner negativity. As Žižek puts it, the sublime object is merely an embodiment of negativity that must remain at a distance and cannot be directly scrutinized (Žižek, 2008, pp.191-192). In other words, within the equivalence of appearance and representation, what seems to be a revelation of essence is only an identification of the outcome and experience produced by the movement of negativity with negativity itself. This embodiment of negativity, therefore, is far removed from negativity as such. That is, the un-reductable paradoxical process of “failure” between “revelation and repression”, which once revealed the non-essential nature of essence, or the non-truth of truth, has now been converted by this self-referential certainty into an identity between the result of failure and the essential problem itself. The latter is undoubtedly a stubborn certainty that is fundamentally at odds with the conditions required by the uncanny. This is why, as Mark Windsor points out, the uncanny, as a victory of the senses and a failure of

⁶⁵ “...there is nothing intrinsically sublime in a sublime object according to Lacan, a sublime object is an ordinary, everyday object which, quite by chance, finds itself occupying the place of what he calls *das Ding*, the impossible-real object of desire. The sublime object is ‘an object elevated to the level of *das Ding*’. It is its structural place - the fact that it occupies the sacred/forbidden place of *jouissance* - and not its intrinsic qualities that confers on it its sublimity.” Žižek, S. (2008). *The sublime object of ideology*. London; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. p.221

reason, stands in stark contrast to the sublime, which is a failure of the senses and a triumph of reason (Windsor, 2025). Therefore, this interference through the reestablishment of certainty may be seen as the primary reason for the failure of the work.

Although I refer to this deviation from the single-structured paradox as a “trap,” this does not imply that such self-referentiality constitutes an obstacle to the evocation of the uncanny. Rather, it is a necessary step to be sublated within the contemporary art context in order to achieve a thorough uncertainty of the subject position. In other words, beyond the single-structured paradox of the artwork’s failure to establish symbolic reference to the external other, it may be productive to develop a paradox of the work’s self-identifying structure simultaneously. This could contribute positively to the realization of a more radical form of “failure.” Therefore, in Chapter Four, I will focus on analyzing the “failure” method that emerges from this double-structured paradox—between reference to the other and reference to the self—that has become the central practical concern in the final phase of this research. In the remainder of the current chapter, I will temporarily set aside this double structure and shift the discussion toward artistic practices and experiments that, within this phase, aim to explore and test how the single-structured paradox might better avoid the self-referential guarantee of artistic identity. Based on reflections on the outcomes of *Alien object-fissure* and a refinement of the single-structured paradox, I carried out the final three sets of experimental practices in this phase to test whether this single-structure model might offer a more precise potential for evoking the uncanny.

In the case of the singular structural paradox, the core reason that enables the viewer to return to their subject-position through self-doubt induced by paradox lies in the oscillation between the structured system that categorizes things as familiar or unfamiliar, and the non-structural of things’ resistance to their integration into the surrounding order. At the same time, in order to prevent the work from once again falling into the dilemma of double-structured paradox, the illusory deception of the work’s appearance must not be easily uncovered by the viewer. In other words, the equivalence between appearance and essence must be avoided, or a work grounded in the singular structural paradox should appear as “a work presenting itself in a way it should not” or “a work whose representation is anomalous,” and should emphasize and amplify this illusion. And in this process, it is necessary to avoid the work highlighting its identity as a work, that is, to use the emphasis on the material existence of the work itself to disguise the work as a symbolic and deliberately made “man-made things, things that are set up”.

A particularly fitting example of the singular structural paradox in the creation of an *alien object* is Robert Gober's work *Untitled Leg* (fig 18). When confronted with this piece, the viewer is immediately prompted to make an intuitive judgment: this is the leg of a person buried (or concealed) behind the wall, partially revealed. However, at the same time, one cannot ignore the rational reflection that reminds us—we are in an art gallery, and this is merely an artwork. The conceptual power of this piece does not lie in whether it faithfully replicates a leg, nor in using a hyperrealistic limb to convey a literary metaphor. Rather, it seeks to awaken the viewer's internalized form of fear—not the fear of an external entity intruding upon a familiar world, but the implosion of that familiar world when its foundational certainty is withdrawn. The work draws the viewer into a confrontation that triggers self-contradiction and self-doubt, gradually dismantling long-held assumptions of certainty⁶⁶. The fear evoked by the piece is not that a wall may have consumed a person—we can rationally accept that museums do not typically devour people after all⁶⁷. The true fear stems from the fact that our doubts challenge the framework we build for a safe and familiar world. In other words, the confrontation with the work compels us to realize that in the unresolved contradiction between our sensory conviction and rational negation, a foreign other long embedded within the self has been awakened. Here, the function of the work is analogous to a sequence of commands that induce a logical paradox that causing a rupture in an otherwise closed system. Or, as Lacan mentioned, the malfunction of the structure exposes the foundational uncertainty and absence that has always been masked by the illusion of certainty (Lacan, 2016, p.131). This failure or glitch is not a breakdown in the sense of a cognitive dead-end or misunderstanding; rather, it is the revelation that the entire system is made questionable by the work's status as an *alien object* embedded within a familiar environment. The viewer is thus simultaneously immersed in the intensified illusion produced by the work and trapped in a loop of self-doubt regarding their immersion. This doubt is neither confirmable nor dismissible. The work, caught in the viewer's cognitive structure, causes the signifier chain it occupies to falter in its ability to produce a stable referent. And within this “failure” of positioning, we catch a glimpse of something neither belief nor skepticism can verify: a truth that eludes both affirmation and negation. In this way, the work reveals the uncanny.

⁶⁶ Publication excerpt from The Museum of Modern Art, *MoMA Highlights*, New York: The Museum of Modern Art, revised 2004, originally published 1999. <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81067>

⁶⁷ “its owner having presumably collapsed to the floor—and then, too, he has only one leg, which issues from the wall, as if the architecture had eaten him” Museum of Modern Art. (n.d.). *Untitled Leg, 1989–90* [Artwork page]. Museum of Modern Art, from <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/81067>



Fig 18 Robert Gober *Untitled Leg*

Inspired by this work, I subsequently created *The Watching Green* (fig 19), *Through the Window* (fig 20), and *Through the Shadow* (fig 21). The central concept of these three works is to create alien objects that are provocative to the familiar cognitive structure in a familiar environment, and to open up the space for the birth of polysemy from the structural stability torn by this alien object. Ultimately, let the paradoxical coexistence of multiple interpretations evoke self-doubt within the viewer. Meanwhile, out of reflection on *Alien object-Fissure*, all three works deliberately adopt figurative forms, ensuring that the projected content functions as a clear signifier. This is intended to prevent the works from falling into the path of self-referential closure. At the same time, however, the content of the projections deliberately deviates as much as possible from the symbolic structure of the surrounding environment. The differences among the three works are as follows: *The Watching Green* (fig 19) generates this effect solely through the anomaly of the referenced image—an incongruous element within the signifying field. *Through the Window* (fig 20) builds upon this strategy by introducing a further paradox through the overlap of interiority and exteriority, adding a spatial and conceptual tension to the displaced signified. *Through the Shadow* (fig 21) continues along the same conceptual path as *Through the Window*, but it clarifies and intensifies the expression of the interior/exterior paradox. Additionally, by incorporating the projection of a human shadow, the work introduces a spectral presence that enhances the sense of uncertainty produced by the alien object.



Fig 19 *The Watching Green*

In *The Watching Green* (fig 19), the work is designed in a relatively simple manner: I selected a shrub growing outside the studio entrance and its surrounding everyday environment as the central subject. I then projected a pre-recorded video of an eye that was positioned and aligned at a fixed angle onto the surface of the shrub's leaves at night, during a moment when the lighting conditions were most appropriate. Through this projection, an otherwise ordinary bush growing by the roadside on campus is transformed into an *alien object*—a silent figure that gazes back at every passerby, turning them into unwilling participants in an unsettling encounter. Much like the self-questioning evoked by Gober's *Leg*, the presence of the projector in this work serves as a clear reminder to the viewer: this is merely a disturbing artwork placed here by a presumptuous artist without prior notice. A bush in the real world does not, and should not, grow eyes that silently gaze at everyone walking past. Yet this rational realization cannot entirely suppress the uneasy, affective experience provoked by the work. At the moment when the passerby is forced into the position of the viewer, they come to recognize that this shrub—an object typically overlooked, normalized, and embedded as a background within their symbolic understanding of the road—has suddenly become alive, prominent, a signifier that occupies a structural position within the symbolic order but resists being symbolized as regular. The work, as a signifier, does indeed point toward a signified, such as the eye, the bush with an eye, or the ghost within the foliage. However, none of these signifieds can be smoothly integrated into the symbolic structure of the real environment in which the

work is situated. No matter how one interprets it, the sliding movement of the signifier chain is obstructed. Just as a living leg should not appear in the corner of a gallery, or a windmill spinning in reverse should not be seen in a Dutch village at a specific moment. On the one hand, rational reflection cannot truly neutralize this affective discomfort because the source of this uneasy experience itself is pre-linguistic structured. It does not originate from the specific fear aroused by some terrifying image (the eyes of a ghost or the ghost of the glasses) within the linguistic structure, but in the stubborn presence of something that fundamentally should not be there. It is this thing's presence within the structure that renders everything around it haunted. The unease arises from the viewer's sudden doubt in their confidence in the symbolic framework they constructed. Thus, rational interpretation, which is situated within epistemological structures, fails to dissolve the unease that emerges from a disturbance of those very structures. Of course, this unease likewise cannot erase the challenge posed by rationality since it is the very experience of this unease that drives us to return again and again to the structure and to seek a resolution to this affective instability through a grasping of determinacy. As Heidegger notes, this return to the structure of language, to the framing of beings as *ready-to-hand*, is a form of *errancy*, and it is also the inner structure of human beings, just as this unease⁶⁸. Thus, the paradoxical coexistence between the viewer's *errancy* rational judgment and "failed" affective experience provides an opportunity for self-questioning. Namely, when the unsettling shrub and the "crude and blunt" artwork are both perceived as equally valid, the viewer is confronted with the absence of a foundational ground for judgment. That is, the inherent uncertainty of our essence.

⁶⁸ "...*errancy* belongs to the inner constitution of the Da-sein into which historical man is admitted..." Heidegger, M. (1998). On the Essence of Truth. In *Pathmarks*. Cambridge University Press. p.150

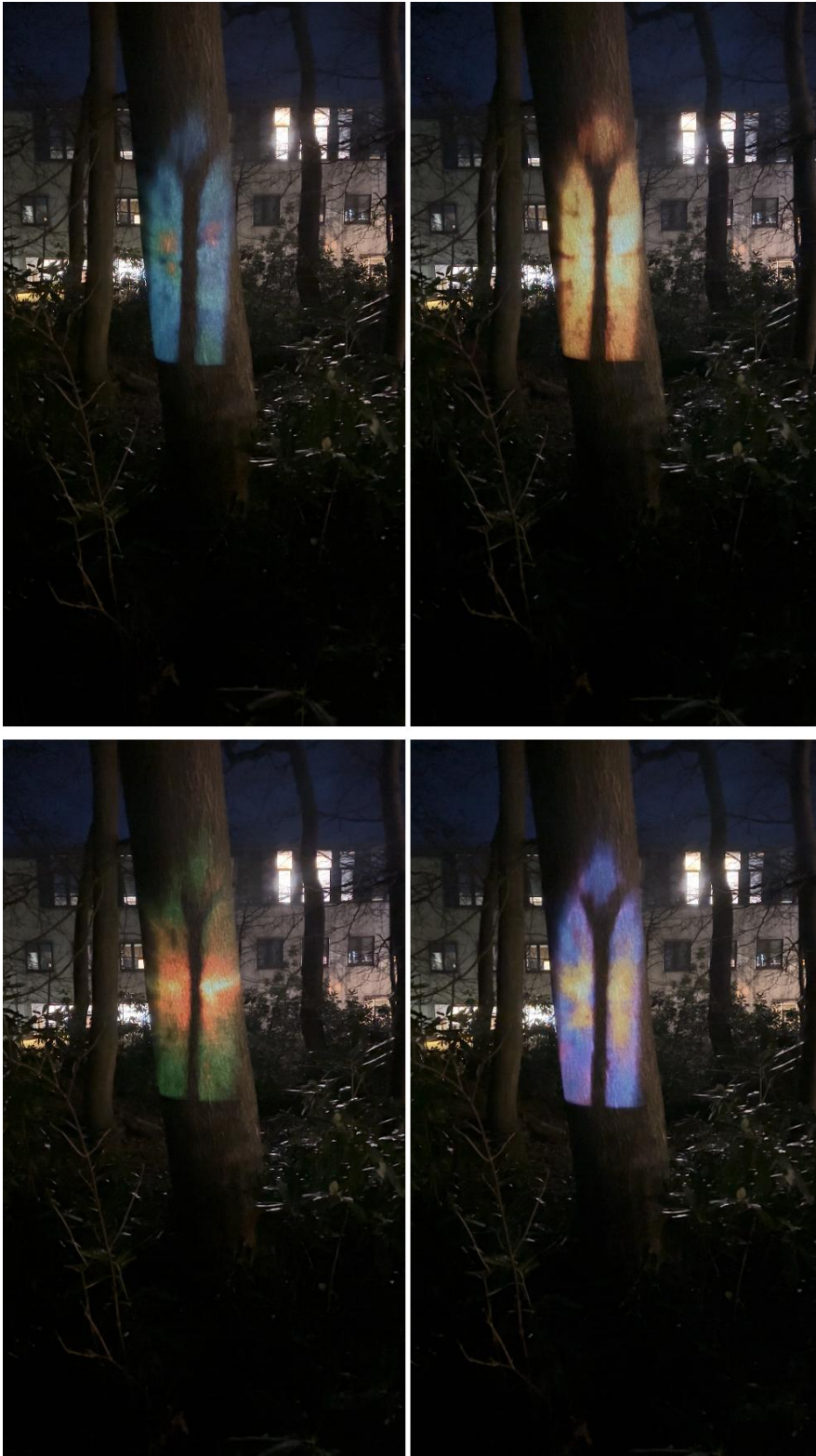


Fig 20.1 *Through the Window*



Fig 20.2 *Through the Window*

As a continuation of this line of thought, I created the work *Through the Window* (fig 20). This piece takes the form of a church's stained glass window projected onto a tree trunk. With the aid of TouchDesigner software, its presentation is not a static

image of a “window” but rather a dynamically generated field of light and shadow, simulating the process of light penetrating through a window from the outside and casting onto interior surfaces. The projected content in the work continuously alternates between fig 20.1 and fig 20.2, reproducing the shifting patterns of light within the space caused by external light sources (such as moving vehicles), thereby creating a visual illusion imbued with temporality and fluidity. More crucially, the work aims to blur the boundary between interiority and exteriority through the dynamic simulation of light projecting from the outside inward. The piece is installed in an outdoor forest environment, a setting that itself constitutes a stable and symbolically charged order of the “outside” or “exterior.” Yet, simultaneously, the visual content presented by the work—a beam of light entering from outside through a window—implies that the viewer is situated within a structure of interiority or inwardness. This perceptual paradox is intensely compressed into the window as the signifier of the division between inside and outside. Here, the window is not only a visual symbol nor merely a simple signifier but becomes the focal point of a confrontation between the work’s reference to interiority and its structural placement within exteriority.

The window on the tree trunk becomes an *alien object* on two levels of meaning within this work. On one hand, it is an anomalous signifier within the symbolic structure of the forest, clearly pointing to the church window at night. It appears on the tree trunk and connects with the nocturnal environment and the forest, yet it has lost the church that once gave it a place to belong. Thus, the window that emerges in the forest, along with the tree that bears it, becomes an obvious *phallic signifier*. Its presence instills the entire forest with a sense of undisclosed meaning, thereby drawing the viewer into an anxious experience. On the other hand, it also becomes an alien element in terms of spatial experience. The window is a symbol that distinguishes externality from internality within the closed semantic structure of an environment. When we are positioned in the “outside” of a structure, the window symbolizes the “inside,” revealing its secrets to us; when we are inside, the window symbolizes the call of the “outside.” Yet, in the context of this work, it is set in a forest that functions symbolically as an “outside”, and the window, in the form of light and shadow, also provides us with a call from the “outside.” So what is it that calls to us from the “outside” of the “outside”? In this call from the “outside” of the “outside,” is the “outside” still the “outside”? Or has it instead become some form of “interiority”? Through this untimely and overtly “exterior” signifier, the viewer is drawn into a paradoxical experience in which “outside” equals “inside,” or finds themselves facing the call of the “outside’s outside.” Within this paradox, the viewer begins to doubt the symbolic structure through which they judge themselves. As a result, between the paradoxical experience revealed by the work and the rational understanding of it, the viewer is confronted with the uncertainty at the foundation of their own structure of perception, that is, the very essence of the uncanny.

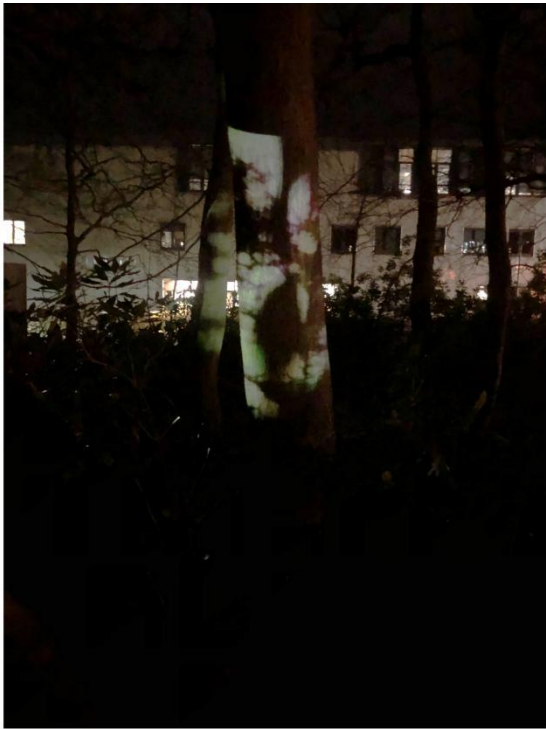


Fig 21.1 *Through the shadow*



Fig 21.2 *Through the shadow*

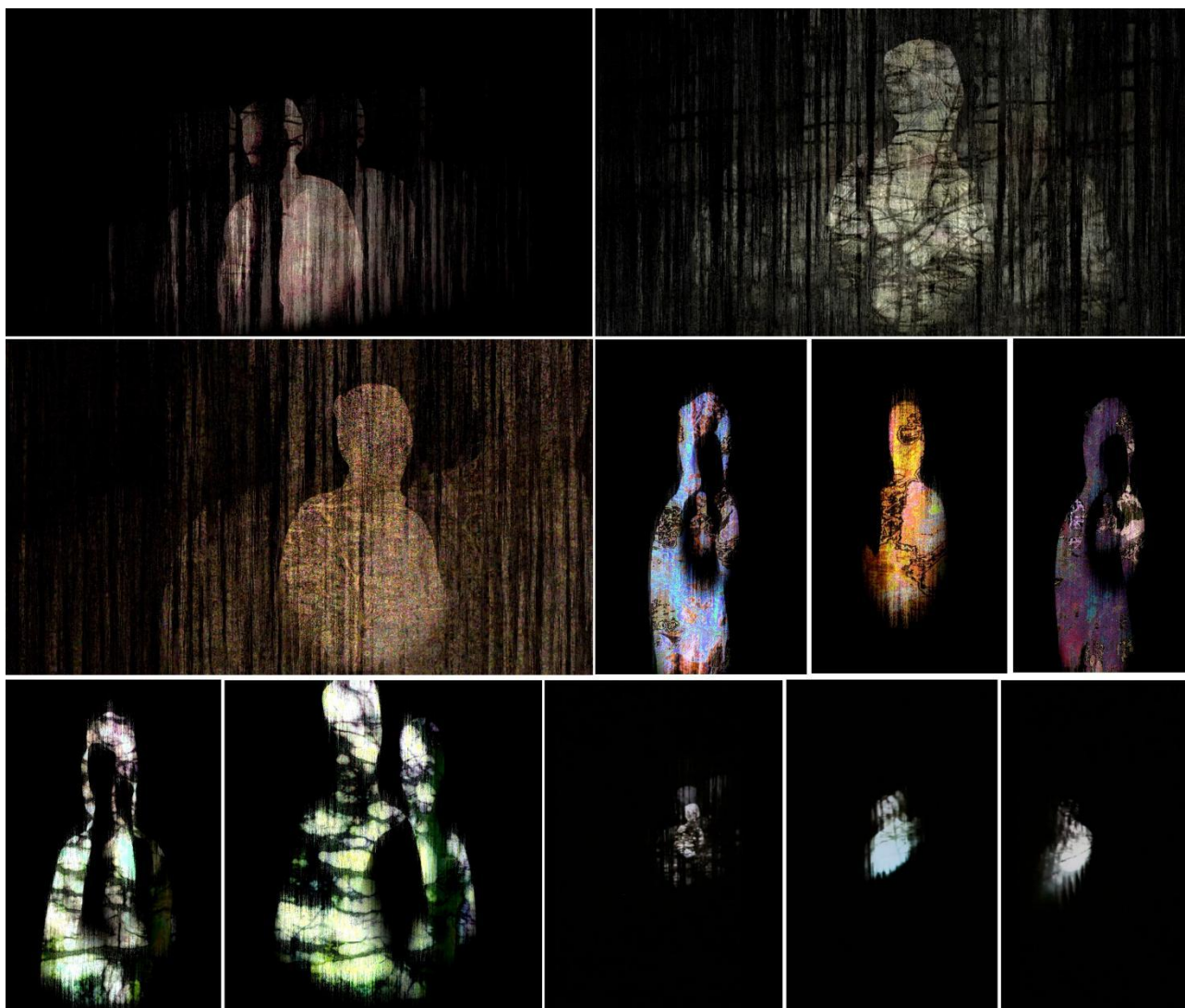


Fig 21.3 *Through the shadow* (pure image)

The final practical project of this stage, *Through the Shadow* (fig 21), shares a conceptual foundation with *Through the Window*, with the primary distinction being a shift in the visual element used as the signifier of an “external” call. Instead of light entering an interior space from the outside, here the focus is on the shadows of outdoor tree branches contained within the shadow itself. The content of the work consists of numerous human silhouettes wandering and moving across tree trunks. However, these figures do not appear as dark shadows formed by blocking light, but rather within a bright projection interspersed with the dappled shadows of branches. As in the previous work, these human figures remain signifiers that have lost their referents (the actual light-blocking people). At the same time, the tree-branch shadows inherently link to the symbolic order of the forest environment, further reinforcing their status as foreign bodies within that order. However, regarding the paradox between interior and exterior, this work no longer relies on spatial relationships to symbolize inside and outside. Instead, it attempts to create a

paradoxical expression related to the signifying reference to the inside and outside of the environment's referential structures. Typically, a shadow is regarded as a symbolic representation of the subject's exteriority—more specifically, a manifestation of the internal other projected outward. But in this work, the shadow is not only a symbol of the internal other's external projection; due to its internal composition of tree shadows corresponding with the surrounding environment, it simultaneously functions as a symbolic reference to an externality originating from that environment's symbolic structure. Therefore, when the shadow appears on the tree trunks in the environment, it refers both to the "interiority" of the subject's internal other and to the "exteriority" of the surrounding environment. This paradoxical overlap also interferes with the integrity of the structure in which the work is located and provides viewers with an opportunity to experience self-doubt about the unstable cognitive structure.

In conclusion, the uncanny occurrence at the level of subjectivity relies on the viewing subject's experience of paradox. Within a singular structural paradox, the anomalous signifier in the structure—whether as an *alien object* or a *phallic signifier*—interrupts the functioning of the signifier chain by either losing its own signified within the structure or by being unable to correspond to its referent within the structure. This disruption breaks the integrity of the structure. Such a destabilized and swaying structure enables the viewer, through the process of self-doubt regarding the cognitive foundation upon which judgment is based, to retroactively uncover the instability of the grounds upon which this structure is built. In other words, the foundation of cognitive structures and symbolic orders is nothing more than a self-referential belief. Human cognition relies on a negation—the absence left behind by the erasure of the original experience of things—as the foundational coordinate for constructing structure and order⁶⁹. However, the structure itself guarantees the efficacy of this coordinate and the internal coherence within the structure. When paradox causes the structure to fail, it retroactively reveals this fundamental absence within the cognitive structure, allowing the viewer to experience the uncertainty of their essence, the uncanniness. Yet, it must be clarified that this does not imply that paradox can be simply regarded as the precondition for revealing this negated subject position. Although the subject position emerges through the rupture of the structure caused by paradox, or rather that paradox initiates the splitting of the subject itself⁷⁰,

⁶⁹ "...is that just as after it is effaced, what remains, if there is a text, namely if this signifier is inscribed among other signifiers, what remains, is the place where it has been effaced, and it is indeed this place also which sustains the transmission, which is this essential thing thanks to which that which succeeds it in the passage takes on the consistency of something that can be trusted." Lacan, J. (2011). *The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book V: The formations of the unconscious: 1957–1958*. Karnac Books. p.264

⁷⁰ "It is here that I propose that the interest the subject takes in his own split is bound up with that which determines it—namely, a privileged object, which has emerged from some primal separation, from some self-mutilation induced by the very approach of the real, whose name, in our algebra, is *the objet a*." This kind of *objet a* within a person that both attracts the subject to build structures around it and repels the structure's grasp of

this paradox is not introduced from outside the structure, but is instead the effect of an internal gap within the structure.

In other words, on the one hand, the efficacy of paradox within the structure is the internal condition for the subject position to be revealed; the subject is positioned within the gap where the symbolic order fails to close upon itself. On the other hand, the subject itself can be viewed as a concrete manifestation of structural paradox. It is because the subject position occupies the central position of the symbolic structure while simultaneously being an internal gap that resists structural integration that paradox occurs at this very position. Paradox and the subject position are not related as cause and effect; rather, they are both manifestations of the non-closure of structure. The coexistence of the two perspectives—paradox rendering structural closure ineffective and thereby revealing the subject position, and the subject being itself the incarnation of structural paradox—does not fall into circular reasoning. Instead, it aligns with what Derrida refers to as structural reflexivity. That is, the center that guarantees the stability of the entire structure and provides the basis for identity operates precisely by claiming to be outside the structure. In the same way, the subject position, by claiming to be outside the structure of cognition, secures the illusion of internal consistency within the structure founded on belief. Yet, at the same time, this claim reveals that the center is nonetheless included within the scope of the structure. It's just the paradox of this center—both within and outside the structure⁷¹—is often concealed beneath the illusion of identity and mistaken as a firm foundation of knowledge. Therefore, one could say that this paradox is an inherent attribute of the cognitive structure that determines the subject position, or our cognitive structure itself is a unity of contradictions. This originally hidden internal property is only forced into appearance when the act of claiming fails. Even further speaking, the paradoxical nature of the subject position and the revelation of the subject position through paradox not only capture the traces of the uncanny through their shared articulation of structural non-closure, but the paradoxical coexistence form between these two expressions of the characteristics of the uncanny is itself a manifestation of non-closure.

Whether it is the internal ambiguity of the text (where we cannot determine whether we are looking at a leg or an artwork), or the external dilemma of judgment (where we struggle to decide whether to continue relying on rational judgment or to

it is the Thing, and this process is $\$ \diamond a$. Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; A. Sheridan, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1973), P.83

⁷¹ Just like “God,” “Reason,” or the “Dao” traced through the artworks discussed earlier, such a transcendent center, precisely by occupying a position *outside* the structure as an “undeniable” source of ultimate legitimacy, ensures the stability of the structure that builds itself around this internal center.” this is why classical thought concerning structure could say that the center is, paradoxically, within the structure and outside it.” Derrida, J. (1978). *Writing and difference*. University of Chicago Press. p.352

acknowledge the object's latent potential), such self-doubt pushes us from a closed epistemological structure toward an open one. If we regard the act of viewing art as a form of questioning, then artworks that reveal the uncanny—as the uncertainty between sensual success and rational failure—respond to us in silence with multiple, mutually incompatible yet equally reasonable answers. The paradox inherent in these answers disrupts our trust in structural identity, namely, the assumed correspondence between question and answer. When this correspondence fails and choices become difficult, the certainties once upheld by belief begin to falter. In other words, this epistemological impasse reveals that the answers we obtain are not derived from the essence of the object itself, but from the echoes of our expectations within the structure of cognition. Only when those answers contradict each other and the structure collapses do we confront the absence that had been concealed by its echo.

This locus of absence (lack), which is this thing that gives rise to paradoxical answers, is what carries ontological significance: *das Ding*, *the Thing*, Freud's *Kern unseres Wesens*, or that which resists and escapes symbolization in the process of signifying operation⁷². Thus, if the “correct” answers we receive in ordinary experience are merely the echoes of the structure in response to our questions, then the “failure” we encounter in the face of paradox is, in fact, the silent reply of the internal other, which is an answer issued not through signification but through silence. This silent response arises at the point where our structural grasp of things fails, where the total silence of the object confronts us with self-doubt about our epistemological foundation. That is the main position of our response to our essence: the uncanny. This is what Žižek emphasizes: the subject is not our questioning and doubting of *the Thing* (the Cartesian, centralized subject), but rather the response⁷³ of our alien internal other from its dwelling place (*the Real*), to the question we pose to it from within our dwelling place (*the Other*⁷⁴). In other words, our impotence in obtaining an answer to our question traps us in self-questioning. This dilemma induces a shame in us for our

⁷² Žižek points out that it is the strange body within us—at once inside us, yet beyond the “I.” Žižek, S. (2008) *The sublime object of ideology*. London; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. p.204

Lacan points out that this position is radically internal and yet external at the same time. He calls it *extimacy* which is internalized within the subject yet remains fundamentally unassimilable. It is radically interior and at the same time already exterior.” Perhaps what we described as the central place, as the intimate exteriority or ‘extimacy,’ that is the Thing” Lacan, J. (1992) *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*. 1st edn. United Kingdom: Routledge. p.13

⁷³ “the subject is not a question, it is as an all-Other, the answer of the Real to the question asked by the big Other, the symbolic order. It is not the subject which is asking the question; the subject is the void of the impossibility of answering the question of the Other” Žižek, S. (2008). *The sublime object of ideology*. London; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. p.202

⁷⁴ Lacan emphasized that “the unconscious is the Other's discourse”—the unconscious is structured like a language and belongs to the *Other*. What we call the “I” or subjectivity does not stem from an essential self, but emerges as a position named, identified, and anticipated by the *Other*. Lacan, J., Fink, H., & Grigg, R. (2006). *Écrits : the first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Tran.). W. W. Norton. p.10

own powerlessness toward our internal object, and it is this shame that tears us apart and allows the subject to emerge (Žižek, 2008, p.204). This is precisely what Lacan means when he asserts that *the subject is originally split* (Lacan, 1978, p.83): we are split in the self-doubt brought on by paradox, and the subject thus created is the embodiment of the utility of this paradox.

To summarize, a crucial pathway for the revelation of the uncanny lies in returning to the negativity of the subject position through paradox. For the subject position, as a reflection of our inability to grasp the object, is also the essential manifestation of the radical uncertainty (unattainable certainty) of our epistemological foundations. In other words, the emergence of the subject position is a form of grasping our essence through “failure”—or more precisely, it is a way of understanding truth through the non-truth of truth about ourselves. Therefore, when an artwork, through its loosened logic and formal inappropriateness, opens for us the gap that is concealed by the illusion of structural coherence within the structure, the paradoxical nature of reflection on external things and the failure to grasp the subject position of internal self-reflection with their common certainty reveal to us the path to “failure”: the most original dimension of our uncertainty. This is the primary reason why the single structural paradox emphasized in this chapter is capable of producing the positive effect of revealing the uncanny.

Chapter 4 the Uncanny as the failure of a double lie

Broadly speaking, one can say that the work calms people, comforts them, by showing them that at least some of them can live from the exploitation of their desire. But for this to satisfy them so much, there must also be that other effect, namely, that their desire to contemplate finds some satisfaction in it.

——Lacan, *Seminar XI*, 1978, p.111

While this self-consciousness consciously forsakes itself, it is preserved in its self-relinquishing, and it remains the subject of the substance, but, as having relinquished itself, it has at the same time the consciousness of this substance; or while, through its sacrifice, it brings out the substance as subject, this subject remains its own self.

——Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, 2018, p.430

4.1 Double Deception and the Double Structural Paradox

In Chapter One, I primarily discuss why the unveiling of the uncanny (through the path of “failure”) becomes an effective response to the question of being and nothingness, which is the origin and practical background of the core issue of this research. In Chapter Two, the focus shifts to a discussion of the failure of “failure” in the initial stage of conceptual art practice aimed at representing the uncanny, that is, the placement of the uncanny as the essential uncertainty of the human being onto the uncertainty of the object being viewed. In Chapter Three, building on the experience of failure from the previous stage, I begin by analyzing fear and anxiety to clarify how the unveiling of the uncanny is realized through a return to the uncertainty of the viewing subject’s position. Based on this viewpoint, I then elaborate on two key threads for tracing the uncanny in artistic practice: the subjective position and the paradoxicality. Finally, after distinguishing between the two methods developed from these threads (the single structural paradox and the double structural paradox), I concentrate on the single structural paradox aimed at shaping the phallic signifier (*the alien object*). Here, in the final chapter, I will focus on the other method: the double structural paradox, which aims at constructing a dialectical structure of deception within deception.

As previously discussed, in the single-structure paradox, the *alien object* causes a collapse of judgment by oscillating within the chain of reference to external others, turning the artwork’s outward referential appearance into an echo of the viewer’s

internal uncertainty (uncanniness). This enables an experience where the failure to “receive an answer” gives rise to the realization that “the question cannot be answered.” However, as also mentioned earlier, this approach faces a challenge: the contemporary art context is overly permissive regarding the identity of conceptual artworks, allowing their status to secure a degree of self-referential legitimacy. As Arthur Danto pointed out, the “artworld”—a priori knowledge structure, including theoretical frameworks or art historical awareness—grants viewers the authority to identify the object (signifier) as an artwork (signified) through the assertion of “is” (Danto, 1964, p.580). Likewise, Timothy Binkley noted that post-20th-century artworks, having abandoned aesthetic criteria and often employing unadorned concepts, have formed a strongly self-critical discipline (Binkley, 1977, p.256). In other words, this self-critical stance, legitimized by the “artworld,” significantly empowers the subjective use of “is” while neutralizing the artwork’s inherent negating force against such symbolic grasp. This mode of self-critique and self-validation is what Kosuth defined as “tautology (Kosuth, 1969)”: the artwork expresses the artist’s intent— “It is art,” or “Art’s only claim is for art. Art is the definition of art (Kosuth, 1969).” Under such conditions, the “failure” brought about solely by a single-structure paradox remains incomplete, since any uncertainty induced by referential ambiguity (e.g., “Will the museum devour people?” or “Is that bush staring at me?”) is easily absorbed by the artwork’s self-confirmed identity (“This is a work that makes me imagine the museum devouring people,” or “This is a work that evokes a sense of being watched”). Thus, this becomes an obstacle to the representation of the uncanny.

The “ultimate certainty” gained through self-referentiality in artworks is a partial unmasking of deception: while it exposes the falseness of the artwork as a representation of some external entity, it then falls into a second illusion—mistaking the work’s appearance as a direct reflection of its essence. This issue is evident in works such as fig 19 *The Watching Green*, and fig 20 *Through the Window*: the works first pretend that their appearances are representations of some creature or a window. The abnormality presented by the work causes the viewer to experience a loss of grounding in judgment as they attempt to grasp the piece as a paradoxical signifier. This form of “failure” can indeed give rise to the experience of the uncanny feeling, because we are unable to find any evidence within the logical conflict of context or structure that could guarantee certainty. However, this uncertainty, which resists guarantees, ultimately finds its security in the identity of the contemporary artwork. That is, no matter how indeterminate, difficult to define, describe, or assess a work may be, its identity as an artwork still grants the viewer a safe distance from which to apprehend it with certainty. Therefore, if the representation of the uncanny entails the unmasking of the symbolic structure’s deception, namely a confrontation with truth in the form of non-truth through the limitations of the subject’s perspective, then the self-referential artwork merely replaces one lie (the appearance of the work represents something external) with another (the appearance of the work represents the essence of itself). As Lacan states, the key to the artwork lies in pretending to be something

other than itself, i.e., in constructing an illusory equivalence between itself and the *Other* (Lacan, 1978, p.112). The former type of deception involves disguising the appearance of its essence as a representation of something external; the latter involves disguising the appearance of its essence as a representation of its surface. In both cases, the essence of the work remains equally missed.

Therefore, this chapter explores how to extend the single-structured paradox into a double-structure—disrupting both the artwork’s reference to external objects and its self-reference to its essence—so that the viewer experiences paradox in both symbolic systems. Lacan offers a precise example to illustrate these two forms of deception that serve as the premise of paradox:

In the classical tale of Zeuxis and Parrhasios, Zeuxis has the advantage of having made grapes that attracted the birds. The stress is placed not on the fact that these grapes were in any way perfect grapes, but on the fact that even the eye of the birds was taken in by them. This is proved by the fact that his friend Parrhasios triumphs over him for having painted on the wall a veil, a veil so lifelike that Zeuxis, turning towards him said, well, and now show us what you have painted behind it.⁷⁵ (Lacan, 1978, p.103)

The former type of deception, exemplified by the painted grapes in the story, lies in using the appearance of the work to represent something external. Whether it is a leg positioned in a museum, a window embedded in a tree, or a human silhouette, these are all forms of deception that fulfill the viewer’s desire to believe the artwork reveals something beyond itself. The veil in the latter painting reveals how self-referential deception works: if the former deceives by “telling a lie” (the work’s appearance refers to something else, its essence is the representation of something external), then the latter deceives by “pretending to tell a lie” (the work’s appearance refers to its own essence by referencing its appearance), meaning that the work deceives by “telling the truth.” In other words, the second deception occurs during Zeuxis’s unveiling of the veil-artwork’s lie—when he exposed the lie of veil-artwork: “The veil on the wall is not a real veil but just a painting,” and further concluded: “The essence of the veil painting is merely the appearance of the painting of veil, and there is nothing hidden behind it,” Zeuxis, in asserting the identity between appearance and representation, fundamentally misses the work’s essence: the “non-essential essence”

⁷⁵ Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; A. Sheridan, Trans.). W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1973), p.103; “Timanthes, Androcydes, Eupompus and Parrhasius. This last, it is recorded, entered into a competition with Zeuxis, who produced a picture of grapes so successfully represented that birds flew up to the stage-buildings; whereupon Parrhasius himself produced such a realistic picture of a curtain that Zeuxis, proud of the verdict of the birds, requested that the curtain should now” Pliny. (1938). *Natural history* (A. C. Andrews, D. E. Eichholz, W. H. S. Jones, & H. Rackham, Trans.). Harvard University Press, Book XXXV, p.307

that exists before any symbolic grasp of the artwork. That is, when we realize we have been deceived by the artwork's act of pretending, and believe we have regained coherence through its self-referential structure, we have successfully deceived ourselves⁷⁶. This aligns with Žižek's notion of the "deceiving by telling the truth" becomes a deception of the very logic of deception itself (Žižek, 2008, p.22).

The structure of self-reference appears to expose the work's existence and honestly present it to the viewer, but in fact, it is a more sophisticated form of "induction", that is, one that leads the viewer, through their desire for certainty and identity, to sublimate the negative movement between essence and appearance into a certainty result. In other words, it prompts the viewer to reduce the direct, discomforting, and counter-intuitive experience of negation (such as the essence of truth being untruth, or the dislocation between appearance and representation revealing the absence of essence⁷⁷) into a confirmation of the result of that negation (the regained identity grounded in the viewer's assurance of non-identity between appearance and representation⁷⁸). This identity, reconstructed by the viewing subject, does not truly reveal the work's essence; rather, it elevates the appearance of a work to a substitute for its essence. Thus, the essence generated in the structure of "the work's appearance equals its representation of essence" is merely retroactively constructed, or the problem itself, in the process of negating itself, retroactively serves as its own answer⁷⁹. This is what Hegel refers to as the appearance of appearance, or *supersensibility*: by concealing the essence, it becomes the manifestation of the essence⁸⁰. Put differently, this "essence" born from the viewer's pursuit of certainty is

⁷⁶ "Man loves sublimation, and thus for him the surprise is not so much to not find there in the picture the object that might have been able to satisfy his needs, but rather to find it as an object-veil; an object that while deceiving vision, does satisfy, so to speak, the gaze" Bonazzi, M., & Tonazzo, D. (2009). *Scrivere la contingenza. Esperienza, linguaggio e scrittura in Jacques Lacan. ETS*. Cited by Pietro Bianchi, Bianchi, P. (2019). *The Restlessness of the Imaginary* (Doctoral dissertation, Duke University), p.87

⁷⁷ "The image is a thing that is not the thing: it distinguishes itself from it, essentially." Nancy, J.-L. (2005). *The ground of the image* (1st ed.). Fordham University Press. Retrieved from

⁷⁸ "He (Hegel) held the definite particular to be definable by the mind because its immanent definition was to be nothing but the mind. Without this supposition, according to Hegel, philosophy would be incapable of knowing anything substantive or essential. Unless the idealistically acquired concept of dialectics harbors experiences contrary to the Hegelian emphasis, experiences independent of the idealistic machinery" Adorno, T. W. (1973). *Negative dialectics*. Routledge & Kegan Paul. P.7

⁷⁹ "There are no definitive solutions to problems; solutions are just repeated attempts to deal with the problem, with its impossible-real. Problems themselves, not solutions, are true or false." Žižek, S. (2012). *Less than nothing: Hegel and the shadow of dialectical materialism*. Verso. p.214

⁸⁰ " (supersensible world) It comes forth from out of appearance, and appearance is its mediation. That is, appearance is its essence and in fact its fulfillment. The supersensible is the sensuous and the perceived posited as they are in truth. However, the truth of the sensuous and the perceived is to be appearance. The supersensible is therefore appearance as appearance." Hegel, G.W.F. (2018) *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Edited by T. Pinkard and M. Baur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Hegel

just a speculative illusion fed back by our modes of knowing. It is only through this illusory identity that we manage to deceive ourselves, while the true non-essential negation or non-identity of the work's essence, and the fundamental uncertainty of our essence, are once again obscured by the "success" of our speculative thinking.

Although to some extent (for those who understand the limitations of the world within a symbolic order), this elevation of appearance can serve as a positive response to the ultimate question (perhaps even the most positive one). But for the representation of the uncanny, it becomes the most dangerous obstacle. This is because, regarding the question of what the veil truly is, what the leg in the corner, the window in the tree, or the eye in the bush truly are, or what the artwork itself truly is, this self-referential elevation of appearance, the self-referential representation elevation, to the greatest extent, affirms through dialectical movement the self-guaranteed power that people obtain for certainty and identity—"it is what it is," "an artwork is the artwork itself." In contrast, the uncanny demands the opposite, it insists on a complete negation of the subject's power to guarantee certainty, based on a full affirmation of sensory experience⁸¹: "it is not what it is," "an artwork is not the artwork." The "essence" revealed by the former is further from the true essence of the question than the "impossibility of essence" revealed by the latter. This "essence" is not equivalent to the true essence, nor even to the internal void that drives us to pose questions about essence; rather, it is merely a stable substitute for the efficacy of that internal drive. In Lacanian terms, this function of a kind of substitutive "essence": The failure result of negative operation is retrospectively regarded as the purpose (essence) of negative operation, merely similar to the object of desire, that is, *objet petit a* which people retrospectively construct because of the failure of desire to replace the vacant position that drives desire. Therefore, this "essence" or *objet petit a* is neither the essence itself, nor the constitutive lack that compels us to ask about essence—it is simply a compromise with negation, mediated by our grasp of its effects.

Therefore, in constructing a path toward the "failure" of answering the question, the second deception constituted by the structure of self-reference becomes both the final line of defense and the most severe obstacle. The paradoxical method based on this demand not only that the work goes beyond the limits of referencing external objects and enter the self-referential structure that defines "essence," but also that it amplifies the internal negation within this self-reference, that is, to amplify the antithesis of "the identity between appearance and the representation of essence." In other words, it should complete the sublation of "self-assurance", based on the sublation of external references by "self-assurance". Put simply, the former synthesis "there is nothing behind the veil; the veil is itself" must be met with a new antithesis: "If the veil hides

Translations). p.88

⁸¹ "(uncanny) involves an experience of an object that appears to contravene the systematic unity of the understanding's cognitions that reason prescribes; in short, it appears to contradict the "unity of reason" Windsor, M. (2025). The Uncanny as Anti-Sublime.

nothing, why am I compelled to uncover its secret?” or “The self-referential identity of the veil is nothing but the subject’s self-assured identity, and this identity is merely a presumed substitution for the veil’s essence; the essential question—what is concealed—remains an absent surplus⁸²”. In other words, through the antithesis, by using the irreducible surplus to expose the substitutive and fictive nature of identity, the viewer may be offered an experience: what I perceive as the coherence and identity of self-reference is merely guaranteed by my symbolic order⁸³. This is because the foundation of such subjectively assured identity lies in retroactively taking the result of a movement of negation as its cause; that is, by symbolizing the experience of a negative result, it becomes a substitute for the surplus that resists symbolization—the Real or *das Ding*—around which the negating movement revolves. The antithesis, in exposing how the negative experience of this failed signifying operation is once again absorbed into the symbolic structure and reestablished as the basis of identity, and in revealing how the content expressed by the artwork always exceeds or falls short of our attempts to define its essence, allows a new synthesis to emerge—on the condition of acknowledging the incompleteness and openness inherent in negation: “The uncertain essence that lies behind the veil, which cannot be reduced to subjective certainty and which perpetually escapes the grasp of symbolization, is precisely the inner drive that compels us to attempt to unveil the secret of the veil—that is, our internal lack.” In other words, within this equivalence between “the uncertain essence of the artwork” and “the internal uncertainty of the subject,” the artwork becomes the embodiment of the uncanny, of the very essence of the subject.

Specifically, the operation of this double-structured paradox consists mainly of two aspects: the paradoxical obstruction of the referential structure toward external objects (the coexistence of revelation and concealment within representation), and the paradoxical obstruction of the self-referential structure (the coexistence of the self-sufficiency of representation referring to appearance and the surplus of representation that exceeds appearance). The paradoxical operation of the latter is built upon the former and ultimately brings together the uncertainty of the artwork’s essence and the uncertainty of the subject’s essence into a unified form through the mediating

⁸² “By the autonomy of their form, artworks forbid the incorporation of the absolute as if they were symbols. Aesthetic images stand under the prohibition on graven images. To this extent aesthetic semblance, even its ultimate form in the hermetic artwork, is truth. Hermetic works do not assert what transcends them as though they were Being occupying an ultimate realm; rather, through their powerlessness and superfluity in the empirical world they emphasize the element of powerlessness in their own content.” Adorno, T. W. (1997). *Aesthetic theory*. A&C Black, p.104

⁸³ “This is the secret philosophy has to conceal to retain its consistency - the secret that Hegel, at the culminating point of the metaphysical tradition, makes us see. This is why the fundamental Hegelian motif that ‘appearance as such is essential’ could not be grasped without the hypothesis of the big Other - of the autonomous symbolic order rendering possible the deception in its properly human dimension” Žižek, S. (2008). *The sublime object of ideology*. London; Brooklyn, New York: Verso. p.225

movement of “seeing through the deception,” which takes the form of a negation — “failure”. The specific method is as follows:

Firstly, in terms of the paradoxical pathway within the structure of external reference, this continues the discussion of the *alien object* developed in the previous chapter. In this structure, the artwork on the one hand accurately provides the viewer with a clearly designated representation, while on the other hand creates a contradiction between the artwork—as a representation referring to external objects—and the symbolic order in which it resides: “the artwork does not appear to represent what it is supposed to represent,” or “what exactly is it that the artwork’s clear representation aims to represent.” This uncertainty within what is presented as determinate provides the condition for revealing the uncertain foundation of the subject’s position—that is, the subject’s doubt regarding its judgment. Therefore, within this paradoxical structure, the thesis is that the artwork clearly refers to external objects (objects other than itself), while the antithesis is that there exists a dislocation between the artwork’s referential function and the symbolic order it inhabits. From this emerges the synthesis: the structural failure of the artwork to refer accurately becomes its successful reference to the fundamental driving force of the symbolic structure—the lack that drives the subject’s symbolic grasp—namely, the uncanny.

Secondly, the construction of the paradox within the internal self-referential structure, as previously discussed, is necessary in order to dismantle the tendency of conceptual art to fall into a closed circuit of self-critique and self-validation. By generating the paradox of external referentiality in the previous structure, that is, through the failure of the external referential function guaranteed by the symbolic order or the external other, the authority to determine what the artwork refers to shifts from the big Other to the subjectivity of the viewer. In other words, the knowledge structure of daily life that tells me “The artwork is a veil” transforms into a conclusion guaranteed by my own act of unveiling: the veil is a deceptive illusion, and the artwork is nothing but the artwork itself. This guarantee of self-deception from the subject’s perspective becomes the thesis: **the artwork takes its appearance as the representation of its essence**. At the same time, this structure, while amplifying this thesis and reinforcing the identity of the artwork, emphasizes its internal negativity: even if the essence of the artwork can be seen as its appearance, the experience of the artwork continuously produces a surplus of uncertainty beyond its appearance. That is, even if the veil painted on the wall represents nothing other than its own identity, what is it that drives us to keep wanting to unveil it, to enjoy the illusion of unveiling what we already know? From where does the negative force of this already assumed “identity” arise? This becomes the antithesis: **the identity of appearance and representation cannot conceal the surplus caused by the absence of essence**. In the process by which this self-referential structure amplifies both its thesis and its internal negativity, the

viewer's practical engagement with the artwork (unveiling, unmasking, reflection, etc.) acts as a mediator, linking the negative surplus of the artwork's missing essence with the internal lack of the subject revealed in the previous structure. This forms the synthesis of the structure: **the absent essence hidden behind the self-referential illusion of the artwork is also the internal lack that drives the viewer's desire to seek.** In this way, the essential uncertainty of the subject is given shape by the essential uncertainty of the object, and thus the artwork becomes capable of revealing the uncanny.

From this, the issue raised in the previous chapter, namely, the problem of the certainty produced by self-referentiality in the representation of the uncanny, finds the possibility of being resolved within this structure. In the structure of the double paradox, the self-referential authority of the artwork's identity can amplify its internal contradictions by reinforcing the form of self-referentiality. Through the exposure of this internal contradiction, the identity of its self-referential structure is undermined. Ultimately, it is through the identity between the artwork's internal non-identity and the subject's internal non-identity that the artwork becomes the embodiment of the uncanny—a condensation of uncertainty. This position was tested and demonstrated in two sets of experiments conducted in the early stage of this phase: The first set, as shown in the contrast between fig 22 and fig 23, revealed that an environment of absolute darkness proves more effective than a realistic or familiar environment in generating the double structural paradox. The second set, illustrated through the comparison of fig 24 and fig 25, showed that presenting the appearance of the work in a form of apparent certainty is more effective than directly presenting uncertain content in evoking the structure of the uncanny.

4.2 The Intensified Artwork Identity and the Internal Contradiction of Waiting

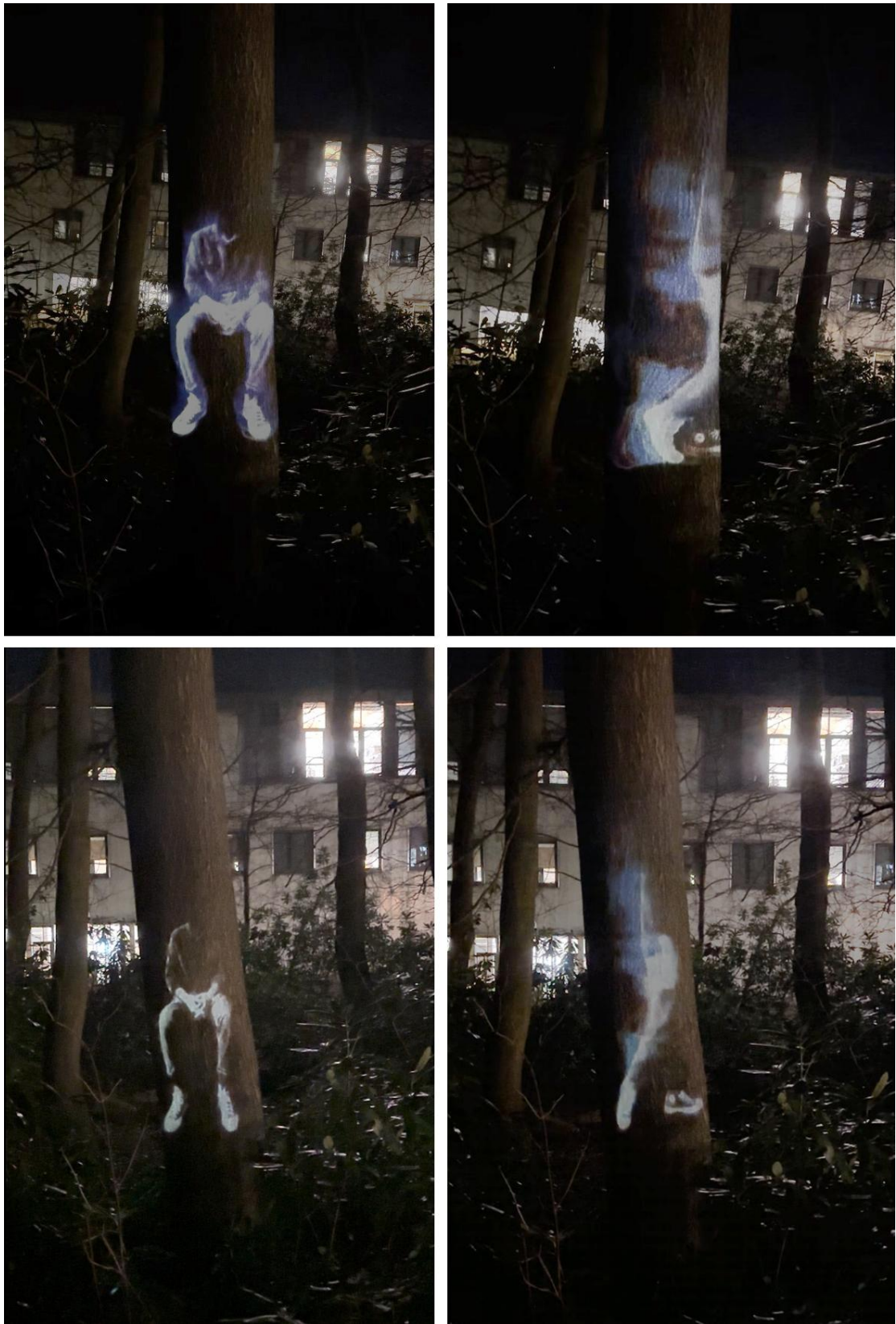


Fig 22 *Character Test – Outdoor*

In the first set of tests, I continued the design strategy from the previous stage by placing the work within a forest environment (fig 22). However, unlike the previous stage, which aimed to create a symbolic consistency between the work's appearance and its surroundings (such as the visual echo between the human figure and tree branches in fig 21), this iteration introduced a signifier that is entirely detached from the symbolic order of the environment. This disjunction between the work's representation and its expected signified generates a paradoxical experience: a clearly identifiable figure appears in a familiar setting, yet both elements become simultaneously difficult to interpret. Specifically, the image of a headless figure, endlessly pacing or sitting motionless at the center, bears little to no direct semantic relation to the forest. While such a figure may suggest unsettling meanings—could the figure walking on the tree trunk hint at some kind of murder? Perhaps it implies some ghost or scrutiny?—these potential meanings remain estranged from the symbolic structure of the forest, generating an irreconcilable disconnection. Yet at the same time, the figure moves between the tree trunks, establishing a formal linkage to the surroundings that prevents the figure from being fully regarded as a “pure artwork” completely detached from the environment and the broader symbolic order. This coexistence of connection and disjunction seems to imply a meaning or identity that continually escapes our grasp—or more precisely, suggests the latent and unrecognized (or always be avoiding our detection) possibility of a symbolic consistency between the networks of signifier and signified within the work⁸⁴. This contradiction leaves the work unable to fully return to its pure artistic identity, nor to integrate into its environment, thus producing a sense of dissonant *alien object*. As a result, the work presents, on one hand, a clear appearance; on the other, the meaning it gestures toward is suppressed by the rupture in symbolic context. The viewer is left in a state of interpretive impasse: the figure and the forest seem like they should be meaningfully related, yet no verifiable connection can be established. In this tension between revelation and concealment, both the work and its surrounding context become enigmatic and resistant to understanding.

From this perspective, the experiment successfully reconstructs the paradoxical structure of the first form of deception. The clear depiction of the figure in the visual presentation allows viewers to easily establish a representational link between the work's appearance and a specific person. Meanwhile, the dissonance between the environment and the projected image creates a stronger sense of rupture than the figure blended with dappled shadows in fig 21. This sharp contrast more effectively prompts viewers to question the basis of their

⁸⁴ “The first network, that of the signifier, is the synchronic structure of the material of language ...The second network, that of the signified, is the diachronic set of concretely pronounced discourses, which historically affects the first network, just as the structure of the first governs the pathways of the second. What dominates here is the unity of signification...” Lacan, J., Fink, H., & Grigg, R. (2006). *Écrits : the first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Tran.). W. W. Norton. p.345

interpretive assumptions. That is, “the image’s appearance represents the behaviour and meaning of a certain person” loses the direct identity between appearance and representation under the obstructive effect of “the split between the normal symbolic environment in which the work is situated and the representational meaning of the work.” However, from the standpoint of the second form of deception, the outdoor presentation in fig 22 does not achieve a successful paradoxical unity. The primary obstacle lies in the way the external environment interferes with the viewer’s entry into a self-referential structure. As previously discussed, the precondition for entering the second mode of deception is the viewer’s realization—upon seeing through the first deception—that the work’s representation refers only to itself. In this sense, the work should be understood as: “the image of the figure does not refer to a person’s behaviour or meaning, nor to any interpretation imposed by the surrounding environment, but only to the image itself.” In other words, the projection of the character carries no surplus semantic content beyond its surface. Whether the headless form or its monotonous and repetitive actions—rising, walking away, returning, sitting—the failure to establish a meaningful relationship between these surface forms and any deeper representational meaning is itself the “essence” of the work: the appearance of appearance. Understanding it does not mean simply acknowledging “this is just an image of a person,” but rather grasping that “the image of the person is nothing more than the image of the person.”

Only on the basis of this recognition as the thesis can the viewer begin to experience the internal contradiction and paradoxical negativity of such a self-constructed “essence.” If the representation of the figure is itself the essence it refers to, then this defined essence does not in fact determine anything. It merely revolves around an empty center, elevating the surface appearance to the status of essence. In this way, the claim that “it is what it is—the work presents the meaning of the figure by presenting the figure itself” becomes a retrospective attribution of cause based on an already assumed conclusion. Thus, it is the difference that re-emerges within the seemingly secured identity that makes the synthesis possible, i.e., the equation of appearance with representation remains a form of deception, though it is no longer the work deceiving the viewer, but rather the viewer deceiving themselves. Behind the seemingly empty appearance that hides nothing lies, in fact, my own emptiness—the internal void of the subject who strives to construct a unity between the work and meaning, the echo of myself in the search for significance.

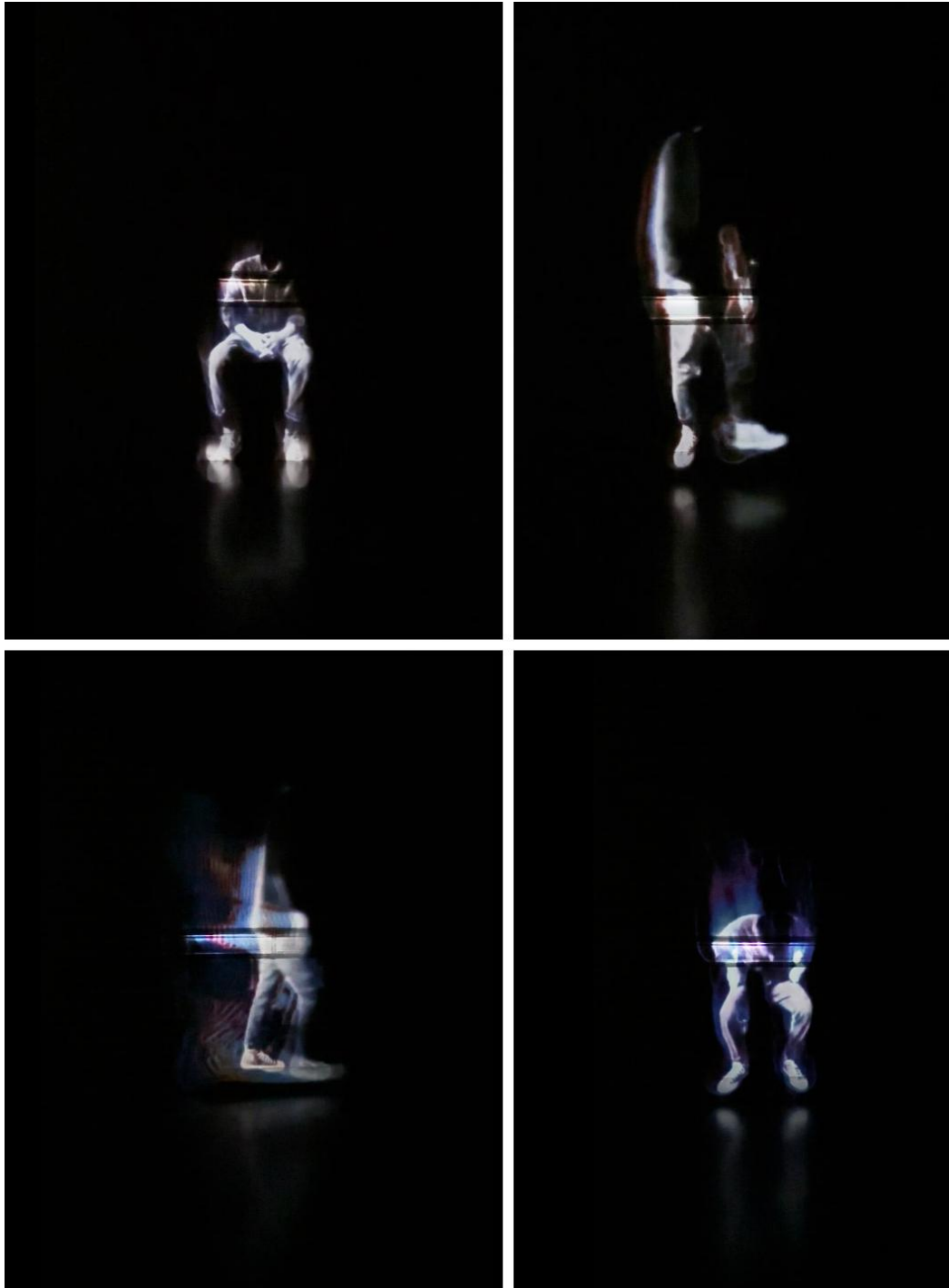


Fig 23 Character Test - Indoor

However, the issue with fig 22 lies in how the forest environment obstructs the unfolding of the second level of deception. While the real environment in the previous stage helped dissolve the artwork's identity, here its symbolic richness makes it difficult for viewers to return to the work's purely self-referential state. Instead, they tend to linger within the complex but indeterminate connections between the work and its surroundings. In contrast, the indoor installation in fig 23 proves more

effective. Although it lacks the strong semantic conflict between representation and environment present in fig 22, and retains only minimal ties to reality through the reflective surface of the floor, its separation from everyday context ensures two things: first, the clarity of the image allows viewers to enter the first deception; second, the darkness eliminates external interference, enabling the work to assert its self-referential identity and thus making the second deception possible. However, under these conditions, the way the work enters into a paradoxical structure differs from that of fig 22.

Within a symbolic structure, identifying the shadowy figure in the artwork as a specific individual and two main factors disrupt their action. First is the incompleteness of the figure, particularly the deliberate removal of the head in this piece. This absence dismantles the core basis for recognizing identity, rendering the figure ambiguous and self-contradictory. While the clear and intact body suggests a concrete, individualized person, the missing head—especially the absent face—hollows out this identification, or rather, the absence of the most crucial position for identifying a character makes the core of the recognition of this character image a void. As a result, the image shifts from being a conventional signifier to a *phallic signifier*: a form that is simultaneously legible and unverifiable, oscillating between an anonymous being, a resurrected dead, a threatening agent, or even a non-human figure. This lack of a stable identity plunges the viewer into a paradoxical state of interpretive uncertainty. Secondly, the human face—especially the eyes—typically serves as the medium for establishing a gaze, a visual exchange between the figure and the viewer. Though the figure in the artwork moves, implying a living presence and a confrontation with the viewer, the absence of the head does not erase its gaze. Instead, it disperses it across the entire space, creating an unsettling experience of being watched: the origin of the gaze has disappeared, yet the gaze seems to be everywhere⁸⁵. Paradoxically, it is through the absence of the gaze that the gaze emerges. This is a gaze from the object toward the subject—a reversal that startles the subject into realizing the failure of their symbolic grasp. It exposes the leftover within the object that cannot be symbolized (*das Ding*), the irreducible real that the subject is powerless to grasp⁸⁶. Thus, in confronting this gaze, the viewer's

⁸⁵ "It marks the absence of a signified; it is an unoccupiable point, the point at which the subject disappears. The image, the visual field, then takes on a terrifying alterity that prohibits the subject from seeing itself in the representation. That 'belong to me aspect' is suddenly drained from representation..." Copjec, J. (1989). The orthopsychic subject: Film theory and the reception of Lacan. *October*, 49, pp.53-71.

⁸⁶ "In so far as the gaze, qua *objet a*, may come to symbolize this central lack expressed in the phenomenon of castration, and in so far as it is an *objet a* reduced, of its nature, to a punctiform, evanescent function, it leaves the subject in ignorance as to what there is beyond the appearance," "The *objet a* is something from which the subject, in order to constitute itself; has separated itself off as organ. This serves as a symbol of the lack, that is to say, of the phallus, not as such, but in so far as it is lacking." Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; A. Sheridan, Trans.). W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1973), pp.76-77, p.103

symbolic grasp is resisted by their incapacity. This negating force stems from the subject's desire to understand, yet simultaneously undermines it—leading the viewer, in their attempt to turn the other into a graspable object, to experience the instability of their cognitive framework. In this moment of contradiction, the viewer encounters the dimension of their own uncanny.

A completely dark environment allows the viewer to more easily eliminate external distractions and interpret the work as a representation of its appearance, that is, to fall into a self-referential structure where “the essence of the artwork about the headless figure is simply the representation of the appearance of the headless figure.” The key to breaking this structure lies in revealing the void at the heart of this appearance mistaken as “essence,” as well as the subjective origin of that void. To this end, the work engages the semantic field of “waiting.” Beyond the fragmented figure, the character's repetitive pacing and cycles of sitting still—seemingly meaningless actions—point to a continuous, unresolvable condition of “waiting.” This act of waiting is itself self-referential: its meaning does not arise from the eventual arrival of something, but rather from the ongoing affirmation of the state of “being in waiting.” In other words, it is not the arrival of the awaited object that gives waiting its meaning, but its absence. Waiting sustains itself through its repetition: “I am waiting because I am waiting,” or, “the shadow that waits is waiting for its waiting.” Put differently, the act of waiting exceeds what it refers to; its meaning becomes the surplus of the act itself. As Sartre writes, “the structure of being of the cloud is a transcendence toward rain” or “It is possible that he may come (Sartre, 1958, p.98)”, that is, a structure in which the present existence of a thing supports the imagined possibility of a future state. Within this symbolic illusion, “potential rain” becomes the essence of the cloud, “the one who has not yet arrived” becomes the justification for waiting, and the “seemingly waiting figure” becomes the equivalent of the meaning that is being waited for. Thus, the essence of “waiting” revealed by the work is constructed through the appearance of “a figure in waiting.” In the work's self-referential structure, this appearance is misrecognized and elevated to the status of “essence,” acquiring a subjectively imposed identity. Yet the true essence—what the work is, or what the figure is waiting for—remains ungrasped, retained within the viewer's attempt to penetrate beyond self-reference, and ultimately constitutes a latent negating force against the falsely elevated “essence.”

This negative force is gradually amplified through the viewer's experience of the work. As the viewer waits alongside the shadowy figure, it becomes apparent that no matter what actions the figure performs in the video, and no matter how long the viewer waits before the work, the meaningless repetition of the figure's actions endlessly postpones the arrival of the future (meaning) that the act of waiting seems to summon. The viewer, caught in the loop of infinite waiting and the watching of waiting, experiences two layers of tension: on one hand, the referential relationship between waiting and arrival that the work appears to stage; on the other, the very

purity of waiting within the work suppresses or obscures that referential logic. Thus, in encountering a work that both appears to await something and simultaneously collapses into the pure form of waiting itself, the viewer ultimately discovers that what their waiting calls forth is not any arriving meaning, but waiting itself within the symbolic grasp of the work. Put more simply, as the viewer waits for the result of the figure's waiting (when waiting for the eternal absence of the result to be waited for), they come to realize that what they are truly experiencing is their act of waiting. This marks the emergence of a paradox at the core of the work's self-referential structure. On the one hand, the viewer may identify the essence of the work as: "the essence represented by the waiting figure is nothing more than the appearance of the waiting figure itself", or "the figure is not waiting for anything; it is waiting for the fact of its own waiting." In this case, the waiting figure becomes a veil that, once exposed, reveals that there is nothing hidden behind it. But on the other hand, through the shared experience of waiting with the figure, the viewer also comes to feel that: "the essence of the figure's waiting is an absolute void; it is precisely this void that enables our waiting to occur", or: "we are indeed waiting for something, but this something is pure nothingness." In other words, without this effective and operative void, the act of waiting would lose its very structure and meaning. Thus, we can identify a thesis and antithesis at play here: Thesis: "Waiting waits for nothing; waiting is simply the meaning of waiting itself." Antithesis: "The essence of waiting is an absolute void; waiting is the experience of this void."

In the negative operation through which the antithesis negates the thesis, the artwork effectively becomes a stage structured around the object of desire in Jacques Lacan's theory—*objet petit a*. Within this stage, the object that has not yet arrived (and in fact will never arrive as meaning) appears through the work's imagery in a substitutive sense. Such substitutive imagery does not hypothesize the arrival of the object or the fulfillment of meaning; rather, it functions as a metaphor for the negative form of that object or meaning. In other words, the imagery of the work does not give form to any determinate thing, because the object to which it refers is merely an empty position. Yet precisely because the imagery lacks determinate meaning, it paradoxically reveals the existence of that empty position to the viewer. Thus, through the effort of its structural and formal references, the artwork sketches out a blank space or fissure within the symbolic order. In doing so, it allows the subject, through the fantasy generated in the act of viewing, to encounter the effect of *objet petit a*: although it is not present, it nonetheless governs our desire through its absence. Ultimately, what viewers confront is not the lack of the object itself, but rather the lack within the subject. In other words, what drives the viewer to uncover, to wait, is none other than the viewer themselves—it is the subject who creates the object they long for in the very process of longing for it. This paradoxical process, where the search itself retroactively creates the object being searched for (Žižek, 2008, p.180), provides the condition for a dialectical synthesis: "What drives the act of waiting is both the absence of the object and the internal void of the subject." In other words, this synthesis ultimately reveals that what lies hidden behind the work is the desire to

establish an identity with the ultimate, always-absent inner object—a desire that emerges in response to the disjunction exposed by the two preceding positions. And the internal void that generates this desire is the uncertainty inherent in the subject’s position—the uncanniness.

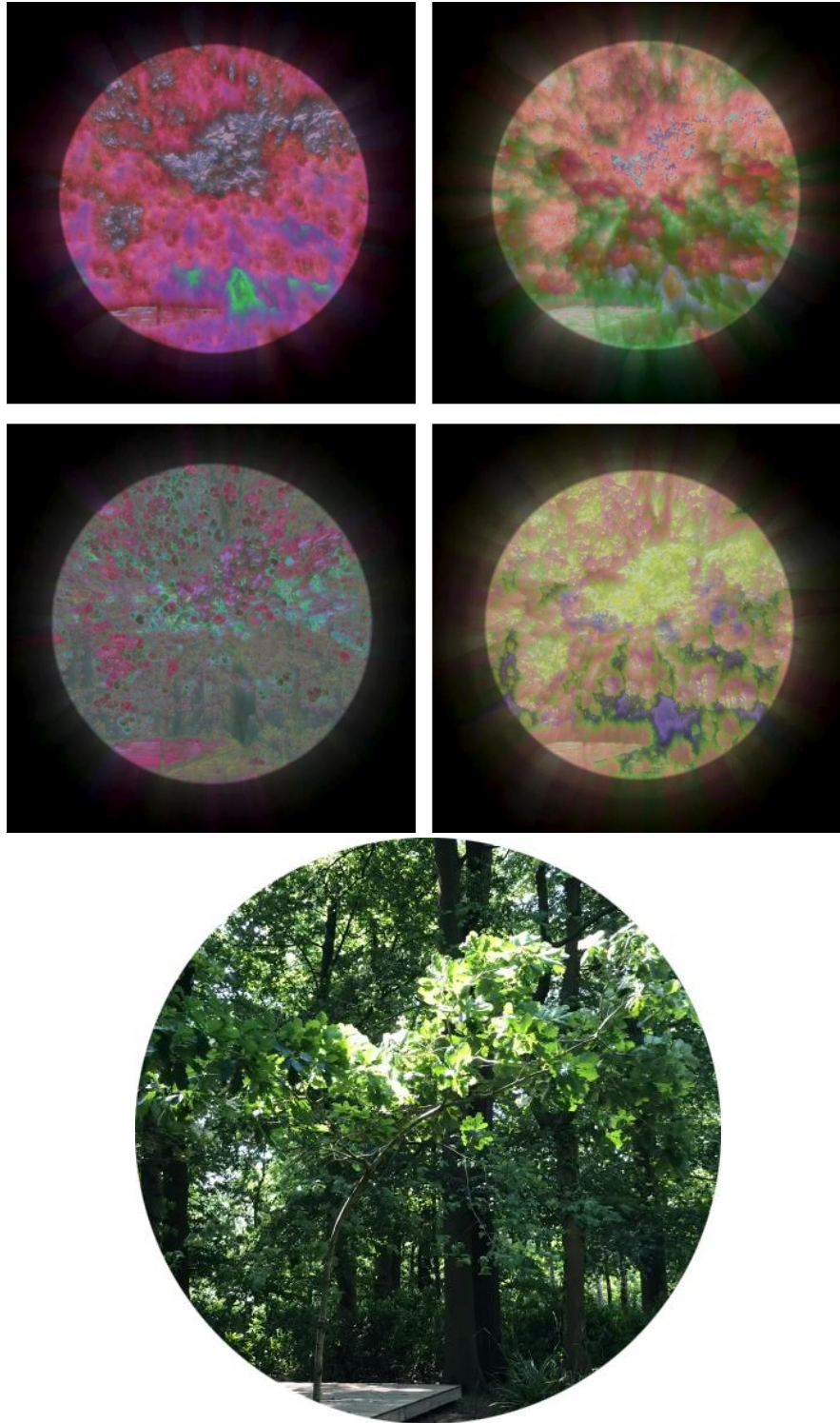


Fig 24.1 Uncertainty Image Test

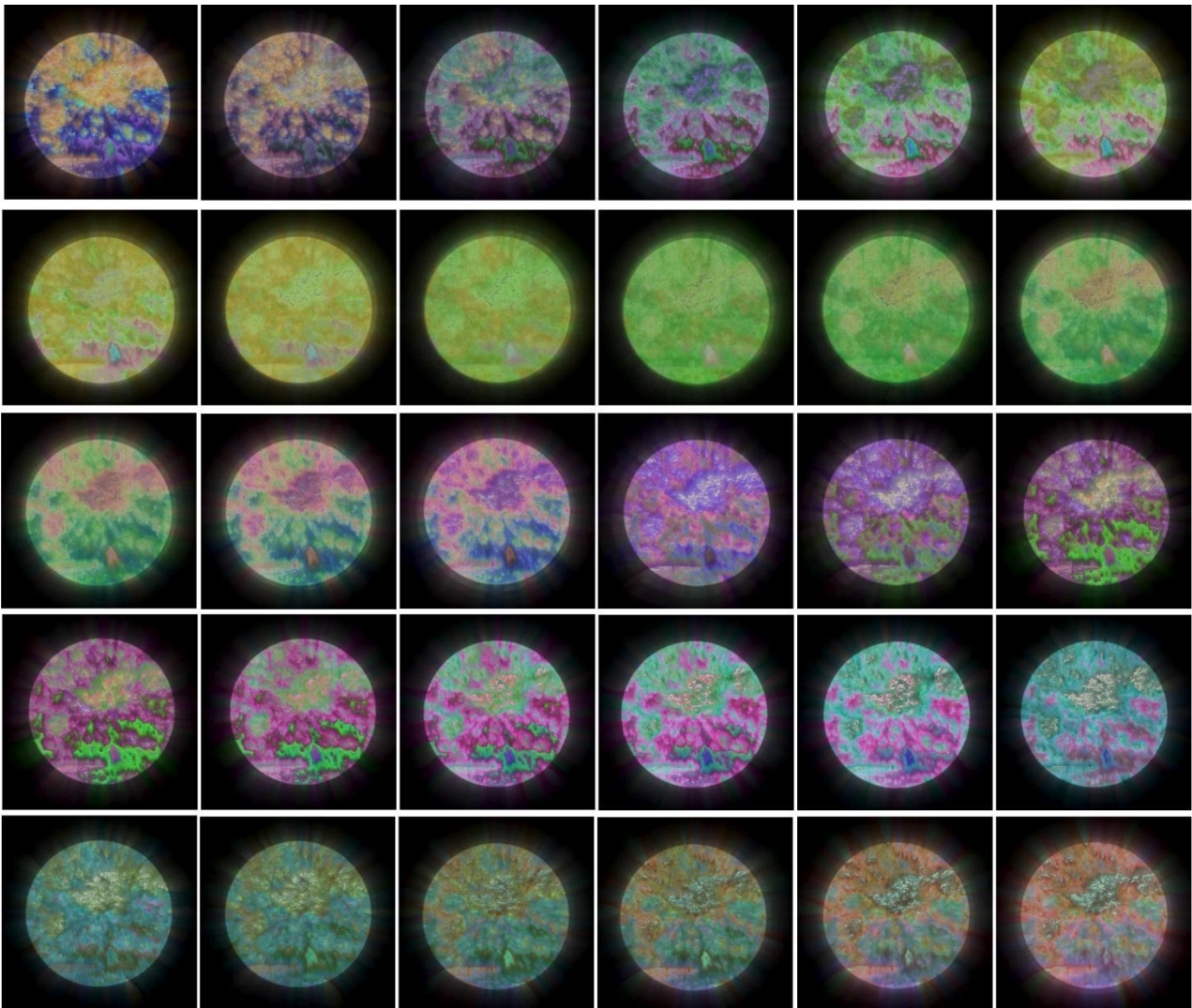


Fig 24.2 Uncertainty Image Test – Transformation Process (from left to right, top to bottom)

It is also worth mentioning that during this phase, I conducted a set of tests focused on uncertainty in imagery, represented by fig 24 and fig 25 as comparative experiments. These included fig 24, which explores the representation of pure uncertainty, and fig 25, which contrasts the disruptive effect of uncertainty applied to an otherwise stable and coherent image. In fig 24, the original image (the natural landscape in the lower portion of fig 24.1) was processed using the software TouchDesigner for real-time generative manipulation. By visualizing random noise—translating its parameters into chromatic relations—and mapping these color dynamics onto the color structure of the original image, the resulting visual output manifests as an abstract composition that combines the chromatic logic of impressionism with the spatial disintegration of Abstract Expressionism (as seen in the upper part of fig 24.1). This image continues to evolve over time (see fig 24.2), constantly shifting between faintly recognizable

traces of the source landscape and completely illegible fields of fluctuating color. Projected in a completely dark space, the work appears like a surrealist sun placed in a black chamber. Beyond its organic visual transformation—imbued with an illusion of vitality precisely because of the randomness that distances it from mechanical or artificial generation—the work also emits light from its edges in an outward burst, resembling solar prominences, evoking an overwhelming, almost aggressive presence. However, in terms of its ability to evoke the uncanny, this piece falls short compared to fig 23. While the direct presentation of uncertainty in the image aids the construction of a self-referential structure by weakening visual legibility and distancing the viewer from the symbolic act of referencing external objects. This experience is especially evident when the work is presented as a definitive result of a collection of dynamic visual languages that are difficult to confirm, seemingly landscapes, celestial bodies, and abstract expressionism. It allows the viewer to identify it as uncertainty comfortably. However, on the other hand, this direct mode of presentation fails to provide the viewer with the paradoxical negative force necessary to activate the experience of disorientation. Because when it makes a deterministic reference to its uncertainty, it has already clarified its own representational identity. Simply put, a work that offers a confusing appearance does not necessarily confuse the viewer; only a work that deceives the viewer through clarity can truly plunge them into a state of bewilderment. In other words, this piece attempts to present itself as a silent presence—an existence detached from the symbolic structure, a non-referential reality. However, because of this direct revelation, its purpose is instead obscured by its characteristic of being readily grasped by the viewer. As suggested in the metaphor from Chapter One, mortals cannot access truth through direct apprehension; rather, it is the prophet, through their death (or failure), who reveals truth in its non-truth, thereby exposing the essential truth. Thus, this work represents a deviation from the path of “failure.”

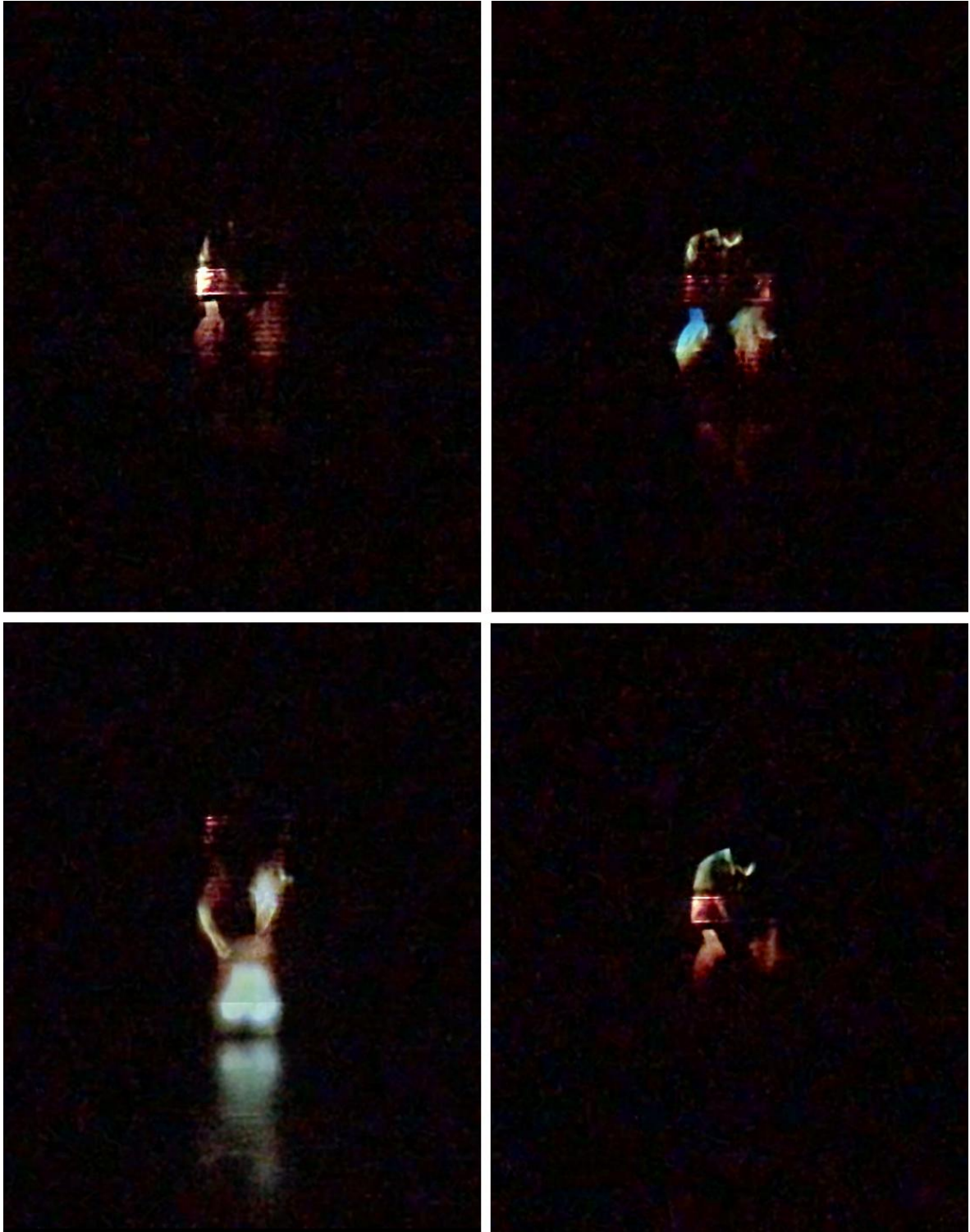


Fig 25.1 Uncertainty Disruption Test on a Determinate Image-1

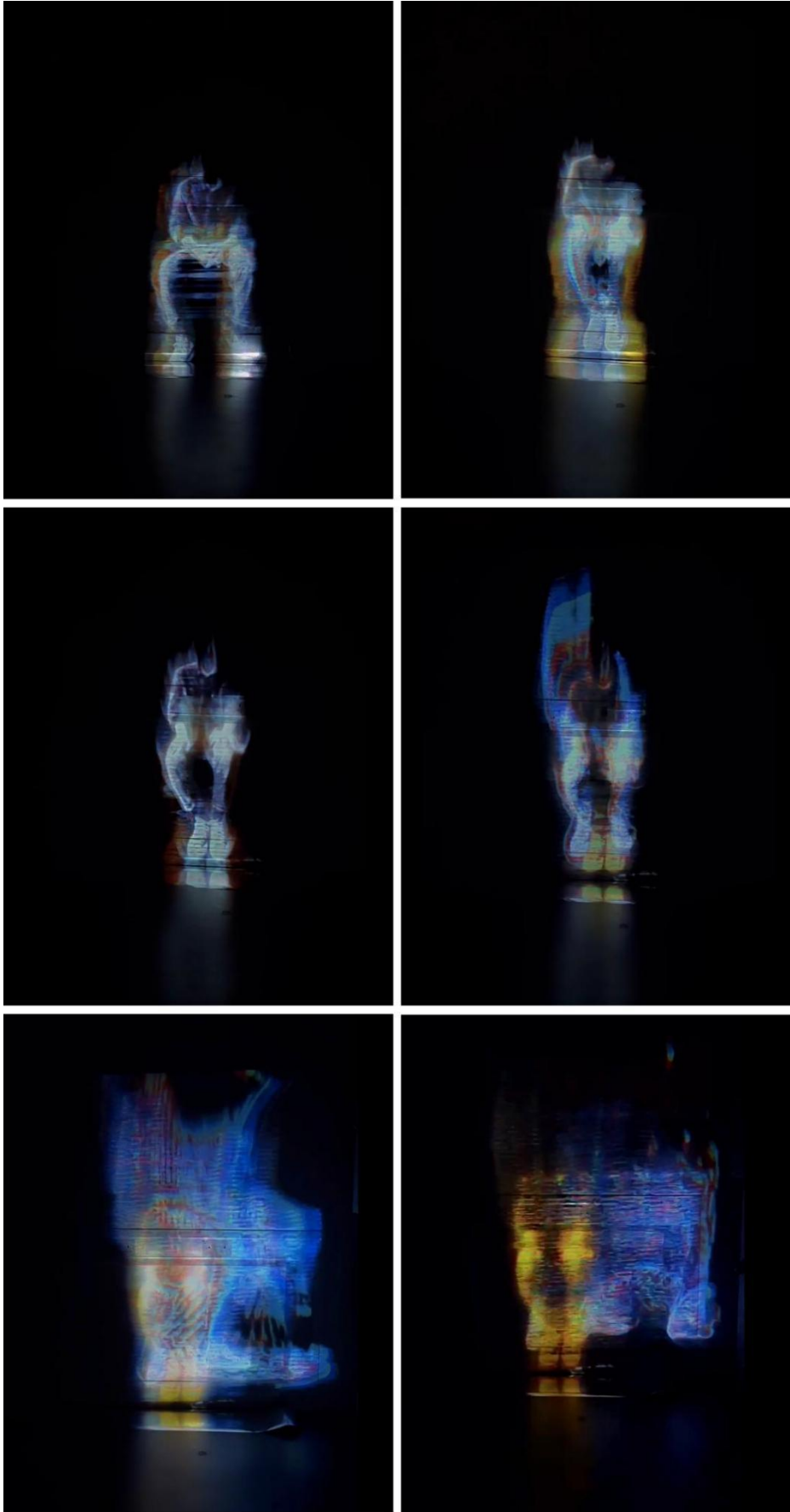


Fig 25.2 Uncertainty Disruption Test on a Determinate Image-2

By contrast, fig 25 achieves a more satisfactory outcome by combining the indeterminate visual effects from fig 24 with the clear, defined human figure from fig 23, resulting in a balanced state between ambiguity and legibility. In fig 25.1, the high-saturation colors slowly flow across the body over time, giving the figure a dynamic, glass-like luminosity. Moving shadows partially obscure the figure, while intense highlights trace along its edges—sometimes lingering on the hands or feet—placing the image in a state between clarity and concealment. fig 25.2 employs noise textures and visual glitches reminiscent of old cathode-ray televisions. Delayed afterimages emerge as the figure moves, producing the impression of a digital ghost that wanders and waits before the viewer. These two treatments are particularly effective in a completely dark environment: on one hand, the darkness concentrates the work’s referential content by minimizing external symbolic interference; on the other, reflections on the glossy floor preserve a minimal connection to reality, subtly suggesting a limited rupture of the work’s symbolic space. Moreover, the emphasis on the materiality of the work effectively guides viewers into the “second deception”: in fig 25.1, the figure oscillates between the signification of a person and the shimmer of radiant light, while in fig 25.2, it hovers between readable reference and noisy distortion. This material presence blurs and destabilizes the viewer’s ability to identify a singular symbolic referent, drawing them back into the self-referential illusion evoked by the texture of the work. In other words, through the revelation of its material properties, the work enables viewers to perceive the internal contradiction within the illusion of external symbolic unity, namely, that what the appearance signifies is merely a substitution for its material, meaningless essence: the void of external signification. However, the work still lacks a clear articulation of the internal negating force that arises when external reference collapses into self-reference. As such, it remains a “successful failure” positioned somewhere between the single-structure paradox and the full realization of a double-structure paradox.

4.3 the uncanny as failed waiting

Building upon the previous two sets of tests, the experiment on the double structural paradox has demonstrated that this practical path is indeed an appropriate approach for achieving, to a certain extent, a thorough “failure”. Artworks operating through this path enact a deception within the symbolic structure, wherein the appearance functions as the representation of something. At the same time, they also invoke another deception—a deception directed at the symbolic structure itself—by highlighting both the reference to meaning and the work’s materiality, thereby calling forth a deceptive identity between the appearance and the essence of the work. The paradoxes inherent within each of these two structures, as well as the paradoxical negation between them, hold significant potential to push the work further into a state of radical uncertainty. In other words, the work simultaneously performs a paradoxical conflict internal to the symbolic structure, that is, a representation of the internal negation of its referential function, and also strips the viewer of the possibility

of stabilizing this failure (the oscillation between structure and non-structure) into a deterministic failure, that is, the reproduction of the internal negation of the identity of the work. Therefore, through this double negation that the work gains the ability to shape a determinate image into pure *uncertainty*, and to give form to pure negativity, in other words, to give form to the uncanniness that constitutes the essence of the subject's position of uncertainty.

Based on this line of thought, this phase of the practice first continued the use of the "headless figure" as an image and the internally contradictory semantics of "waiting," and, on this basis, conducted the first set of extended and comparative tests (fig 26 and fig 27):

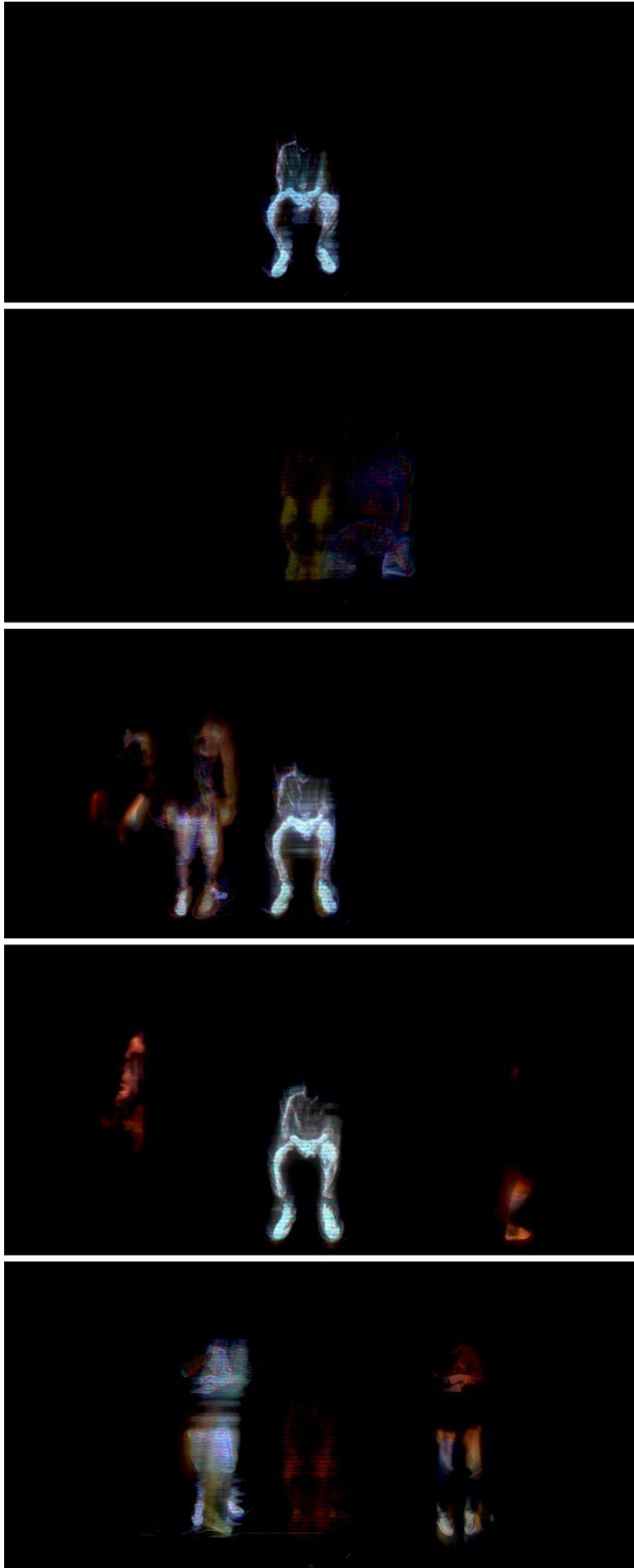


Fig 26.1



Fig 26.2

In fig 26, I continued the strategy of fig 25, combining the visual effects from fig 25.1 and fig 25.2, while refining the treatment of the figure's motion-induced afterimages. Unlike in fig 25.2, where the residual image merely served as a trace of movement, here it acquires autonomy and its trajectory. As shown in fig 26.1, when the seated figure rises and exits the frame, the afterimage drifts to both sides of the screen, persistently “waiting” through aimless pacing and static standing. When the central figure returns and sits down, the wandering afterimage slowly shifts into a dark red hue and fades into blackness, as if continuing the act of waiting through its absence. In the later part of the video, as the pacing accelerates, these ghost-like afterimages become increasingly fragmented, circling the main figure even after it disappears—insistently lingering and wandering. In the final scene, once the scattered fragments and the main figure fall into stillness, three distinct forms—the clear yet glitched main figure, the luminous flowing afterimage, and the faint static trace—sit silently at the center of the frame. Through their fragmented yet synchronized gaze, they silently stare back at the viewer, inviting them into a shared act of waiting.

The core of this experiment lies in shifting the concept of “waiting” from a symbolic reference to a concrete object, toward a self-referential formal structure. The work emphasizes “waiting” as an idle behavioural mechanism (a form and behaviour that ensures the repetition and loss of meaning of waiting) through a large number of disordered, repetitive and misaligned behavioural images, rather than subjectively - emotional content pointing to a certain result or object, such as “the object being waited for”, “the result of waiting” or “the person or thing that triggers waiting”. This repetition weakens the emotional and narrative logic usually found within symbolic systems, and redefines the meaning of “waiting” as something derived from the self-perpetuation of the act itself, rather than from its referential relationship to an external object. In this way, the act of “waiting”, which separates form from content and emphasizes form, no longer serves the arrival of some future event, but becomes a circular structure in which the act refers only to itself. In this transition from the union of form and content to the primacy of pure form, the work ultimately reinforces its self-referential structure. To borrow the words of Žižek, it is when the overpowering presence of form blocks subjective-psychological content—when content is forced to keep its distance from form—that the truth of the repressed content can find a space to reveal itself (Žižek, 2008, p.215). And this “truth” of the repressed content is what Lacan defines as the *desire of the unconscious*. This fundamental driving force compels us to interpret, to explore, to grasp the object symbolically. This drive, as discussed earlier, is born from the subject torn apart by the structure of language. More precisely, this drive does not originate from within the symbolic structure itself, nor can it be fully articulated by subjective-psychological language. Rather, it is revealed through the insufficiency of the symbolic system, through the gaps between signifiers, or through the rupture between form and content⁸⁷. Just as in this work, our

⁸⁷ “This is why desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love, but the difference that results from the subtraction of the first from the second, the very phenomenon of their splitting” Lacan, J., Fink, H., &

true encounter with the essence of “waiting” occurs in the misalignment between the symbolic position of “waiting” within our system of meaning and the demand that “waiting” makes upon us to experience its form in a raw, pre-symbolic way, that is, to experience “waiting” through the act of “waiting”. In other words, it is because the symbolic demand of “waiting” can never be fully satisfied within its pure formal manifestation that the appearance of “waiting” can be elevated to the position of essence. And it is through this elevation that we enter the structure of self-reference.

This emphasis on form does not obstruct the first mode of deception; in fact, it is the symbolic reading enabled by the first deception that creates the precondition for the emergence of pure form. It is also the exposure of mechanical repetition at the formal level that introduces a rupture within the previously credible symbolic interpretation. Although the repetition of form, as a negative force, challenges the content that is being represented, the root of this negative force remains closely linked to that very content. Thus, it is not a simple negation or overthrow, but rather a paradoxical process in which the negative experience between form and content is sublimated into the appearance of appearance as essence. At the same time, as the voidness of this appearance of appearance reveals itself to the viewer, the viewer is offered a similar shift in perspective as in the previous work (fig 25). That is, the essential void that drive the continuation of “waiting”, or the lack within the structure of language that constitutes the “essence” of waiting, is now perceived as the void of the viewer’s subject position, the shaping of an indeterminate and ungraspable internal place. Therefore, within the coexistence of two paradoxical propositions—where “the essence of waiting is both the pure form of waiting and the inner void of the subject that drives the generation of the form of waiting” and the former symbolic interpretation where “the representation of the waiting figure is both like a human and not like a human” or “the figure in waiting seems to be gazing at me, yet it seems as if the entire darkness is gazing at me”, the completely unattainable certainty will shape the qualities of the uncanny within the viewer.

Subsequently, building on this line of thought, I conducted a new test in fig 27. In this work, my primary goal was to examine whether further enriching and disrupting the video effects applied to the figure could more forcefully emphasize its materiality and the characteristics of pure form. However, in terms of results, this attempt did not render the form of “failure” any more complete. While it did not regress into the trap of turning the uncertainty of the uncanny back into a kind of symbolic certainty, the

Grigg, R. (2006). *Écrits: the first complete edition in English* (B. Fink, Tran.). W. W. Norton.p.580

“There is situated a horizon of being for the subject of whom there is question, namely of knowing whether the subject can reach it or not. It is in this interval, in this gap that there is situated an experience which is that of desire, which is first of all apprehended as being that of the desire of the other, and within which the subject has to situate his own desire. His own desire as such cannot be situated elsewhere than in this space.” Lacan, J., Miller, J. A. E., & Fink, B. T. (2019). *Desire and its interpretation: The seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book VI*. Polity Press.p.14

added effects in fact made the previously condensed visual symbols more difficult to interpret. And this interpretive difficulty is not the erasure of semantics required by uncertainty, but rather the insertion of excessive possibilities for interpretation into the extremely complex video effect, which in turn leads to the composition confusion of the first level of deception.

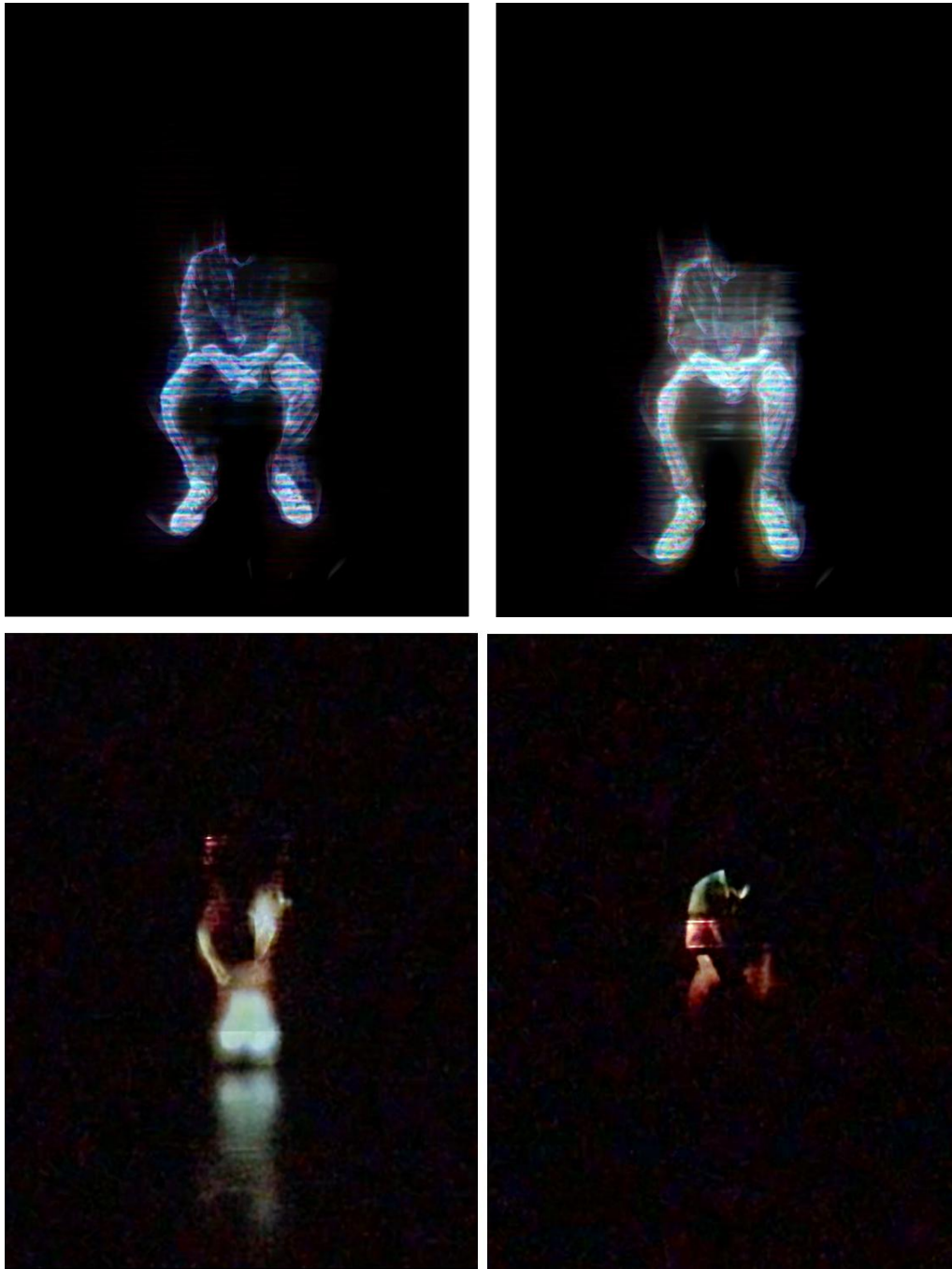


Fig 27.1

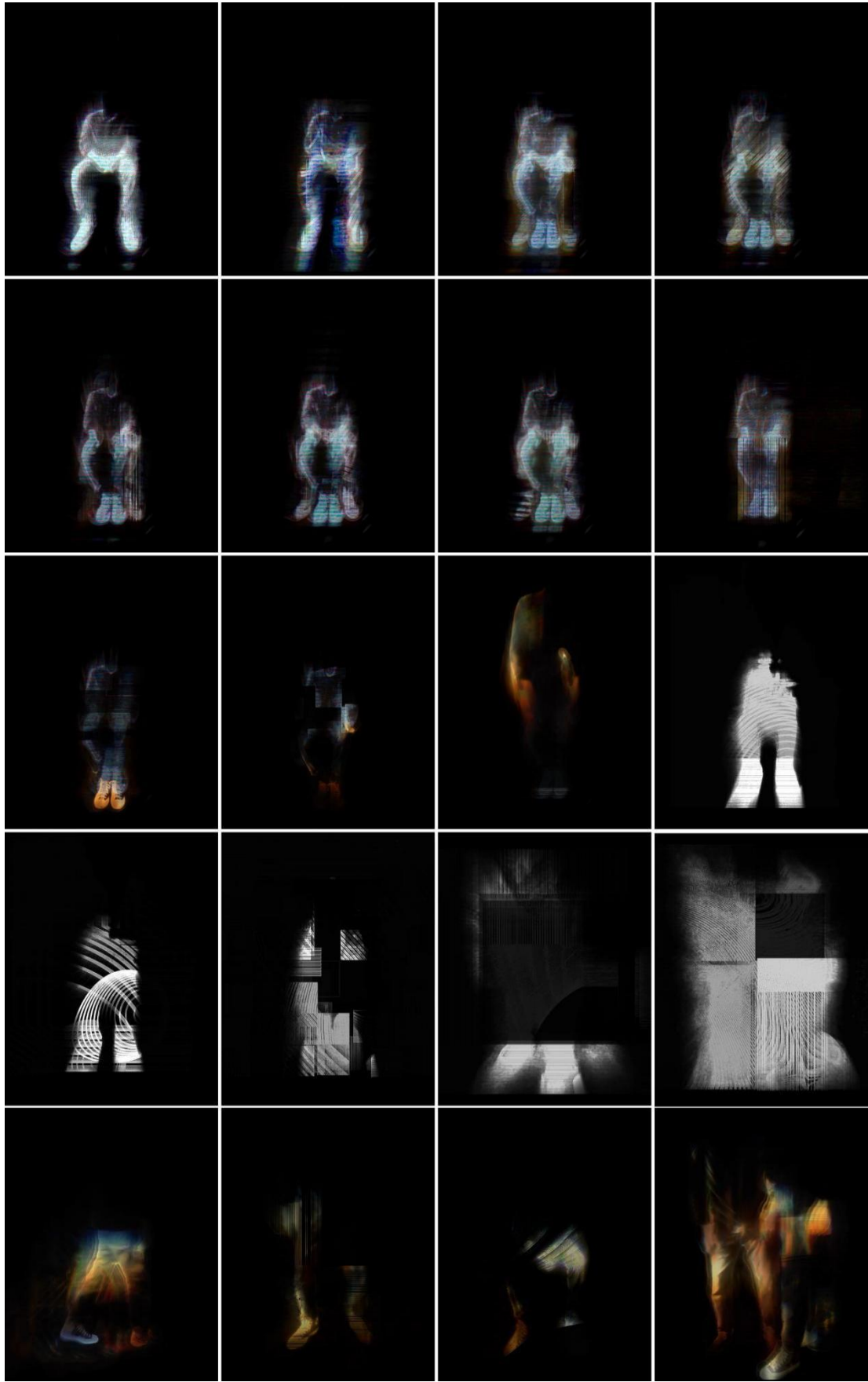


Fig 27.2 glitch effect

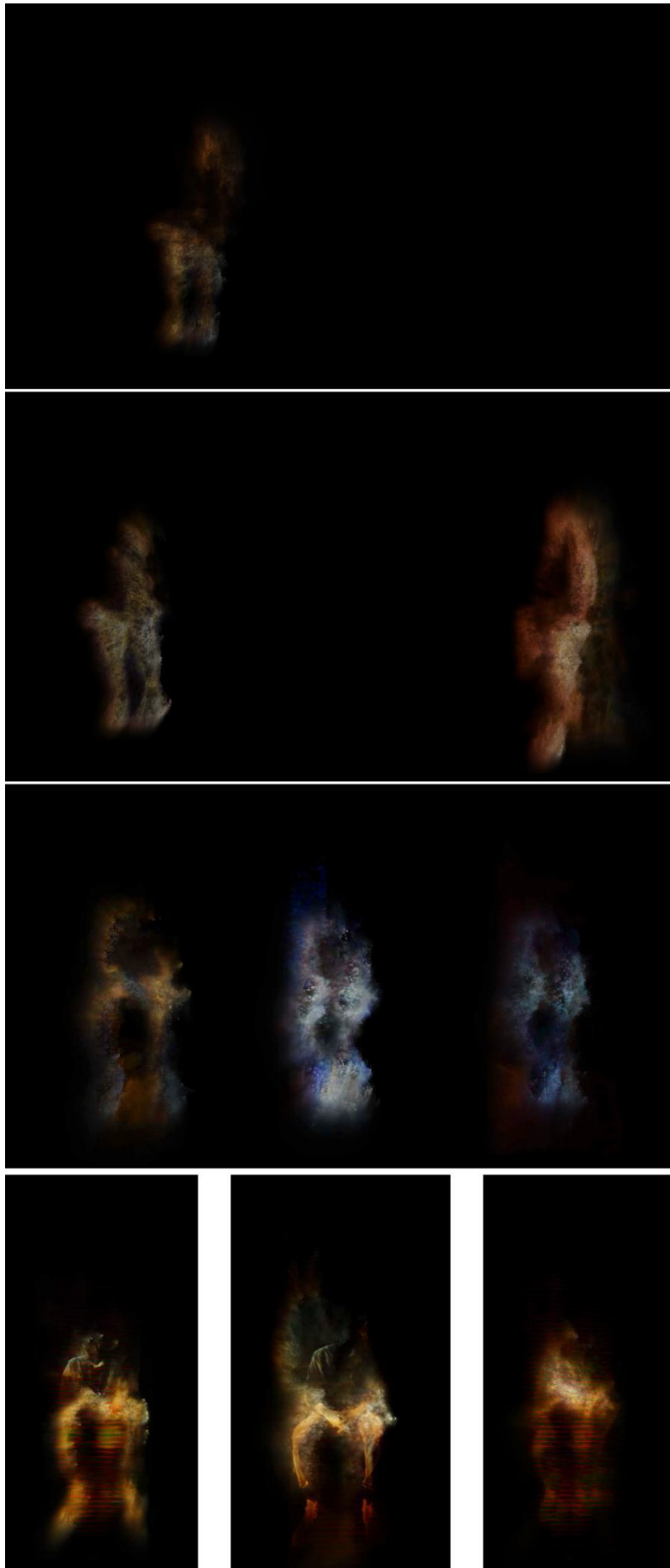


Fig 27.3 particle effect

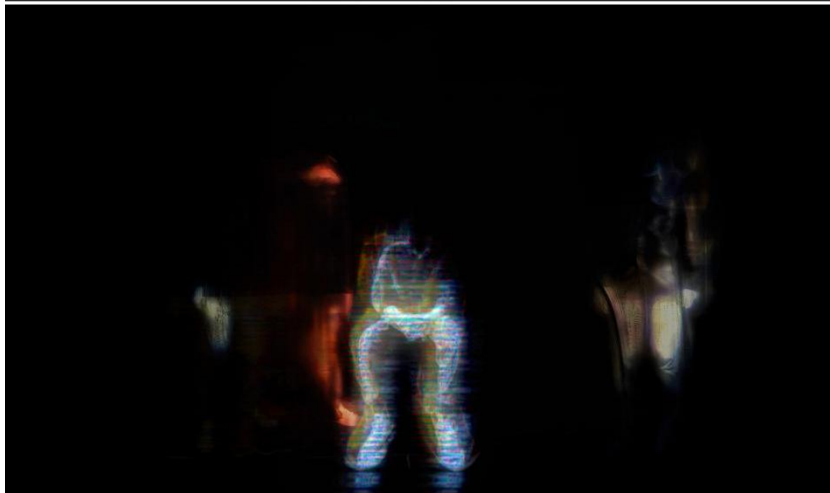
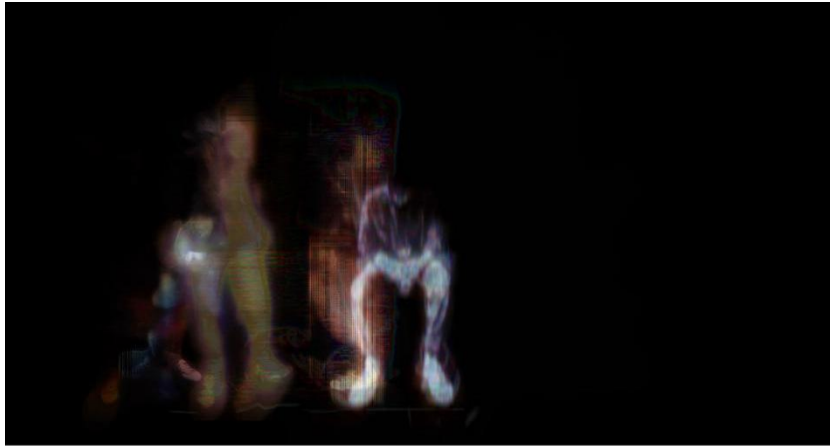


Fig 27.4

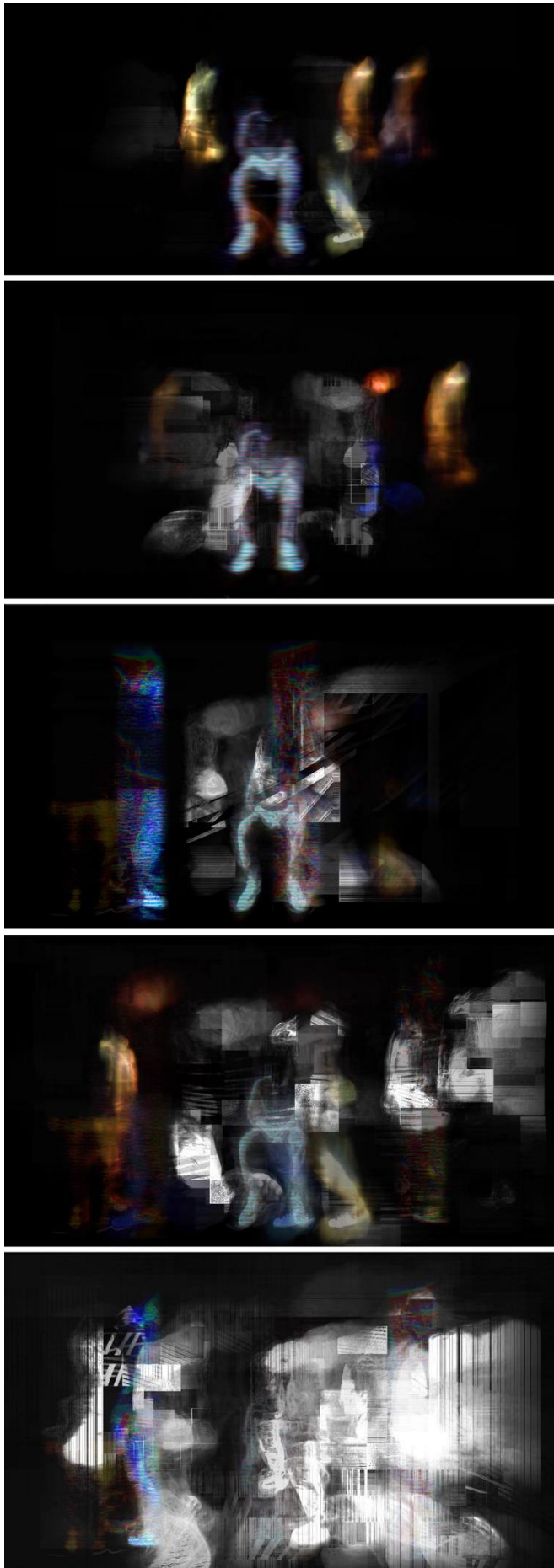


Fig 27.5

In fig 27, I applied two additional visual effects to the existing video: a glitch effect (fig 27.2), aimed at emphasizing the materiality and chaotic instability of the digital image; and a particle effect (fig 27.3), intended to blur the subjective-psychological content accessible within the symbolic structure and reduce the legibility of the image. As shown in fig 27.2, the glitch effect aggressively disrupts the frame by simulating data corruption—manifesting as sharp noise and abrupt overlays of white glitch textures that replace the original image. The particle effect, on the other hand, gradually dissolves the figure into a fog-like cloud, softening its contours and visual identity. These two effects alternate throughout the figure’s movements (fig 27.4): at times the figure dissipates into smoke and disappears into darkness while walking and waiting; at others, it is suddenly overtaken by white glitch fragments. In the video’s final sequence (fig 27.5), an increasing number of shadowy figures begin to pace around the central seated figure. As the pacing accelerates, these figures merge into a continuous field of glitch, visually reducing the once-symbolically readable body back to its material essence of pixels and code. However, this layering of effects ultimately diminishes the work’s capacity to evoke uncertainty. While the glitch effect foregrounds the materiality of the image, it draws too sharp a distinction between two registers: the image “as a representation of a figure” and the image “as a representation of a glitch.” This clarity undermines the paradoxical tension between representation and appearance, reducing the work to a binary of fixed choices, rather than allowing the coexistence of conflicting readings. In other words, the excessive emphasis on materiality separates what was originally an internal negation within a single image into two externally opposed entities—fragmenting the latent paradox into two unrelated propositions: “the work as a representation of a figure” versus “the work as a representation of glitch.”

The particle effect, though functionally similar to the earlier light trail effect, operates oppositely. Both aim to disrupt symbolic coherence by fragmenting the image, but while the light trail does so through subtraction, i.e., destabilizing the figure’s outline and thus reinforcing its fictive and substitutive nature, the particle effect does so through visual accumulation. This excessive layering risks freezing the work into a closed system, and thus it is also superfluous for the goal of this work. Furthermore, although the processing of evolving the afterimage at the end of the video into a full-screen fault pattern (fig 27.5) is intended to represent “the nothingness of waiting” and “the universal experience of disconnection”, what is ultimately presented is “definite uncertainty” rather than the “certainty of indeterminacy” demanded by the uncanny. In the original conceptual framework, the intention was to express the void of waiting through a shift from an ordered, relatively legible figure to chaotic and entirely unreadable digital noise. This shift was also meant to represent a movement from individual experiences of waiting to a collective, more abstract and universal concept of waiting, namely, a void not born from an individual’s anxious helplessness in the face of nothingness, but from a confrontation with a bustling, disordered world in which no meaningful or trustworthy connection can be made, in other words, the experience of being thrown into the world. Yet in execution, this idea

once again falls into a familiar trap: presenting such an experience as the representational content of the work itself, rather than using the work as a catalyst to activate the viewer's own experience of the world's uncertainty. As a result, the work fails to function as a medium through which the viewer's inner sense of unease might be evoked, and instead renders the void as a determinate visual target, thereby diverging from the subjective experiential dimension that the work originally aimed to stimulate. Therefore, from both an artistic and technical perspective, the layering of these three effects not only weakens the conceptual clarity of the work but also disperses the viewer's attention, failing to support the paradoxical practical goals of the work effectively.

The failure of this test once again pointed me toward a valuable insight: in the artistic practice of the concept of the uncanny, an increased conciseness (degree of reduction) in video language facilitates the internalization of the negating force between appearance and representation, whereas a complication of the video language has the opposite effect. Based on this understanding, I subsequently conducted the following two sets of tests (fig 28 and fig 29):



Fig 28.1

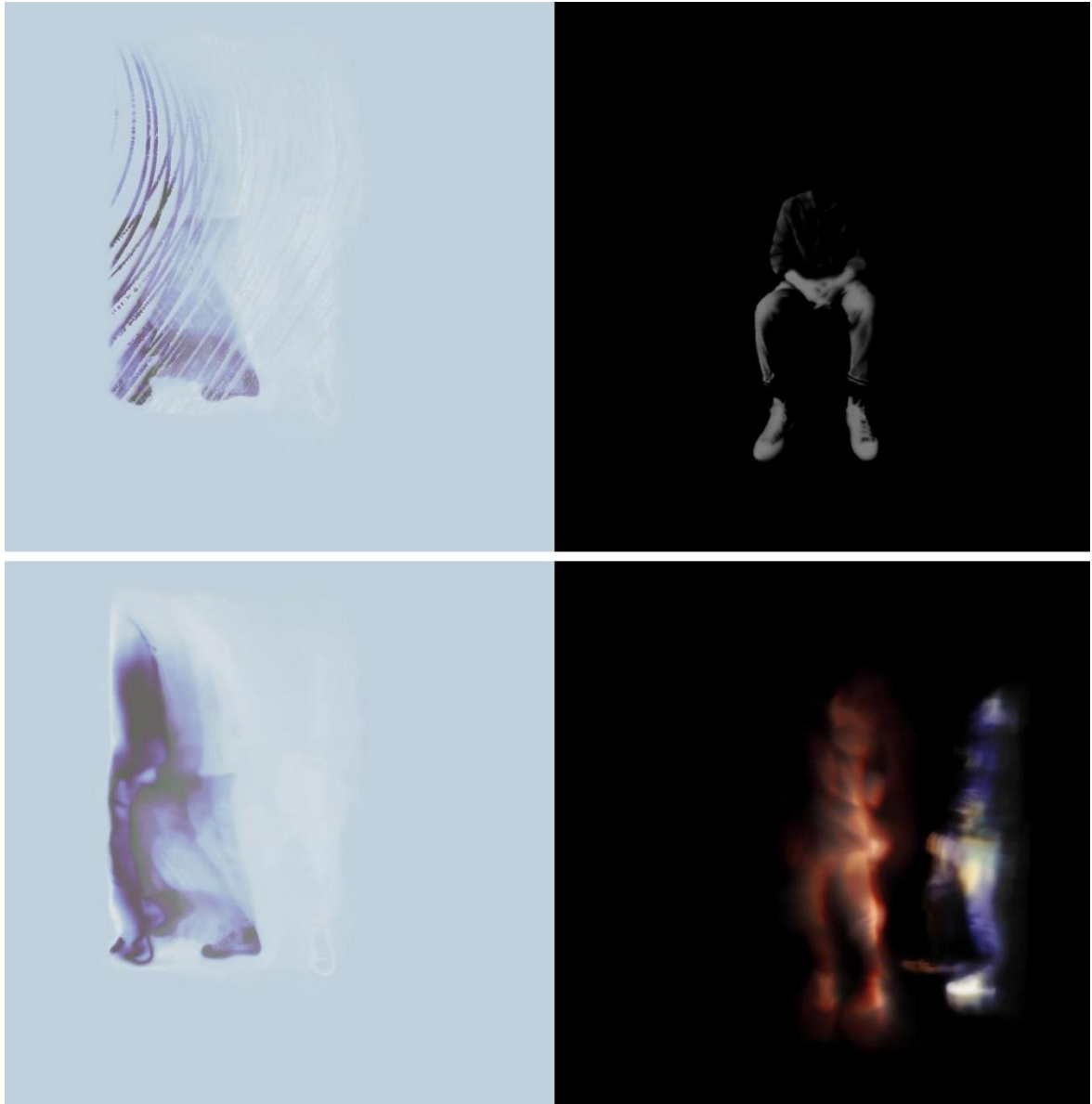


Fig 28.2

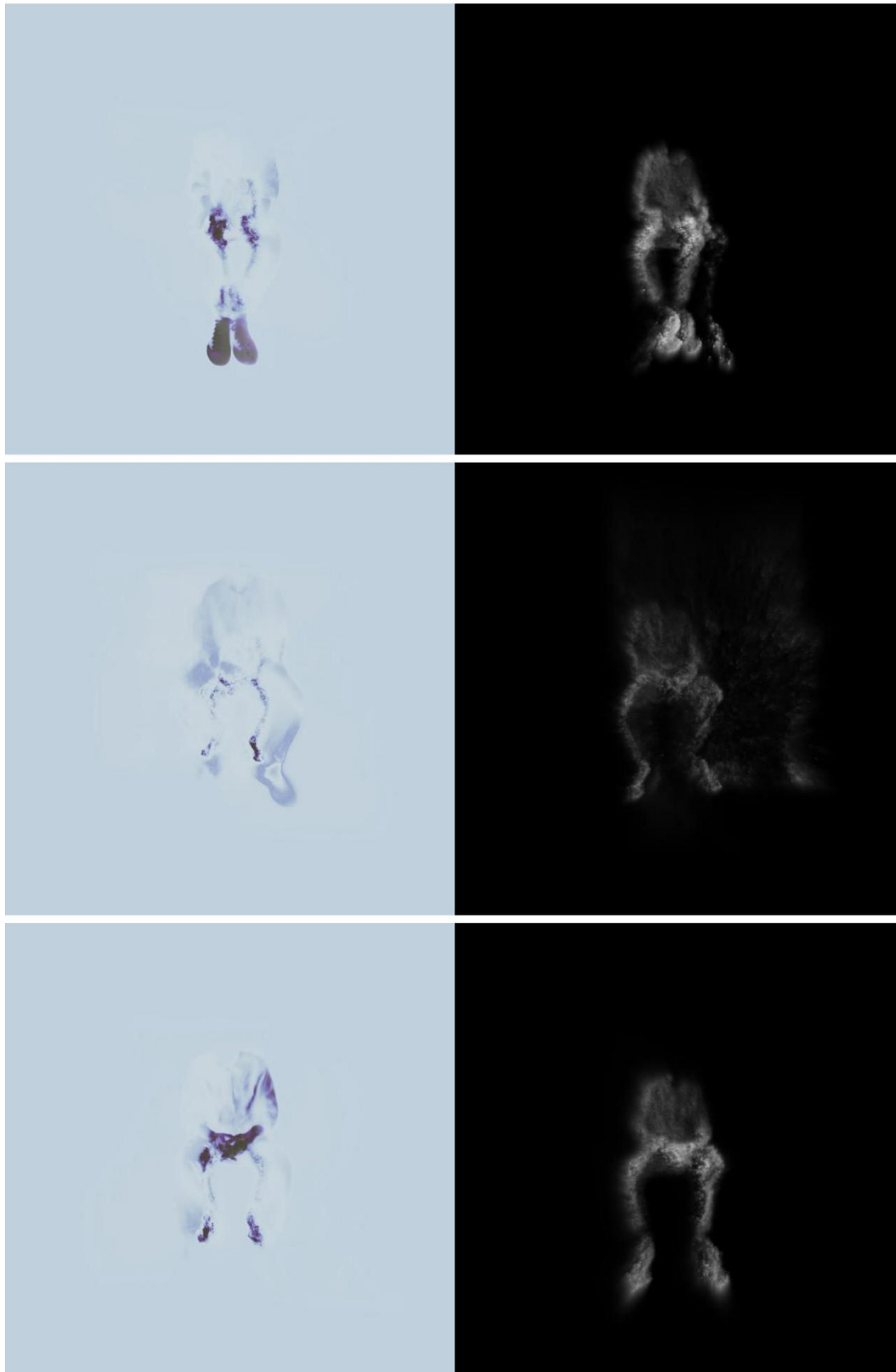


Fig 28.3

In these two sets of tests, I adopted a comparative format to present a single human figure. Fig 28 takes alignment and dislocation as its core, aiming to explore semantic possibilities for evoking the uncanny beyond the theme of “waiting.” The visual layout is split into black and white: the right side, set against a black background, presents a standard headless figure, while the left, on a white background, displays its inverse. The work operates within the TouchDesigner and incorporates Japanese Noh music as a trigger mechanism. With each beat of the drum, the figure in the image experiences a slight dislocation, accompanied by haunting chants. As the program progresses, these dislocations accumulate and gradually shift from simple temporal delays to displacements in visual effect and representational content, for example, the figure moving between the left and right frames, or disappearing from one side only to reappear on the other.

Through the strong contrast of black and white, and the inversion of tones, the work initially encourages viewers to perceive the two sides as formally distinct but semantically connected—two independent but mirrored works, each functioning as a different signifier that shares the same signified, thus forming the first deception. As the dislocation intensifies, the original relationship of contrast is broken, and the viewer begins to read the work as a unified in form but alienated in representation—the original perception of the left and right works as formally separate yet contrasting entities is disrupted, giving way to a new formal unity (a single, integrated work), while the initial semantic alignment (both sides referring to the same headless figure) is replaced by a self-referential structure marked by an internal void (the linkage between the figures transforms the referential content from pointing to a singular contrasted character to pointing toward the figure’s operative function within the work itself). This substitution reveals the first deception and transitions into a second: the work no longer refers to a person, but instead to its mechanism of representation. Although this transition is formally successful, the work ultimately fails to disrupt its stable identity as an “artwork.” Whether understood as two contrasting representations or as a single self-referential entity, it maintains a comfortable distance from the viewer and remains easily grasped as a work to be watched. In contrast, the earlier “successfully failed” piece achieved a breakthrough of the self-referential structure through the paradoxical concept of “waiting” (where the drive to wait arises from the absence of meaning). This concept resonates with everyday experience, allowing the viewer to engage their internal perspective, and thus points to both the void at the core of waiting and the viewer’s desire that fills that void—enabling the dialectical resolution of the two deceptions and evoking the uncanny. However, the current work lacks such a point of experiential access. The viewer cannot shift from watching the work to reflecting on their position. As a result, the final and most persistent layer of certainty—the identity of the work as an artwork—remains intact. The second deception cannot be exposed, and the uncanny is never truly activated.

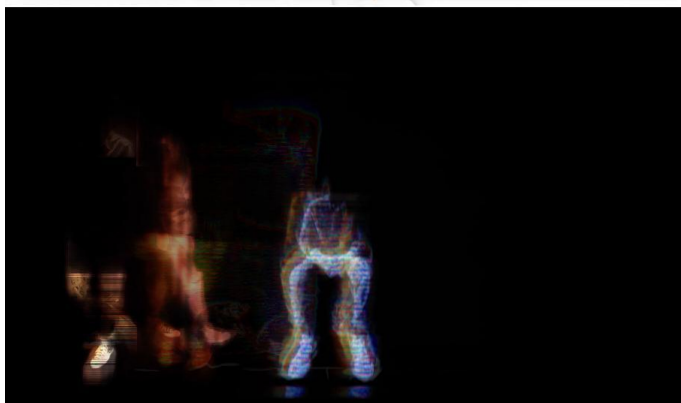
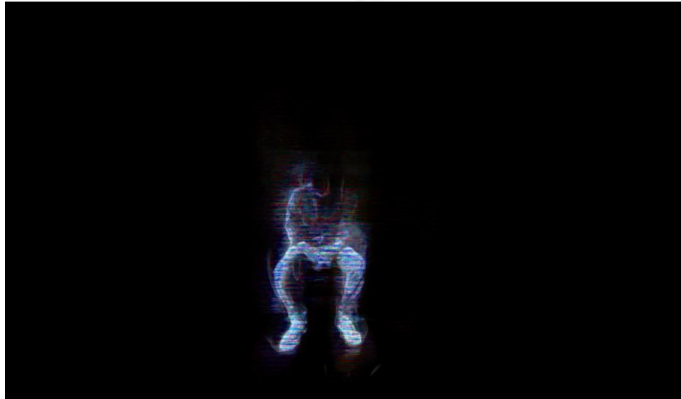
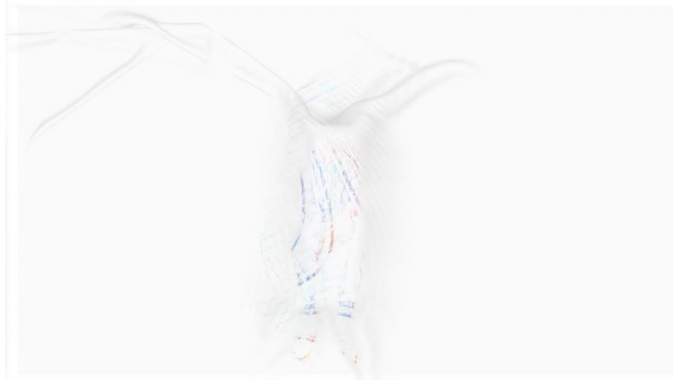


Fig 29.1

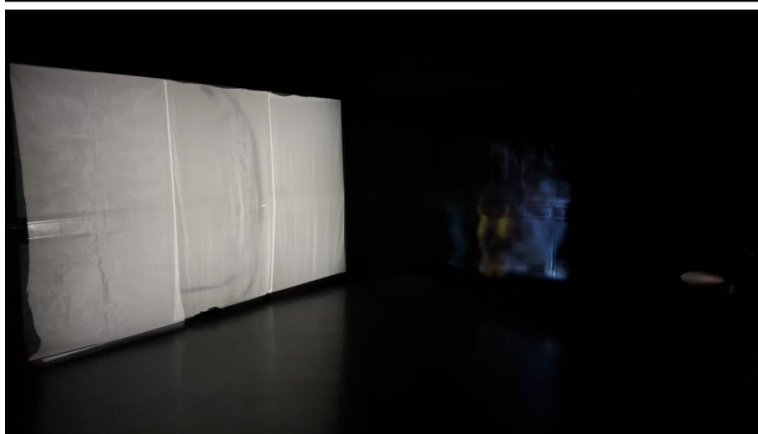
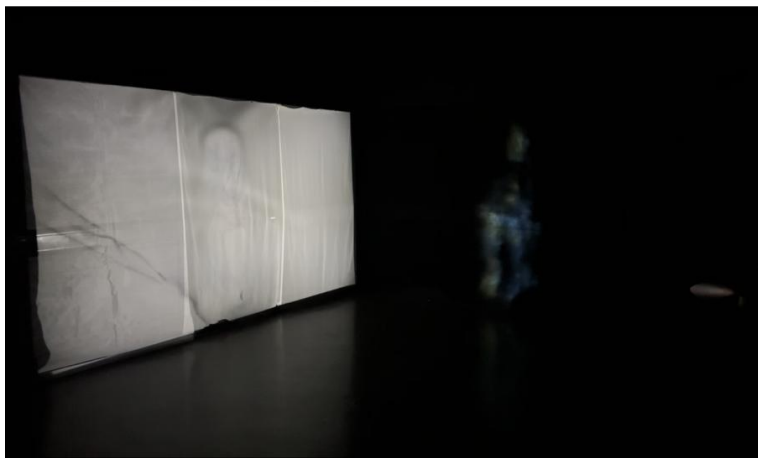
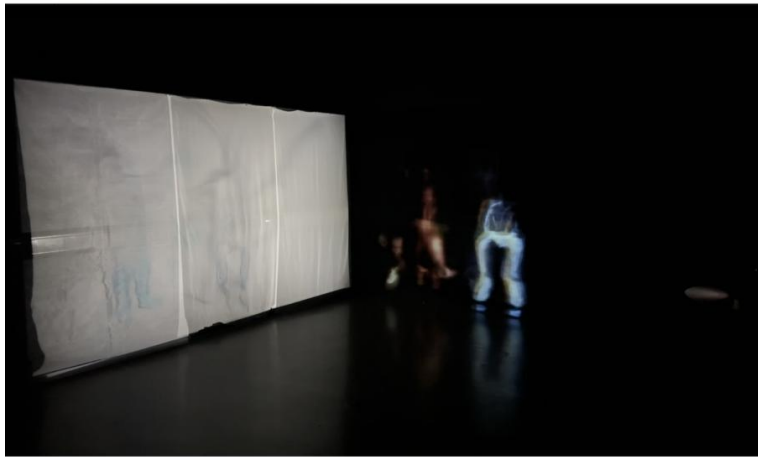
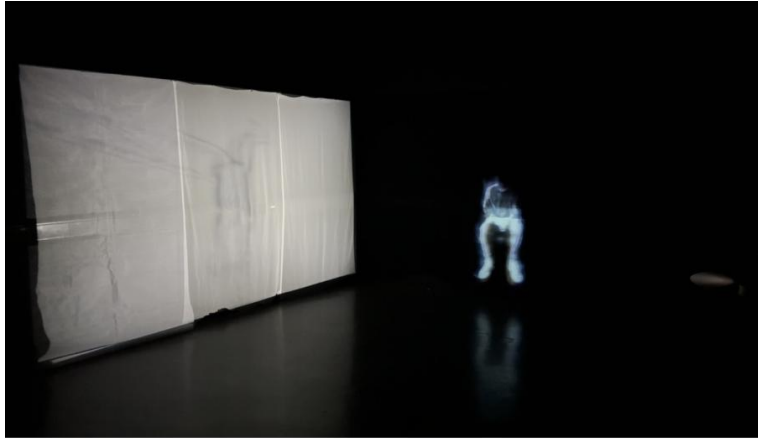


Fig 29.2

In fig 29, the concept of “alignment and dislocation” is once again at the core of the test. However, unlike fig 28, this work does not present a process of transition from formal separation and semantic unity to formal unification and semantic displacement. Instead, it explores a parallel structure in which formal division and content correspondence coexist on the surface, while the generative potential of difference is suppressed beneath the appearance. As shown in fig 29.2, the right side presents a wandering figure in a dark background, while in the white area on the left, a white cloth covering the figure is presented based on the image in the dark area. As the figure moves, it causes bulges, dips, or lateral shifts in the fabric’s surface. At the beginning of the video, the movements on both sides are synchronized. However, as time progresses, except for the central figure, the residual traces of figures that have disappeared from the dark side continue to disturb the fabric on the left, implying their persistent presence. This design, like the previous one, constructs the first deception through symbolic alignment: the two sides, though differing in representational form, share a unified referential content by the same headless figure. Yet as the afterimages persist and fail to vanish, the initial alignment is broken. The surplus of meaning, which was originally erased by precise referential equivalence, is now hinted at through this dislocation. The tension between the fabric and the dark background generates meanings that exceed the original signification, re-linking the two parts into a single whole, thereby shifting the work from external referentiality to self-referentiality. In other words, what could be clearly understood as “two images referring to the same person” gradually transforms into “a single work revealing its unsettling appearance, whose representational meaning remains unclear.” It is this negating force—emerging from the internal differences—that turns the deception of external referential alignment into a deception of self-reference. However, similar to fig 28, this work also lacks a core semantic element that could connect with the viewer’s everyday experience. As a result, the viewer is unable to shift their perspective and transform the “ontological void” revealed within the work into the recognition of their internal lack. For this reason, this experimental piece ultimately fails to generate the paradox of the second deception and thus becomes a “failed failure” in its attempt to represent the uncanny.

Therefore, at this stage, I returned to exploring other possibilities for the core signifier of “waiting”—a concept that unifies both layers of deception and inherently contains paradoxical meaning. Specifically, I shifted focus to examine how other representational forms might reproduce the uncanny by crystallizing the dual deception embedded within the notion of waiting. From this renewed inquiry emerged the work fig.30 *Fall*.

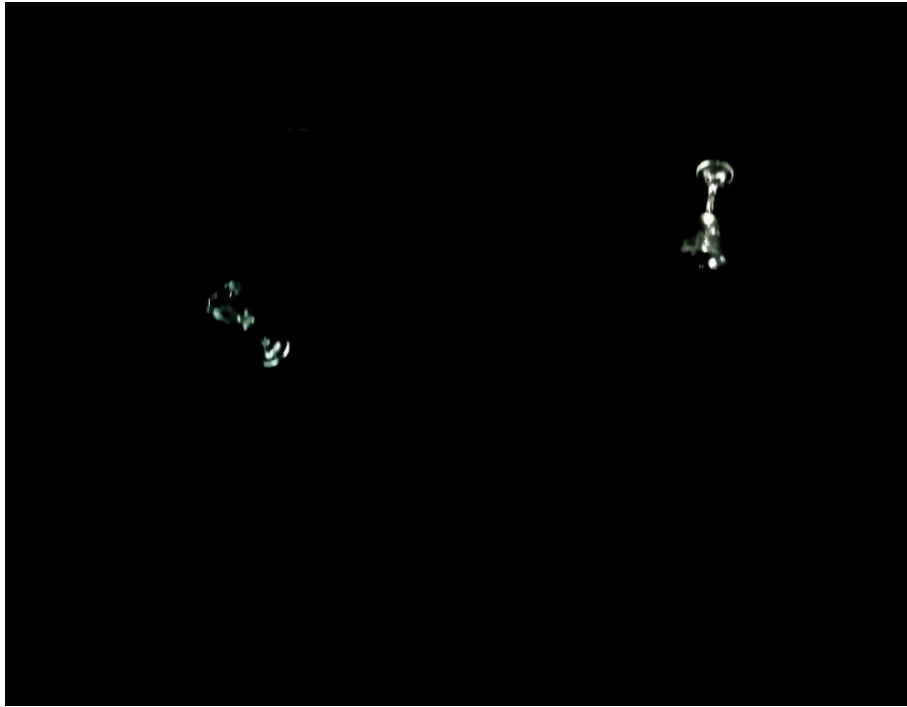


Fig 30.1 *Fall*

This work presents a simple loop: the repeated descent of a falling glass cup (as shown in fig 30.1). Its core signified remains “waiting”. Through recursive reenactment, a cup that should logically shatter at the end of its fall instead undergoes an endless repetition of falling, never arriving at its expected conclusion. This reference extends beyond the cup’s own suspended fate, it also implicates the viewer, who waits for the cup to shatter, which has always been absent and yet to come. Through video editing, the glass cup falls slowly from the upper darkness of the frame toward the bottom, and four distinct visual effects disrupt this fall (see fig 30.2):

1. A slightly faster-moving, iridescent flame-tailed phantom of the cup, tinted primarily in bluish hues;
2. A faster black-and-white glitched cup image, whose position and quantity become misaligned upon contact with the original cup;
3. A cup image falling at the same speed, but which gradually dissipates into particles and smoke as it descends;
4. Another image descending at the same pace, but transforming into a distorted, luminous-flow version of the cup.

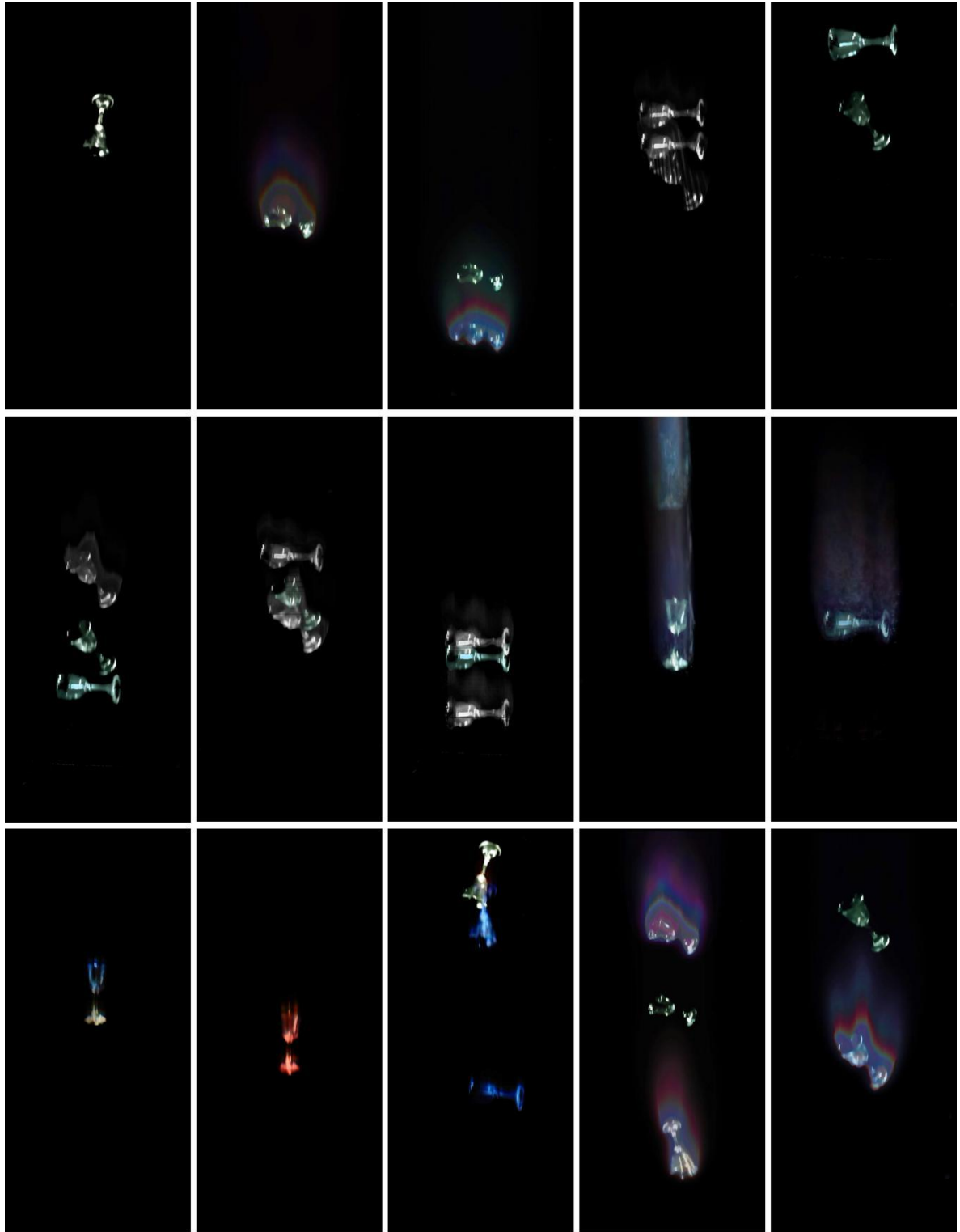


Fig 30.2 *Fall*

In this work, I aim to utilize these varying renderings of descent to disrupt the viewer's tendency to perceive the cup purely as a symbolic representation of a "real-world cup." In other words, these effects generate differences based on the original referent, offering a negative possibility for the certainty grasped by the

former. However, this kind of negation does not mean that “what falls is not the cup”, but rather that “the falling cup is not merely the falling cup”. Through this multiplicity, the cup gains the potential to become an *alien object* within its reference system, namely, the limited effects make the originally closed semantics polysemous and suspicious. Therefore, this effect also makes this work the first paradox of deception, that is, the deception and exposure of referring to external things.

From the perspective of the second form of deception, the object engaged in meaningless “waiting” has shifted from the formerly headless figure to the aberrant glass cup. Previously, the headless figure, through its persistent, purposeless pacing and stillness, embodied the internal paradox of “waiting”: that “waiting” derives its meaning from the promise of future arrival, yet this very meaning endlessly postpones that arrival. This paradox drives the work into a self-referential structure, where the work does not represent what is being waited for, but instead presents the act of waiting itself as the object of waiting. In other words, the surface of waiting is elevated to the “essence” of waiting, while the true essence of waiting becomes an absent, hollow signifier of meaning. However, what introduces negation into this self-referential proposition is the viewer’s own lived experience—an embodied familiarity with waiting that allows them to reject the ontological void produced by the self-referential structure. That is, the emptiness behind waiting is not a true absence of meaning, but is animated by an internal anticipation, a lack within the self that drives the act of waiting forward. Thus, the paradoxical coexistence of the “essence” of self-referential waiting and the essential void at the heart of waiting produces a resonance: the work’s essential uncertainty mirrors that of the viewer. In this alignment, the uncertainty of the self and the uncertainty of the work find an equivalence, and it is precisely through this mirroring that the uncanny takes form. The operation of the glass cup functions in the same way. The paradox of the work’s self-referential structure—the appearance of a “glass cup waiting to be broken” is the “essence” it represents, and the true essence of a “glass cup waiting to be broken” is empty and unknown—resonates with the viewer’s experiential structure.

4.4 The Uncanny and the Amplification of Propositional Paradox

In summary, this study has basically clarified an approach to conceptual art that takes “failure” as its pathway and reproduces the uncanny through paradoxical structures. Specifically, by employing the paradoxes of external referential structures and self-referential structures, and the coexistence of these two forms of paradox, the work, within the context of conceptual art, maximizes the loss of any subjective certainty or anchoring. As a result, the uncanniness emerges from the shared uncertainty of both the work’s essence and the viewer’s subject position. From the practical outcomes, The falling glass has proven the most effective in reproducing the uncanny, followed by the headless figure imagery. However, both works are limited

by their heavy reliance on the meaning of “waiting,” whose effectiveness is fundamentally rooted in the viewer’s own real-life experiences. In other words, the interpretation of the work extends beyond the content provided by the work itself; this experience remains external to the work. Therefore, this will bring a risk to the work, namely that the interpretation of the work depends on the viewer’s a priori knowledge structure, or the artist’s creation presupposes that the viewer possesses an a priori knowledge structure consistent with that of the creator (Kosuth, 1969). Such a presupposition of the viewer’s knowledge structure positions the artist as a central decision-maker from beginning to end (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p.xxi), thereby excluding viewers who do not share this knowledge framework or lack the corresponding cognitive preparation. To avoid the possibility of such closedness and to prevent the increased difficulty of interpreting the work, a viable approach in this work is to implement Lewitt’s method of “eliminating the object of perception and emphasizing the process of the concept’s emergence (Alberro and Stimson, 2000, p.xxi), thereby enabling the viewer to break through the Kosuth-style positivist aesthetic model. In other words, compared with the previous artistic practice that approached the proposition of “the paradox of waiting” as an object to be grasped sensually and perceptually in order to indirectly grasp the uncanny, allowing “the paradox of waiting” to manifest itself in the process of the artwork’s presentation, or rather, presenting the “concept” through a paradoxical representational form rather than representing the “paradoxicality of the concept” will better align with the mode of revealing the uncanny. That is to say, this approach allows the specific experience of the uncertainty of the uncanny to be individually extracted by each viewer from the work itself, rather than predetermined by the creator’s intent. Specifically, in the final set of practices, I will attempt to ensure that the paradoxical experience provided to the viewer is based solely on the negative operation between the artwork’s appearance and its representation, or in other words, that the appearance of the work directly provides the viewer with an intuitive paradoxical phenomenon, rather than generating paradox through the viewer’s knowledge structure. In this way, I attempt to eliminate any prerequisites that rely on the viewer’s prior knowledge and to transfer, to the greatest extent possible, the interpretive authority of the work to the viewer. That is, it is not about letting the viewer experience the uncertainty of the subject I have predetermined, but rather, through the setup within the artwork, enabling the viewer to experience the uncertainty of their subjectivity.

Based on this practical approach, in the final stage of this study, I focused primarily on amplifying the paradoxical nature inherent in the representational content of the work itself, namely, directly providing the viewer with a paradoxical proposition akin to “Spirit is a bone.” As in Hegel’s classic example, “The being of spirit is a bone (Hegel, 2018, p.201),” because the rational interpretation of a proposition seeks to ground its interpretation in a basis of “certainty” as an objective reality or determinacy, one encounters an irreducible paradox when faced with such a proposition: the “spirit,” which is endowed with reality by the negativity within the proposition, in turn serves as the basis of that reality. In other words, this kind of

propositional formulation forcibly establishes an identity between the fragile positivism of spirit or self-consciousness—indirectly clarified through negativity—and the inert, determinately existing thing represented by the bone⁸⁸. The “is” in the proposition implies that a certain determinacy serves as the foundation of the proposition’s validity, but the contradiction between the subject and object within the proposition draws us into a negating inquiry of that very foundational determinacy. That is to say, through the contradiction between the “subtle spirit” and the “rigid bone,” and through the proposition that equates the two, we are able to retrospectively experience the power and limitation of the often-overlooked “is” within this forced and discordant linkage. Namely, on the one hand, it serves as the basis for constructing our cognitive structures; on the other hand, its viability is guaranteed solely by ourselves. Thus, the proposition, through its paradoxical representation of determinacy, reveals the essential contradiction within the rational, everyday grounding of our knowledge—namely, the reality or certainty of conviction—which is the groundlessness and uncertainty of our cognitive foundation. This is what Žižek refers to as the equation of two absolutely incompatible terms: the pure negative movement of the subject and the total inertia of a rigid object. The dimension of subjectivity is transmitted (Žižek, 2008, p.235), that is the uncanniness as the essential attribute of humanity. Based on this paradoxical structuring within the proposition, I created the work fig 31 *Waiting for Failure* on the basis of the image of the falling glass depicted in fig 30.

⁸⁸ “One is its true meaning insofar as it is a complement to the results of the preceding movement of self-consciousness. The unhappy self-consciousness emptied itself of its self-sufficiency and agonizingly rendered its being-for-itself into a thing” Hegel, G.W.F. (2018) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit. Edited by T. Pinkard and M. Baur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Hegel Translations), p.201

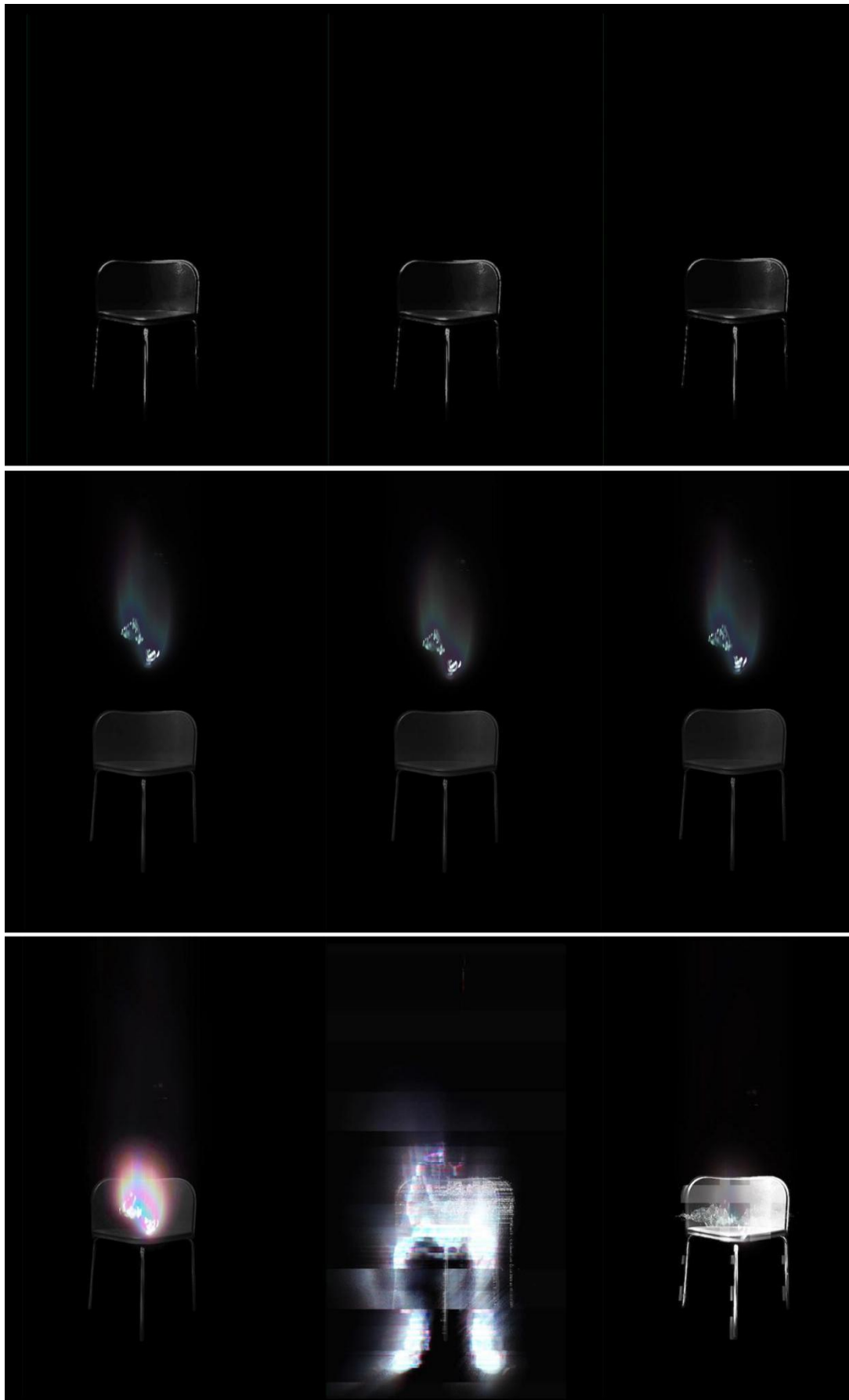


Fig 31.1 *Waiting for Failure*

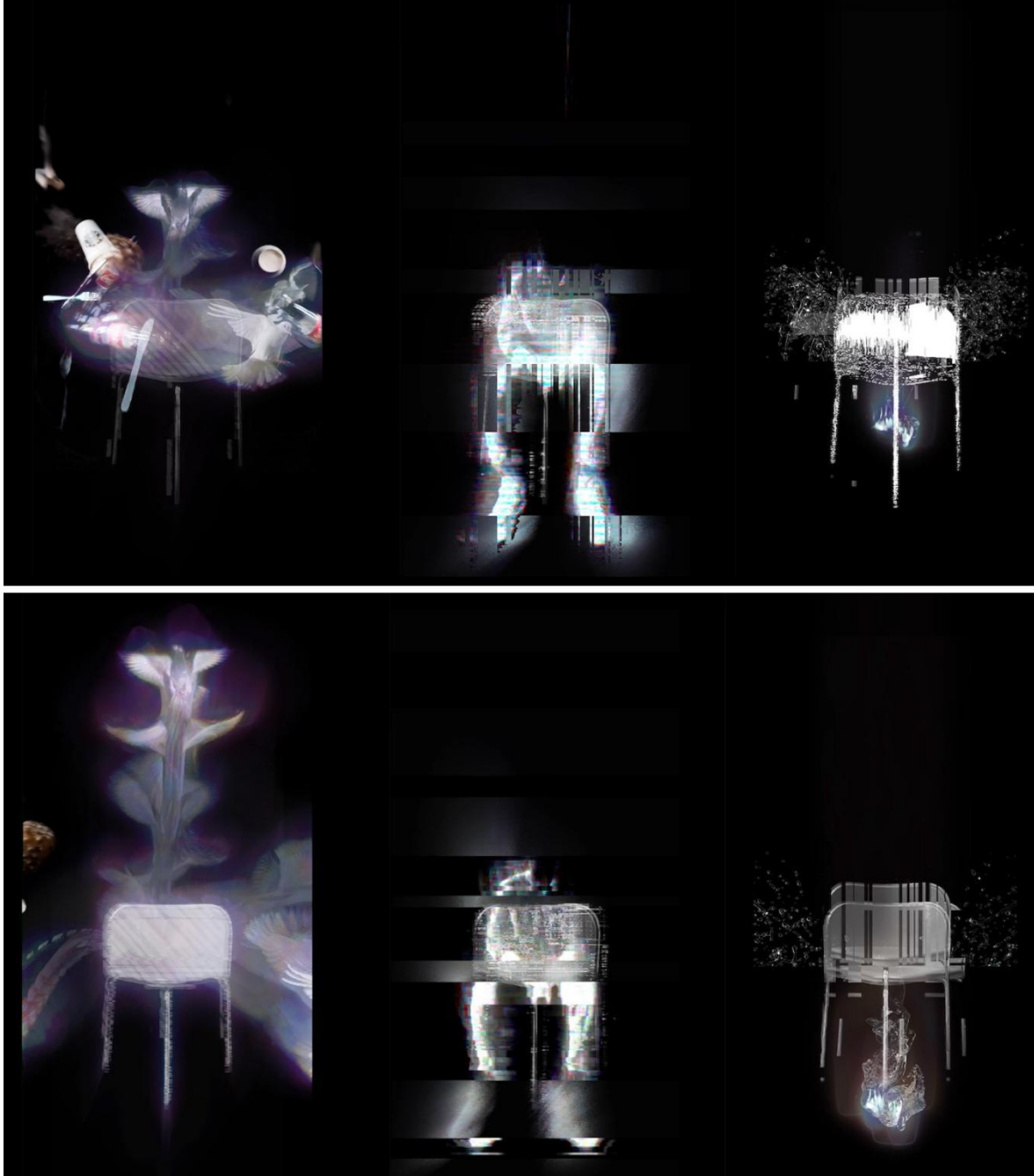


Fig 31.2

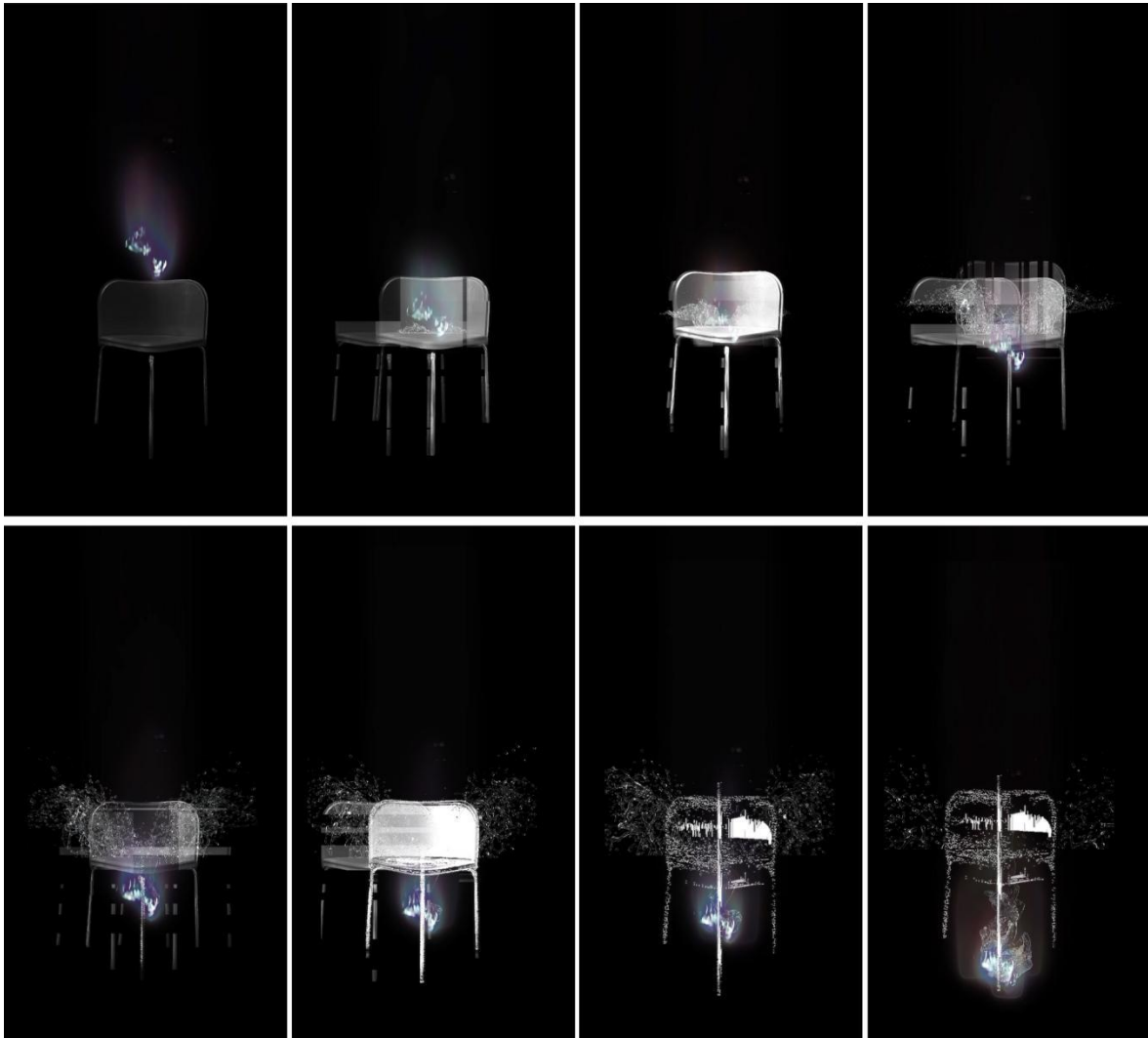


Fig 31.3 First from the right

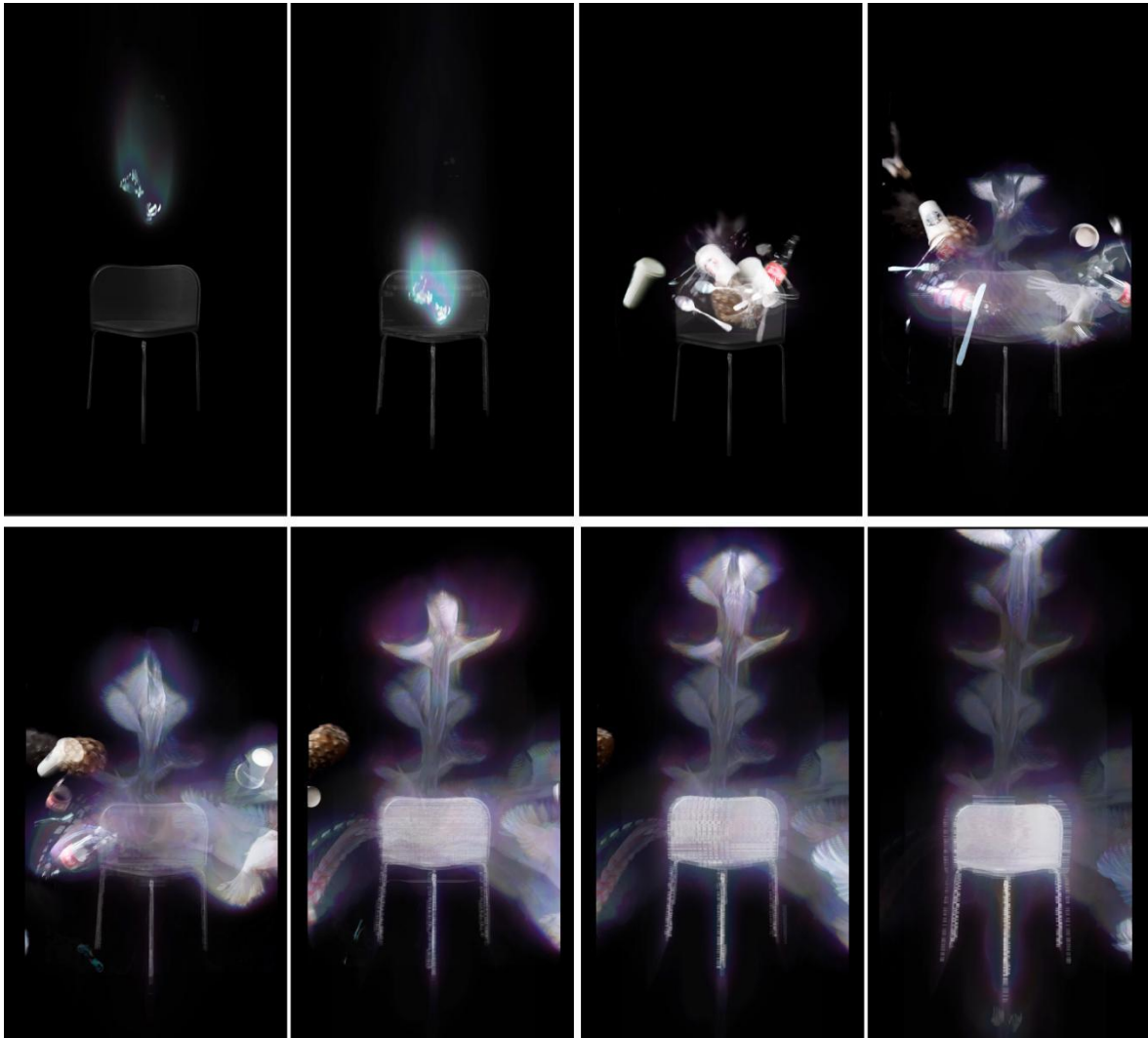


Fig 31.4 First from the left

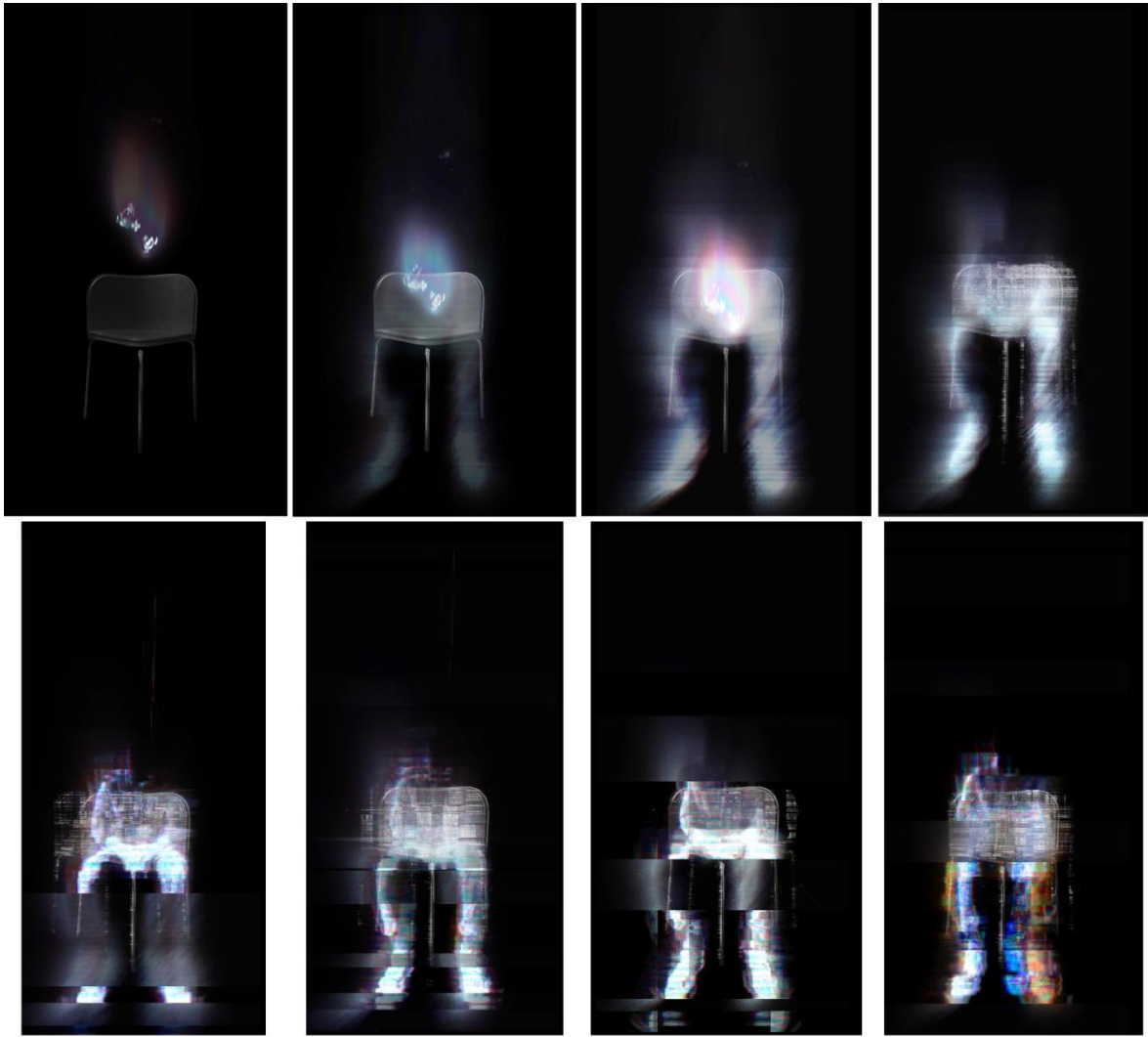


Fig 31.5 The centre

In this work, I attempt to use visual imagery to construct a set of propositional paradoxes akin to “The being of spirit is a bone”—namely, “A glass shatters into...”. In three parallel sets of visual images, the object position in the proposition is filled with representations that contradict the foundational certainty of the statement “A glass shatters into shards.” This, in turn, draws the viewer into a state in which they are compelled to reread the work and, in the process of rereading, retroactively examine the questionable nature of the determinacy that underlies their cognitive foundations and experience the uncertainty of their cognition through the difficulty of interpreting a paradoxical proposition. As Žižek has pointed out, what creates the paradoxical tension in “The being of spirit is a bone” is the opposition between the bone as “the total inertia of a rigid object” and the spirit as “pure negative movement of the subject (Žižek, 2008, p.235).” In this work, the chair standing quietly in the darkness serves as the representation of the inert, subjectively endowed but objectified cognitive certainty that “a glass normally shatters into glass shards.” The representation of the pure negative movement of subjective speculation is embodied,

respectively, in the following: the glass, upon touching the chair, shatters into cutlery, a cup, a pineapple, and a bird (as shown in fig 31.4); at the moment of contact, it transforms into a splash of water accompanied by digital glitches in the chair (as shown in fig 31.3); and, at the moment of contact, it evokes a headless figure rendered in the same digital glitch effect as the chair (as shown in fig 31.5). Thus, this work aims to offer the viewer a visually generated, intuitive paradoxical proposition, produced through the internal contradiction of its representations. These include: “The shattered glass is an unshattered glass (transformed into another kind of glass),” or, “The shattered glass is cutlery, Starbucks, a pineapple, and a bird,” “The shattered glass is a twitching, flickering figure,” “The shattered glass is a splash of water.”

Therefore, in this work, the deception it offers to the viewer no longer relies on the viewer’s speculative engagement with the process in order to achieve a self-sublation. Instead, it directly provides the viewer with a sensuous experience of the internal negative operation within the deception itself. For example, before the glass touches the chair, the work offers the viewer a clear symbolic reference, namely, “a glass waiting to be shattered.” Yet at the moment the glass makes contact with the chair, this deceptive appearance of reference simultaneously touches on a negating proposition equated through is: “the glass that should have shattered is instead alienated into something else.” What differentiates this from earlier works involving headless figures is that the revelation of the initial deception no longer depends on a displacement between the representational content within the work and the signified meaning it would typically correspond to in a referential network, in other words, it does not become an *alien object* through the failed slippage. Rather, this work directly presents two contradictory and unrelated referential meanings within its appearance and forcibly connects them through the power of is. In other words, the paradox occurs at the moment when the referential relationship based on conviction coexists with the referential relationship based on questioning, that is, within the proposition formed by “the falling glass should shatter into shards” and “the shattered glass transforms into references unrelated to a glass.” This paradox enables the work to gain its place within our symbolic system, as the references both before and after the shattering of the glass are clearly articulated. However, at the moment they are joined by the is represented by the chair, the false identity of both prior and subsequent references as a veil is exposed through their mutual negation and semantic disconnect, i.e., revealing not a hidden meaning (that the glass will shatter), but the absence of meaning (that the result of the glass’s fall is unreadable). This paradox thus exposes the fictional basis of the symbolic order when the displacement between the subject and object of a proposition is bridged by a predicate—specifically, the deception and subsequent unmasking of the symbolic structure of external reference that constructs an identity between the representation of an external referent and the appearance within the artwork.

The second deception is likewise grounded in the failure of the first. In the dilemma of failed meaning interpretation, the work generates, to a certain extent, the possibility of falling into a self-referential impasse. The void produced by the split between signifier and signified, which renders the meaning of representation undecipherable, opens up the potential for the appearance to explain itself. Distinct again from earlier works, the self-referentiality in this piece no longer relies on the viewer's understanding of the concept of "waiting" within a real-world context, thereby generating a structure in which the appearance of "waiting" is identical to the essence signified by "waiting." Instead, it hinges on the difficulty of interpreting the proposition itself, transforming the meaning of the proposition for the viewer from a statement referring to external reality into one in which the elements within the proposition interpret themselves. Just as in "The being of spirit is a bone," its central claim does not lie in answering the question of "what spirit is," but rather in questioning why we can assume "spirit *is* something." In other words, the focus of the proposition is not on the "what is," but on where the legitimacy of the *is* itself comes from. And as Žižek notes, when we are forced to reread such a seemingly meaningless proposition, we retrospectively discover that its true meaning lies in the "failure" of its initial reading (Žižek, 2008, p.235). In other words, the so-called true meaning is the form through which the proposition generates failure, rather than the object displaced from the subject. Likewise, in this work, when viewers re-experience the paradox inherent in interpreting the appearance, what they see is no longer merely the contradiction between their expected outcome and the meaningless conclusion. Rather, they witness (and reflect on) the very conditions that constructed the "failure" of that contradiction—the assumptions behind their original expectations and the proposition posed by the work itself. They are prompted to reflect on why they experienced a gap in understanding and judgment, and why they assume there is a self-evident logical relationship between a falling glass and its shattering. In other words, during this rereading process, the viewer is not only watching the work, but also observing the process of their viewing and thinking.

This is the paradoxical existence revealed in the second level of deception. On the one hand, because of the meaninglessness or unreadability of the work's representation, the appearance of the work becomes the only guarantee of the meaning that represents the work's essence itself. That is, the viewer comes to recognize that what the work represents is the appearance of the failure of meaning-connection itself. However, on the other hand, an inescapable sense of dissonance arises from the fact that this self-referential guarantee—elevated to the status of "essence"—still fails to provide any positive identity for the work's meaninglessness. In other words, the content conveyed by the work continues to challenge the viewer's desire for certainty through the failure of interpretation. Put differently, this elevation of appearance cannot truly mask the emptiness of meaning exposed by the extreme contradiction within the proposition, and thus becomes the antithesis of the self-referential claim. Or, in the former, what is represented by the failure of the glass to shatter is the appearance of failed shattering itself—there is no hidden meaning behind the glass. In the latter,

however, there is something hidden behind the failure to shatter—but what is hidden is the perpetual absence of meaning. Therefore, through the negative movement between these two positions, the viewer, in the act of rereading the proposition, experiences that the power which ensures the “success” of the former (the elevation of appearance) is provided by themselves, just as the power that ensures the perpetual “failure” of the latter (the exposure of the lack of a cognitive foundation) is also provided by themselves. It is precisely the viewer’s ongoing pursuit of determinacy, their desire for the authority of is, and their subjective assurance of the link between subject and object that causes them to experience this radical paradox. Therefore, there is indeed something hidden behind the cup; however, what is concealed is the subject’s internal lack and uncertainty. The falling cup, in this sense, is no longer simply a cup, but rather a gap of inner lack within the subject, outlined through the referential operation of representation.

However, relying solely on dialectical reflection on the meaninglessness of the proposition to enter the paradox of the self-referential structure still does not provide a trigger that is sufficiently clear or direct for the viewer. In this work, the emphasis on the materiality of the work’s appearance was limited by the video medium as an artistic form and thus did not function effectively. Therefore, as shown in fig 31.6 and fig 31.7, in order to more strongly evoke the recognition of “appearance as the representation of essence” by emphasizing the work’s materiality, I placed the work in a real physical environment for display, thereby achieving a more impactful visual effect and further activating the second level of deception.

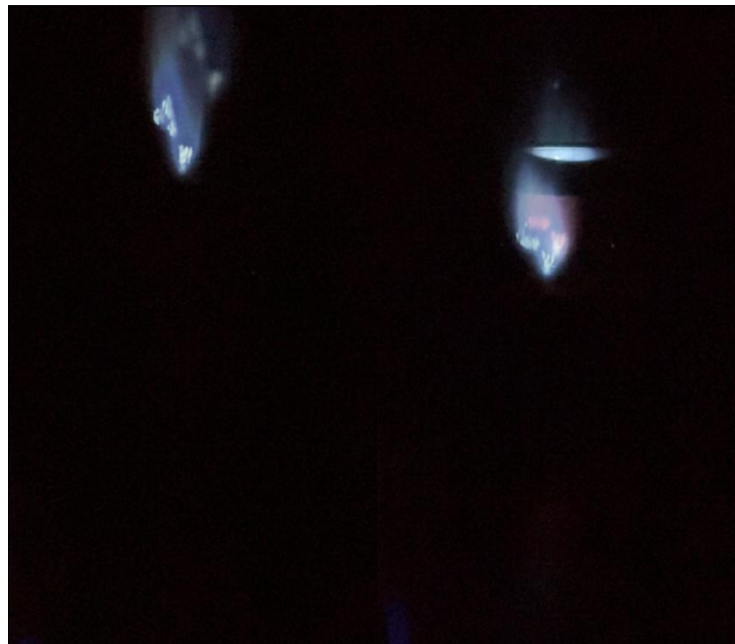


Fig 31.6 in real space

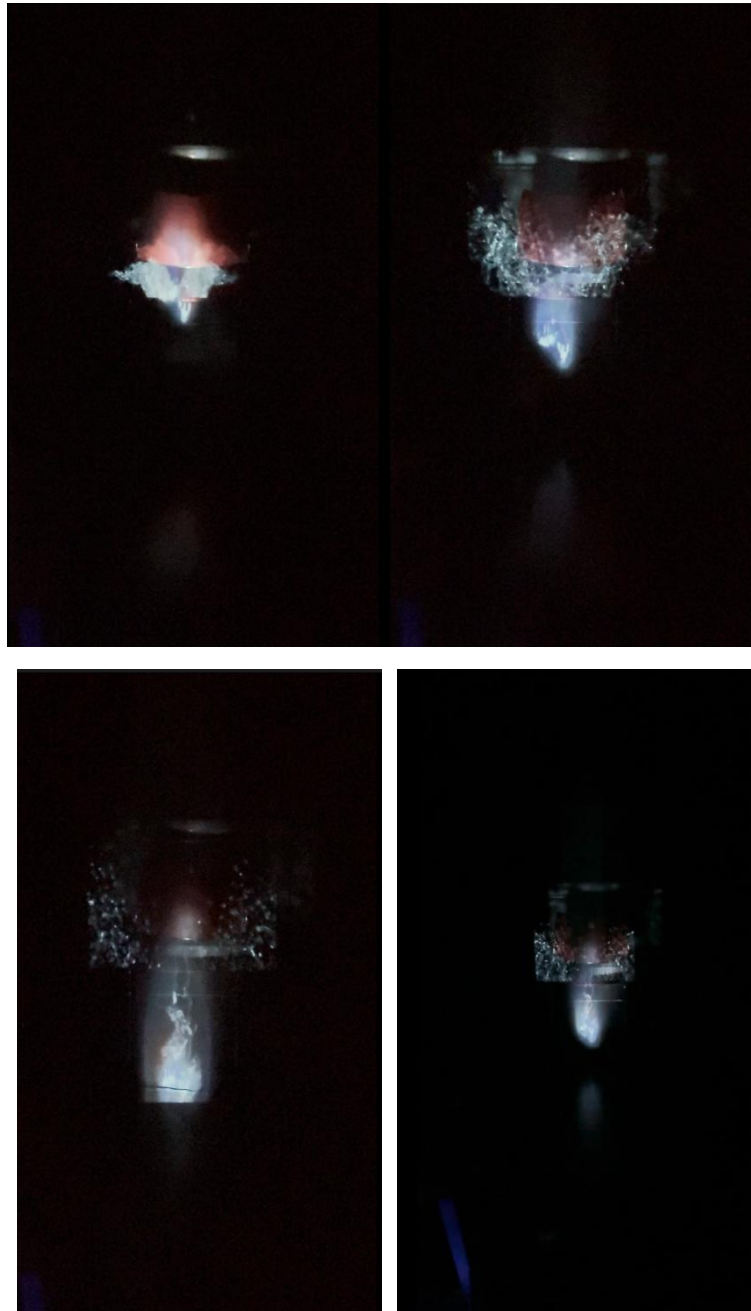


Fig 31.6 in real space

As shown in fig 31.6, in this experiment, I transformed the video work into a physical video installation and specifically tested the proposition in fig 31.3: “The glass falls and becomes a splash of water.” This piece was likewise set in a darkened space. However, unlike the previous presentation where the projection appeared on a flat wall surface, this test positioned the projection at the center of the space. The projection surface consisted of two components: a physical chair placed in the space, corresponding to the image in the video, and a piece of black chiffon placed in front

of the chair, which is highly transparent, easily blending into the darkness, and capable of carrying the projected image. Taking advantage of the semi-transparent quality of the chiffon, the work shifted from a familiar flat video image—maintaining a safe “viewer vs. object” distance—into an alien presence that intrudes upon real space: a phantasm that exists within the three-dimensional physical environment but simultaneously does not belong to reality. At the beginning of the piece, as shown in fig 31.6, the nearly invisible black chiffon makes the glass appear as a slightly distorted but largely realistic object, slowly falling from the center of the dark space. Before it touches the chair, due to the chiffon’s translucency, the projector’s light not only casts the image onto the chiffon itself but also passes through it, projecting a large, blurred shadow of the glass onto the distant wall. Although this unintended effect was not part of the initial design, and is a result of the inescapable transparency of the projection material, it unexpectedly serves to remind the viewer of the physical reality of the dark space. In other words, the effect reveals the grounded, material limitations of the dark void that carries the illusion of the falling glass, pulling the viewer back from the imaginary infinity and mysterious emptiness conjured by the image of a lone glass descending in darkness.

As the glass nears the chair, the chair, which was previously obscured by darkness, is gradually revealed by the glass’s image and the visual trail left by its descent. This localized illumination, enabled by the projection, gives the work a unique effect: on the one hand, our gaze (our desire) is drawn to the image that never conceals its void-like nature, the image is constantly magnified to maintain its symbolic reference. On the other hand, wherever this illusory, desirous, subjective image touches, the real, material presence of objects, the opposite of symbolic abstraction, is reawakened by our gaze. This reawakened material presence continuously reminds the viewer that the falling glass is not a glass at all, but a deception produced by light and shadow. Yet once the light moves on, this negating force recedes once again into the darkness and mystery where it originated. This effect becomes particularly powerful at the moment the glass touches the chair and a large splash of water bursts forth. The splash not only illuminates the chair but also casts its shadow onto the background wall, revealing the entire environment previously concealed in darkness and imagination—only to vanish again quickly into the void. This effect renders the paradox of the two deceptions simultaneously, in a non-speculative form: the viewer does not need to engage in conceptual negation of the proposition to understand, but instead directly experiences the paradox of erased cognitive certainty through the sensory clash between materiality and symbolism within the viewing experience itself.

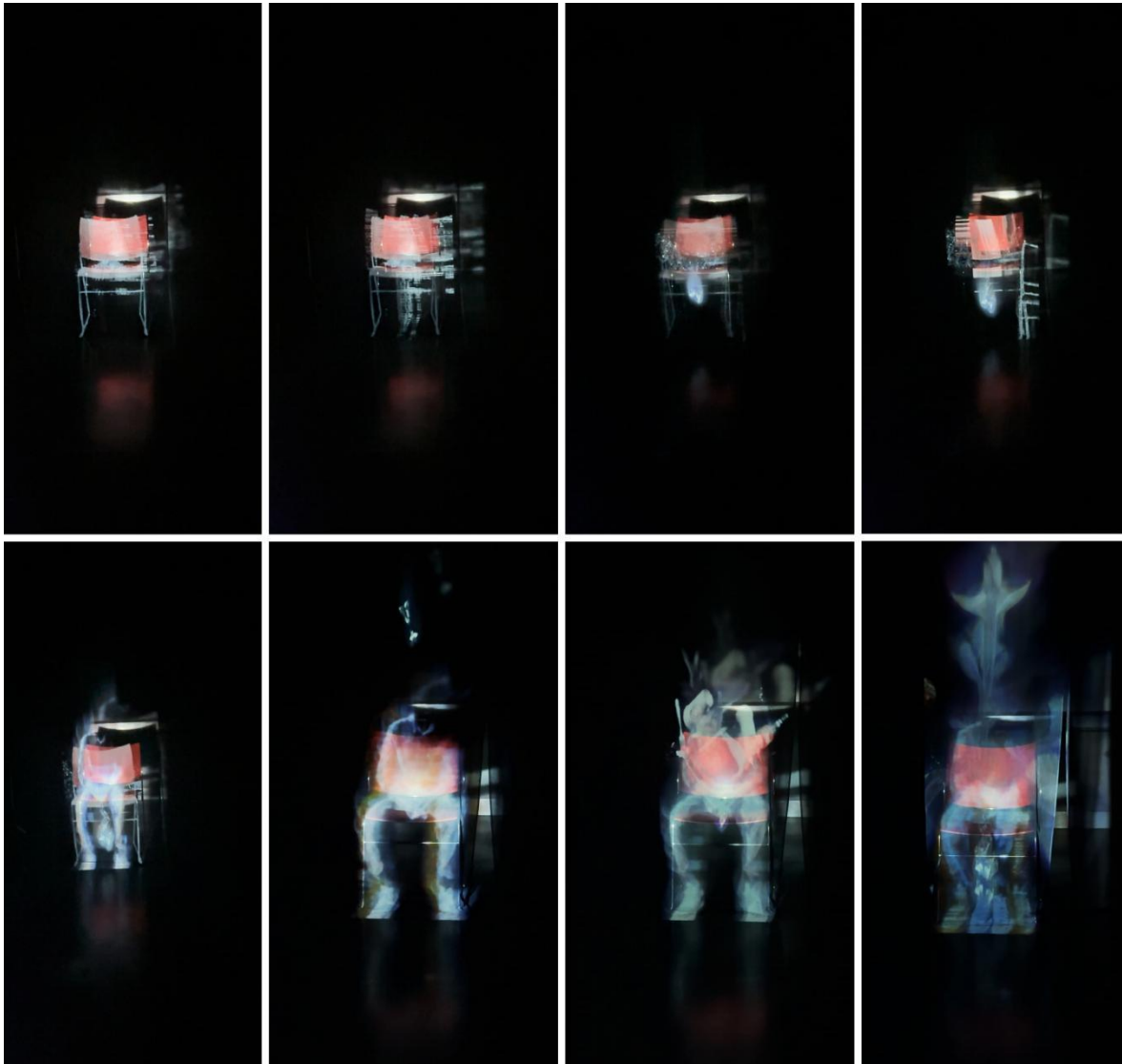
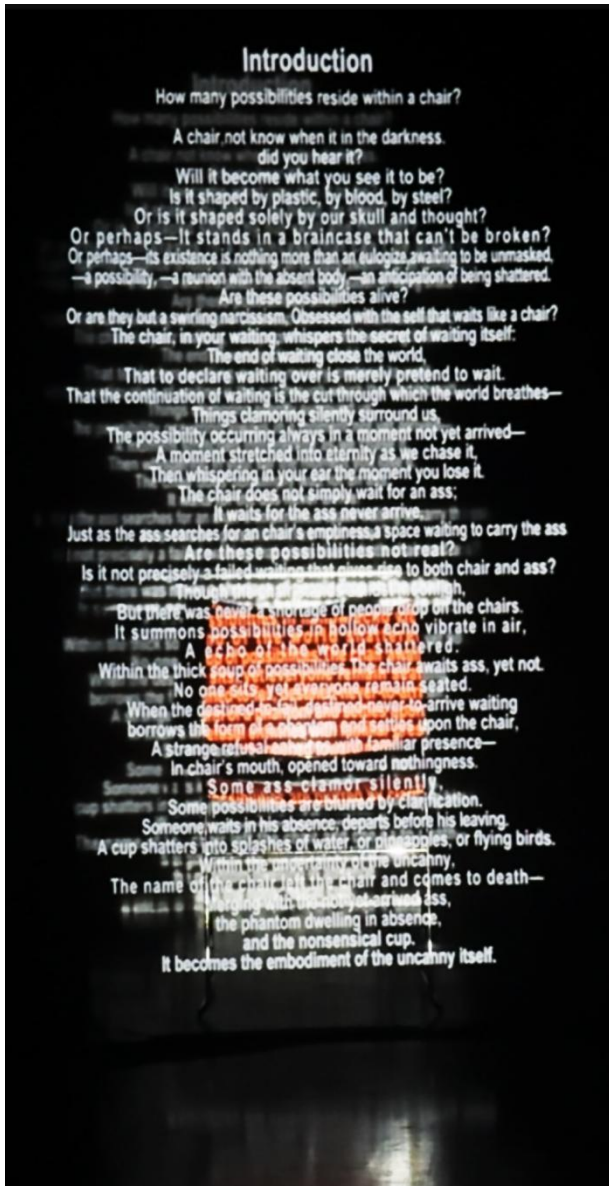


Fig 31.7 in real space

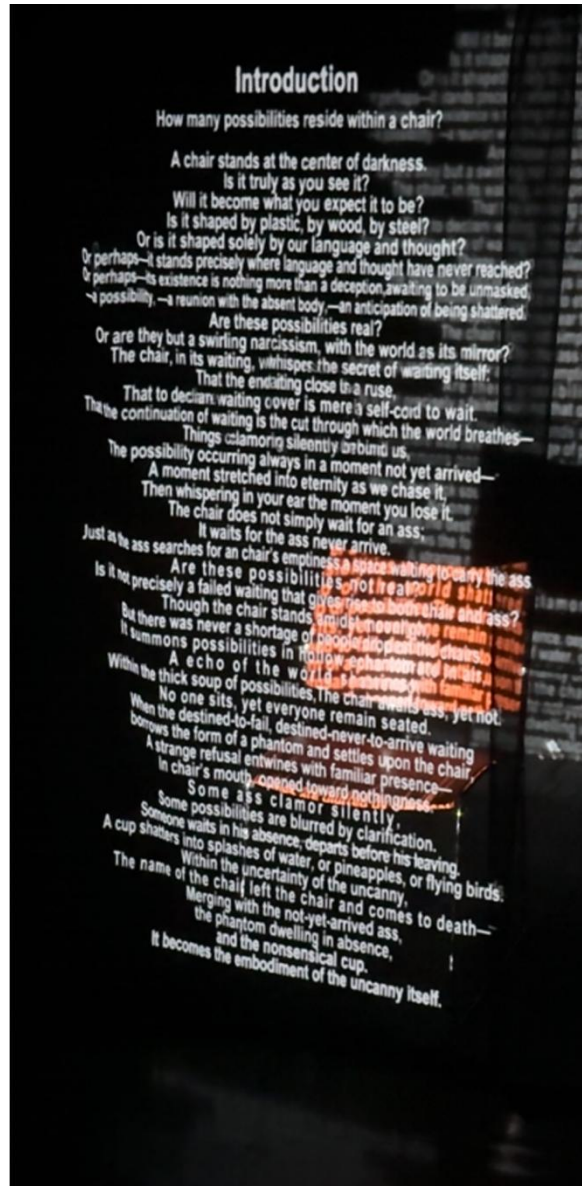
In other words, within this work, the paradoxical experience of the two forms of deception is simultaneously condensed into the sensuous form of the piece itself. At the moment when the illusory glass overlaps with the real chair, the work presents both the proposition “the falling glass represented in the work refers to its impending shattering as signified” and its antithesis: “the glass is merely an illusion, and its overlap with reality produces no actual effect,” revealed through the material presence of the chair that negates the projection. At the same time, the work transforms itself through the negative operation of the former into a synthesis: “the glass shattering into water becomes unreadable, and this unreadability guarantees the meaning of the work’s appearance as its own representation.” Yet this synthesis is once again confronted by its antithesis: the material presence of the chair and environment disrupts the illusion of a symbolic link between image and essence, thus revealing “regardless of what the shattered glass transforms into, the essence of that transformation is merely a phantom substitution for the void of essence,” or, “no

matter what the glass becomes, any interpretation of that appearance is false in the face of silent materiality.” Therefore, within this dual self-negating recognition, the viewer comes to experience both the force behind their self-guaranteed is and the unreliability of that force. In other words, the overlap between the phantom of the glass and the reality of the chair simultaneously provides the viewer with two paradoxical, intuitive sensory experiences. Through engaging with this contradiction, the viewer is able to successfully give form to the failed, uncertain essence of their subjectivity. Based on this line of thinking, I also conducted an experiment shown in fig 31.7, in which I combined the three propositions into a single video. That is, at the moment of impact, the falling glass evokes not only the splash of water, but also all three previously mentioned unrelated propositions: a ghostly human figure descending into reality, a glitched chair, exploding debris, and fleeing birds—all appearing simultaneously upon contact with the chair, and gradually fading away after the glass departs. The strength of this approach lies in its extended effect, which sustains the activation of real-world entities such as the chair, allowing the viewer to experience the coexistence and confrontation between the illusory, fragile symbolic structure and the solid, silent materiality over a prolonged period of time. However, its weakness remains: the merging of the three propositions results in an overly complex representational structure, which risks confusion. Although this semantic confusion strengthens the work’s resistance to being deciphered, it also disperses the viewer’s attention, reducing the intensity of their engagement with the core concept of the work, namely, the uncertainty of epistemological foundations. In other words, this experiment demonstrates that the evocation of epistemological uncertainty is best achieved through purer formal arrangements and simpler representational content. Compared to the definitive discourse presented by the work, it is the unspoken possibilities outside of that discourse that hold greater expressive potential.

Therefore, in pursuit of creating a more condensed paradoxical text capable of evoking the uncanny feeling, I proceeded with the next experiment: fig 32 *The Introduction*:



front view



right side view

Fig 32.1 the Introduction

Introduction

How many possibilities reside within a chair?

A chair stands at the center of darkness.
Is it truly as you see it?

Will it become what you expect it to be?
Is it shaped by plastic, by wood, by steel?

Or is it shaped solely by our language and thought?

Or perhaps—it stands precisely where language and thought have never reached?
Or perhaps—its existence is nothing more than a deception, awaiting to be unmasked,
—a possibility, —a reunion with the absent body, —an anticipation of being shattered.

Are these possibilities real?

Or are they but a swirling narcissism, with the world as its mirror?

The chair, in its waiting, whispers the secret of waiting itself:

That the end of waiting is a ruse,

That to declare waiting over is merely a self-consolation.

That the continuation of waiting is the cut through which the world breathes—

Things clamoring silently behind us,

The possibility occurring always in a moment not yet arrived—

A moment stretched into eternity as we chase it,

Then brushing your ear the instant you turn away.

The chair does not simply wait for an ass;

It waits for the arrival of the ass.

Just as the ass searches for an empty chair.

Are these possibilities not real?

Is it not precisely a failed waiting that gives rise to both chair and ass?

Though the chair stands amidst emptiness,

But there was never a shortage of people around the chairs.

It summons possibilities in the form of what will never arrive,

And thus becomes an incision in the world.

Within this cut, the chair waits for ass, yet does not wait for an ass.

No one sits, and yet shadows remain seated.

When the destined-to-fail, destined-never-to-arrive waiting

borrow the form of a phantom and settles upon the chair,

A strange refusal entwines with familiar presence—

In chair's mouth, opened toward nothingness.

Some things clamor silently,

Some possibilities are clarified by elusiveness.

Someone waits in his absence, departs in his absence.

A cup shatters into splashes of water, or pineapples, or flying birds.

Within the uncertainty of the uncanny,

The name of the chair departs from the chair and comes alive—

Merging with the not-yet-arrived ass,

the phantom dwelling in absence,

and the nonsensical cup.

It becomes the embodiment of the uncanny itself.

Introduction

How many possibilities reside within a chair?

A chair, not know when it in the darkness.
did you hear it?

Will it become what you see it to be?
Is it shaped by plastic, by blood, by steel?

Or is it shaped solely by our skull and thought?

Or perhaps—It stands in a braincase that can't be broken?

Or perhaps—its existence is nothing more than an eulogize, awaiting to be unmasked,
—a possibility, —a reunion with the absent body, —an anticipation of being shattered.

Are these possibilities alive?

Or are they but a swirling narcissism, Obsessed with the self that waits like a chair?

The chair, in your waiting, whispers the secret of waiting itself:

The end of waiting close the world,

That to declare waiting over is merely pretend to wait.

That the continuation of waiting is the cut through which the world breathes—

Things clamoring silently surround us,

The possibility occurring always in a moment not yet arrived—

A moment stretched into eternity as we chase it,

Then whispering in your ear the moment you lose it.

The chair does not simply wait for an ass;

It waits for the ass never arrive.

Just as the ass searches for an chair's emptiness, a space waiting to carry the ass.

Are these possibilities not real?

Is it not precisely a failed waiting that gives rise to both chair and ass?

Though the chair stands amidst moonlight,

But there was never a shortage of people drop on the chairs.

It summons possibilities in hollow echo vibrate in air,

A echo of the world shattered.

Within the thick soup of possibilities, The chair awaits ass, yet not.

No one sits, yet everyone remain seated.

When the destined-to-fail, destined-never-to-arrive waiting

borrow the form of a phantom and settles upon the chair,

A strange refusal entwines with familiar presence—

In chair's mouth, opened toward nothingness.

Some ass clamor silently,

Some possibilities are blurred by clarification.

Someone waits in his absence, departs before his leaving.

A cup shatters into splashes of water, or pineapples, or flying birds.

Within the uncertainty of the uncanny,

The name of the chair left the chair and comes to death—

Merging with the not-yet-arrived ass,

the phantom dwelling in absence,

and the nonsensical cup.

It becomes the embodiment of the uncanny itself.

Initial text

paradoxical text overlapping with left side

Fig 32.2 the Introduction original text

The primary design concept of this experiment takes as its point of departure a mockery of the typical *introduction* placed at the entrance of art exhibitions. Ordinarily, such introductions serve to provide viewers with the exhibition's theme, background, central content, and theoretical framework. However, this supporting role often becomes the semantic center of the exhibition, offering viewers a predefined framework for understanding the works on display. This framing tends to erase the multiplicity of meanings, the semantic drift, and the latent possibilities that each artwork might offer to different viewers. As a result, the closure imposed by such introductions presents a notable obstacle for works that aim to evoke the uncanny, since the essence of the uncanny lies precisely in its resistance to such

enclosed, safe, and familiar linguistic structures. It is a sway between structure and non-structure. Therefore, as a challenge to this conventional format, this work aims to provide viewers with a “confounding” exhibition introduction that one capable of evoking the uncanny feeling.

The presentation format of this work remains consistent with the previous ones: a projection set upon a chair and a layer of black chiffon placed in the center of a darkened space. The content of the projection is an original poem suspended in the darkness before the chair, describing the uncanny and the work itself, titled *How many possibilities reside within the chair?* (as shown in the *initial text* on the left side of fig 32.2). In this poem, I deliberately describe the representational content of the work through contradictory language, attempting to recreate within the text a kind of logical, paradoxical dissonance, for instance, through lengthy, verbose passages portraying the mutual waiting and desiring between the chair and the buttocks. However, as viewers become absorbed in reading this loosely connected semantic text and attempt to extract the function an introduction is conventionally meant to serve, a transformation begins to occur. Roughly 30 seconds into reading, the paradoxical text (as shown on the right side of fig 32.2) begins, almost imperceptibly, to replace the original words, line by line, character by character, from top to bottom. By the time the viewer notices that the previously read text has changed, the newly overlaid version presents itself in a way that both contradicts the original and takes on an even more extreme paradoxicality and anti-readability. The original text, already difficult to decode due to its looseness and contradictions, is now plunged into a deeper state of interpretive uncertainty. And just as the viewer attempts to reread from the beginning, the paradoxical text—under timed control—gradually returns, word by word and line by line, to the original appearance. As a result, the viewer becomes trapped in a perpetual chase after semantic certainty—only to lose it at the very moment it seems graspable.

This loss occurs not only on the content level (the referential dimension), where stable meaning proves elusive and uncertain, but also on the formal level, where what has just been read is replaced before it is fully reread. On this basis, the work gives form to two types of “failure”: On one hand, it materializes the *failure* of symbolic-referential structures that aim at semantic certainty—failures produced by the paradoxical expressions within and between the texts. On the other hand, it gives form to a formal failure. This kind of failure is a shaping of the deterministic presentation and representation of the text itself, or rather, of the paradoxical nature of the fundamental attribute of the text itself, which is to take its appearance as the representation of its essence—the appearance of the text always differs from the content represented in the previous moment. In other words, the failure of the structure that refers outward (to the other) and the failure of the structure that refers inward (to the self) are both condensed into the logical and formal conflicts of the text. Through its persistent inability to accurately define the uncanny, this introduction

paradoxically introduces the true essence—or rather, the non-essence—of the uncanny.



Fig 32.3

On the other hand, this work introduces an additional effect: during the reading process, the projected text occasionally undergoes a diffusion and flowing transformation. Within this diffusion, certain letters subtly morph into black shadows or bright white highlights, creating the impression that a human figure—either surrounded by text or composed entirely of it—is seated silently on the chair behind the projection (see fig 32.3). This effect is intended to enhance the work’s textual uncertainty, while simultaneously establishing a resonance between the emerging figure and the buttocks and chair in the text that mutually “wait” for each other (fantasy and material) illusion and object. With regard to this latter effect, the emergence of the human silhouette as a response to the text is productive. It reinforces the ghostly undertone of the first deception, namely, the suggestion that the uncanny is referenced through an uncertain, fleeting human presence concealed within the work. In this sense, something is indeed hidden behind the veil. At the same time, this hidden presence undermines the referential function of the text and is revealed instead through its formal and material existence—thus further intensifying the paradox at the core of the first deception. Moreover, the appearance of the figure strengthens the self-explanatory quality of the work: the appearance of the silhouette emerging from the text is the representation of the essence of this ghostly uncanny by both the text and the human figures. Yet simultaneously, this silhouette reveals no actual meaning. It remains, in essence, an empty space or a highlight within the text, offering no real help in fulfilling the work’s supposed purpose, namely, to serve as an “introduction” explaining what the uncanny is. In this way, the human figure becomes a crystallization of the paradox inherent in the self-referential structure itself, reinforcing the viewer’s ultimate dilemma: the genuine experience of the uncanny is to encounter its own “failure” in attempting to interpret and attain the expected identity amidst uncertainty. Thus, the human silhouette proves effective. However, the diffusion and flowing effects applied to the text are unnecessary within the context of this work. The difficulty of interpretation intended to be achieved by this ambiguity in the text form is repetitive of the function of interpretation difficulty achieved by the logical paradox inherent in the text itself. Moreover, the addition of formal distortion interferes with the viewer’s ability to grasp these internal paradoxes. Therefore, this formal blurring is ultimately shown to be unnecessary.

The final experiment in this stage attempts to transform the logical and formal paradoxes embedded in the text of *The Introduction* into a purely visual paradox, namely, to amplify the image’s contradiction of its own legibility. This experiment is presented in fig 33:

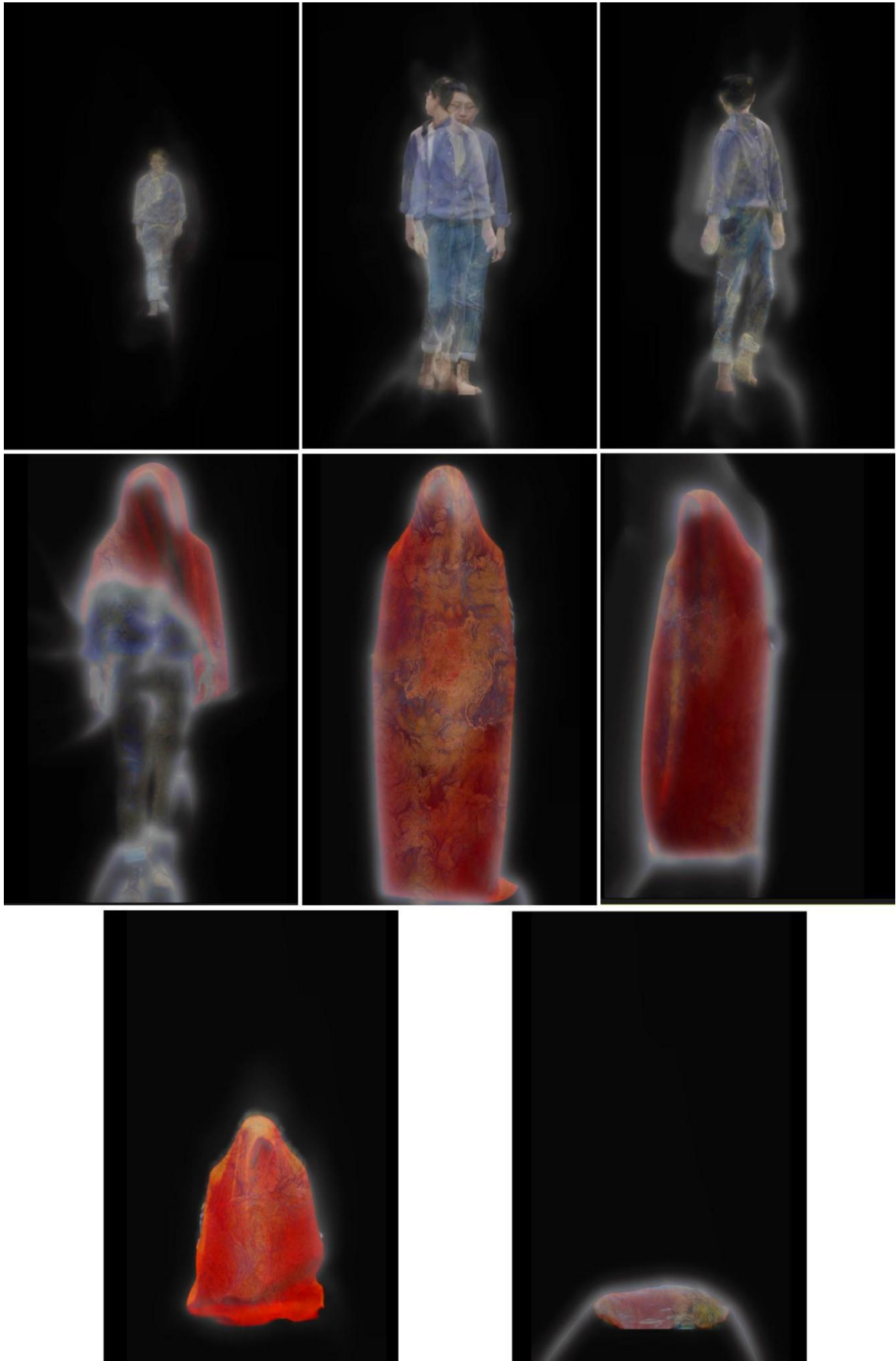


Fig 33.1

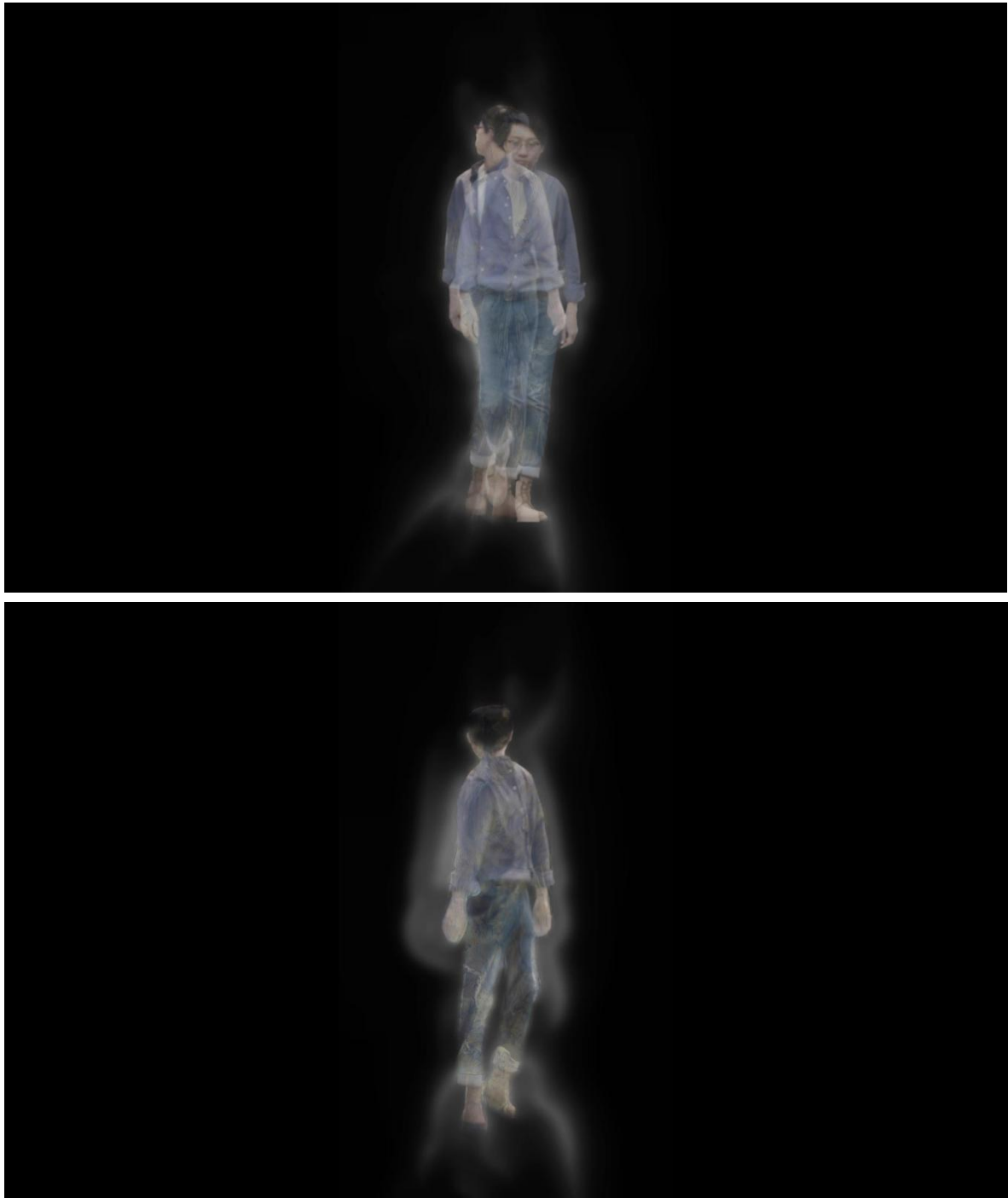


Fig 33.2

This work likewise does not rely on the context of “waiting,” but instead attempts to present a more distilled rebuttal of conventional legibility. The central content of the piece depicts a figure gradually walking from the depths of the frame toward the viewer—from far to near, from small to large. However, in the first stage, the figure, during its approach, falls into darkness roughly every ten seconds. Upon reemerging from the darkness, the originally normal human figure becomes weird and distorted: its head twists and rotates in unnatural ways; its leg joints move in reverse while still

maintaining the posture of walking forward; its hands and feet multiply and overlap in unnatural formations (see fig 33.2). This rejection of the normative human form is achieved through AI video generation techniques: the original footage provided to the AI is paired with vague or self-contradictory keywords, and the glitchy AI-generated results are then further edited. Through this visual of an anomalous figure that at times emerges from the darkness and at other times recedes into it, the work enacts a provocation against the viewer's attempt to find the identity between image and reference—to match representation with symbolic meaning—based on the expectation of visual normalcy. In the second part, once the figure reaches the foreground and comes to a halt, it gradually becomes shrouded, from head to toe, by a red cloth. The cloth-covered, humanoid form then sways gently side to side. Finally, during the cloth's descent, the figure disappears into thin air.

For this work, the effect of its first half is well-suited to creating a paradoxical experience of the image's unreadability. On one hand, the figure's distortion functions as an effective disruption of its original symbolic referentiality: it maintains the representation of the referent while simultaneously deviating from it through its abnormal appearance. Thus, in the process of the figure slowly approaching and alternating between its normal and distorted forms, the work fulfills the function of the *alien object* as previously discussed. That is, the work exists in a state that both conforms to the symbolic order's demands for referential coherence and deviates from those demands, rendering the originally stable symbolic structure questionable and polysemous. This identity provides the work with a negative force in relation to its external referent, revealing the antithesis of the veil—"the referent of the approaching figure"—as "the work's appearance refers to something beyond the domain of the figure it is supposed to represent." On the other hand, the coexistence of proper signification and excess meaning leads the external-referential reading of the figure into a crisis of interpretive grounding. It is in this moment that the work's identity as art emerges, offering a new kind of support for the instability that challenges the viewer's familiar frameworks rooted in everyday experience. This gives rise to the second form of deception: the difficulty of interpreting the work's appearance stems from the fact that there is nothing beyond that appearance that needs to be interpreted. In other words, the transformation of the figure from normal to distorted is itself the object of representation—the process of distortion is what the work represents. Put differently, the abnormal form *is not* a manifestation of some prior knowledge or transcendent essence; the experience of the abnormal form *is* the experience of its essence. This is akin to the proposition "Spirit is a bone," which does not reveal what spirit is, but rather how "is" allows spirit to be regarded as something. In this transition from reference to the other toward self-reference (from the first deception to the second), the viewer shifts from experiencing the power of certainty to experiencing the power of generating certainty. However, in the second deception, the work (the proposition) misleads the viewer into believing that this generative power originates from the self-elevation of the object's appearance, that is, the appearance is misrecognized as having been sublimated into the "essence" of the work, becoming

the appearance of appearance in its *supersensible* form. This misrecognition forms the thesis of the second deception: “The distorted appearance of the figure is the essence represented by the distorted figure.”

However, this seemingly stable mode of recognition still fails to conceal its internal contradiction, or rather, the self-referential compensation for the failure of external reference cannot truly mask a more fundamental failure: after the viewer encounters the cognitive failure of the work’s reference to external objects (the figure no longer aligns with the referent of a human figure), the attempt to reconcile this dissonance through an ontological elevation of the work (the figure refers only to itself) is merely a passive acceptance of the work’s internal negativity. That is, it treats the movement of negation as an experience of certainty, rather than genuinely achieving sublation (recognizing that the appearance is only a negative manifestation of essence, not mistaking the experience and outcome of negation for a positivist affirmation of identity). Thus, the more stable this self-referential logic becomes, the more it reveals the inescapable emptiness at its core. In other words, even if the viewer comes to understand that the distorted figure is meant only to represent itself, this very erasure of the question of what the essence of the distorted figure truly is only serves to further highlight the void of essence that has been erased. Put differently: the more completely the work explains itself, the more the viewer is overwhelmed by the deafening “failure,” i.e., the failure of their desire to uncover and reveal. What lies behind the work is, simply, nothing⁸⁹. This forms the antithesis of the work is not “the appearance of the work is not equal to the representation of its essence,” but rather “the appearance of the work is the representation of essence’s negativity”; or, “appearance is the mediating form of essence’s void and emptiness.” Here, appearance is still a kind of representation, but not as a reference to an external object, nor as a representation of so-called “essence.” Instead, it represents the pure void and negativity of essence’s unknowability.

Therefore, only under the force of this antithesis can the viewer arrive at a synthesis: an experience of the uncanny as the internal uncertainty of the subject: The distortion of the figure represents neither essence, nor essence’s pure void, but rather the sublation of these two propositions—the figure’s distortion becomes the negative operation of the viewing subject’s desire for certainty and identity. The more that desire is denied, the more it becomes something the subject can experience directly. In other words, because the distorted figure negates itself in two ways—failure to refer to the other, and failure to refer to itself—it becomes the true representation of “failure”: the necessary failure of revealing essence, caused by the viewer’s own internal uncertainty. This produces the synthesis: what lies behind the work is neither

⁸⁹ “What is equal to itself instead repels itself from itself, and what is unequal to itself instead posits itself as what is equal to itself.” Hegel, G.W.F. (2018) *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Edited by T. Pinkard and M. Baur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Hegel Translations). p.95

the elevation of appearance nor pure nothingness, but rather the subject's own internal negativity—the uncanniness.

However, for this purpose, the effect of the red cloth is ultimately unnecessary. In a work that has already successfully established a dual paradox of external reference and self-reference, the final act of draping the figure in a red cloth introduces a new form of certainty—an externally imposed “unknown” that obscures the figure's previously self-contradictory status (i.e., the tension between normal and distorted form). The red cloth conceals the multiplicity of potentialities that the self-contradictory figure had revealed. In other words, the work shifts from presenting an appearance of uncertain certainty to presenting a certainty of uncertainty—something that clearly contradicts the representational mode of the uncanny. Therefore, for this work, it is necessary to preserve the first half of the video and omit the latter part.

Based on the numerous experiments conducted across the three preceding stages, this research proceeded with the final round of practical testing (as shown in fig 35). In the earlier practices, the most significant obstacle to representing the uncanny, namely, the self-assurance of the artwork's identity, was effectively addressed through the method of double paradox. However, a remaining challenge lay in the form of presentation: how to strike a balance between allowing video effects to sufficiently generate paradoxicality and avoiding the use of excessive visual effects that might reintroduce determinacy into the work. In other words, the question was how to balance video effects that disrupt the work's representational function between paradoxically readable/unreadable ambiguity and purely unreadable, indeterminate opacity. Therefore, to meet this challenge, I ultimately modified and combined elements from earlier experiments—specifically the “headless waiting figure” and the “falling glass”—to produce the final project: fig 34:

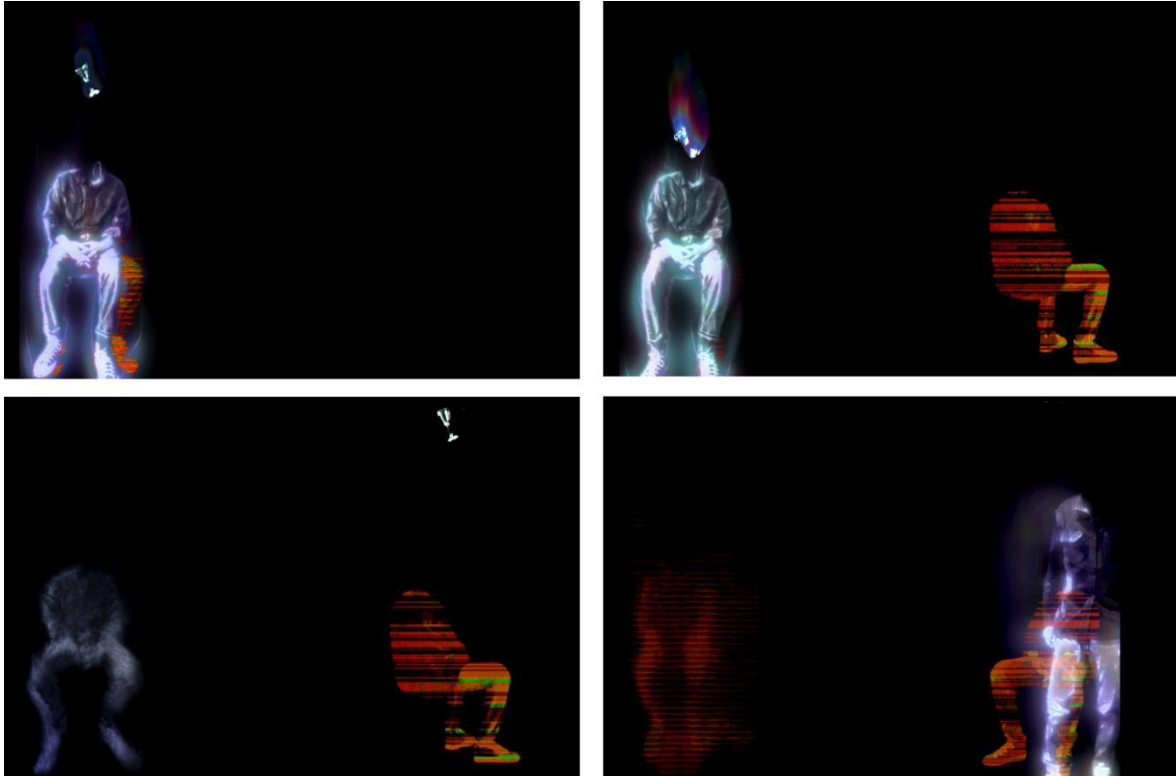


Fig 34.1



Fig 34.2

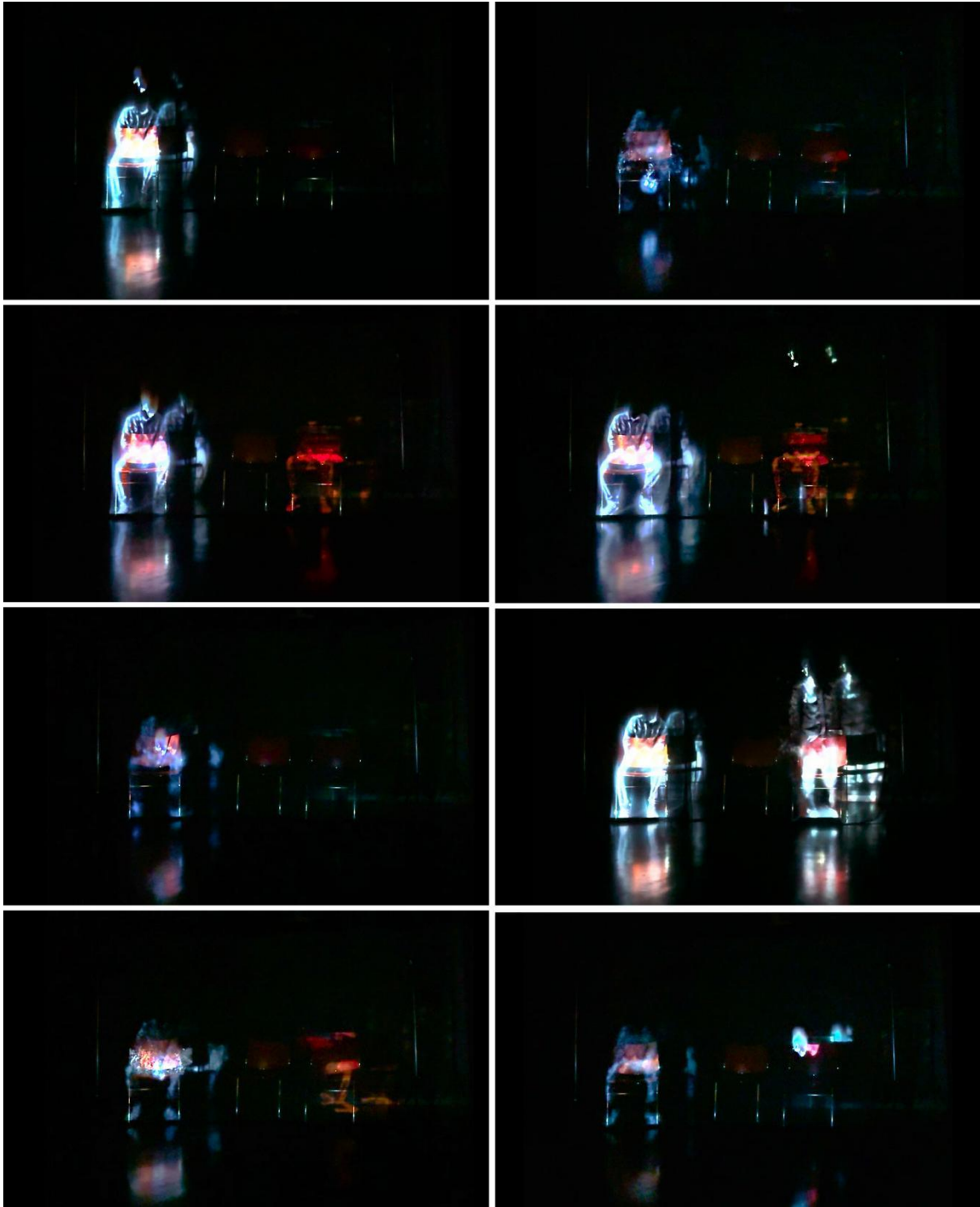


Fig 34.3



Fig 34.4



Fig 34.5

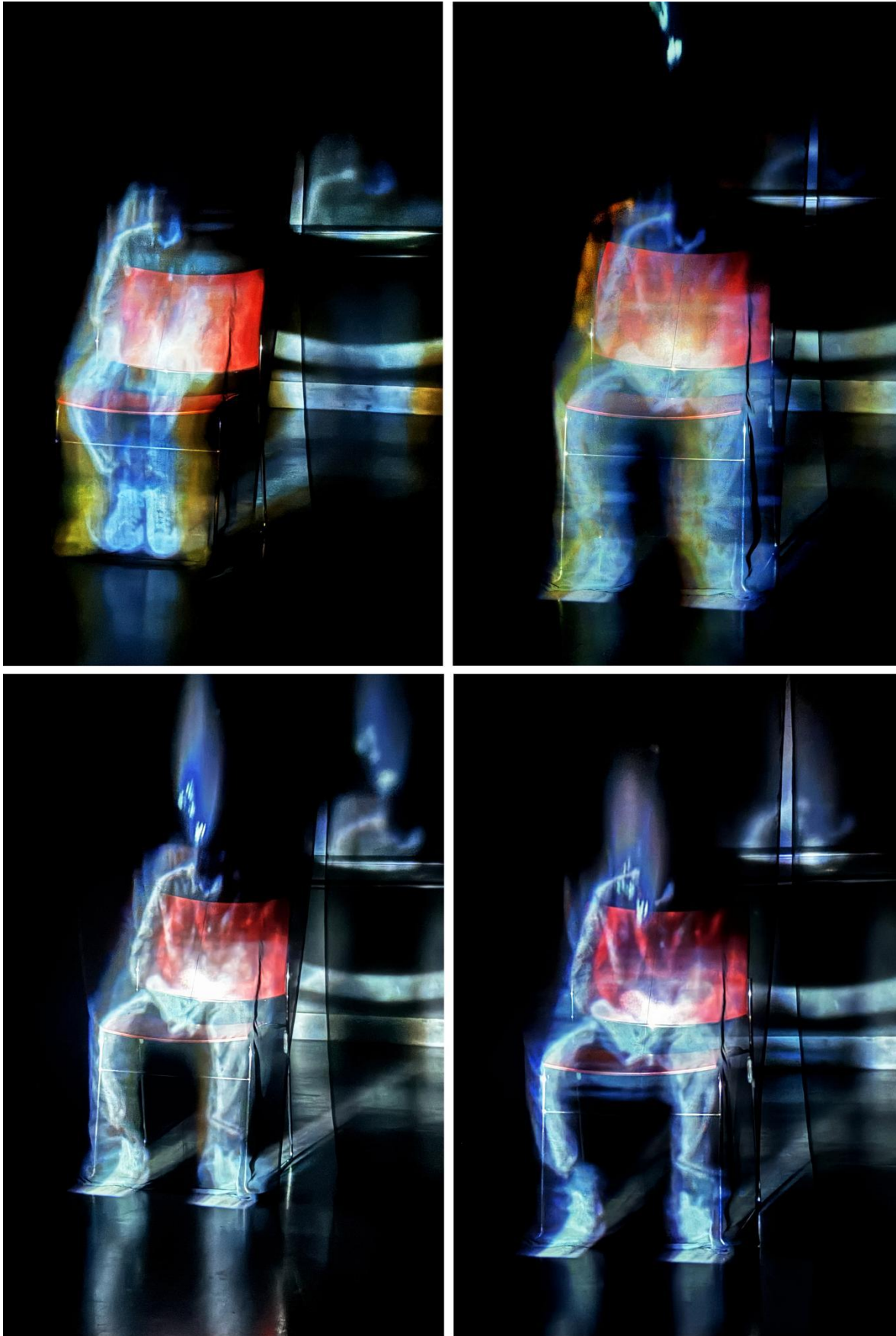


Fig 34.6

In this final group of practical works, the presentation format remains composed of two parts: fig 34.1 (the video projection content) and fig 34.2 (the physical projection medium in real space). The medium carrying the projection remains the same—a chair placed at the center of the space, along with a layer of black chiffon used to receive the projection. The video part has undergone certain changes, as shown in fig 34.1, the screen is divided into left and right halves. On the left appears a headless human figure, similar to previous experiments, flickering and ascending in light and flame. During its “waiting,” this figure leaves behind glitch-like residual shadows with each movement. On the right side, the image is dominated by a deep reddish tone interwoven with highly saturated greens, presenting a glitching human silhouette. Unlike the figure on the left, which as in previous works, paces or sits in a repetitive “waiting” state, the right-side figure remains seated and slowly rotates, continuously alternating between visibility and disappearance. Another change from earlier works is that the figure on the left is no longer restricted to its side of the frame. When it stands and leaves the left screen, after a brief delay, it suddenly crosses the central darkness and enters the right side. The chair, which mediates and blurs the boundary between illusion and reality, is thus rendered both present and absent through the figure’s act of sitting and departing. Meanwhile, the falling glass reappears with only the splash effect retained, alternating rhythmically between the two sides of the screen. This serves a dual function: formally, it offers viewers a structured, metronome-like rhythm; conceptually, it gives form to an eternal, unchanging transcendent idea by this rhythm, or, as referred to at the beginning of this study, the “non-truth” answer to humanity’s ultimate question—the void as a “failed” answer. For it is against the backdrop of the glass’s eternal, uninterrupted, and undelayed descent that the figure’s wandering and actions appear powerless and incapable of producing any effect. And this very impotence—this negation of the subject’s own intentions—paradoxically transforms the glass’s regularity into a representation of an eternal, immutable, and silent essence of existence that rejects the human.

In this work, the expression of the meaninglessness of “waiting” is no longer revealed solely through the repetitive actions of the figure. Instead, this void is intensified through contrast. On one hand, as before, the phantom figure’s endless, cyclical, and silent waiting manifests the essential void of “waiting” through the form of waiting itself. On the other hand, all the figure’s actions—sitting, pacing, leaving, or returning—may be seen as human strategies for coping with the unbearable emptiness at the heart of “waiting.” Yet these actions are rendered utterly powerless against the background of the glass’s constant, uninterrupted fall, which remains unaffected by and disconnected from anything the figures do. In other words, the glass’s perpetual descent contrasts with the continuity and void of “waiting,” highlighting the futility of the human figures’ gestures. This helplessness gives form not only to the fact that the essence of waiting is eternal absence, but also to the viewer’s existential predicament in facing the fundamental uncertainty of human subjectivity.

As for the specific design concept of this work, it still follows a presentation model based on a double-structured paradox. Regarding the first level of deception, the artwork's reference to the figure in waiting coexists within the proposition with the paradox of the figure's alienation and the meaninglessness of the act of waiting. This breakthrough in the form of the work's own carrier (digital media) mainly relies on the transparency of the chiffon and the setting off of the real chair behind it - the overlapping of the figure floating on the chiffon that disappears in the darkness and the real chair makes the deceptive appearance of the work as a "ghost sitting still on the chair in reality" more credible and deceptive (as shown in fig 34.5 and fig 34.6). Yet simultaneously with this reference to the "waiting ghost," the figure's movements and the constant rotation of the right-hand figure, remind the viewer of the negation of that image: "This ghostly presence is nothing more than an artistic trick; the glitches in the video constantly reveal its material identity as a digital medium." This is a paradox in the symbolic reference to an external Other: the work appears to present a ghost waiting in the darkness, yet constantly exposes the former's deception through its materiality. On another aspect, the work also carries an omnipresent sense of being gazed. As discussed earlier, due to the figure's missing head, the viewer may feel that the figure seated in front of them is casting a gaze from where the head should be. Yet, paradoxically, the absence of the gaze's source disperses this unsettling gaze across the entire dark space—everywhere except where it should be. This feeling of disorientation and unease is also evoked by a paradoxical breakdown in the symbolic order of reference to external reality. These two forms of representation, by reinforcing the contradictory position of the artwork's referential function within the symbolic order, reveal the viewer's own subjective position in relation to the artwork, as well as the fundamental uncertainty underlying any judgment made from that position.

Based on the failure of the structure of external other-referentiality generated by the former paradox (the failure to refer to the meaning of waiting and the failure of the image of the work to refer to anything external), the work is able to avoid another possible interference from the other, namely, the interference posed by referring to itself in a determinative manner. The "objectlessness of waiting" unmasks the deception of meaning-referentiality in "waiting"; the "formlessness of the figure" exposes the illusion of the work referring to a fixed character; the "originlessness of the gaze" reveals the illusion of being gazed at by something; and the "exposure of the materiality of the work" undermines the deception that the work refers to something else. These elements, while cornering the viewer who seeks identity from all sides, simultaneously leave a path of retreat: allowing the viewer to fall back (or move forward) into the ultimate identity that "whatever the work expresses is the content represented by the work's essence". Within this framework of assurance, the act of "waiting" provides the guarantee for the meaning of "waiting"; the "alienated figure" guarantees "the figure's alienation"; and the "difficulty in determining the work's appearance" guarantees the work's representation of uncertainty. This corresponds to what was previously mentioned: through the experience of the work's

failure to refer to the other, the viewer is offered a possibility to convert the external symbolic order—on which the desire for identity was premised—into an assurance grounded in their own rationality, through the act of “seeing through the deception of the veil”. In other words, when the viewer enters this highest logic of identity, a cognitive structure is formed wherein the appearance of the work, by presenting itself as the external determination of its internal negativity, is retrospectively identified as its very essence⁹⁰, and re-suppresses the non-identity that drives viewers to view the work. When the appearance of the perceived act of “waiting” is reduced to its purpose of waiting, the process by which this appearance negates any representational link to external meaning and elevates itself as self-representation selectively overlooks the reason that compelled both the viewer and the work to wait in the first place. The work amplifies this overlooked remainder to magnify the internal contradiction of such self-referential identity: for instance, in terms of the self-referentiality of meaning, the more the act of waiting is compulsively repeated in an attempt to explain its meaning, the more it amplifies the absence at the core of waiting itself, and the more the lack of what is being awaited becomes impossible to fill. Similarly, the more the viewer equates the material, self-revealing appearance of the work with its essence, the more they are confronted with the meaninglessness of that act and the purposelessness of the installation itself—both of which expose the absence of essence and that absence’s essence of any subjectively constructed “essence.” In other words, the more we experience that the work’s “waiting” is waiting for “waiting” itself, and that its appearance refers to its own identity, the more we can experience this “waiting” as a form of self-reference that cannot conceal its own void.

Thus, in the process of reinforcing the thesis—“what the work presents is exactly what it intends to present”—revealed by the failure of the first deception in the second layer of deception, the internal negating proposition is also magnified: “the identity between appearance and essence only highlights the lack at the core of the work’s essence.” In other words, within this meaning-referential system constructed by the viewer’s subjective experience, the elevation of appearance that conceals essence excludes the viewer’s interpretative intent from the system, and in doing so, reveals the position and irreducible importance of that intent. Put differently, it is because the work’s self-reference erases its own meaning that this erased meaning continues to exert a driving force on the viewer⁹¹. In other words, the thesis of formal

⁹⁰ “the supersensible ... It comes forth from out of appearance, and appearance is its mediation. That is, appearance is its essence and in fact its fulfillment. The supersensible is the sensuous and the perceived posited as they are in truth.” “The first supersensible world was only the immediate elevation of the perceived world into the universal element, and it had its necessary counterpart in this perceived world, which still retained for itself the principle of flux and alteration.” Hegel, G.W.F. (2018) *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: The Phenomenology of Spirit*. Edited by T. Pinkard and M. Baur. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Cambridge Hegel Translations). p.88, p.95

⁹¹ “I love you, but, because inexplicably I love in you something more than you—the *objet petit a*—I mutilate you.” Lacan, J. (1978). *The four fundamental concepts of psychoanalysis* (J.-A. Miller, Ed.; A. Sheridan, Trans.).

self-referentiality (that the material appearance of the work is self-sufficient in its explanation) generates its own antithesis, which reveals the surplus left by such self-sufficiency (if the work signifies nothing beyond its appearance, how should I understand this signification?) The self-referential concealment of the void of essence paradoxically increases the possibility that the viewer may experience this void. Through this, ultimately, in the process of the viewer experiencing the inescapable inner emptiness brought about by the perfect, “successful” answer of self-reference, the viewer once again encounters a paradoxical coexistence: The appearance and representation of the work acquire the identity guaranteed by the rationality of the viewer in the failure of symbolic order, but the construction of this identity simultaneously reveals its concealment of the essential deficiency. Therefore, within the proposition of self-reference, the only identity attainable is the impossibility of attaining identity itself—the essence of “waiting” is both the appearance of waiting and the eternal lack of that appearance in representing its essence; the material appearance of the work is both the entirety of its representation and the surplus of its self-explanation from the viewer’s perspective. In this paradoxical coexistence, what ultimately offers identity is neither the determinacy of symbolic order nor the rational substitution of that order by the viewer, but the impossibility of securing any certainty—the double failure of referring to the other and to itself. In other words, this paradoxical proposition of the double structure simultaneously reveals, in two aspects, both the ungraspability of the work’s essence and how this ungraspability, as the epistemological foundation of the viewer, generates a motivating force upon the viewer. In the final synthesis: “the void hidden behind the work is also the internal lack that drives the viewer’s impulse to reveal,” or “the non-identity between the work’s appearance and its essence becomes the identity of the viewer’s pursuit of certainty and the fundamental uncertainty of that pursuit”. Ultimately, the work aligns its self-exposed void of essence with the viewer’s internal void, using the viewer’s engagement with the artwork as a bridge. In doing so, the work that reveals its essence gives form to the viewer’s essential uncanniness.

W. W. Norton & Company. (Original work published 1973), p.268

“This coincidence of emergence and loss, of course, designates the fundamental paradox of the Lacanian *objet petit a* which emerges as being-lost - narrativization occludes this paradox by describing the process in which the object is first given and then gets lost.” Zizek, S. (2020). *The plague of fantasies*. Verso Books, p.15

Conclusion

As Heidegger said, “*Uncanniness* brings this entity face to face with its undisguised nullity, which belongs to the possibility of its own most potentiality-for-Being (Heidegger, 1962, p.333).” Facing the ultimate question of being and nothingness, the appropriate attitude in answering may be neither the simple admission of the limited human being’s incapacity and utter failure to respond to it, nor the falling into evasion of such failure and nullity through guarantees offered by certainty. Rather, it may be that one ought to grasp this impossibility of grasping being-in-the-world with an attitude of “anxiety (Mulhall, 2005, p.168)”. This anxiety is not a concrete threat brought upon the subject by the world, but a threat to Dasein when it has lost all relations to anything in the world and lost its orientation within things, facing the most expansive potential possibilities it gains through radical “nullity”. It is because this threat has no determinable object that it exists in every position; therefore, that which anxiety is anxious about *is already ‘there’, and yet nowhere* (Heidegger, 1962, p.231). The reason this study takes *the uncanny* as the core of artistic practice is to create a sensuous bearer closer to the concept of this pure uncertainty. In other words, what this practice has consistently focused on is how to allow the work to provide an object capable of bringing continuous “anxiety”, so that the viewer, within the limited space opened by the work, may experience a transformation—from the failure to grasp the work, to a mode of grasping the work through “failure” itself—and, in sustaining this path of “failure”, avoid any certainty subjectively imposed. In doing so, they may experience the essential unknowability, the “mystery”, of the work and of external things which are brought by themselves, as well as the lack of the foundation of the cognitive structure that leads to the occurrence of this “mystery”, i.e., this lack is the result of people retrospectively confirming the limitations of cognitive behaviour as the cause of cognitive behaviour. This is how the uncanny, as an essential characteristic of human being, is given form by the viewer through a practice of “failure”, or rather, how the work summons into presence the viewer’s uncanny feeling through the path of “failure”. Rather than reducing the artwork merely to a representation of the outcome shaped by the uncanny—namely, the strange, unsettling, or eerie affective experience it produces.

Finally, it must be clarified once again that the uncanny addressed and represented in this research is theoretically grounded in an ontological positioning derived primarily from Martin Heidegger, rather than strictly following the interpretation proposed by Sigmund Freud, who understood it as an emotional response to a particular aesthetic object. However, this ontological positioning does not imply that the uncanny can be fully understood as a property of objects. In other words, the uncanny described here is neither an intrinsic characteristic of objects nor a purely subjective experience. Rather, it is a Heideggerian ontological clarification based on a structure of relations, that is, a structure describing how Being appears to the subject. More specifically, the

representation of the uncanny in this research does not treat it as the essential quality of an object represented by the artwork's imagery. Instead, through the method of "failure," the artwork reveals to the subject the essence of the subject itself as the ultimate aesthetic "object": namely, the internal void that drives the subject's aesthetic activity, and which the uncanny experience clarifies through forms of encirclement and substitution. Therefore, while this thesis maintains the ontological positioning of the uncanny, it also recognizes that, due to the particular nature of the concept, it becomes internalized as an essential attribute of the aesthetic subject within artworks structured around specific propositions. It can only appear through the unstable relations within the subject's cognitive structure that are disclosed by these propositions. For this reason, it is insufficient to attribute the uncanny either to the intrinsic properties of objects or to locate it solely within the psychological reactions of the subject. Only by clarifying the negative relation between the artwork and the viewing subject can the experience of uncertainty, which is generated through the interaction and encounter between practice and exhibition, fully reveal this essential attribute of the subject. Because of the specific representational demands of this concept, the central question of this research is how "failure," as both a philosophical and artistic path and method, can be used within the domain of conceptual art practice to represent and evoke the essential character of the viewer's own uncanny through the construction of paradoxical propositions. The response to this question in the thesis is primarily structured through answers to two more specific questions:

How does the path of practicing and experiencing "failure" in art locate the pure indeterminacy of the uncanny as the essence of human being?

This question is primarily addressed in Chapters One and Two. Chapter One begins by outlining the fundamental motivation behind this research through my pre-doctoral art practice. Drawing on past explorations of Chinese *Daoist* and French existentialist thought on being and nothingness—as well as the failures within those practices—the chapter defines "failure" not as a conclusive result but as an open-ended response to ultimate questions. It further discusses the significance of this notion of failure for representing *the uncanny*, through Lacan's theory of the split subject and Heidegger's structure of truth as negation. Subsequently, in Chapter Two, drawing on a brief overview of modern philosophical discussions of the uncanny and my analysis of the failed attempts to represent the uncanny during the early phase of this research, I focus on three key issues: the confusion between "anxiety" and "fear," the distinction between uncertainty represented by determinacy and indeterminacy that provides an experience of uncertainty, and the negative impact of the "artwork identity" (the self-defining character of contemporary conceptual art) on the artwork's capacity to present itself as an embodiment of uncertainty. Through the articulation of these issues in the artworks, I address the central question of this stage: that the attempt to locate the uncanny through the path of "failure" requires reliance on two essential preconditions—the subjective position in which uncertainty arises, and the

paradoxical approach in which uncertainty operates.

How can the practice of conceptual art evoke the indeterminate experience of the uncanny through the construction of paradoxical propositions?

Based on the clarification in the previous chapters regarding the conditions for determining whether the uncertainty experience provided by an artwork meets the requirements for the representation of the uncanny, Chapters Three and Four focus on exploring a repeatable path or practical paradigm of “successful failure.” Chapter Three centers on the concept of the single-structure paradox, focusing on how the artwork can function as an alien object within the symbolic order—based on the notion of the phallic signifier—to destabilize the referential structure toward the external Other. It further argues that this fundamental disruption of referentiality may trigger a viewer’s self-questioning, opening the possibility for encountering the uncanny as the uncertainty at the core of one’s epistemological foundation. Chapter Four then reflects on the limitations exposed by the single-structure paradox, specifically, how the self-referential identity assigned to artworks in the contemporary art context imposes a certainty that hinders the representation of uncertainty. In response, the chapter develops an alternative practice based on a double-structure paradox, which constructs both a paradox of external reference and a paradox of the self-referential structure that “appearance is equivalent to the representation of essence”. Ultimately, three main works—*The Paradox of the Falling Glass* (fig 30, fig 31), *The Paradox of the Waiting Silhouette* (fig 34), and *The Paradox of the Textual Proposition* (fig 32, fig 33)—are presented to respond to the initial questions raised in this study, that is, the way of responding to the “failed answer” to the question of existence and nothingness: As a condensation of speculative and creative processes within artistic practice, the artwork is no longer a mouthpiece for articulating an experience of failure as determinate, but rather—through its representation of certainty, and through the exposure and amplification of the internal structural inconsistency within that representation—the artwork becomes the inescapable fissure within language and symbolic order for the subject. Ultimately, the uncanny—as the absence of human essence, the very reason for the complete failure to answer the ultimate question—is invoked in the presence of the viewer through the medium of the artwork.

Value Achieved, Practical Limitations, and Future Research

The main contribution of this study lies in its critical reflection on the displacement that has occurred between previous artistic practices of representing the uncanny and the ontological definition of the uncanny itself, and in its attempt to propose a practical framework for representing the uncanny’s metaphysical essence. In earlier visual art practices, artists have, for the most part, limited the representation of the

uncanny to the level of phenomena and the affective experiences associated with those phenomena. Examples include Mike Kelley's curated exhibition *The Uncanny* (Tate, 2004), which sought to provoke psychological unease and fear (Kelley, 2003); Michaël Borremans's recent representative work *Sixteen Dances*, which generates tension, disorientation, and oppression through three semantically ambiguous and uncanny motifs—a group of naked children seemingly involved in a ritual, Black hip-hop men whose faces have been effaced, and human figures tightly wrapped in glittering fabric (Zeno X Gallery, 2017); Gregor Schneider's installation *Weisse Folter* (2007), whose excessively empty and sterile corridors and small rooms contrast with the title's reference to "torture" (Albano, 2008); Mona Hatoum's *Nablus Soap* (1996), soap embedded with sharp spikes, and her oversized kitchen grinder *La Grande Broyeuse* (1999), scaled to human proportions; and Marko Mäetamm's *Sandbox* (2007), which juxtaposes children's toys with a hanging noose, transforming them into an execution device for children. Although such practices have greatly expanded the possibilities of presenting the feeling of the uncanny within non-linguistic structures—allowing viewers to experience how this feeling might occur in a variety of semiotic contexts—they nevertheless remain at a distance from the uncanny's metaphysical status within contemporary discourse, where it functions as one of the most pervasive tools of deconstruction (Windsor, 2019, pp. 51–56). In other words, these works can be regarded only as elaborations of phenomena generated by the uncanny, without sufficiently giving form to the ontological conception of the uncanny or uncanniness itself. Accordingly, how to make use of the openness of conceptual art (the practical path of "failure"), so that the appearance of the works can directly point to, encircle, and substitute for the metaphysical essence of the uncanny as the ultimate condensation of internal negation from the perspective of the subject, rather than becoming a substitute for the sensory experience created by the uncanny, that became the main contribution to the reproduction of this concept by the evaluable paradoxical proposition structure proposed by the research institute. Focusing on revealing the paradoxicality inherent in concepts themselves, rather than simply producing paradoxical conceptual propositions, offers a way of approaching the metaphysical essence of the uncanny more directly.

From another perspective, namely, the personal perspective, this research, in balancing theoretical inquiry with practical investigation, has advanced my reflection on the original (personal) driving force behind my artistic practice. In the early stages, the driving force behind the research stemmed from a critical reflection on the notion that "artistic practice should be grounded in primal experiences and passions from life." This notion had been deeply rooted in the seven years of art education I received in China, from undergraduate to master's level. However, as revealed by the two practice projects discussed in Chapter One, the subjects that have consistently aligned with my artistic interests—or rather, those that have stimulated my passion for practice—have always been the sensuous expression of pure rational speculation through artworks, rather than the sublimation of intuitive, sensory experiences from everyday reality. In other words, both in this research and in future explorations, the

methodology I seek to discuss and construct is not one that treats art as “derived from life and elevated above it” through the sublimation of real-world experience or appearance. Rather, it aims to search for a path within the artwork where “concepts become perceptible” or “ideas are phenomenologized”—a path where abstract content born of pure rational thought can reclaim a place in the sensory world through a process of self-sublation. This process of self-sublation could also be described as a path toward *the supersensibility*; yet, unlike the framework discussed earlier in this text, this is not a process where representations from lived experience are sublimated into expressions of abstract essence. Instead, it sublimated the abstract concept to the substitution of the abstract essence by representation in the process of suturing its abstraction. In other words, the fundamental drive behind this research is not the search for a path that begins with real-world experience and leads to the sublimation of ideas. It is, rather, the search for a path that begins with abstract ideas and—through the process of “failure” as self-sublation—reconnects those ideas with the sensuous world.

With regard to this fundamental drive, or rather, long-term objective, this research can be said to have, to a certain extent, established a successful “failure” starting point, while still having certain incompleteness and limitations. For the former, through an integration of philosophical discussions related to the uncanny—drawing from Freud, Lacan, Žižek, Heidegger, and Hegel—this research has established a convoluted yet potentially accessible bridge named “failure” that connects this highly abstract ontological notion to the viewer. By shifting the concept of “failure” from a result-based judgment to a process-based structure, the abstract failure to answer the ultimate metaphysical question is manifested, from the perspective of the subject of experience (the human being), as the ontological trait of the uncanniness. Through the viewer’s experience of the collapse of certainty provided by “failure,” this rational speculative process is transformed into a sensuous and existential experience unique to each individual viewer. Paradox, as the core method of this “failure,” is not, as in the conceptual art model proposed by Kosuth, offered as a determinate artistic proposition to the viewer. Rather, it invites each viewer to witness their failure to understand, through the process of experiencing the impossibility of understanding the artwork. The experience gained in this encounter with self-failure is undoubtedly sensuous, yet it does not belong to any particular existent object. Instead, it is a sensuous experience of the failure of all determinate judgments regarding any existent object. In this way, the revelation of the subject’s uncertainty through paradox can be seen as a kind of sublation of this abstract negativity of failure. This is because, in the course of this revelation, on the one hand, the paradoxical proposition provided by the work’s appearance negates the abstract negation of this paradox itself through its reality, but on the other hand, this paradoxicality also ensures that the viewer’s basis for judging the proposition shift from the original subjective certainty to the negation (using the threat of negation to identity as the basis of negation) (Žižek, 2008, pp.198-199). In other words, it negates the abstractness of negativity while preserving the force of negativity itself in the sublating process. Thus, within the “failure” path

proposed by this research, the inner force of negativity—manifested as the uncertainty of the subject’s perspective—is introduced into the viewer’s individualized sensuous experience of “failure” through the practice of paradox. This, to a certain extent, refines the aesthetic methodology constructed by Sol LeWitt to counter the Kosuthian paradigm of conceptual art—namely, that conceptual art emphasizes the conceptual process and the openness of ideas to an infinite public (LeWitt, 1967). Moreover, in response to LeWitt’s claim—illogical or contradictory logic within the representation of a work may be used to mask the artist’s true intention (LeWitt, 1967)—this research offers a specific method of practice aimed at a particular abstract concept (the uncanny): the double-structured paradoxical proposition.

However, even after completing the final practical projects, I realized that certain limitations of this research remain impossible to ignore. Looking back at the entire research process—whether it was the early-stage distinction between “fear” and “anxiety,” the mid-stage exploration of how to evoke “subjective uncertainty,” or the later attempts at constructing internal paradoxes within the artwork’s propositions—there has always been a central contradiction that has continuously hindered the realization of my ultimate goal (representing the uncertain essence of the subject through certainty appearance of works). That contradiction lies in the tension between the pure uncertainty of the reproduction required by the concept and the guarantee of certainty provided by the text or form of the work to the viewer. In attempting to overcome this obstacle, I tried several approaches: having the artwork directly present the appearance of uncertainty (which proved unsuccessful, as it simply rendered uncertainty into a determinate representation); positioning the artwork as an alien object within its environment (which been proved to be defective, since the identity of the artwork still offered a form of certainty); and finally, employing paradox as a method whereby the work simultaneously negates both its textual referentiality and its identity as an artwork. This final approach did, in theory, achieve the original goal. However, it also introduced a new problem:

In the final stage of testing, based on feedback from viewers, including contemporary art PhD researchers Xingdu Wang, Yuan Cao, and supervisor Dr. James Quin, Professor Charlie Gere from Lancaster University, the operation of self-referential paradoxes evoked by the form of a work is feasible. However, for the paradoxes of symbolic structures that refer to foreign things or meanings, it is still necessary to rely on the introduction of the work or the interpretation of its symbolic meaning to achieve a paradoxical interpretation of the first kind of deception. This issue is less apparent in *The Falling Glass*—a work with relatively condensed semantic referentiality—but remains unavoidable in works related to *The Waiting Silhouette*, where textual interpretation is still necessary. Although this reliance on external knowledge structures to introduce the first level of deception does not undermine the core focus (the double structural paradox) of this practice, it nevertheless indicates that the project has not yet completely freed itself from the guidance imposed on the

viewer. A comparison between *The Glass* and *The Silhouette* shows that this dependence on guidance stems from the increased complexity of the paradoxical propositions the artwork attempts to carry, which in turn raises the difficulty of interpretation. In other words, the reason the work has not yet fully realized LeWitt's vision of an "infinite audience" (where viewers possess complete interpretive authority) lies in the persistent gap between the conceptual proposition carried by the artwork and the viewer's primary perceptual experience, i.e., the proposition's level of condensation remains insufficient.

Thus, this limitation means that the viewer's aesthetic engagement with the artwork still, to some extent, requires a priori knowledge structures to support the work's self-presentation. This reliance on guiding the viewer and on textual connotations still does not completely and thoroughly free the work from rational and epistemic structures as its preconditions of interpretation. In other words, the viewer is still not truly free, not fully autonomous in returning to their own uncertainty in front of the work. From this perspective, when compared to Tony Oursler's installation works, although his themes are not directly concerned with the uncanny, the way his installations evoke in viewers a pure indeterminacy of irrational, non-textual, and sensuous experience is closer to the aim I propose. In his installations, the weird appropriation of human facial features condenses a sense of alienated, pre-linguistic, and multifaceted panic within the sculptural assemblage, requiring no semantic explanation (Oursler, 2002). By contrast, in my final work, the ghost placed on the chair still relies on rationally mediated processes—such as the notion of "waiting" and the confrontation between the ghostly signifier and material presence—as intermediaries to achieve its intended dialectical movement. Therefore, the limitation of this practice still lies in the fact that the artwork merely offers a path leading the viewer toward the "failure" I have theorized as the uncanny, but does not truly allow the viewer to freely access their own experience of the uncanny. That is to say, the power of interpretation—and the power to fail at interpreting—has not been fully handed over to the viewer. As a result, the "failure" produced remains within a bounded range—even if that range is as broad as possible—and cannot yet be called a truly radical experience of failure.

On the other hand, the fact that this research ultimately still relies, to some extent, on specific textual frameworks or subject positions also reflects its implicit presupposition of an "ideal viewer." This presupposed viewer is expected to follow the dialectical logic of the propositions, enter into the uncertainty of judgment, experience a cognitive structure incapable of providing definite answers, and, through the encounter with their own internal otherness which produces a form of doubling, arrive at the experience of the uncanny. However, it fails to provide a solution for the experiences of other perspectives generated by the viewer during the aesthetic process, such as understanding and summarizing the work, deviating from the subject of the work, understanding the work as some kind of technical installation, or not

understanding and ignoring the paradoxical nature of the proposition. This issue is not merely a limitation of the present research methodology; it also echoes a difficulty that emerged in the methodological debate between LeWitt and Kosuth. When an artistic method seeks to guarantee, to the greatest extent possible, the viewer's freedom of interpretation, it inevitably confronts the possibility that the viewer's interpretation or experience may diverge from the artist's intentions. Within this framework, viewers can broadly be divided into three categories: 1. The first type consists of viewers who genuinely follow the "failure" pathway of the double paradox and experience the threat posed by their own internal otherness as well as the uncertainty of their cognitive foundations. This represents the most ideal outcome for the aims of this research. 2. The second type includes viewers who are able to perceive the structural contradiction and disharmony within the work, yet maintain a rational distance from it, for example, interpreting the work as "a conceptual art experiment." Although this response is less ideal, the structure of failure can still be perceived; however, the experience of the uncanny remains relatively weak. 3. The third type consists of viewers who completely refuse the invitation to enter the pathway of failure, instead understanding the work merely as a visual effect or as a particular exhibition device. In this case, the structural conditions upon which the method of failure relies prove insufficiently universal. The context constructed by the artwork—the structural conditions of practice, the representational content, and the experiential framework—fails to penetrate the most fundamental and universally shared layers of cognitive structure. For such viewers, the pathway of "failure" ultimately fails to function.

In fact, about the accuracy of conceptual expression and the avoidance of excessive divergence in viewers' interpretations, the explanatory conceptual method associated with Kosuth would allow the purpose of the work to be articulated more precisely and would reduce ambiguity for the viewer. However, for the purpose of this research about representing the uncanny, such precision is more likely than ambiguity to fall into the risk of objectifying the uncanny. This risk, from the first chapter to the last, has been the most persistent "specter" that this study has attempted to escape. Therefore, despite the clarity offered by the explanatory mode of conceptual art, this research still chooses a practical approach that carries the risk of being misinterpreted or overlooked. This is because, for both "failure" and the uncanny, the practical process is not the representation of a predetermined object or a final result waiting to be depicted. Rather, it is a structural pathway and an experience of that pathway's structure. In this context, the role of the artwork is merely to provide a viewing structure with a minimal degree of orientation, while at the same time striving to resist unifying the viewers' final experiences. Ideally, this method guides viewers to encounter different forms of "failure" during the aesthetic process—experiences of self-questioning and doubling that arise from their own distinct cognitive structures and perspectives. However, due to the limited exploration of the universality of the textual structures of the works within this project, the research still retains the limitation that the third type of viewer cannot be effectively incorporated into the

pathway of “failure.” Exploring how to further expand the universality of this method will therefore constitute an important direction for future research.

It should also be noted that, because this research method insists on preserving the viewer’s freedom of interpretation, the definition of the uncanny as an ontological condition, namely, a form of uncertainty occurring at the subject position, becomes difficult to quantify when evaluating the outcomes of the practice. In most artistic forms, it is difficult to completely avoid objectifying a particular idea or aesthetic tendency, and this research is no exception. However, given that this study aims to evoke “failure” in the viewer’s cognition, the intention is not to objectify either this method itself or the concept of the uncanny associated with it. Instead, the research proposes to objectify the defamiliarization and de-signification of familiar situations drawn from everyday life, or through the objectification of paradoxical or anomalous real conditions that may cause the collapse of ordinary understanding, to let the viewer encounter a paradoxical threat between the ordinary interpretation of the represented situation and the anomalous elements within the artwork that contradict that interpretation. Thus, the observable and quantifiable elements within the work function only as the preconditions of the conceptual proposition. The actual pathway of “failure” and the genuine occurrence of the uncanny take place within the viewer’s subjective experience. From the perspective of this research, what can be quantified and analyzed in terms of feasibility are the objectified structural conditions capable of producing uncertainty at the subject position. For example, elements such as a headless figure, temporal delay, or visual ambiguity do not objectify the uncanny itself; rather, they objectify propositions containing potential contradictions. Viewers who accept the invitation of these objectified propositions may encounter the paradox they present and thereby gain the opportunity to embark upon the pathway of “failure.” At the end of this pathway, they may experience the uncanny as a form of uncertainty arising from their own internal doubling. Nevertheless, the limitation of this method lies in the fact that the uncanny experience ultimately generated at the subject position cannot be directly quantified or examined. It can only be assessed indirectly, by considering whether the structural preconditions necessary for producing such uncertainty have been sufficiently established. In other words, evaluation can only determine whether the artwork provides adequate conditions for viewers to potentially experience this form of subjective uncertainty. Therefore, in future research, addressing the limitations that remain in the present study will require expanding the scope of this practical method, in particular, by reducing the dependence of the propositional structure on specific contexts so that it may better meet the requirement of greater universality across a broader range of viewers.

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Video Link:

Fig 3 Test-Portrait: <https://vimeo.com/1122661489>

Fig 4 Reflection: <https://vimeo.com/1122662345?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 6 Uncertain Self: <https://vimeo.com/1122662356?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 11.1 WoodWight: <https://vimeo.com/1122662384?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 11.2: <https://vimeo.com/1122662408?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 13.1 Digital Sculpture – Woodland-1:
<https://vimeo.com/1122662439?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 13.1 Digital Sculpture – Woodland-2:
<https://vimeo.com/1122662475?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 13.1 Digital Sculpture – Woodland-3:
<https://vimeo.com/1122662507?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 13.1 Digital Sculpture – Woodland-4:
<https://vimeo.com/1122662529?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 14 Alien object-1: <https://vimeo.com/1122662555?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 15 Alien object-2: <https://vimeo.com/1122662573?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 16 Alien object-3: <https://vimeo.com/1122662593?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 17 Alien object-fissure: <https://vimeo.com/1122663216?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 17 Alien object-fissure-2: <https://vimeo.com/1122663236?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 19 The Watching Green: <https://vimeo.com/1122663259?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 20.1 Through the Window-1: <https://vimeo.com/1122663271?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 20.1 Through the Window-2: <https://vimeo.com/1122663289?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 21.1 Through the shadow: <https://vimeo.com/1122663319?share=copy#t=1>

Fig 21.3 Through the shadow (pure image) :
<https://vimeo.com/1122663342?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 22 Character Test – Outdoor: <https://vimeo.com/1122663359?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 23 Character Test – Indoor: <https://vimeo.com/1122663378?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 24.1 Uncertainty Image Test: <https://vimeo.com/1122663385?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 25.2 Uncertainty Disruption Test on a Determinate Image–2:
<https://vimeo.com/1122663435?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 26: <https://vimeo.com/1122663460?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 27 glitch effect: <https://vimeo.com/1122663576?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 28: <https://vimeo.com/1122663672?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 29: <https://vimeo.com/1122663728?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 30 Fall: <https://vimeo.com/1122663755?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 31 Waiting for Failure: <https://vimeo.com/1122663766?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 31.6 (in real space): <https://vimeo.com/1122663789?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 31.7 (in real space): <https://vimeo.com/1122663800?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 31.7 (in real space)-1: <https://vimeo.com/1122663816?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 31.7 (in real space)-2: <https://vimeo.com/1122663844?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 32 the Introduction: <https://vimeo.com/1122663877?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 33: <https://vimeo.com/1122663926?share=copy#t=0>

Fig 34: <https://vimeo.com/1122663988?share=copy#t=0>