

Attention to distraction: a visual investigation of temporal
experience through time-based media

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Tasmania, April 2013

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Abstract

This project has explored the relationship between the moving image and temporal experience. Acknowledging the constructed temporality of narrative cinema, in conjunction with what Peter Osborne has described as distracted perception, I have examined the potential for the moving image to direct attention to the here-and-now. What began as an attempt to provide an antidote to the condition of distraction through contemplative immersion evolved as a reflection on the temporal dialectic of contemporary experience.

The project's concern with temporal experience is based on my response to working with narrative forms of the moving image in a commercial context. Drawing on anti-illusionist strategies of the film-artists of the 1960s as well as representational aspects of commercial production has resulted in work that embodies the inherent tension between these conditions of spectatorship, simultaneously heightening and dissolving temporal perception.

The visual context for the project is defined by the work of contemporary artists who also deal with the potential for the moving image to both absorb and distance viewers. This has been explored through a selection of specific works by Andy Warhol, David Hockney, Chantal Akerman, Christian Marclay, Douglas Gordon, Tacita Dean, Daniel Crooks and David Claerbout. These works challenge viewing habits and expectation through strategies of duration, re-contextualisation and re-examining the configuration of normative cinema.

In developing a theoretical understanding of the relationship between temporal experience and conditions of spectatorship, the project has been informed by Walter Benjamin, Tom Gunning and Sean Cubitt, writing on the relationship between narrative and non-narrative forms of cinema. These concepts have been further developed through Michael Fried's theory of absorption and theatricality and Peter Osborne's writing on attention and distraction. A philosophical understanding of temporal experience has been explored through the existentialist thought of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

The work developed as a combination of gallery-based and site-specific artworks that include single channel projections, multichannel installation, panoramic photography, live-feed cinema/installation and augmented reality. This broad, experimental approach is the result of exploring the moving image beyond the confines of linear cinematic structures. These diverse outcomes have been refined in the context of the Plimsoll Gallery for the submission exhibition.

By developing strategies that examine the relationship between time and the moving image the project has concluded that to offer a *contemporary* experience of the here-and-now, the work must fluctuate between states of immersion and awareness; between attention and distraction. Here, the inherent tension activated by the intersection of these temporal states directs audience attention toward the potential of a moment.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is dedicated to my two beautiful children Stella and Jude, who have shown great patience, and who thankfully continue to direct my attention to the here-and-now.

I would like to graciously thank a number of people, without whom this project would not have reached this point.

To my supervisors: Leigh Hobba, for his implicit understanding of what the project needed and for showing me what it means to be an artist; Dr David Stephenson for his rigour and insight; Professor Jonathan Holmes for his belief and guidance and Dr Martin Walch for asking the hard questions.

Special thanks to my Dad, Gil Sawford, for his unconditional support and wisdom, and to my Mum, Irene, who gave me the tools to embark on this journey. I also wish to thank Claire Krouzeckey for her insight, intellect and calming influence. Special thanks also to Leah Barker, who gave me the support and encouragement that allowed me to begin the project, and the patience that allowed me to finish it.

To my colleagues and associates Aaron Horsley, Lucy Bleach, John Vella, Leigh Carmichael, Paul Zika, Dr Meg Keating, Dr Bill Hart, Dr Brigita Ozolins, Dr Yvette Watt, Dr Ruth Frost, Dr Peter Waller, Professor Noel Frankham, Michael Edwards, Dr Matt Warren, Jack Robins, Anthony Johnson, Dr James Newitt, Terence Munday, Stuart Haughton, Gerrard Dixon, Phil Blacklow, Laura Hindmarsh, and Craig Walsh. Thank you all for your support and advice.

Thanks also to Kath Symmons and Craig Dow Sainter, who had the confidence and generosity to give me my start. And to my mentor Steve Thomas, without whom I would never have been able to develop my passion.

Finally I would like to thank my brothers Adam & Bryn, and my close friends Richard Angus, Nick Bell and Sam & Nell Nettlefold, for their love and support throughout this journey.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction to the Project

*Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it.*¹

Project Description

This project has explored the relationship between the moving image and temporal experience. Here I have identified the capacity for the moving image to simultaneously heighten and dissolve the experience of time. This investigation has aimed to bring awareness to this tension through the development of artworks that attempt to situate the viewer between temporal states of absorption and awareness;² between the illusory and the real.

Using the rejection of narrative cinema's goal of 'closure and fixity'³ as a starting point, the central concerns of the project have emerged through a series of research propositions, experimentation and personal experience. An exploration of alternative structures to normative cinema's traditional linear form raised questions surrounding notions of intent and led to the development of work that aimed to return focus to the here-and-now. These works sought to challenge habitual modes of viewing reliant on resolution, instead placing emphasis on each moment as it unfolds.

These initial strategies of contemplative immersion, developed through various forms of representation, raised further questions relating to the illusory nature of time inherent in the moving image. Responding to this informed the development of the project's central concern: how can the moving image direct audience attention to a moment *in* time – toward the real – while engaging them *outside* of time – through illusion?

¹ Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. London: Penguin, 2000, p 20

² The term absorption is used by Michael Fried to describe an engagement with the work itself. It is used throughout this exegesis to suggest a state of immersion, at the exclusion of awareness of one's own experience. It is also interchangeable with the term distraction; first used by Walter Benjamin and later Peter Osborne to also describe identification with anything outside of time's existence.

³ Cubitt, Sean. *The Cinema Effect*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005, p 40

In addressing this question the project shifted focus from strategies of pure immersion and representation, toward strategies that also aimed to direct audience attention toward the *experience* of time.

Central to defining the aims of the project is Michael Fried's theory of absorption and theatricality, Peter Osborne's writing on attention and distraction, and an engagement with the existential thought of Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Engaging with these philosophers offered an insight into my personal experience that had formed the impetus for the project, by introducing the existential paradox of being both *in* time and *outside* of it. Fried's theory provided a representational framework through which to view this paradox by examining the relationship between the temporal experience of the spectator and the moving image.

To further understand these 'conditions of spectatorship' I have examined both narrative and pre-narrative forms of cinema and drawn on the legacy of the avant-garde, in particular the Expanded Cinema movement from the 1960s and 1970s, which sought to return the experience of time to the viewer. The project then examines specific works by contemporary artists using the moving image to both absorb and distance viewers.

The gallery-based artworks that have been chosen for the project exhibition have evolved from an emergent and experimental process and represent a distillation of the research concerns. During the course of the project the selected works have been exhibited in various forms, including group and solo gallery exhibitions, public artworks and research symposia. Experiencing the work beyond the confines of the studio has allowed a reflexive process and facilitated dialogue, encouraging further development and refinement prior to the project exhibition.

This exegesis supports the artworks presented in the project exhibition, offering a theoretical and contextual basis from which to assess the research outcomes.

Background and Motivation

As a child I would often spend my time exploring land surrounding our property south of Hobart. I recall wandering through the bush seeking out places beyond my previous reach in an attempt to expand my knowledge of the area, and to perhaps discover some secret place: a utopian valley or some expansive view. I can also recall a tension between the *anticipation* of discovering this yet unknown goal, and an acute *awareness* of my distance from home and the time until dark. Both of these sensations highlight the effect of an external force; a distraction from my lived experience.

In his book *Ancient and Modern*,⁴ Stephen Muecke relays a section of Donald Stuart's 1962 novel *Yaralie*, a coming-of-age story of a young aboriginal girl. The passage describes Yaralie's discovery of a gold nugget, which she is led to by a procession of ants whilst wandering in country. Yaralie's discovery is accidental: a pleasant surprise made through an engagement with place, rather than one driven by intent. When she realises what she has found she is content, happy in the knowledge that it will please her mother. Rather than search for more, she returns home with great excitement:

It had been heavy that slug of gold, as she took it to her mother, holding it in her dress pulled up by its front to make a pocket, and when she had stopped in front of her mother and sat down, to roll the slug out at her feet, all the midday air, the shade, the sunshine the high clear pale sky, the silent world of flat and well and camp and waiting secret hills had suddenly become golden and hazed with the smile in her mother's eyes, and yes, her mother had said it, softly ... with warmth, 'Just walking about, you found gold. Good.'

*And her mother had hefted it in her fine slim strong hand, and had put her head on one side, and clicked her tongue, and they had both drunk from the black billycan of cold tea till it was all gone, and had walked up the slope in the heat of noon to the camp, and had sat waiting for the day to wear away.*⁵

From this passage Muecke highlights the unity between 'body and place', a hallmark of Aboriginal philosophy exemplified by the fact that the country and

⁴ Muecke, Stephen. *Ancient & Modern: Time Culture and Indigenous Philosophy*. Sydney: UNSWP, 2004.

⁵ Ibid, p 101

the mother's smile share the same golden shine. He also draws attention to the fact that 'mother and daughter persist there in that place while time disappears' observing that 'the hours do not pass, the day wears away, like the dissipation of energy from a labouring body', suggesting a unity between body and time as well.

This unison with time and place experienced by Yaralie contrasts with the recollection of my own experience. Hers was one of engagement, observing her surroundings, content to simply *be* as the day 'wears away'. Mine was one of seeking further; searching for fulfilment in an unknown future, pitted against the clock.

...

Prior to beginning this project I was working as an editor and director of documentary film and other forms of commercial media production. Over the seven years I was involved in this industry I worked on a number of significant television projects and countless smaller productions. During this process I don't ever recall *consciously* considering the temporal experience of the viewer. Instead, my primary concern was to create a compelling story that could retain their attention for twenty-six minutes.

Within this standardised and unquestioned format of the 'television half-hour', the finer temporal details of how long each shot should remain on screen were crucial. It demanded a fine balance between feeling 'cheated' – a colloquialism for a shot ending too abruptly thereby drawing attention to itself – or conversely lingering too long, creating boredom and inattention.

The mechanics of this would be initially deduced by an intuitive feel, followed by a process of continual refinement; crafting the rhythm and pace of the work, always with the aim of minimising awareness and maximising engagement.

This meant that although frames and seconds were consciously counted, trimmed, extended, and shots slowed down or sped up, it was all done within a framework of fixed duration, intended to be consumed from beginning to end.

The consideration to time then, was unconsciously one of making it *dissolve*; of invisibly and seamlessly drawing the viewer out of their world and into the illusory one that I was crafting.

Coupled with this unconscious temporal manipulation was an underlying sense of pressure to complete the work within a specific time, a factor that manifested as a *felt experience* in the form of stress and heightened attention. And although this sensation registered as one induced by a lack of time, it was not recognised as a felt experience in the present, only as a point of potential relief in the future.

So although the entire production process, the medium and consumption of the product were essentially temporal, with time playing a critical factor throughout, it was, on reflection, only ever considered as an obstacle to overcome: an external force to be manipulated and mastered to achieve the desired outcome of immersive engagement; obliterating time's existence.⁶

This comparison serves as a point of reference and communicates the underlying impetus for the project. The first reflection alludes to the condition of the modern subject as one that is essentially alienated from the time in which they exist; the second highlights how narrative forms of the moving image further distance their subject from their existence *in* time.

This project set out to explore temporal structures of the moving image beyond its narrative form, in an attempt to return to the viewer an awareness of time as present, not a constructed illusion with a focus on the future.

In Search of Presence

In existential thought the inability to feel whole, to be fulfilled as a conscious being, is known as *futurising intention*.⁷ In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre states that because we are conscious beings aware of both our past and our future we can never exist in the present, suggesting that reality, or being-for-itself, 'is what it is not and is not what it is.'⁸

This statement can be interpreted by understanding that consciousness is *essentially temporalised*, meaning that rather than existing *in* time, it exists in relation *to* time as a continual flow into the future. So while we are present as beings *in* the world, our consciousness is moving away from our past – what we are – and toward our

⁶ Gidal, Peter. *Andy Warhol: Blow Job*. London: Afterall, 2008, p 12

⁷ Cox, Gary. *Sartre: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London: Continuum International, 2006, p 37

⁸ Priest, Stephen, ed. *Jean-Paul Sartre: Basic Writings*. London: Routledge, 2001, p 107

future – what we are not. This is felt as ‘lack’; a desire for unity that can only be found in a future one cannot reach.

This innately fragmented sense of self was further alienated following a dramatic shift in experience through the inception of modernity. As the world sped up and the future came rushing toward late 19th century society, it brought with it equal measures of anxiety and optimism, marking the rise of an accelerated existence that defines contemporary experience.

In the introduction to *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*, Rebecca Solnit highlights the effect of new technologies during this period by recounting a common phrase of the day: ‘the annihilation of time and space.’⁹ This sentiment characterised the sensation induced by the introduction of infrastructure such as the railway and the telegraph, as they served to highlight the relativity of time and distance.

Although these technologies brought great economic benefits through opportunities for trade and increased productivity, Solnit describes an equally significant effect upon the individual:

*People were being drawn out of their small familiar worlds into one more free, less personal, in which associations that once attached to each person, place and object came undone. It was a leap forward of extraordinary liberation and alienation.*¹⁰

This change in experience engendered through systems of industrialised production is described by Phillip Zimbardo and John Boyd in *The Time Paradox*, who suggest that ‘time was no longer measured against the rhythms of the natural world’¹¹ but instead governed by the clock. For the worker this move from ‘event time’ to ‘clock-time’ resulted in a new relationship with time. No longer integrated into the fabric of life, work was now delineated; marked by the whistle of the factory that signalled the start and end of each shift.

9 Solnit, Rebecca. *River of Shadows: Eadweard Muybridge and the Technological Wild West*. London: Penguin, 2004, p 10

10 Ibid, p 11

11 Zimbardo, Phillip, and John Boyd. *The Time Paradox*. London: Rider, 2008, p 38

Walter Benjamin, writing in the 1930s about the effect of modernity, also observes this sense of disconnection:

*A generation that had gone to school in horse-drawn streetcars now stood under the open sky in a landscape where nothing remained unchanged but the clouds and, beneath those clouds in a force field of destructive torrents and explosions, was the tiny fragile human body.*¹²

This is an image of man no longer in unison with the world. In the pre-modern past, experience was felt as an accumulation of continuous and gradual immersion in a time governed by cycles. Here we are presented with a ‘fragile human body’ at the mercy of forces outside of nature.

This new environment, characterised by Georg Simmel in 1903 as ‘the rapid crowding of changing images, the sharp discontinuity in the grasp of the single glance, and the unexpectedness of onrushing impressions’,¹³ was seen by philosophers such as Benjamin and Martin Heidegger to effect an ‘evacuation of the present’,¹⁴ which they were impelled to locate.

In an essay titled *In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity*, Leo Charney describes this search for ‘a moment of sensuous presence’ and details the difficulty of such a task. Interpreting *Being and Time*, in which Heidegger claims that ‘nothing can occur in the moment of vision’, Charney explains that *rationally* we can only recognise a moment after the moment has occurred. But if this ‘moment of vision’ is experienced in a non-rational way, *as bodily sensation*, then the present can be understood as an ‘encounter ... in time’.¹⁵

Benjamin also recognised this and saw the potential for felt experience in his concept of *shock* that he saw as defining the discontinuity of modern life; an experience he saw replicated in the new medium of film.

¹² Benjamin, Walter, cited in: Moore, Rachel. *Hollis Frampton (Nostalgia)*. London: Afterall, 2006, p 9

¹³ Simmel, George, cited in Charney, Leo. "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity." *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Eds. Charney, Leo and Vanessa R. Schwartz. Berkeley: UCP, 1995, p 279

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p 282

The Cinema Effect

Early forms of cinema were developed in parallel to this shift in experience and came to perform a dual role in the evolution of this temporal change. On one hand this new form of entertainment offered a refuge and distraction. On the other, the cinema provided an opportunity to feel the presence of a moment in light of its evacuation by re-presenting the distraction and sensation of modern life; by framing it and bringing awareness to it.

The first moments of cinema began in 1895 with the Lumiere Brothers first public screening of *La Sortie de l'Usine Lumiere a Lyon (Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory)*,¹⁶ a 17-metre long film that equated to approximately 50 seconds.

These first simple films, known as 'actualities', were an eclectic mix of quotidian scenes, exotic locations and bizarre action. Film scholars Andre Gaudreault and Tom Gunning later termed them *The Cinema of Attractions*.¹⁷



Figure 1: Lumiere Brothers, *Workers Leaving the Lumiere Factory*, 1895, DVD still

Gunning delineates this form of cinema from its narrative future by equating it to the type of 'curiosity-arousing device'¹⁸ of the fairground. And while he clarifies

16 Muir, Gregor. "Chronochromie." *Time Zones: Recent Film and Video*. Eds. Morgan, J and G Muir. London: Tate, 2004, p 36

17 Gunning, Tom. "Now You See It, Now You Don't: The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions." *Silent Film*. Ed. Abel, Richard. London: The Athlone Press, 1996, p 72

that there are narrative elements within these simple representations of events, the key difference between early and later cinematic forms was the way in which each addressed the viewer.

Early forms of cinema spoke directly to the spectator with a primacy of presentation, and an 'immediacy of "Here it is! Look at it!"'¹⁹ The narrative structure that followed sets out with the opposite intention: to evoke viewer interest by creating what Gunning describes as an enigma that then requires a solution:

the art of narrative consists in delaying the resolution of that enigma, so that its final unfolding can be delivered as a pleasure long anticipated and well earned. Further, in classical narrative cinema this pursuit of an enigma takes place within a detailed diegesis, a fictional world of places and characters in which the action of the narrative dwells. From a spectatorial point of view, the classical diegesis depends not only on certain basic elements of coherence and stability but also on the lack of acknowledgement of the spectator.²⁰

Gunning reinforces his position by referring to film theorist Christian Metz, who claims that 'this is a world that allows itself to be seen but that also refuses to acknowledge its complicity with a spectator ... [whom] watches in secret, without the scene he watches acknowledging his presence.'²¹ This mode of viewing, where the spectator is situated outside the autonomous world that is being observed, invites one into that world, to be absorbed by the illusion.

This difference in the way in which spectators engage with these varying forms creates two types of temporal experience. While narrative generates a trajectory that builds toward an ending, *attractions* alternate between presence and absence. Gunning describes this difference, explaining that, 'Rather than a development that links the past with the present in such a way as to define a specific anticipation of the future (as an unfolding narrative does), the attraction seems limited to a sudden burst of presence.'²²

18 Ibid, p 73

19 Ibid, p 76

20 Ibid, p 74

21 Christian Metz as quoted in Ibid, p 75

22 Gunning, op. cit., p 76

Both of these forms of cinema were a continuation of the evolution of entertainment during a period in which middle-class society continually sought new novelty and distraction.²³ But non-narrative forms of cinema created awareness in the viewer; what they were watching was a continuation of the social fabric in which they existed. In *The Cinema Effect*, Sean Cubitt describes 'cinema events'²⁴ as tending toward incompleteness, whereas narrative cinema 'tends toward a gestalt'. He continues,

*The goal of narration's subject is its own completion in the contemplation of the completed narrative, a goal of closure and fixity. The cinematic event tends toward incompleteness. Its subject is constituted in the ephemeral movement from frame to frame, mobile and unfixed.*²⁵

Cubitt is suggesting that this sense of incompleteness defines pre-narrative cinema, and makes it 'profoundly human.' It does this by reflecting back our own *incompleteness* that he describes as the 'unstable lack of totality and equilibrium that makes it impossible to be at home with oneself alone, and makes us social.'

This echoes Sartre's theory of being, when he says 'before itself, behind itself: never itself.'²⁶ The self can never be present.

This suggests that the incomplete structure of the pre-narrative cinema, its lack of resolution, retains a link with the external world it is re-presenting. This allows spectators to be at once absorbed *and* distracted by the magic of its movement, while maintaining or perhaps even heightening awareness of their relationship *with* and *in* the world.

By comparison, cinema in its narrative form offers a refuge from the fragmentation and discontinuity of the external environment by offering not only (another) distraction, but also another world to enter. In the case of narrative this is a world that is whole, and in Cubitt's words 'complete', but ultimately it is a world of timeless illusion.

23 Schwartz, Vanessa R. "Cinematic Spectatorship before the Apparatus: The Public Taste for Reality in Fin-De-Siècle Paris." *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Eds. Charney, Leo and Vanessa R. Schwartz. Berkeley: UCP, 1995, p 297

24 The 'cinematic event' is Cubitt's term for pre-narrative cinema.

25 Cubitt, Sean. *The Cinema Effect*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005, p 40

26 Charney, Leo. "In a Moment: Film and the Philosophy of Modernity." *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*. Eds. Charney, Leo and Vanessa R. Schwartz. Berkeley: UCP, 1995, p 292

An Absurd Existence

Albert Camus' essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* also deals with this notion of existence as incomplete, and like pre-narrative cinema, embraces a lack of resolution through immersion in its own existence. Camus summarises existence as 'a divorce between the mind that desires and the world that disappoints,'²⁷ describing an awareness of this as 'absurd.' He argues that acceptance of this 'absurd existence' is the key to fulfilment.

As a framework for his argument Camus uses the metaphor of the Greek mythological figure, Sisyphus, condemned by the gods to the meaningless task of eternally pushing a boulder up a mountain, only for it to roll back down before repeating. Camus relates this Sisyphean task to the absurd repetition of existence: to the daily tasks of a life without meaning. But rather than face defeat by succumbing to nihilism or suicide, he suggests an *acceptance* of our fate; for it is only in the knowledge that the desire for fulfilment is futile, that we are able to find fulfilment.

In concluding his essay, Camus imagines Sisyphus walking back down the mountain to repeat his labour, and in this image envisages a man filled with silent joy. Here in this moment of respite he has accepted his fate. Rather than look toward his hollow goal, he embraces *this* moment, and accepts it.

And through this acceptance he feels whole.

The themes presented in the first part of this introduction offer an entry-point by expanding upon the basic drive behind the project. Through these ideas the relationship between a desire to break from the restrictions of narrative forms of moving image, and the human desire for unity are brought together, revealing a common thread that binds and guides the research.

This has manifested throughout the development of the body of work that forms this submission, with Camus' notion of the 'absurd' revealed through the subversion of narrative's demand for resolution.

27 Camus, Albert. *The Myth of Sisyphus*. London: Penguin, 2000, p xii

Through strategies of duration and seamless repetition, anticipation and expectation are replaced by endlessness and futility. But just as Camus' hero overcomes the horror of his existence, so too can the endlessness of the work be defeated. Not through suicide²⁸ (or in this case the much less destructive option of moving on to the next work in the gallery), but through acceptance.

By accepting an absurd existence the weight of anticipation is lifted and possibilities are opened up beyond the inevitable, creating a space to *be*.

This can be seen in the pre-narrative forms of cinema, unencumbered by the expectation of narrative. Without the weight of expectation, the spectator is free to engage with the 'event' as it unfolds, drawing focus onto the here-and-now. Narrative denies the here-and-now, replacing it with its own temporality and drawing viewers into an alternate, illusory reality; thus returning focus to Sisyphus' rock, waiting expectantly at the bottom of the mountain.

Toward the Real

As technology improved, cinema began its trajectory toward a narrative medium. In 1929 the sound film was developed, sealing cinema's fate as essentially a story-telling device. The distraction that the passive and easily consumed product cinema now offered meant it quickly developed a mass-audience. Described by Christian Metz as the 'super-genre' of the 20th century, narrative cinema became a dominant cultural force.

Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer, both ardent critics of mass-culture, highlight the shift from early cinema to its narrative form describing its effect upon the spectator. According to Adorno, what was once an actual extension of reality was now manipulated, blurring the distinction between illusion and reality:

Real life is becoming indistinguishable from the movies. The sound film, far surpassing the theatre of illusion, leaves no room for imagination or reflection on the part of the audience, who is unable to respond within the structure of the film, yet deviate from its precise detail without losing the thread of the story; hence the film forces its victims to equate it directly with reality.²⁹

²⁸ Camus thesis is that suicide is an admittance that a meaningless life is not worth living.

²⁹ Adorno, Theodore W., and Max Horkheimer. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Trans. Cumming, John. London: Verso, 1979, p 126

The avant-garde film artists of the 1960s were impelled to address this passive relationship between the film and the audience, regarding the ideology being presented as reality as oppressive. Malcolm Le Grice, a key figure in the British collective of film-artists³⁰ responding to the dominance of narrative cinema, summarises their concerns. Echoing Adorno's observations, Le Grice cites the mainstream film as presenting an idealised and highly constructed illusion that is indistinguishable from reality:

*I have given a great deal of thought to the kind of condition, role and behaviour which is available to the audience, to the credibility of what is presented as some form of, or relation to reality. I have considered the situation of the audience politically and ethically, and have reacted strongly against the passive subjectivity to a pre-structured substitute and illusory reality, which is the normal situation for the audience of the commercial film.*³¹

Chapter Two: Context for the Project begins by examining in detail the field of Expanded Cinema that developed in the 1960s as artists and filmmakers responded to these concerns.

This exploration analyses their rejection of narrative forms of cinema and provides an understanding of the effect of these alternate temporal structures upon the spectator. The chapter then examines specific works by contemporary artists that have continued to explore the relationship between the moving image and the experience of the viewer.

This leads into *Chapter Three: Development of the Project*, which describes the development of my own work. This chapter tracks the evolution of the project concerns, which through their exploration of temporal experience via the moving image seeks to direct attention toward this tension.

Chapter Four: Conclusion, discusses the outcomes of the project, and looks at the contribution it has made to the field.

³⁰ The British artists working with these concerns were termed Structuralists or Materialists based on their reflexive strategies using the medium as content, rejecting all forms of representation and illusion.

³¹ Le Grice, Malcolm. "Real Time/Space." *Art and Artists* 1972, p 39-43

CHAPTER TWO: Context for the Project

Introduction

This chapter begins by examining the development of what became known collectively as Expanded Cinema, a movement in the 1960s that saw the work of a collection of film-artists enter into the critical discourse of contemporary art. Through a broad examination of a complex history, the chapter provides an historical context for the project that offers an understanding of the motivations of these artists to explore alternative modes of production and consumption of the moving image.

Through this examination the chapter describes the trajectory of moving image practice as it responded to the dominant narrative form that had evolved. This saw a shift from an emphasis on the *representation of* time and space to *experience in* time and space, and from a *transparency* of process to a *foregrounding* of process.

I then look to a number of contemporary artists that have built upon this legacy, and describe a number of specific works that also seek to foreground the spectator's experience of time.

The chapter concludes with an examination of Michael Fried's revised theory of absorption and theatricality, in which he identifies certain examples of video art that have a capacity to be absorptive; a claim he had previously refuted, suggesting that video art creates a condition of self-awareness in the spectator. Responding to this, Ken Wilder furthers Fried's renewed position, by suggesting that there exists a tension between these alternate conditions of spectatorship: a fluctuation *between* absorption and awareness.

An Expanded Cinema

The collection of artists and filmmakers who began working under the banner of Expanded Cinema in the 1960s were certainly not the first to experiment with the film medium beyond the narrative form. Nor was the experimental urge to push up against the dominant reality offered by cinema isolated to those working with anti-narrative concerns. But in the context of this project, it is the film-artists responding directly to the narrative structures of mainstream cinema that not only inform this inquiry, but pioneer the development of gallery-based film and video.

Prior to the highjacking of cinema by narrative structures, early filmmaking was essentially an exercise in recording subject matter; thrilling audiences with simple representations of everyday life.³² It wasn't until filmmakers began to understand the cinematic potential of the new technology, through various techniques such as editing, framing, lighting and narrative, that the illusion of cinema was complete.

As with any mainstream activity there is always a cultural fringe and this was certainly true of cinema, with the pioneering spirit of early cinema remaining amongst filmmakers working both within and outside of a narrative approach. This desire for innovation amongst the mainstream and the avant-garde is cause for confusion surrounding the notion of what actually defines the avant-garde in a cinematic context. A.L. Rees, in *A History of Experimental Film and Video* attempts to unravel these complexities and delineates the two by defining it as such:

*The avant-garde rejects and critiques both the mainstream entertainment cinema and the audience responses which flow from it. It has sought ways of seeing outside the conventions of cinema's dominant tradition in the drama film and its industrial mode of production.*³³

Within this broad definition are a number of key movements and figures active in their rejection of the mainstream. The surrealist and abstract films of the 1920s are well documented and demonstrate the first example of the use of film by artists. These include Man Ray, Dali, Brunel and Maya Deren, whose dream-like film *Meshes of the Afternoon* breaks temporal and spatial conventions to portray an

³² Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film as Art*. Berkeley: UCP, 1957, p 35

³³ Rees, A.L. *A History of Experimental Film and Video*. London: BFI, 1999, p 1

interior psychological state. The films of these artists are well known, and have influenced the development of avant-garde film through their inclusion in art schools and film studies programs.



Figure 2: Maya Deren, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943, film still

It wasn't until the heightened political climate of the 1960s that film artists working outside the mainstream began to develop enough critical traction to be considered as a discrete avant-garde movement.

Expanded Cinema,³⁴ a manifesto-like book written by Gene Youngblood in 1970, aimed to provide an overview of what was a critical approach amongst the variety of practices that went beyond merely challenging the traditional conventions of cinema with new ways of seeing; instead concerned with the temporal, spatial and social experience of the viewer:

*Expanded cinema isn't a movie at all: like life it's a process of becoming, man's ongoing historical drive to manifest his consciousness outside of his mind, in front of his eyes. One no longer can specialise in a single discipline and hope truthfully to express a clear picture of its relationships in the environment. This is especially true in the case of the intermedia network of cinema and television, which now functions as nothing less than the nervous system of mankind.*³⁵

Youngblood seems to suggest that the concerns of these film artists were no longer forged by a desire to simply find alternate methods of expression outside of the structures of commercial film.

³⁴ Youngblood, Gene. *Expanded Cinema*. New York: Dutton, 1970

³⁵ *Ibid*, p 41

Instead this iteration of the avant-garde saw the possibility of the moving image as a radical means of generating a political and ideological shift. Narrative cinema was viewed as reinforcing the oppressive and passive nature of consumption.

Anti-Illusion

Peter Gidal,³⁶ one of the key British artists working and writing on experimental film in London at this time, published an edited volume of essays titled *Structural Film Anthology*. Similar to Youngblood's survey of the American avant-garde in *Expanded Cinema*, Gidal attempts to describe the concerns of the British filmmakers in an equally visionary introduction to the book, in which he defines Structural film as 'anti-illusionist'.³⁷

This is a key premise for the film artists working at this time and is at the heart of their attack of narrative cinema. They saw through the illusion of seamless reality; a reality that was in fact the product of a series of recorded, fragmented moments, combined through a fragmented process, and governed by a very specific set of rules. By deliberately masking this process the producers of mainstream cinema were creating an illusory environment that allowed their audiences to identify with whatever dominant ideology was presented. Introducing the book, Gidal writes:

*In dominant cinema, a film sets up characters... and through identification and various reversals, climaxes, complications (usually in the same order) one aligns oneself unconsciously with one or more characters. These internal connections between viewer and viewed are based on systems of identification which demand primarily a passive audience, a passive viewer, one who is involved in the meaning that word has taken on within film-journalese, i.e. to be not involved, to get swept along through persuasive emotive devices employed by the film director. This system of cinematic functioning categorically rules out any dialectic.*³⁸

Gidal's view (shared by other film artists writing critically about these films) was that an active and analytical engagement with film – one where the materiality of

36 Peter Gidal was the voice of the British film avant-garde at the same time as Youngblood was writing in America. Gidal named the British collection of artists the Structural/Materialists, thus expanding on P.Adams Sitney's categorisation as Structural Film. Because of these variations in names across continents, Expanded Cinema is considered the catchall term.

37 Gidal, Peter. "Theory and Definition of Structural/Materialist Film." *Structural Film Anthology*. Ed. Gidal, Peter. London: BFI, 1978, p.1

38 Ibid, p 3

the film *itself* was foregrounded – would enable within the viewer a spatial and temporal *awareness*. This awareness could then occur through the *experience* of viewing, rather than entering into an illusory reality where *lived* experience is exchanged for identification with the author's point of view. Gidal saw this identification with the illusory ideology of the film as oppressive:

Narrative is an illusionistic procedure, manipulatory, mystificatory, repressive. The repression is that of space, the distance between the viewer and the object, a repression of real space in favour of the illusionist space... The repression is also that of time. The implied lengths of time suffer compressions formed by certain technical devices, which operate in a codified manner, under specific laws, to repress (material) film time.³⁹

Malcolm Le Grice was also active as both a writer and artist amongst the Structuralists during this period in London, and like Gidal his work was also strongly opposed to narrative cinema, particularly in relation to Gidal's view of film's relationship with time. In a recent essay Le Grice asks 'If there are ways of understanding our experience that are not confined to the processes and forms of narrative. Can we define time structures for cinema and particularly expanded cinema that go beyond narrative?'⁴⁰ The issue of one's temporal experience in relation to cinema (and particularly celluloid film) is at the core of the concerns of the Structuralists and this is based on the simple premise of the illusion of time inherent in narrative cinema.

Duration

For a narrative film to work – meaning that the audience becomes involved in the story by identifying with the characters and following the action through to its logical conclusion – time has to be compressed so that the action can flow in a logical sequence. This creates a sense within the viewer of being present *in the diegetic world of the film* – unaware of their lived experience. If the viewer were to become aware of the discontinuity of the production process i.e. the temporal and spatial distance between shots, then the narrative illusion would be broken.

³⁹ Gidal, Peter. Op. Cit., p 4

⁴⁰ Le Grice, Malcolm "Time and the Spectator in the Experience of Expanded Cinema." *Expanded Cinema: Art, Performance, Film*. Eds. Curtis, David, et al. London: Tate, 2011, p 160

By foregrounding the process of production, and by denying identification with representation, the structural materialists sought to increase the level of awareness within the viewer. Malcolm Le Grice explains the importance of this concept:

Crucial to the understanding of time in expanded cinema is the notion of 'duration', a term that implies a subjective awareness of time's passage, a continuity of attention that 'belongs' to the spectator - the experience of time's passage within a condition of actual, not illusory presence.⁴¹

So where narrative cinema constructs an illusory world that leads the viewer through a preconceived, highly compressed structure of cause and effect to an inevitable conclusion, structural film allowed this construction to occur within the viewer's lived experience. Through this process of exchange between the viewer and producer we can see a shift from the passive nature of mainstream cinema to the dialectic and self-reflexive⁴² experience of structural film.

Of course time and space are intrinsically linked, so the strategies devised to foreground temporal awareness, such as duration and repetition also incorporated a spatial element. In Expanded Cinema this was often achieved through multi-screen installations that offered the viewer a choice of focus and therefore of structure. Through the strategy of installation the choice of where to be in the space creates an awareness of the space. This is in contrast to the traditional cinema environment that places the viewer in a fixed relationship with the screen. This disconnects them further from their surroundings and invites greater immersion into the diegetic world of the film:

Reconfiguring the cinema space simultaneously breaks the singularity of the experience - but more particularly breaks any assumption that there is a singular (authorised) interpretation based on matching spectator experience to artistic intention.⁴³

This notion of denying any authorial control over the viewing experience returns us to the drive behind the revision of temporal and spatial structures by the film artists

⁴¹ Le Grice, Malcolm. Op. Cit., p 169

⁴² Gidal, Peter. Op. Cit., p 10

⁴³ Le Grice, Malcolm. Op. Cit., p 169

as being essentially a political one. At a time when mass media was disseminating information through television at levels previously unprecedented, and the issues surrounding global digital networks were being raised by Marshall McLuhan, these artists sought ways of using screen-based media that denied the use of narrative and representation to reinforce dominant ideologies. Instead they developed strategies that returned the power to the viewer, allowing them to experience *reality as duration*. This created a space for awareness and for the development of unique concepts outside of those derived from mainstream representation.

A Legacy

Nicky Hamlyn, in discussing the lack of importance placed on the effects of ideologies posited through the media, by ‘a younger generation of so called gallery artists’⁴⁴ summarises the intent of Gidal’s work, and essentially that of Expanded Cinema in general:

*In the work of Peter Gidal, representation, explicitly theorised as a political process, is withheld on the grounds that it is necessarily conservative, since it reproduces what is already there and hence is complicit in the maintenance of an ideological status quo. The political effect in these films comes through the stimulation in the viewer of self-conscious sensations of boredom, frustration, engagement. This subject may be surprised by him/herself, and put into a position of not-knowing. This is in contrast to, for example, suspense films, where ‘surprises’ are expected and anticipated – unsurprising.*⁴⁵

Concerns relating to the dissemination of dominant ideologies through mainstream forms of media amongst those working under the banner of Expanded Cinema are not, as Hamlyn suggests, consciously shared amongst contemporary artists working with the moving image. Yet concerns around temporal and spatial structure are still at the forefront for many of these artists. In fact Hamlyn concludes his book by acknowledging that there is a continuing tradition of filmmakers and artists responding to the need for alternate forms of moving image, stating that:

⁴⁴ Hamlyn, Nicky. *Film Art Phenomena*. London: BFI, 2003, p 183

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p 185

*their work stands against both the dominant media and the trivialising convergence of MTV, fashion, art and media that is evidenced in the work of artists like Mariko Mori, Wolfgang Tillmans and others, and whose ideology is disseminated in magazines like Res, Wallpaper and Dazed and Confused.*⁴⁶

Although the practices of the earlier film-artists were developed during a time of significant political and technological change that almost demanded an alternative to the mainstream, Hamlyn suggests that there is still a responsibility amongst contemporary artists working with the moving image outside of mainstream channels to uphold the basic tenet of this legacy; to offer the viewer of the work an experience of which he/she is the author and where he/she becomes simultaneously activated and engaged.

Here and There

Of course the ground has shifted significantly since the height of Expanded Cinema in the 1970s when these artists paved the way for the gallery based moving image works that now form a major part of contemporary museum and gallery collections and exhibitions. The work of the Expanded Cinema artists was shown outside the fine art gallery in specific spaces dedicated to experimental forms, where the emphasis was placed on the materiality of the film and its spatial and temporal structures and effects. Works that used multiple screens had an important spatial aspect in terms of the mobility of the viewer, heightening awareness of their presence in relation to the work, but the actual space the work inhabited was usually not considered.

The gradual acceptance and move of these works into the gallery, where the screens and monitors were likened to the fine art objects in minimalist work of the same period, now offered a new reading of these works; one in which the space and the work operated in tandem, blurring the line between the virtual and the actual. Kate Mondloch describes the effect of this experience as one that can 'productively destabilise our conventional relationships to screen spaces'.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Ibid, p 186

⁴⁷ Mondloch, Kate. *Screen: Viewing Media Installation Art*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis, 2010, p 75

In Mondloch's examination of screen based work in a fine art gallery context she proposes a kind of doubling effect where the virtual space of the work and the actual space that the work inhabits, coupled with the materiality of the screen (as object) and the immateriality of the work, create a 'disorientating' viewing experience:

*By foregrounding an active relationship between the spectator, media objects, exhibition space, and screen spaces, these media art installations generate a self-conscious and troubled spectatorship explicitly contingent upon the articulated tension between actual and virtual times and spaces. We are simultaneously both here and there, both now and then.*⁴⁸

To draw these conclusions Mondloch has focused on specific works by two artists working in the field of Expanded Cinema in the 1960s and 70s: *Ping Pong* (1968), by Valie Export and *Interface* (1972) by Peter Campus. Both of these works support Mondloch's observation that certain gallery-based media art can simultaneously fulfil *and* contradict the aims of Expanded Cinema by creating both a self-reflexive viewing experience that locates the spectator in the 'here and now' but that also asks them 'to engage with virtual screen space'.⁴⁹

Selected Works

The following works have been chosen from a selection of artists and filmmakers who demonstrate a concern with the viewer's experience of time. The diversity of these works reflects the breadth of experimentation that I undertook in the development of my own work. And while the works by these and other artists often became apparent once I had 'developed' a well-established strategy, the engagement that emerged allowed a greater understanding of the field I was now immersed in. This folded back into my work, merging narrative and non-narrative influences into my practice.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p 75/76

⁴⁹ Ibid, p 75

Chelsea Girls (1966): Andy Warhol

An early example of fusion (or confusion), between the typically illusionistic world of mainstream cinema and the actual lived experience of the spectator can be further explored through Andy Warhol's film *Chelsea Girls* (1966). Unlike Warhol's earlier films, such as *Sleep* (1963), *Empire* (1964) and *Blow Job* (1964) that challenged their audience through extreme duration and a distinct lack of action, *Chelsea Girls* contains a mix of experimental and mainstream characteristics. This resulted in favourable reviews from sections of the mainstream media that lead to Warhol's first commercial film release in 1967. Placing it in this cinematic context allows an examination of the potential for perceptual shifts in the viewing experience.



Figure 3: Andy Warhol, *Chelsea Girls*, 1966, film still from DVD

The film's content is loaded with cultural references, and offers a voyeuristic snapshot into the lives of some of Warhol's most famous associates. This 'insider' view of the seedy underground of the New York scene in the 1960s was largely responsible for the film's popular appeal; yet it is the experimental and formal aspects of the work that are of most interest to the context of this project.

The basic premise of the film, which is known as a Warhol work but was in fact co-directed by Paul Morrissey,⁵⁰ was to film a number of Warhol's Factory 'collaborators' going about their lives in various rooms of the Chelsea Hotel, New York.

50 Garry Morris, writing in *Bright Lights Film Journal* suggests that Morrissey was responsible for Warhol's 'great film achievements', producing, writing, directing 'while Warhol contributed no more than his name above the title.' Morris, Garry. "Slapstick Realist - the Cinema of Paul Morrissey". 1996. *Bright Lights Film Journal*. 28/11 2012. <http://brightlightsfilm.com/17/03_morrissey.php>.

This resulted in twelve 35-minute 16mm films, using black & white and colour film stock. Each film was shot in a single take using a mostly fixed frame, with occasional zooms and other minimal camera movement. Natural sound was also recorded onto the film.



Figure 4: Andy Warhol, *Chelsea Girls*, 1966, production still

Like his previous films, Warhol allows the action to unfold in front of the camera without an authorial intervention. But in *Chelsea Girls* the scenario is constructed in such a way as to invite potential drama through both the nature of the characters and their interactions with each other. So while the methodology of the film is still located within his oeuvre of previous film work, it is the 'installation' or the final presentation of the work that defines the film's place in moving image history.

Because the final version of the twelve 35-minute reels ran to over six hours, it is purported that Warhol and Morrissey decided to create a more easily consumable work by pairing the reels together and running only one of the soundtracks. Making this decision meant that the filmmakers relinquished control over the specific pairings of the reels, leaving the projectionist to decide both the visual and aural combinations at the time of showing the film. What was now effectively a two-channel work also referenced the widescreen format of mainstream cinema, rather than the typically square format of 16mm experimental works, further blurring the distinction between a mainstream and experimental experience.



Figure 5: Original promotional advertisement for *Chelsea Girls*, Cinema Theatre CA.

The effect of this on the ‘mainstream’ audience – who presumably came to watch the likely explicit nature of the content – would have been profound and confusing as they were forced to make sense of the film’s random juxtapositions. Not only were they invited to create meaning from these pairings where no meaning was intended, it was also necessary to piece this together with only one of the films audible. This required the audience to in effect edit their own film as it unfolded, bringing to it their own meaning and subjectivity.

This is in stark contrast with traditional narrative works, which maintain a fixity and closure in terms of both structure and resolution. *Chelsea Girls* denies this resolution and is open to both interpretation and outcome. This *active* viewing experience again serves to create in the viewer a continual fluctuation between a passive immersion in the unfolding drama and a heightened awareness as they construct their own film.

24hr Psycho (1993): Douglas Gordon

Building on Warhol's legacy of challenging normative modes of cinematic spectatorship is Scottish artist Douglas Gordon. And while Gordon's interdisciplinary practice spans text, painting and sculpture, he is widely regarded as a contemporary video artist. This is due, in part, to his rise to art fame after first showing his work *24hr Psycho* at Tramways in Glasgow in 1993. The work then went on to win the Turner prize in 1996.

Much has been written about *24hr Psycho*, still seen as Douglas' seminal piece, which has the simple premise of slowing down Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece *Psycho* (1960), from its original 109 minutes to an effectively unwatchable 24 hours. This equates to approximately 1 frame every 2 seconds, as opposed to standard film speed of 24 frames per second.



Figure 6: Douglas Gordon, *24hr Psycho*, 1993, installation view

In a number of interviews with the artist, Gordon candidly explains that the work emerged through a late night solo viewing of Hitchcock's film on a VCR where he began to play around with the slow-motion feature on the remote control, the result

of which he found 'interesting'.⁵¹ Regardless of how the work came to be, it has acquired a great deal of interest and critical writing that essentially locates it within the anti-narrative category of work described above.

Because of the work's extreme duration, the narrative element of the work is stripped away, thereby shifting the focus onto the structural elements of the film. As Douglas himself explains:

*While the viewer remembers the original film, he is drawn into the past, but on the other hand also into the future, for he becomes aware that the story, which he already knows, never appears fast enough. In between, there exists a slowly changing present.*⁵²

This slowly unfolding present allows the viewer of *24hr Psycho* to become immersed in each moment, but unlike the immersion that might occur as we are swept up in the narrative of the original film, here we also experience the *actual* passage of time and not the illusory present of the narrative.



Figure 7: Alfred Hitchcock, *Psycho*, 1960, film still

⁵¹ Brown, Katrina M. *Douglas Gordon*. London: Tate, 2004, p 24

⁵² *Ibid*, p 26

Following this first video work Gordon went on to create other works using strategies of what Nicolas Bourriaud came to term *postproduction*:⁵³ pre-existing cultural material that has been re-purposed to create new meaning and new cultural forms. And although *24hr Psycho* was created prior to the implementation of the World Wide Web that Bourriaud suggests is the catalyst for postproduction as a form of art production, Jorg Heiser points out that it is the domestic technology of the VHS video player that facilitates the work's existence and makes it conceptually relevant.⁵⁴

By foregrounding the fragmentation of the film made possible by available technology, *24hr Psycho* re-activates the hypnotic and absorptive quality of the original film, as experienced in its original cinema setting. Simultaneously, the work highlights the shift in the consumption of media through these available technologies by using a feature of this domestic machine that was once only available to industry specialists.



Figure 8: Douglas Gordon, *24hr Psycho*, 1993, installation view

This sets up an ambiguous mode of spectatorship, blurring the divide between an absorptive, cinematic experience, and a fragmented and self-aware relationship with the work. What was traditionally *transparent* to an audience viewing a film in a theatre (the 'cinematic apparatus', such as the screen, the space and the audience,

⁵³ Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Postproduction*. New York: Lukas & Sternberg, 2002.

⁵⁴ Heiser, Jorg. *All of a Sudden: Things That Matter in Contemporary Art*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008, p 194

as well as the acting, editing and camera movement) is now exposed by the gallery that the work is situated within: by the screen that the work is shown on and by the extreme slow-motion of the film itself. This mode of viewing is also representative of a domestic viewing of film, where interruptions and awareness of the conditions of spectatorship also form part of the viewing experience.

By creating a situation in which the audience is now able to analyse each frame as they move through and around the space, Gordon has opened up the inner-workings of the film, drawing attention to the illusion by denying us the action of the narrative.



Figure 9: Douglas Gordon, *24hr psycho back and forth and to and fro*, 2008

In 2008, Gordon developed a new iteration of the original work, pairing together two versions of the 24-hour film: one playing forward and one in reverse. There is little critical writing centred around this new version, titled *24hr psycho back and forth to and fro* but from viewer reports the juxtaposition between the disparate scenes is compelling. It functions, I imagine, in a similar way to Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*, with the to-and-froing between images creating new meaning and visual relationships. In the context of this project, the heightened anticipation in conjunction with the extended duration would result in a temporal dialectic.

Merce Cunningham Performs Stillness (2007): Tacita Dean



Figure 10: Tacita Dean, *Merce Cunningham Performs Stillness*, 2007, film still

These fluctuations, between self-awareness and absorption in the kind of timeless present of the gallery, are also evoked through the work of British artist Tacita Dean. Like Gordon, Dean works across disciplines: drawing, painting and film. But in contrast to Gordon, whose process of *postproduction* requires he work with digital reproductions of the celluloid originals he manipulates, Dean's work is exclusively shot on 16mm film, preferring the 'softness' and analogue materiality of celluloid to the hard precision of digital:

... for me, it just does not have the means to create poetry; it neither breathes nor wobbles, but tidies up our society, correcting it and then leaves no trace. I wonder if this is because it is not born of the physical world, but is impenetrable and intangible.⁵⁵

Dean's sense of the analogue nature of film as one of 'proportion and likeness' gives an insight into Dean's films as meditations on the world: a transmission of stillness; an analogue of time itself. Yet the immersive quality of many of these works is both enhanced and disrupted by the presence of the film projector that inhabits the space alongside the screen-based image.

⁵⁵ Dean, Tacita. *Tacita Dean*. Ed. ACCA. Melbourne: ACCA, 2009, p 70

This is particularly evident in her work *Merce Cunningham Performs Stillness (in three movements) to John Cage's composition 4'33" with Trevor Carlson, New York City, 28 April 2007 (Six Performances, Six Films)*.

I experienced this work in a major survey of Dean's work at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), in 2009, which for me at this time was the standout of the show; although it wasn't until I began to understand this project more fully that I understood its relevance and appeal.



Figure 11: Tacita Dean, *Merce Cunningham Performs Stillness*, 2007, installation view

The catalogue⁵⁶ describes the work being realised as the result of a request from Dean to Merce Cunningham⁵⁷ to improvise a performance to John Cage's seminal work, *4'33"* (1952) – a composition constructed in three parts, constituting a total of four minutes and thirty-three seconds of silence. This work by Cage is itself contextually relevant to this project, in the sense that it invites an audience to become both immersed and aware of their *presentness* in an environment as they engage in an atmosphere heightened by a constructed silence. Dean's work encapsulates this original intent through the medium of film, re-presenting and extending Cage's piece formally in a gallery context, making it a more relevant work to describe.

⁵⁶ Ibid, p 18

⁵⁷ Merce Cunningham is an avant-garde choreographer and dancer who was in a relationship with composer and artist John Cage, until Cage's death in 1992.

The work is, as alluded to in the title, six films, but what the title doesn't convey is that the six films are presented simultaneously in the gallery space, with each projected life-size onto free-standing screens.

The six performances that are described in the title relate to the six takes of Cunningham responding to the silent composition, with each take eventually resolved as a film. During each 'performance' we are witness to Cunningham sitting on a chair in a mirrored dance studio. In the space is another 'performer', Trevor Carlson,⁵⁸ who is present in all of the films, but only visible in some of them.

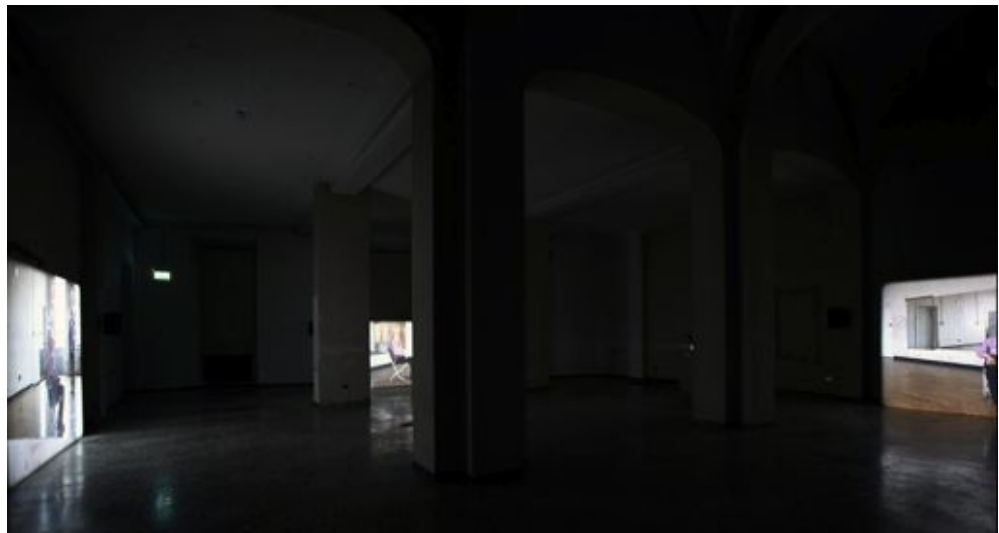


Figure 12: Tacita Dean, *Merce Cunningham Performs Stillness*, 2007, installation view

Dean's direction to Cunningham was simply to respond to Cage's silent piece. Carlson's role was to silently indicate to Cunningham the moment that each of the three parts of the composition begins, by counting down on his fingers. This is visible in one of the films. At these points of transition, Cunningham re-adjusts his position in his seat, shifting from one static pose to another as he immerses himself in the stillness of the moment. This is repeated six times from six different camera positions. After the performance Cunningham titled the work *Stillness*.

When I experienced the work at ACCA I was unaware of any of this background information. I don't even recall reading the title of the work prior to entering the space, and as such I had no idea who the performer was, or that they were 'performing' to a silent composition. Irrespective of my ignorance to these details, I was fascinated by the work. This response was primarily due to the formal

⁵⁸ Trevor Carlson is the Executive Director of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MDC) in New York, which is where these films were shot.

elements of the work. The large dark space filled with freestanding and floating screens, flickering light and whirring projectors, was instantly engaging due to the materiality of these formal elements.

The image also was compelling in terms of its filmic quality; the soft edges of the frame, the grainy, flickering picture, and the striking and luminous image of the noble figure of Cunningham, emerging from the darkness. Despite the seduction of the image I wasn't held by any one of the six separate films for any length of time. Instead I found myself continually exploring the space, trying to understand the relationship between camera and subject, viewer and screen. Where was the point where my position in the space aligned with the camera's position? Was the position of each screen representative of the camera/subject relationship? I also spent time with the projectors themselves, fascinated by a technology that I understood very little about.



Figure 13: Tacita Dean, *Merce Cunningham Performs Stillness*, 2007, installation view

So rather than being immersed in the stillness and silence of the performance, I found myself distracted by what I came to understand later as the 'apparatus' of the film; and by the space itself as I explored the work. By acknowledging this awareness as my experience, the original intent of Cage's composition is actualised. Here, the silence and stillness generated by his and Dean's framework result in a heightened sense of real time and real space, in contrast to the illusory time and space of the film itself. This is akin to the sentiment expressed by Cage in his 1957 lecture 'Experimental Music', where he suggested that the experience of exploration or 'play' is 'simply a way of waking up to the very life we are living.'⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Cage, John. "Experimental Music." Music Teachers National Association. 1957, p 5

Bordeaux Piece (2004): David Claerbout

The tension that exists between the formal and material aspects of Dean's work, and the immersive stasis of her imagery, between the illusory and the real, is also generated in the work of Belgian artist David Claerbout. Claerbout's video installation practice is also concerned with temporal experience, creating work that exists somewhere between photography and film. Using strategies of repetition and duration, fusing stasis with motion, Claerbout creates work that acknowledges time by subtly manipulating the relationship between the spectator and the work, subverting their habitual perceptions of viewing both moving and still imagery.

Yet it is only through spending time with, or perhaps returning to the work, that viewers are able to observe the background events and processes that Claerbout is interested in: shifting perception from what he describes as the foreground, or narrative element of the work, to experience the reality that lies beyond the illusion. In an interview with Christine Van Assche, curator of a major survey of his work at the Pompidou Centre (2007), he confirms his understanding of the habitual spectatorial conditioning of audiences of the moving image:

The scenography of the exhibition at the Pompidou Centre as it has been conceived with its transparent screens and its projections of varied dimensions, authorises the spectator to stroll through the space without ever being obliged to sit in order to grasp something.

The first view of the exhibition embraces the ensemble of the five installations without having anything specific to see, except formal resemblances between the works. Only after 15 minutes can something be triggered. But probably 95% of spectators will miss the meaning of the works.⁶⁰

These comments seem to reaffirm his desire to create works that challenge modes of viewing that simply offer a passive distraction from reality, instead focusing attention and awareness on the discomfort and inattention often induced by the experience of lived time. *Bordeaux Piece* (2004), beautifully illuminates the temporal ambiguities at play in Claerbout's work, and by implementing strategies of *foreground* and *background*, offers the viewer an opportunity to shift the focus of their attention.

60 Van Assche, Christine. "Interview." *David Claerbout the Shape of Time*. Ed. Van Assche, Christine. Zurich: JPR Ringier, 2008, p 10

The work is presented as a short (10-minute) film with a stereotypically B-grade script centred on an affair between a father and his son's girlfriend. For Claerbout, the script (which he wrote) was simply a framework that would allow him to explore these concepts of *foreground* and *background* – terms that are seemingly interchangeable with this project's concern with *absorption* and *awareness*.

For Claerbout, the foreground is the actors and their narrative trajectory; the elements of the film that an audience instantly identifies with, absorbing their attention and dissolving awareness of real-time. The background, on the other hand is the expanded environment within which the 'action' of the foreground occurs.



Figure 14: David Claerbout, *Bordeaux Piece*, 2004, film still

Claerbout has devised *Bordeaux Piece* to very gradually and subtly *shift* the emphasis from foreground to background – from a focus on the narrative, to a focus on the time frame within which the narrative takes place. To achieve this outcome the basic premise behind the work is to repeat the film (which despite its narrative form has no satisfactory resolution) at 10-minute intervals throughout an entire day. To do this involved an extremely precise and exhausting production process, in which 70 versions of the 10-minute film were produced, each consisting of 8 shots, or scenes.

Claerbout's intention was based on two key factors. The first was that as the actors progressed from dawn at 5:30am through until sunset at 10pm, they would tire. This would lead to deterioration in their performance, which would in turn become less compelling. The second factor, which is dependent on the first, is that as the narrative deteriorated, the location and the environment – in particular the shift in light as the sun moved across the sky⁶¹ – would become *foregrounded*.

⁶¹ The location – a Rem Koolhaas designed residence – was specifically chosen for its emphasis on capturing the shifting light throughout the day.

The resulting work is a single channel projection, with each version of the 70 films performed in slightly different atmospheric conditions. The final work has a total duration of 13 hours and 43 minutes. Of course this is effectively unwatchable in its entirety, and according to the artist most viewers leave after seeing the 10-minute script begin to repeat, believing it is simply a loop of the same film. It is only when people return hours later that they understand the importance of the structure, the location and the emphasis of the work.

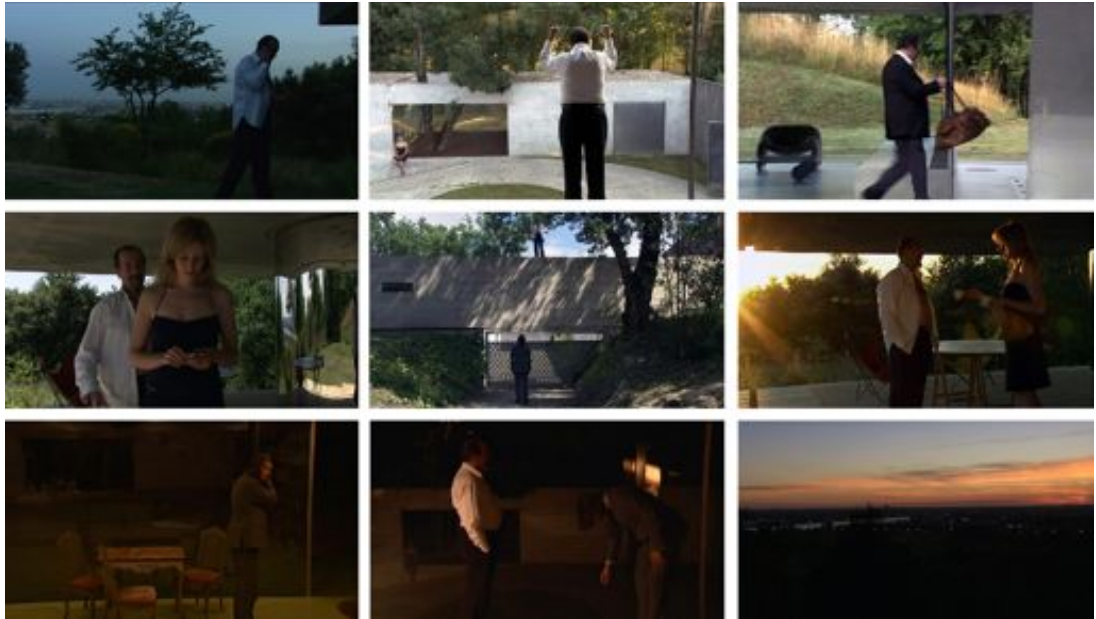


Figure 15: David Claerbout, *Bordeaux Piece*, 2004

Claerbout is resolute about the fact that many viewers of this work will leave not knowing what they just saw. In a 2008 video interview he acknowledges that ‘the spectator [of his work] is ... inclined to walk away, uninterested’⁶², but he continues by saying that being uninterested is something that he looks for. This seems to suggest that the failure of the work to absorb the viewer is in fact his desired response, with the work activating a felt experience in the viewer.

Of course on the other hand, spending time with Claerbout’s work will eventually reward a patient viewer, as there is as much to be absorbed by, as there is to dismiss. In discussing his own view of the work, the artist offers a pertinent summary: ‘if you stay in front of *Bordeaux Piece* during several scenes, you notice an atmosphere establish itself. And this atmosphere comes from real time.’⁶³

62 culture, el. "Int Claerbout Net". Greece, 2008. Video. YouTube. accessed 21 November, 2012.

63 Van Assche, Christine. Op. Cit., p 14

Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles (1975): Chantal Akerman

Claerbout's strategy of purposefully developing a stereotypically 'thin' dramatic script, to function as a vehicle for his exploration of the spectator's temporal experience, is in a sense reversed by artist and filmmaker Chantal Akerman's feature film *Jeanne Dielman, 23, Quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975).



Figure 16: Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman*, 1975, film still

In contrast to *Bordeaux Piece*, Akerman's film is a three-hour and twenty-one minute meditation intended to clearly focus the viewer toward the measured, domestic experience of the lead character Jeanne Dielman.⁶⁴ The film follows Dielman over three days, closely observing her as she goes about her daily routine in as close to real time as possible in a cinematic narrative. The alternate approaches by these two artists are a means to achieve similar ends: to explore the heightened tension between the illusory time of the work, and the duration of the viewer.

The characters of *Bordeaux Piece* are in place as props designed to gradually move attention beyond their superficial facade to the shifts and fluctuations of an exterior world. In contrast Akerman's character is a solid presence who draws the viewer in to her hypnotic world of methodical and measured routine. Through a distinct lack of action or plot, the stasis of the character is transmitted to the viewer.

⁶⁴ The role is played by Delphine Seyrig, in what is an incredibly authentic and controlled performance.

Once seduced, this strange temporality fluctuates between boredom and anticipation. Attention is directed to the nuance and detail of the character's world, while at the same time the viewer is distracted by the experience of their own duration.



Figure 17: Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman*, 1975, film still

In an essay accompanying the DVD, titled 'A Matter of Time', film scholar Ivone Margulies goes behind the scenes, describing Akerman's unorthodox method. In a scene where Dielman is preparing dinner Margulies describes how the camera deliberately continues to roll even once the actor moves out of shot, 'so that Jeanne's actions out of frame – going to check the time, placing something in the refrigerator – actually happen.'⁶⁵ This off-screen action would traditionally involve an edit, to compress time and move the scene along; or we would witness the action as part of the continuity.

Letting the invisible action play out in real-time gives an insight into Akerman's intent: to allow the audience to *feel* this time. Where traditional narrative film is about reaching resolution through cause and effect, Akerman is more concerned with conveying *actual* experience. Margulies relays details of a rehearsal that offers an insight into the precision employed by Akerman to achieve this authenticity:

⁶⁵ Margulies, Ivone. "A Matter of Time." DVD Booklet. New York: The Criterion Collection, 2009

Akerman, script and watch in hand, describes Jeanne's moves. Seyrig follows the directions. "You wait for a minute, you stand up, go to the balcony, wait for twenty-five seconds, come back, pick up the broom, and sit back down. You skim the stock and sit." Seyrig sits.

Mirroring her, elbow at the table, Akerman sits and waits. For the longest minute, the director lets Seyrig and Jeanne's time pass through her own body. It is this experience she relays to us, gently and surely.⁶⁶



Figure 18: Chantal Akerman, *Jeanne Dielman*, 1975, production still

Of course the work is created as a dramatic narrative, to be viewed from beginning to end, and retains a finite and linear structure that eventually concludes in a moment of shocking resolution. But it is really only through this dramatic (and unforeseeable) ending that we are reminded that what we are watching is a work *of fiction*. Throughout the film's extended duration, the line between illusion and reality is continually blurred as we become absorbed in the unification between the time of actor, director and viewer.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

The Clock (2010): Christian Marclay



Figure 19: Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010

The occurrence of the slippage between illusion and reality, absorption and awareness, reaches its apex in Christian Marclay's work, *The Clock* (2010). With what seemed like an art-world equivalent of a Hollywood blockbuster in terms of promotion and publicity, *The Clock* – unlike the tired Hollywood format – lived up to its hyperbole, creating a screen-based experience like no other. Ironically, the work is constructed from thousands of scenes, many of which are from films produced in Hollywood. Yet the effect of what is essentially a montage is markedly different from that of the films that constitute its parts.

Prior to experiencing *The Clock* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, in April 2012, I had read a number of articles in the mainstream media in which the basic premise of the work is described. The *Weekend Australian's Review*, for instance, describes the 24-hour installation as 'a time machine, or talking clock, in which several thousand movie clips, edited sequentially, tell the time for us.'⁶⁷ Although armed with this basic understanding – that Marclay (and his team) had scoured thousands of films to find clips that illustrated each minute of an entire day – nothing prepared me for the effect that viewing the work would have on my temporal experience.

⁶⁷ Westwood, Matthew. "Time Lord." *The Weekend Australian* March 17-18 2012, sec. Review

On one hand the film functions in a similar way to that of a traditional movie-going experience. There's a queue that you follow into a darkened cinema theatre where you join hundreds of people – all of them, whether seated or standing, absorbed in the on-screen activity. Finding a space I join them.

Having limited time I automatically check my phone for the time before engaging with the film. It is 11:47am. Now looking to the screen this is confirmed by a black & white image of London's Big Ben, inside of which a dramatic scene is being played out. A man, attempting to escape from his would-be-attackers by climbing onto the clock's face, is grimly hanging from the giant minute hand.



Figure 20: Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010, film still

Instantly I was absorbed. Suddenly, as the hand moves from 11:47 the film cuts to a disparate scene, as another clock flicks to 11:48. And it is here that something strange begins to occur: the tension and intrigue is at once dissolved, *and* maintained, in fact renewed, as I am automatically re-absorbed by this new set of circumstances.

But it doesn't stop there. Having to catch a plane, my thoughts drift to the time outside of the narrative, the time of the real world. I am suddenly reminded that the two temporalities are in fact one and the same. This understanding brings with it a strange realisation: that I am able to become absorbed in the world (or in this case worlds) of the film whilst maintaining a direct connection to my own world.

This is the uncanny brilliance of the work – the dual sensations of absorption and awareness; being both in time and outside of time. Coupled with a consistently rising and falling tension that simultaneously interrupts and captivates as the viewer is torn abruptly, yet fluidly, from each scene only to be reconnected to the next by the continuity of time itself.

This results in a condition of spectatorship that combines reality and illusion with perfect balance.



Figure 21: Christian Marclay, *The Clock*, 2010, film still

Joiners: David Hockney

Although the work of David Hockney seemingly sits outside the field in which I have so far located this project, his series of ‘joiners’⁶⁸ are a rigorous study into visual perception, prompting questions surrounding temporal and spatial relationships between subject and viewer.

Functioning in a similar way to the plural viewpoints of Warhol’s *Chelsea Girls*, these large photographic composites consisting of multiple images taken from multiple points of view serve to activate the spectator, releasing them from a fixed relationship with the image.



Figure 22: David Hockney, *Pearblossom Hwy*, 1986

It could also be argued that Hockney’s technique of fragmenting and re-combining multiple perspectives share similarities with the concerns of artists working in the field of Expanded Cinema, who also sought to break from the authority of a fixed point-of-view by responding to cinema’s passive mode of viewing.

⁶⁸ Hockney coined this term himself.

By opening up the perceptual field and expanding the point-of-view beyond the traditional single point perspective of western image making, Hockney saw these works as a way of acknowledging the temporality that a single point-of-view ignores:

Perspective is a theoretical abstraction that was worked out in the fifteenth century. It suddenly altered pictures: it gave a strong illusion of depth; it lost something and gained something. At first the gain was thrilling, but slowly, very slowly we became aware of what had been lost. That loss was the depiction of the passing of time. We thought this way of looking was so true that when the photograph came along it seemed to confirm perspective. Of course it was going to confirm perspective because it was exactly the same way of looking, from one central point with one eye fixed in time.⁶⁹

What began as a simple experiment with a Polaroid camera, became an in-depth exploration into ways of seeing and the conditioning of western perception; a perception that favoured the representation of space ahead of time. Hockney cites Japanese scroll paintings and Cubism as the only other styles of representation that have deliberately incorporated time as a formal element into their depiction of space.



Figure 23: David Hockney, photographing *Pearblossom Hwy*, 1986

⁶⁹ Joyce, Paul. *Hockney on Photography*. New York: Harmony Books, 1988, p 34

Where the viewer of a traditional image using single point perspective is in effect replicating the physical position of the artist – seeing from the same point-of-view as the picture was created – a viewer of one of Hockney’s ‘joiners’ is denied what is in effect a false depiction of reality. By moving around his subject Hockney not only experiences time through the process, but he also begins to understand his subject’s relationship to the space and to himself. The experience of seeing is therefore expressed more accurately; it is an experience *in space, over time*.

Hockney summarises this by comparing eastern and western painting traditions:

If the Chinese scholar-artist had a garden, however small that garden was, he would want to walk in it, so he would make his path so that he’d have a longer walk. So he walks up the path of his garden and then goes and makes a picture of that garden, or the experience of walking in it. But the renaissance scholar sits in his room and looks out of the window, and then he makes his picture. He is fixed there with the window picture, and therefore he thinks of perspective. The Chinese wouldn’t because their experience is moving, flowing as time is flowing.⁷⁰



Figure 24: Wang Hui, *Wu-hsi to Suchou*, 1691-8

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The paintings of Paul Cézanne are created in a similar way, and are described by George Heard Hamilton as ‘the sum of continuous perceptions of space in the mode of time’⁷¹. Comparing Cézanne’s methodology to that of the Impressionists, Hamilton describes a much slower process that unfolded over time. This meant slightly different points of view were combined into a single image, more closely representing the experience of seeing, which involves the passing of time and movement in space. The Impressionists painted quickly, so as to capture the effect of a single moment in time; a moment that is beyond the realms of conscious experience.



Figure 25: Paul Cézanne, *Bords d'une rivière*, 1904-5

The effect of this on the viewer of the work is to also create a doubling effect, similar to the moving-image work described above. Yet rather than slipping between illusion and reality, where the awareness of viewing is fused with immersion in illusion, these works fluctuate between a unity and fragmentation; between the instant and the durational. Within the ambiguity of this perceptual shift, temporal experience is again foregrounded and perhaps momentarily brought to attention.

⁷¹ Heard Hamilton, George. "Cezanne, Bergson and the Image of Time." *College Art Journal* 16.1 (1956): 2-12, p 7

Timeslice: Daniel Crooks

Like Hockney, Daniel Crooks also shifts our perception; but where Hockney's 'joiners' operate as 'space in the mode of time', the body of work that constitutes Crooks' 'timeslice' series visualises 'time in the mode of space'. Hockney's composite works not only expand the volume of space beyond that of a single photograph, they also afford an expansion of the way we view pictorial space, beyond the tradition of a single and fixed point of view. Similarly, Crooks also deliberately seeks to broaden understanding; not of space, but of time.

By manipulating the pictorial convention of the moving image, Crooks offers the viewer a re-visioning of the linear; replacing it instead with simultaneity.



Figure 26: Daniel Crooks, *Static No. 12 (seek stillness in movement)*, 2010, video still

In an almost diametrically opposed technique to Hockney's expansion of space and time through joining images together, Crooks takes each frame of video and reduces it to a single pixel slice. Each subsequent frame 'slice' is then placed alongside the previous frame until the screen is filled. What was once a sequential series of images shifting and changing *through* space and time is now a simultaneous image *across* space and time. Where the still image prioritises space, and the moving image prioritises time, Crooks' 'timeslice' series combines them in equal measure.

The effect of this is an image of fluid beauty, transforming any object or environment in motion from a series of fragmented moments into a myriad of fused instances; at once both fractured and whole. Unlike the active mode of viewing promoted through Hockney's joiners though, the effect of Crooks' work on the spectator is immersive: hypnotic and rhythmic as it gently and beautifully unfolds.

Absorbed in the fluidity of quotidian and once pedestrian scenes, the time that is being spatialised and materialised before us is simultaneously dissolved by the liquid crystal of the screen.



Figure 27: Daniel Crooks, *Static No. 7*, 2003, video still

On first discovering these works during the early stages of the project I was fascinated by the technical prowess and the aesthetic of these impressive digital works. I felt that this manipulation of time and space was in line with the way that I wanted to express my own concerns: drawing the viewer into an image of the world previously unseen. Or conversely, creating a new way of seeing the world. Gradually this view shifted as I became aware that I was interested in creating work that foregrounds the experience of time, and not representing its character or dissolving its presence.

Absorption & Theatricality

In 1967, Michael Fried wrote 'Art and Objecthood',⁷² an essay attacking minimalist painting and sculpture that he described as literalist art. This was based on his argument that it 'theatricalises the relation between object and beholder'⁷³ and is thereby in opposition to the self-sufficient art of modernism. Fried ardently defended the position of modernist painting and sculpture that he saw as 'wholly manifest ... a continuous and entire presentness, a perpetual creation of itself that one experiences as a kind of instantaneousness.'⁷⁴



Figure 28: Robert Morris, *untitled*, 1965-71

This was in stark contrast to his experience of minimalist installation, which rather than absorb its spectator in a timeless illusion, addressed them directly, creating a self-awareness *in time* and *in space*. Fried describes his experience with Robert Morris' minimalist work, responding to Morris' statement: 'The experience of the work necessarily exists in time':

⁷² Fried, Michael. "Art and Objecthood." *Art in Theory*. Eds. Harrison, Charles and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell, 1992, p 822

⁷³ *ibid.*

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p 832

The literalist preoccupation with time – more precisely, with the duration of the experience – is I suggest, paradigmatically theatrical: as though theatre confronts the beholder, and thereby isolates him, with the endlessness not just of objecthood but time; or as though the sense which at bottom, theatre addresses is a sense of temporality, of both time passing and time to come, simultaneously approaching and receding as if apprehended in an infinite perspective...⁷⁵

There is an obvious relationship in Fried's argument regarding temporal experience, between modernism / minimalism, and mainstream cinema / artist's moving-image. Narrative cinema shares modernism's timeless effect upon its audience, absorbing them into the illusionary time of the work, thus dissolving the time of the viewer. Whereas minimalist installation heightens the spectator's awareness, confronting them with time in the way that the durational strategies of the film-artists does.

Fried has contended that narrative cinema defeats theatre, as modern art defeats minimalism, automatically, because of its inherent diegesis. Because the actors, set, editing, lighting, projection etc. (the 'apparatus' of the cinema) are transparent,⁷⁶ the audience is automatically absorbed into the world created by the producer. He therefore dismisses it as a modernist art.⁷⁷ Quoting critic D.K. Holm, Fried reinforces his argument:

the camera would move or track or pan ... but almost always such movements were invisible in the sense that the action being photographed was so vivid that the viewer was distracted from the operation of the camera. The lens was going where the narrative demanded it be in order to continue the tale with clarity. The viewer wants to see what is going to happen next, and rides the camera obliviously.⁷⁸

Given his reaction to the theatricality of minimalism it stands that his response to video art would maintain its literalness, in addressing its viewer in time, rather than suspending it.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ By transparent Fried means that they are unseen.

⁷⁷ Fried, Michael. *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011, p 182

⁷⁸ D.K. Holm, cited in: Ibid, p 183

Despite this once fervent (and polarising) view, Fried has recently renewed his argument in relation to gallery based moving image, suggesting that a number of works by specific artists *can* absorb the viewer, regardless of the spatial relationship to the viewer and the apparent visibility of the apparatus that arguably have the opposite effect of heightening awareness of spectatorship.⁷⁹

Fried first alludes to this renewed position in his 2008 book, *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*,⁸⁰ and then more recently he consolidates his argument in *Four Honest Outlaws*, published in 2011. To briefly summarise this shift in his position, we need to return to the development of his initial argument⁸¹ presented in his 1980 book *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot*, which expands upon Denis Diderot's theory of a particular style of 18th Century painting that specifically excluded its viewer.



Figure 29: Jean-Baptiste-Siméon Chardin, *Young Student Drawing*, 1733-8

79 Raveln, John. *Outer and Inner Space*. Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, 2002, p 2

80 Fried, Michael. *Why Photography Matters as Art as Never Before*. London: Yale UP, 2008

81 Fried further developed his criticism of theatricality initially put forward in his 1967 essay, "Art and Objecthood."

By creating a scene in which the figures within were wholly absorbed in their world, Fried, following Diderot, describes these works as absorptive. In contrast, paintings that addressed the viewer or were not convincing in their execution of an absorptive scene, were considered theatrical, in the sense that they played to an audience. Recapping his argument in *Four Honest Outlaws*, Fried affirms his argument:

... for Diderot the contemporary renewal of painting (also of drama) as a major art depended absolutely on the ability of painters (and playwrights, actors, directors and scene designers) to devise various means of negating or neutralizing what I came to call the primordial convention that paintings and stage plays are meant to be beheld; only if that could be done would the beholder be stopped, held and transfixed by the work.⁸²

Fried experiences similarities in this definition of absorption in a number of contemporary video artists, including Douglas Gordon and Anri Sala, whose work he views as *antitheatrical*. Citing specific works he argues that because the figures (or elephant in one example) are wholly absorbed in their task, the viewer is also able to become absorbed in the work. This transcends the typically durational and spatial elements of gallery based video art that according to Fried's previous position, have traditionally resulted in a theatrical, self-aware relationship between viewer and artwork.

In a detailed analysis of the trajectory of Fried's position, Ken Wilder proposes a broader understanding of this renewed argument. He examines Fried's analysis of Douglas Gordon's work *Déjà-vu* (2000) – a three-channel projection of Rudolf Mate's 1949-50 film *Dead on Arrival*, in which each projection is set to a different frame-rate: 23/24/25 frames-per-second (fps), respectively.

Wilder explains Fried's claim that the work 'opaques' the film, with the slower frame rates pushing it out of sync with itself. 'In other words,' explains Wilder, 'expelled from the narrative, we start to experience a heightened awareness of the configurational aspects of the film'.⁸³

⁸² Fried, Michael. *Four Honest Outlaws: Sala, Ray, Marioni, Gordon*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2011, p 12

⁸³ Wilder, Ken. "Michael Fried and Beholding Video Art." *European Society of Aesthetics*. University of the Arts London, 2011, p 306



Figure 30: Douglas Gordon, *Déjà-Vu*, 2000, installation view

So rather than being absorbed by the narrative, or distanced by the ‘real world’ of the gallery space, the viewer instead becomes absorbed by the actors *acting*. By this Fried is suggesting that the absorption once generated by the *narrative* of the film, is now replaced by foregrounding the *configurational elements* of the film (in this example the acting). Thus the work defeats the theatricality of being in the literal presence of the spectator in the gallery, but also defeats the automatic, antitheatrical nature of narrative cinema. Based on this analysis, Wilder expands on Fried’s theory:

*The revealing of the configurational properties of film in moving image installations might thus be said to structure a mode of reception distinct from film, but in a wider sense than Fried’s specific focus on antitheatricality ... structuring a particular tension between both theatricality and antitheatricality; between immersion and distance.*⁸⁴

Here Wilder articulates the effect of particular examples of gallery based video art, that through formal considerations can heighten the spectators attention toward their presence in relation to the work, in the space of the gallery (in effect distracting them from the content of the work); but that can paradoxically heighten

⁸⁴ *ibid*, p 310

attention toward the work itself; distracting them from their self-awareness, their time now dissolved into the temporal rhythm of the work.

The following chapter, *Development of the Project*, documents how through a desire to return to the viewer a sense of presence denied by narrative cinema's focus on resolution, I became aware of a similar tension, fluctuating between anticipation and acceptance.

CHAPTER THREE: Development of the Project

Introduction

This research project originated from a simple desire: to explore the moving image outside the confines of commercial production that I had been involved with; to break from the mechanised production methods of the mainstream system, seeking the freedom of an experimental approach.

This chapter describes how this project was pursued. It tracks the formal and conceptual evolution that occurred through an emergent process of experimentation, resolution and refinement. The artworks described in this chapter have been selected from a larger body of work on the basis that it is these examples that best articulate the project's development. Through this process of reflection I have identified three key stages in the development of the work, each further defining the concerns of the research.

STAGE ONE

This was a period of intense filming and post-production, exploring a wide variety of conceptual and formal strategies. As an entry-point I began where I had left off: making short narrative works. Although formally these works were comparatively impressionistic and experimental, they maintained the reliance on story, script and outcome that I was no longer inspired by. Conceptually, the need for story resulted in personal expression and didactic illustration critiquing contemporary society.

Identifying this outcome-driven and literal approach saw a conscious shift to an approach that was process-oriented and intuitive, but often resulting in meaningless abstraction. Through the research, I understood that it was the structure of narrative itself that I was interested in expanding upon. The artworks included here in *Stage One*, describe the process of the project from the point of this understanding.

Breaking the Narrative

During this initial stage of research, I had looked at filmmakers working on the fringe of the mainstream; pioneers such as Able Gance, Jean-Luc Godard and Mike Figgis. I was interested in how their work pushed the boundaries of traditional narrative structure; expanding the viewing experience from a mode of *passive* consumption to one of *active* engagement – inviting the audience to make their own connections within the work.

They achieved this using a range of formal strategies: expanding perceptions of time and space, experienced in Gance's split-screen epic *Napoleon* (1927),⁸⁵ rupturing traditional notions of temporal continuity with Godard's 'jump-cut'⁸⁶ in *Breathless* (1960); and in Mike Figgis' *Timecode* (2000), a complete absence of editing heightens attention as the audience⁸⁷ piece together their own version of the narrative.



Figure 31: Mike Figgis, *Timecode*, 2000, video still.

Despite the experimental and non-linear nature of these works there was still a strong sense of narrative. Reflecting on my response, I understood that I was

⁸⁵ French filmmaker Able Gance directed the four-hour silent epic *Napoleon* in 1927.

⁸⁶ Jean-Luc Godard is an influential filmmaker identified with the 1960s French New Wave film movement. He is known as a pioneer of film technique, including his use of the 'jump-cut', an edit that breaks temporal continuity.

⁸⁷ Aitken, Doug. *Broken Screen: Expanding the Image, Breaking the Narrative*. New York: DAP, 2006, p 143

interested in drawing attention away from narrative's focus on outcome, and began by questioning linear structures of cause and effect.

Having established a preliminary intent, how would I address the question of content? To begin I devised two simple events charged with expectation: finding a parking spot and filling a sink. These were filmed in a single shot and then edited into seamless loops, thereby extending their duration infinitely. I was interested in how denying the resolution of an action loaded with anticipation might impact on audience engagement.

The most successful of these, titled *Sink* (2007), was a shot of a bathroom basin continually filling, without overflowing. The endlessness of this slowly unfolding, almost static scene, embodied a tension in the work; a fluctuation between stasis and motion.

A low-frequency sound accompanied this single channel work, slowly rising and falling in pitch, increasing the tension. The dramatically lit mise-en-scène transformed an ordinary sink into a sculptural form, its now iconic status reinforcing the weight of expectation.



Figure 32: *Sink*, 2007, video still

As an introduction to the project, I felt that *Sink* was successful in achieving what I had set out to do: by removing the cause and effect structures inherent to narrative, I was inviting the viewer to engage with the work for an unspecified duration. By implementing strategies that engendered a sense of expectation – drama and tension – a level of engagement was attained *without* progressing the action.

The starting point for the next work developed through broadening my definition of what constitutes a linear process. Rather than understanding this as simply an action or event, I considered the notion of *intent*; that in the setting and achieving of goals, a structure that requires resolution is established, and like an unfolding narrative instils anticipation of the future.

Reflecting on previous personal goals, I considered the ideology of the ‘Great Australian Dream’⁸⁸ as a representation of this. On this basis I devised a premise to use ‘the suburban’ as a motif that might allow further exploration of these ideas.

Although the previous work *Sink* had avoided narrative’s goal of resolution, it had still maintained links with narrative processes through its reliance on a ‘script’. Where *Sink* was an expression of an idea, I determined this new work should be an expression of experience. In response to this I embraced the uncertainty of how this new work might develop, by simply immersing myself in place.⁸⁹



Figure 33: Walter Ruttmann, *Symphony of a Great City*, 1927, film still

Recent engagement with Walter Ruttmann’s film *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* (1927) and Dziga Vertov’s film *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929) had demonstrated that through pure cinematic formal language, without reliance on narrative structures, the character of a place could emerge through montage. My aim was not to directly express the character of place through illustrating it; rather to experience place, inviting a visual response.

⁸⁸ An aspirational desire to own a house in the suburbs as an expression of success and security.

⁸⁹ At the time this was quite a radical experience for me. Being immersed in a location with no crew, no script and no shooting schedule I felt quite uncertain as to what I was actually trying to achieve.

The work emerged from a field trip to Austin's Ferry – a new suburb on the outskirts of Hobart. I arrived in the middle of a hot day and the street I had chosen (aptly named Sunshine Rd) was silent apart from a distant sound of power-tools and cars on the highway. Carefully composing a shot, (echoing the carefully composed street), I set the camera to record in time-lapse,⁹⁰ hoping to reveal some underlying motion to visually bring the place to life.

I filmed for an hour, waiting for something to signal the end of what felt like an extended moment. Standing in the street, immersed in the milieu, I felt vulnerable and exposed. The atmosphere was intense, as if something was about to break the silence and immediacy of this static scene. This was the experience that I wanted to embed in the work: an extended moment that builds with anticipation.

Titled *Sunshine Rd* (2007), the final work is an Arkleyesque re-visioning⁹¹ of the Sunshine Rd location, with a heavily saturated foreground contrasting against darkened clouds. This heightened intensity of colour and the threat of an impending storm visually express the anticipation and anxiety that I experienced at the site while filming.



Figure 34: *Sunshine Rd*, 2007, video still

As the work unfolds the clouds build with intensity above the houses, but every so often just as it seems the storm will break, the suspense is momentarily released by a burst of TV static. This signals the end of my finite encounter – an artificial

⁹⁰ A recording process that captures footage at a low frame-rate, in this instance 1 frame per second (fps). This compresses time, speeding up the final output.

⁹¹ Howard Arkley was an Australian artist, born in Melbourne. He was known for his airbrushed paintings of suburbia.

marker that imitates the end of the recording. But as the scene resets and continues, its infinite repetition suggests a more extreme version of the hour-long experience that I spent making the work.

On completing *Sunshine Rd* I discovered Australian author Stephen Carroll's examination of suburban life in a quartet of novels set in post-war Melbourne. While I had approached the suburbs as a site of intent, a destination to aspire towards, Carroll examines the 'inner life' of the suburbs, seeking 'presence in the moment'. In an interview with Carroll, for *The Australian*, Helen Elliot compares his concerns with those of Proust:

... he is trying to hold time, to examine the moment before it skitters past. 'There's a tension between the world of becoming and the world of being,' he says, 'and in the state of becoming we might miss the now. We have a yearning towards progress but society can lose itself in the yearning, missing the moment in the rush to be someone else.'⁹²

Carroll's articulation that 'in the state of becoming we might miss the now' helped to expand my understanding of the project concerns. By infinitely prolonging duration and averting focus from *intent*, what Carroll described as *becoming*, I was attempting to 'hold time, to examine the moment', shifting focus toward immersion in *being*.

Based on this new interpretation, I began to understand that perhaps the concerns were more broadly related to the relationship between narrative and time.

Space in the Mode of Time

The development of a number of works to this point had required manipulating and compositing multiple layers of footage to resolve formal and conceptual considerations. This often involved layering the same shot taken at different times, merging different shots to create a single image, or using the same shot in different ways. This led to further exploration of spatial and temporal synthesis.

92 Elliott, Helen. "Poet of Suburbia." *The Weekend Australian* 10 February 2007, p 12

Expanding on the strategy of examining a moment through extending its duration, I proposed that these works might articulate an event⁹³ by extending it spatially. I devised a number of experiments⁹⁴ that involved filming multiple points of view of an event or process and combining the clips into a single image, fusing them temporally and expanding them spatially – a process that I related to a cubist approach to the moving image.

These two *untitled* works from this period were each constructed from four camera positions from a single site. The shots were merged to create a single composition across two video channels. I understood these as panoramas of space, and of time.



Figure 35: *untitled_01*, 2007, 2 channel HD projection, video still



Figure 36: *untitled_02*, 2007, 2 channel HD projection, video still

Although none of these works were fully resolved, their reference to cubism guided me to John Berger's essay 'The Moment of Cubism'. This provided the project with a broader context, with Berger describing the artistic response to new spatiotemporal perceptions at the beginning of the 20th century. The modern world was no longer perceived as a series of moments in time from a single point of view. Instead space and time were viewed as integrated and intrinsically connected; the Cubists' work expressed this new perception:

⁹³ Berger suggests that 'space is part of the continuity of the events within it. It is in itself an event, comparable with other events. It is not a mere container.' Berger, John. *The Moment of Cubism: And Other Essays*. New York: Pantheon, 1969, p 87

⁹⁴ I went on a research trip to the North West Coast region of Tasmania to develop these ideas through landscape. I gathered footage intuitively and developed a number of works from it.

*The Cubists created the possibility of art revealing processes instead of static entities. The content of their art consists of various modes of interaction: the interaction between different aspects of the same event, between empty space and filled space, between structure and movement, between the seer and the thing seen.*⁹⁵

Here I formed an understanding that where Cubist painting was concerned with extending spatial perception beyond the linear perspective of renaissance painting, this project was concerned with expanding temporal perception beyond the linear view of narrative.

Relationscape

The next series of work saw a shift from a screen-based to a print-based approach, and emerged from a simple experiment: recording time-lapse⁹⁶ footage from a moving car. Reviewing footage recorded on the journey home from a research trip on the Northwest coast of Tasmania, I found that the temporal compression of the time-lapse had accentuated the relativity of observed motion between foreground and background. Where the foreground of the frame was a blur of motion, the background was relatively static.



Figure 37: frame from time-lapse footage

To further understand the spatial relationship the footage was deconstructed into its component parts.⁹⁷ Working in Photoshop™ each frame was compared with the one before it and the one after it. This process revealed commonalities between each image. These overlaps provided points of alignment, which were combined

⁹⁵ Berger, John. Op. Cit., p 87

⁹⁶ The footage was recorded at a rate of 1 fps – 1/25th or 4% of real-time. This was a practical consideration to allow the full 4hr journey to fit on the camera's media (1hr at full HD resolution).

⁹⁷ The camera was shooting in progressive mode which creates 25 discrete frames per second.

to form a single, continuous landscape. The result was a 16-metre 'panorama' in which the background remained visually 'correct' but the foreground was either expanded or compressed, depending on the speed of the car.



Figure 38: *Relationscape No1*, detail, 2007

This created new visual relationships between elements as the camera shifted its point of view or altered its speed. Half a car would merge with a tree that in reality was many meters away; hills and sidings were made transparent revealing sections of landscape once hidden. Vertical lines marking the edge of each frame also conveyed information about speed; closer lines indicating the camera was travelling more slowly. Also of interest (besides the rich image) was the capacity to view this entire expanse of time and distance in a single image. A linear journey viewed as an expanded moment.

Other elements of the experiment were also of interest: re-visioning the landscape by reconstituting the fragmented image into a unified whole, and the compression of the foreground in contrast to the relative expansion of the background. Despite these positive outcomes I saw the linear properties of the image – the finite beginning and ending of the journey – as negating the concerns of the project.

In an attempt to resolve this I decided to repeat the process. Rather than a linear stretch of road, I planned a circuitous route from the Hobart waterfront to the summit of Mt Wellington,⁹⁸ a physical loop that would develop the work conceptually.

⁹⁸ The 1200m high mountain that forms Hobart's backdrop.

Constructed from over 2500 frames arranged in vertical strips of horizontal sequences,⁹⁹ *Relationscape 02* (2008), articulates Mt Wellington as an image of time and space; each layer describing shifts in elevation as the camera moves from sea level to the summit.



Figure 39: *Relationscape No2*, digital print 210 x 110cm, 2008

The final image functioned on two distinct levels: close-up made visible the fused fragments of space and form that constitute the image; zoomed out revealing a gestalt – an instantaneous and expanded view of the whole.



Figure 40: *Relationscape No2*, detail, 2008

⁹⁹ The total length of the image as a single sequence was 30m making it impossible to resolve in this way.

Other work made at this time used similar methodologies, but shifted focus from a spatial concern to a temporal one. Again filmed from a car in motion, these images were determined by the time of the journey rather than the destination. Three digital prints were developed in this way: 30/60/90 minutes; each one constructed as a grid using the total number of frames from each recording. This resulted in an arbitrary image of landscape that accurately described an event – literally an image of time.



Figure 41: *Midland Highway: 90 minutes*, digital print 290 x 110cm, 2008

This strategy was developed further, again as an attempt to negate the linearity of the constructed journey. Using a playground ‘roundabout’ as an axis to rotate the camera, the surface of the structure was recorded as it revolved. Through the cycle, shadow and reflection on the metal surface was captured. Although I understood that this was still a representation of a linear event, I was interested in the capacity for the image to articulate time’s passage. I considered this print to be the most successful from this series, its abstracted subject matter making it a more compelling image.

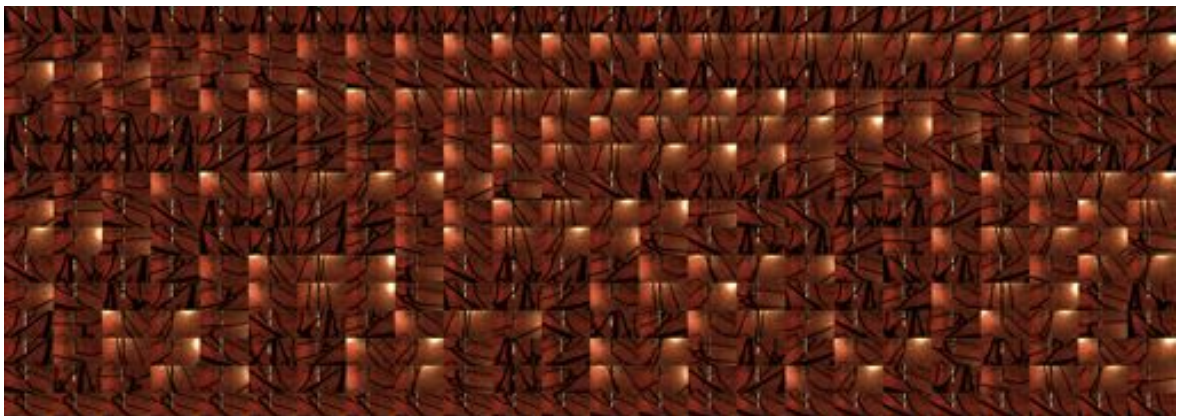


Figure 42: *roundabout: full cycle*, digital transparency 300 x 110cm, 2008

Case study: MONA FOMA

Toward the end of 2008, I was invited to develop a work based on my current research for the inaugural Museum of Old and New Art's *Festival of Music and Art*.¹⁰⁰ This project now offers the potential for a critical reflection into the development of work that reverted to an outcome driven approach.

Conceptually, I was interested in continuing to explore the temporal paradox that was emerging as central to the research – that time and space could be experienced as both a fragmented collection of discrete moments, events, memories and projections, and as a continuous unfolding of experience, both indivisible and accumulative.

The research had led me to Marcel Proust's novel *In Search of Lost Time* (1913), in which detailed recollections of past events trigger in the narrator a desire to hold these moments. He describes the effect of tasting a 'Madeline' biscuit:

*I sensed that it was connected with the taste of the tea and the cake, but that it infinitely transcended those savours, could not, indeed, be of the same nature. Whence did it come? What did it mean? How could I seize and apprehend it?*¹⁰¹

This idea of seizing time to examine a moment whilst continuing to unfold through time, further strengthened the understanding of my own concerns, and was an entry point for this work.

Formally, I was interested in developing the work spatially, expanding and fragmenting the video image. This thought was encouraged after discovering the work of Doug Aitken, Pierre Huyghe and Isaac Julien.¹⁰² Experiencing Julien's *Baltimore*, (2003) and Huyghe's *The Third Memory* (1999) at ACMI¹⁰³ in early 2008, had led me to Aitken's *Sleepwalkers* (2007), which invites viewers to move throughout the space to experience the totality of the work.

100 Known as MONA FOMA, the festival began in 2009 and continues to be held in January each year.

101 quoted in: Ricoeur, Paul. *Time and Narrative. Vol. 2*. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985, p 136

102 These references were a very early influence and so are not discussed in the context chapter.

103 Centre Pompidou, Collection, New Media Installations at The Australian Centre for the Moving Image.



Figure 43: Doug Aitken, *Sleepwalkers*, 2007

While eventually coming to understand that the function of these spatialised narratives was in part a questioning of cinema's traditional relationship with the viewer, my initial interest was a literal interpretation of the formal and conceptual concerns that I was dealing with.

Although the narrative element of these expanded cinematic forms was outside of my interests, I considered expanding a single image across multiple channels, developing the dual reading of the previous print-based works – both fragmented and continuous – into a screen-based context.

The limits of resolution meant that this would not be possible on standard monitors, but a recent development in screen technology, Organic Light Emitting Diode (OLED), would make it possible.¹⁰⁴

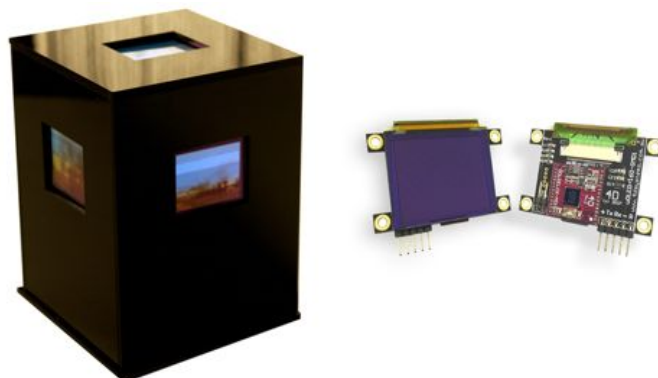


Figure 44: Prototype for screen cubes, and the mini-OLED display unit

¹⁰⁴ A revolutionary display system based on LED but with improved brightness and reduced power consumption. They are 'self contained,' with data displayed via a micro SD card and controlled by an on-board chip. This allows them to function without any external input device.

The specifications of these displays meant that twelve screens could run from a single power source. This required the screens to be connected in series, making each unit vital to the operation of the whole; a configuration that seemed relevant to the formal manifestation of the project concerns.

The twelve screens were housed in four small 100mm cubes. Crafted from ply and professionally finished in a teak veneer, the screens were embedded into three sides of each cube: windows, inviting viewers to peer inside. The fourth side of each cube was mirrored, designed to reflect adjacent screens, multiplying their effect.



Figure 45: installation view of 100mm cube

A video image, spread across all of the 12 screens, was fragmented into tiny flickering impressions of imagery sourced from suburban interiors; the camera's gaze looking out of windows onto quotidian scenes; curtains waft in the breeze; forms blur behind textured glass. This was a development of the suburban motif through the influence of Proust: seeking beauty in the everyday through a deep engagement with the often unnoticed.

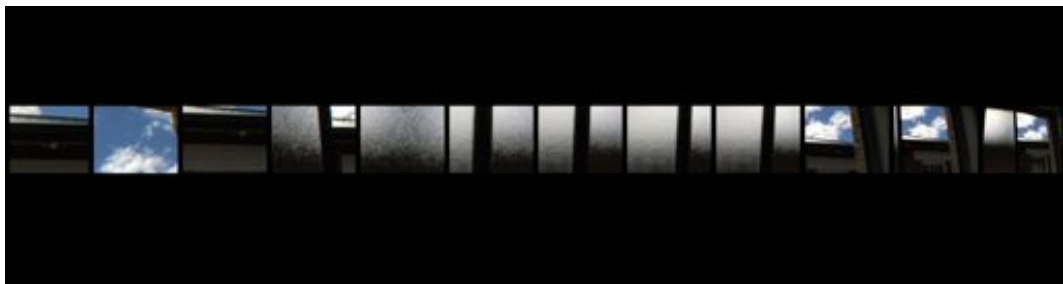


Figure 46: the fragmented image prior to being loaded onto the 12 screens

Other concerns incorporated into the work included the doubling effect of the camera looking out and the viewer looking in, referencing concepts of 'inner' and 'outer' time that had emerged through my research. The teak veneer of the 'screen-

cubes,' was designed to reinforce the suburban motif, by alluding to the wood-grain finish of retro TVs. Also referencing the suburbs, an immersive surround-sound audio track of *Greensleeves* circles the room; evoking childhood memories of ice-cream vans, simulating the effect of Proust's 'Madeline' biscuit.

The outcome of this conglomerate of motifs, concepts, influences and formal strategies was unclear. What was clear though, was that once installed in the large gallery space the work had no presence.

Created in isolation with no consideration of their effect or the context in which they would be viewed, these exquisite screens inside their beautifully crafted cubes were lost in the large gallery; dominated by the wooden floor, beams and columns. Lost also was any sense of the concerns that I had been grappling with. The academic notion of being and becoming; of viewing time as a unity; the suburban motif, were reduced to four tiny, twinkling boxes sitting clumsily on plinths in the centre of the space.

Recognising the problem of a prescriptive approach was an important moment in my development as an artist. I decided at this point to release myself from the edifying approach I had assumed and to instead rely on intuition to guide decisions about what the work needed to function effectively in the space.

Completely blacking out the gallery reduced the impact of the room's heritage character, but the tiny images remained lost in darkness. A decision to expand the image on the screens simultaneously into the space via projection instantly brought the work to life. The addition of another projector balanced the effect. The imagery was now scattered throughout the room, fracturing as it came in contact with the plinths, columns and other surfaces, activating the space. These once static and interruptive objects and planes now accentuated the fragmented nature of the imagery and complemented the bright, magical light emitting from the screen-cubes.

Reflecting on the process I could see that imposing criteria onto the work had resulted in an outcome that lacked depth; a surface treatment of a collection of concepts, initiated by formal and technical concerns. This reversion to an outcome-based approach reflected my desire to find solutions to problems, rather than continue to embrace the freedom and uncertainty of an intuitive and practice led approach.

Importantly, after spending time in the space with the work, I experienced a shift that transcended an intellectual response. Rather than focusing on what the work was *about*, I found myself absorbed, experiencing what could be described as a *presentness*. As the cognitive process of interpretation dissolved into the darkness, so did my awareness of time.



Figure 47: *In Search of Lost Time*, 2009, installation view

STAGE TWO

This work marked a significant turning point in the project's development. The experience I gained through creating a new work for a major show gave me confidence in my creative process. I also understood the importance of controlling the space. Importantly, the experience of spending time with this work initiated a shift in my understanding of the project.

I had been developing work that explored the moving image beyond narrative structures of mainstream cinema; this response to its fixed outcomes and focus on resolution had resulted in strategies that might offer an alternative perception. In the darkened space of *In Search of Lost Time* I understood that the project wasn't just about an alternate *representation* of time; the work could transform the *experience* of time.

Recognising that some of the strategies to emerge could also create an immersive space led to a more focused, deliberate approach. This is reflected in the methodology and subject matter of these next works. I also recognised characteristics of more successful examples. Those works that expressed something of my experience resonated more powerfully, whereas those that were purely conceptual were devoid of this sense of authenticity.

Anticipation

The next project was well served by this understanding. Offered an opportunity to create a work for a new experimental space at CAST,¹⁰⁵ I approached the process by considering strategies that might elicit *my experience* of time, rather than illustrate concepts about temporal experience. Thinking how I might approach this with a more deliberate reference to narrative I recalled my response to a scene from the Sergio Leone 'spaghetti western' *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly* (1966), and decided that I would begin by attempting to express that.

In the climactic ending to the film, the three protagonists arrive at a graveyard, identified as the location of their sought after prize: a large stash of confederate gold. What ensues is a classic 'Mexican standoff', with all three men (Clint Eastwood, Lee Van Cleef and Eli Wallach) staring each other down.

My recollection was of the scene lasting an eternity; the montage of shots cutting methodically between characters extending well beyond a typical climax. I felt an intense urge for the action to continue; for the narrative to progress. This was the experience that I wanted to explore in the work.



Figure 48: Sergio Leone, *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*, 1966, film still

Using the simple gesture of infinitely prolonging the described scene, the resulting work, titled *Meanwhile...* (2009), attempts to intensify the recollection of my experience. Deconstructing the montage and removing shots of hands-at-the-ready reduces the scene to a sequence of glances, building with farcical suspense.

¹⁰⁵ Contemporary Art Spaces Tasmania (CAST) – Hobart's contemporary art space funded by Arts Tasmania.

In this first iteration of the work I was compelled to increase the absurdist humour that had emerged through the endless repetition, by incorporating the suburban motif that I had worked with; the desert landscape of this iconic location replaced with shots of Austin's Ferry.¹⁰⁶

The effect of these alterations to the original scene was markedly different to the intense urge for narrative action I had attempted to reproduce. While an initial sense of anticipation arises as the work begins its cycle, it gradually dissolves, as consideration of outcome is replaced by immersion.



Figure 49: *Meanwhile...*, 2009, video still

The absurd nature of the work – distancing of the characters from their original context and denying expectation – coupled with their intense focus, offers a point of engagement that is not reliant on the progression of action. As the viewer is drawn into the work, thoughts of intent begin to fade. Future and past appear to collapse into the present, experienced as the acceptance of a moment as it unfolds.

Experiencing the work in the exhibition space directed my attention to the nature of the relationship between the viewer and the work. Reflecting on my indeterminate decision to spatialise *In Search of Lost Time*, I saw this as an opportunity to apply a spatial dimension to the work with very specific intent.

¹⁰⁶ This was done by rotoscoping. A process of manually masking out each frame of the sequence.

Instead of the viewer engaging with the work passively, reinforcing a linear sequence, I was interested in creating an active engagement between the viewer and the viewed by blurring the line between subject and object. To achieve this I deliberately separated each character across three channels, referencing the spatial configuration of the original scene.



Figure 50: *Meanwhile...*, 2009, installation view of 3-channel version, *connect/dis/connect*

Invited to show a work at Mosman Gallery, Sydney, I tested this three-channel version using 21" LCD monitors. Parallel to this show I exhibited the work in Hobart as part of *connect/dis/connect*,¹⁰⁷ using 1970s TV sets. Both referenced the figure by placing the monitors onto 150cm-high plinths. I later rejected the nostalgic intent of the TVs, determining the focus should be on the image rather than introducing other layers of meaning unnecessarily.

In both instances, separating the characters strengthened the work by implicating the viewer in the exchange; no longer passive bystanders but active participants in the scene; absorbed by *and* aware of the extension of this event.

A third iteration of the work, re-titled *Meanwhile: spatial variation* (2012), which has emerged in the final stages of the project, sees a reversion to a simpler form.

¹⁰⁷ *connect/dis/connect* was my first solo exhibition, held at Arts Tasmania's Gallery 146, Nov-Jan 2009.

This final version of the work retains its three-channel form, but returns the image to its original state. The revised title reflects the refinement of the work, clarifying the concerns and focusing the intent.

By clarifying the spatial concerns of the work and using the original footage from the film, the work can be clearly viewed in the context of the research: an exploration of form beyond a narrative structure. The sequence in each channel has also been simplified, with the shot of each character reduced to a single close-up, seamlessly looped, rather than the previous version's montage of shots.

Rejecting the cause-and-effect structure of montage in this way rejects narrative's illusion of temporal continuity; the time of the character is now the time of the viewer (for as long as they remain a viewer). Now the spectator of the work is not only implicated spatially, but temporally also.



Figure 51: *Meanwhile: spatial variation, 2012, installation view*

While this removes the work further from its narrative origins, it also partially maintains the traditional relationship between viewer and narrative, through their recognition of the film's diegetic elements. This intersection of the conditions of spectatorship creates a tension; the work now fluctuating between the illusory time of the scene, and the real time of the viewer. In the final installation, the decision to float the screens in the gallery, rather than simply project the images onto a wall, was a very deliberate consideration, implemented to further this spectatorial tension between reflexive awareness and absorption in illusion. By giving the screens a material presence in the space, the viewer is afforded an awareness of the configurational elements of the work.

Es Muss Sein! (It must be!) (2009), followed the first iteration of *Meanwhile...* and shares a similar approach, with the impetus for the work emerging while watching the film *Metropolis* (1927).¹⁰⁸ During the viewing I was intrigued by a specific shot in the film's introduction, in which a particular scene shows the sons of the city's wealthy rulers amusing themselves with games and sports; a running race ensues and the sons compete.

An image in this sequence stood out amongst the surrounding shots. Filmed from a dolly,¹⁰⁹ the characters run toward the moving camera, their focus accentuated by the high angle of view. This heightened expression of intent drew my attention; like the three cowboys pursuing gold at all costs, these wealthy young men were pursuing victory with equivalent fervour. I saw this as an opportunity to loop the action, shifting focus from resolution to the moment as it unfolds.



Figure 52: The original image from *Metropolis*, 1927

Like *Meanwhile...* I was interested in re-contextualising the found-footage, differentiating it from the original narrative, potentially altering expectation and prolonging engagement. To do this I again used a suburban motif, but this time placing emphasis on creating a *seamless* composited image. To recreate the angle and fluid motion of the original dolly shot I mounted the camera accordingly and

¹⁰⁸ A seminal feature-film directed by German filmmaker Fritz Lang in 1927.

¹⁰⁹ A system of moving the camera fluidly through a space.

drove slowly around Austin's Ferry. With a degree of manipulation the two films were combined.

The work finds these privileged runners transported in time and place, condemned to an eternal lap of the suburbs; the hypnotic rhythm, in tension with their struggle for victory seemingly dissolves the urge for it to end. Simultaneously, the infinite duration and ultimate futility of their task heightens an awareness of the experience of viewing.

The title of the work is taken from a theme in Milan Kundera's novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984). Here, Kundera explains the origins of this German phrase as a motif, originally used by Ludwig van Beethoven to describe a previously light-hearted matter that has come to attain a heavy metaphysical truth. On reading this I thought of this work, that I had previously titled *Dreamrun*, in which the initial sense of absurdist humour, generated through the contrast of imagery, gradually gives way to themes of futility and meaninglessness through infinite duration. It is this shift of emphasis, from light to heavy, that I felt was encapsulated by Kundera's explication of Beethoven's motif: *It Must Be!*



Figure 53: *Dreamrun*, 2009, installation view, *connect/dis/connect*

Time as Duration

Parallel to these investigations I had progressed the central concepts and processes of the *Relationscape* series of prints and developed a new body of related work. The evolution of the work occurred through an engagement with Henri Bergson's theory of duration, which views time as continuous and indivisible, and not a sequence of isolated moments:

*For our duration is not merely one instant replacing another; if it were, there would never be anything but the present – no prolonging of the past into the actual, no evolution, no concrete duration. Duration is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances.*¹¹⁰

Through Bergson's theory I came to understand that merging video frames was, in a sense, *returning* the continuity of duration (what Bergson describes as reality) to the image sequence. Although this continued a representational approach to the project, I was interested in further exploring the potential for a static image to expand a linear understanding of temporal experience, and potentially offer new ways of viewing 'reality.'

Building on the notion of the 'cubist' lens, through which I had viewed the *Relationscape* prints as representations of *spatial* continuity, Bergson's theory offered a view of the work as a representation of *temporal* continuity; an indivisible and accumulative 'mingling of moments.'

In developing these ideas I began using a digital SLR rather than a video camera. This allowed me to maximise image quality and control, and brought greater awareness and subjectivity to the process. Working with a small dSLR, not a large HD video camera also freed me up, increasing mobility and spontaneity.

The methodology for these new works was to again *combine* multiple images, expanding the field of view. But rather than a passive approach – the camera functioning as an innocent mechanical eye objectively recording everything in its path – this process would involve my subjective eye roaming 'space in the mode of time.'¹¹¹ I thought of this as visualising an experience in time; an image imbued with duration.

¹¹⁰ Bergson, Henri. *Creative Evolution*. London: Macmillan, 1913, p 4

¹¹¹ Heard Hamilton, George. Op. Cit., p 7

Flattered (2009), is the first work in a series of large digital prints,¹¹² and is constructed from thirty-six photographs taken on top of the Rialto Plaza, Melbourne; a location based on a comment Bill Viola made in an interview: ‘When you engage something in vision, literally part of you goes out seventy-five miles to touch that, and you realise that what you see is not separate from your self.’¹¹³

I became interested in this idea in relation to Bergson’s theory of duration as an *accumulation of consciousness*. Viola’s comment triggered an understanding that consciousness is accumulating an expanded ‘view’ of our experience and not simply that which we focus our attention on. I determined that the view from one of Melbourne’s tallest buildings would allow me to create an image that explored distance and proximity, expanding perception beyond the focus of intent.



Figure 54: Single image from *Flattered* pre-merge (50mm lens)

At first glance *Flattered* presents a typical aerial view of a cityscape; its vertical format narrowing focus out over the tops of increasingly smaller buildings to the horizon. Closer inspection reveals that the image is an incongruous fusing of perspectival shifts and distortions, simultaneously looking down to the city floor, up to the clouds and out to the horizon. To see this expanded view requires a distancing, but in doing so the image reverts to a snapshot. It is only when the image is viewed *in time* that the viewer can experience the embodied duration.

112 I resolved four prints in this series of works, all sharing the same process. The choice of subject matter was determined by my desire to understand a specific experience more fully. While *Flattered* was pre-determined, other work was developed spontaneously.

113 Elliott, David, and Akio Obigane, eds. *Bill Viola Hatsu-Yume First Dream*. Tokyo: Mori Art Museum, 2006, p 28



Figure 55: *Flattered*, 2009, digital print, 60 x 220cm

Like Hockney's 'joiners', the expansion of perspective beyond the fixed and single point of a photograph embodies these 'still images' with a temporal dimension. This engenders an active, durational viewing, with information accumulating over time. But while Hockney's works are constructed manually, with the artist's subjectivity informing the outcome, the images in this series are, in part, formed objectively.

Using ‘image-merge’ image recognition software,¹¹⁴ similarities in each shot are detected. These are automatically combined to form a single large image. Certain factors, including the type of scene being photographed, the number of images used and the software settings, can significantly vary the results. I became interested in the effect that the element of chance had on the outcome of these works. I saw the partial removal of subjectivity from the process as a way of returning focus to the *potential* of the present, as opposed to a pre-determined outcome.

Figure 56 below, shows three smaller prints that form a series of multiple versions, originating from the same sequence of photographs taken over Marrickville, Sydney in 2009.



Figure 56: *Formation*, 2009, 3 x digital prints, 110 x 60cm

Figure 57 is an image-merge from the Museum of Old and New Art’s (MONA), building site. Approximately 50 images were combined to create this impossible labyrinth of scaffolding.



Figure 57: *Connect/Disconnect*, 2009, digital print, 220 x 60cm

The process of creating these photographic composites furthered my understanding of the relationship between pictorial space and time, and between duration and the moment. But on reflection, using a photographic process shifted the project from its core concerns, specifically relating to the moving image.

¹¹⁴ This is a feature of Photoshop CS3 and above. I also experimented with software specific to this task. The original function of these types of software is to create traditional panoramic images that use a small number of shots to widen the field of view. Inputting large batches of images that have multiple points of overlap (as mine intentionally did) means a higher chance of random and abstracted results. It was this element of altering the original image beyond my control that also interested me.

Despite the decision to stop using still photography, I continued to use the ‘image-merge’ process with short sequences of video-frames.

Beginning with a spontaneous, unstable hand-held video recording of a Boeing 747 aircraft approaching for landing against a clear blue Sydney sky, I was curious as to how ‘image-merge’ would deal with the 12-seconds of ‘shaky-cam’ footage, exported as 350 still images.

The result, titled *SYD approach: synthesis* (2009) was an elongated aeroplane on an irregular blue background; the software having aligned all iterations of the plane and sky onto a single point. Enlarging and cropping the image removed the distraction of the irregular edge of the frame, leaving the small grainy object, hovering with anticipation, in the centre of a large blue space. Completely still and brimming with intent, this single moment is imbued with the potential of all of its other moments.



Figure 58: *SYD approach: synthesis*, 2009, installation view, *connect/dis/connect*

The work reinforced temporal perception as both a series of fragmented moments *and* an expanding continuity. Building on this was a strong sense of *potential* embedded in the work; a coming into being. This complimented my understanding of Bergson’s theory of duration, which he refers to as ‘the present pregnant with the past,’ as I began to comprehend the present as a site of *infinite futures*.



Figure 59: *untitled*, 2009, installation view, *connect/dis/connect*

Other iterations of the work explore this idea further. Although discarded as too literal in its interpretation, this *untitled* version consisted of five OLED screens in clear acrylic, connected via electrical cable: visibly connected *and* disconnected. Comparable to *In Search of Lost Time*, each of the screens display a fragment of the larger looped image. Dividing the image across multiple screens sees the plane randomly appear and disappear, in an attempt to articulate the tension between these states.



Figure 60: *SYD approach: suspension*, 2009, video still

In *SYD approach: suspension* this idea is repeated as a single-channel video work. Here the plane continually shifts from one part of the screen to another, suspended within the confines of the frame. This strange motion eschews expectation of trajectory where the focus is destination. Instead the work alternates attention between anticipation and absorption.

Based on the development of the project concerns I developed a final iteration of *SYD approach: synthesis* (2012), returning the print-based version of the work to its screen-based origins. By reinstating this image constructed from multiple video frames to the LCD monitor that gave it its original form, the themes of anticipation and potential that emerged through this exploration are realised with more potency. Where the print-based outcome was a single image imbued with multiple images, the static nature of the medium denies the viewer this understanding. And while the mechanics of the image still remain hidden in this final version, the return of the image to the screen foregrounds the *experience* of anticipation and potential more tangibly by harnessing habitual modes of screen-based spectatorship.

Still Moving

Developing work informed by Bergson's theory of duration raised the question: how could I reconcile that to create these images they must first be isolated from the continuity that *is* duration, before being seamlessly reconstituted back into a whole?

This query directed the next development of the project, researching the panoramic image. Through this inquiry I discovered a lens that would create a 360° image with a dSLR or a video camera in a single exposure, rather than recombining a series of moments. I saw this as a potential solution to creating an image that could more truthfully express duration; affording vision beyond direct perception, but no longer constructed from fragments torn from the whole.



Figure 61: the 360-degree lens

The lens was a mirrored dome that is mounted onto the camera vertically. Light entering the camera from 360° forms a circular image on the sensor. The circle can be 'unwrapped' with correction software into a traditional panoramic format.

I experimented with this lens extensively, creating hundreds of images and multiple video works. I was fascinated by the formal qualities of the image and excited by the potential for the project. Despite this I found the results were disappointing.



Figure 62: A 360-degree view, video still

The video footage, although compelling to watch with what appears to be the future being drawn into the past, quickly slipped into the realm of gimmick, suggesting a heavy-handed use of special effects.

The still images were more successful. Their ability to expand a moment spatially and express its simultaneity was also compelling. But as an expression of duration they remained moments outside continuity, separated from their temporal context.



Figure 63: A 360-degree image prior to 'unwrapping', digital photograph

To resolve this I constructed composites combining 360° panoramas. Revising this earlier strategy, I used the lens to take multiple shots, creating an image with infinite points of view *over time*.

Although the lens captures a complete image of space from its own point of view, there remain areas obscured by objects within that space. Using a tree¹¹⁵ as an axis, I positioned the camera at three equidistant points around its base. Taking a 360° photograph from each point articulated its form, and defined its spatial relationship with the surrounding environment.

By fusing the three photographs into a single black and white image¹¹⁶ I hoped to express the sense of *being* embodied in this tree, in this place.

Aligning the three photographs, using the tree as the point of reference, resulted in an image that I understood as a unity: the sum of the tree and its environment. Expressing this unity as a static image was difficult – it was simply a tree.

I resolved this using a time-based approach, merging the three iterations of the image *over time*; pointing to the underlying form of the work. I envisaged the change of this ‘moving still’ as aligned with the earth’s rotation: discernible only when watched intently, or at intervals.

The final work, titled *Frying Pan Island: axis* (2010) unfolds over two hours, a pace chosen for its almost imperceptible motion. Presenting the work for the first time viewers were absorbed by the ambiguity of the motion, unable to determine if the work was in stasis or motion. This raised questions surrounding the relationship between temporal states, and the experience of this engagement.

The three video stills in *Figure 64* illustrate the motion of the tree as it unfolds from itself. The first image, taken at the work’s starting point, illustrates what seems to be a single tree, but over time the parts of the whole are gradually revealed before returning to the original unified state after 120-minutes. This transformation continues as a seamless loop. Installing this work across an entire wall allows it to function as a window; a threshold between the actual space of the gallery and the virtual space of the Island.

115 The tree was located on a small headland called Frying Pan Island, 20 minutes north of Hobart.

116 The nature of this lens made exposure difficult, since the sun is always in shot. Desaturating these panoramic images allowed me to increase contrast and detail, without the issue of an over-exposed sky.



Figure 64: *Frying Pan Island: axis*, 2010, HD video stills

A number of months later I returned to Frying Pan Island. I had been exploring this place throughout the project and occasionally my young son Jude would join me. I asked Jude if he would walk the circumference of the island while I photographed his journey, as a means of further articulating this environment.

Still interested in exploring the fusing of fragmented moments into a continuous image, this process would reverse previous methods of creating still images from video frames, instead developing a moving image work from a sequence of still photographs.

Following Jude around the island, I took 336 shots using a dSLR camera. The shots were manually aligned, using his patterned jumper as reference. This distorted and fragmented the background, while the ‘foreground’ of the jumper remained continuous; stable.

The effect of this was a strange, warped motion that accentuated Jude's excited five-year-old gait. It also provided a point of focus on which to fix, as the rest of the fragmented environment rushed by. Because the work is constructed from high resolution stills, the image is rich and detailed, absorbing the viewer further into Jude's world of focused exploration.



Figure 65: *Frying Pan Island: circumnavigation, 2010*, video still

I disregarded this work until engaging in the process of previewing works for the thesis exhibition. I became aware of the strength of the relationship between these *Island* works that went beyond their shared site. I envisioned presenting them in close proximity in the gallery, initiating a dialogue, and potentially foregrounding the subtle motion of *axis*, with attention shifting between the two works.

STAGE THREE

The outcome of these works pointed my attention to a spectatorial tension that exists between states of immersion and awareness. Identifying this ambiguity in the work saw a shift from strategies of immersion toward work that focused on this tension. During this phase of development I introduced a live element into the work and explored strategies of site specificity. I intended to blur the line between the real and the virtual, thus both heightening and dissolving temporal awareness.

The work became more open to chance and intuition as strategies, as I focused on developing work that was open-ended and surprising, rather than predetermined and closed.

Site Specific

The next work emerged via a strange mechanical object¹¹⁷ I had used for earlier experiments. By customising it to function as a camera mount, I created long, revolving exposures to visually explore an extended moment.

Reflecting on the cyclic motion of *Frying Pan Island: axis*, it occurred to me that mounting a 360° print onto the rotating drum of the device would allow further exploration of stasis in motion. With some very minor adjustment to the dimensions of the image the print was trimmed to fit seamlessly around the drum. Invited to show some work at the Light Box gallery at Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart, I planned to test this new kinetic sculptural direction.

The Light Box gallery is not a typical exhibition space: in effect it is a window facing onto the street. The limitation of the space prompted an opportunity to use the 360° lens atypically, in a kind of anti-panoramic manner. Rather than create an image that expands outwards, opening up the field of view, the lens could instead articulate an inaccessible interior space.



Figure 66: *Salamanca Place: insert time*, 2010, exterior view

¹¹⁷ The device was a rotating drum that had been acquired from the UTAS biology department. It had been used as a graphing device in the 1970s, but was out-dated and salvaged for a creative use.

Photographing the interior of the space, I repeated the process from outside the gallery, intrigued by the potential of an intersection between the interior and the exterior. Using two identical rotating drums turning in opposite directions would generate multiple points of intersection between these spaces, opening awareness to the potential of a moment.



Figure 67: *Salamanca Place: insert time*, 2010, exterior close-up

The site-specific nature of the final work, which I titled *Salamanca Place: insert time* (2010), caused a shift in perception. The gradual unfolding of opposing images not only created interesting correlations between interior and exterior representations, but also created surprising moments of alignment between past and present, as the image coincided with its real-time source: the site.

This fusing of site, image and also the self (reflected in the window) heightened my awareness; foregrounding fluctuations between past and present; between reality and representation. This strange sensation of simultaneity; being both absorbed by the representation while also aware of my relationship to it, was experienced as a tangible sensation.

Although *Salamanca Place: insert time* began as a *representational* approach to express temporal and spatial continuity, engaging with the final work reinforced the understanding that it is the *experience of the encounter* that the project had become concerned with.



Figure 68: *Salamanca Place: insert time*, 2010, interior view

Open to the Possibility

As the project evolved I developed greater confidence in my process of intuitively and spontaneously documenting quotidian moments without questioning intent or outcome. I also began to understand that if I was fully immersed in this process; in the moment – no matter how simple or undefined that process was – I was open to the potential of that moment.

I also sensed that the authenticity of the viewer's engagement with the work was in direct proportion to my own.

Assisting this was the increasing mobility of imaging technology, affording spontaneity and immediacy. To facilitate this I acquired the smallest HD video camera available at that time, the Sony T1.¹¹⁸ Its size and weight meant that it could be carried discretely, enabling an immediacy that had previously not been possible for me.

¹¹⁸ I purchased this in 2009, prior to owning an iPhone. Although the Sony has better optics and more flexibility than the iPhone, this soon became my preferred camera for these 'interlude' works.

This resulted in an extensive amount of material, much of it still sitting patiently on a hard-drive waiting to be accessed. From this point it was this very notion of waiting that became a framework through which to refine this 'collection' process.

Through an ongoing engagement with existential writers I had encountered Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* (1948-49). The absurdist themes of meaninglessness, repetition and uncertainty had a powerful resonance, as did the play's formal qualities: the confronting lack of action inducing an uncomfortable awareness of duration, fluctuating between boredom and fascination. These were qualities I had previously eschewed, but now found compelling and brave.

I had also read Harold Schweizer's *On Waiting* (2008), which uses Bergson's theory of duration as a framework to analyse the phenomenology of being *in-between* moments. Schweizer describes this as a space where the passing of time becomes excruciatingly foregrounded unless we can accept, or even embrace our temporal existence:

*The waiter hovers and shuttles between absorption and awareness, between self-forgetfulness and self-consciousness, between the spell of the story and the spelling of a word.*¹¹⁹

The *Interlude* series of works broadly locate themselves around these themes by engaging in and representing moments *in-between*, pauses in the continuity of my personal narrative. Documenting these moments cultivated a consciousness of duration; of time passing through me; of *being*. Experiencing myself *in time* heightened awareness, allowing the potential of the moment to reveal itself. This is what I hoped to transfer through the work.

Many of these works have been created during periods while I am away from normal routines, where familiarity and repetition numbs awareness. Setting up this framework provided another routine of sorts, but one that promotes attention, observation and often surprise.

As I recorded this compelling scene I became aware that I was more inclined to watch the scene through the LCD screen than through the window itself. This raised questions about mediation and its ability to dissolve distraction, absorbing the viewer into its virtual space.

119 Schweizer, Harold. *On Waiting*. New York: Routledge, 2008. p 19

The first of these works, *Interlude #1: George St, Sydney* (2010), was made from a recording from my hotel room during a research trip to the 2010 Sydney Biennale. The room had an elongated window looking onto George Street, drawing my focus onto the passing parade of morning rush hour. It was raining so the umbrellas and increased urgency added to the theatre of the procession.

My aim was for these works to remain samples of duration, so resolving them needed little intervention. The dimension of the window required a portrait recording format, so it was returned to its natural orientation. Desaturating the scene was an attempt to shift focus from what exists beyond the frame, onto the formal qualities of the image *within* the frame. The effect of this was a slippage between anticipation and presentness; between an expectation of what *else* and an acceptance of what's *now*.

Installing this image as a virtual window onto the gallery wall, again serves as a threshold between the actual and the virtual. Retaining the natural sound from the recording – the interior of the room – locates the viewer between the space of the room and the space of the gallery; fluctuating attention, as I did, between the image on the screen, the room and the reality beyond the window.

The duration of the work is in direct relationship with beginning and ending of the recording, indicated by the abrupt motion of the start/stop process. This also disrupts the illusion of the image, returning the viewer to their present, now aware of themselves as 'viewer'.

I later came to broaden my understanding of these works in relation to what Gilles Deleuze terms the *time-image*. In a comparison between the *movement-image* that defines traditional narrative cinema, and the *time-image*, Helen Powell quotes Deleuze from *Cinema 2: The Time-Image* (1985), explaining: 'Within the time-image the central question is no longer "What is there to see in the *next* image?" but rather "What is there to see in the image?"'¹²⁰

Powell's interpretation of Deleuze's 'time-image' has made it accessible after struggling with his concept early in the project. Although a very preliminary engagement, it is encouraging to discover a resonance with these works. It also opens up an opportunity to return to the source and engage more thoroughly, now having a concrete experience of a 'time-image'.

¹²⁰ Powell, Helen. *Stop the Clocks! Time and Narrative in Cinema*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2012, p 7



Figure 69: *Interlude #1: George St, Sydney, 2010, video still*

The next work, eventually titled *Collective Presence* (2010) was developed through a public artwork commission for a new building expansion at Ogilvie High School in Hobart.¹²¹ My initial response was to create a work that could evolve with the population of the school. This was based on my sense that a pre-recorded video work could, over the course of four years of high school, become tired and irrelevant to its audience.



Figure 70: *Collective Presence*, 2010, exterior view

The resulting work is a live projection of the sky. The image is formed by nine security-cameras, installed on an exterior wall, covering a 180° view above the eastern horizon. Each camera sends a real-time image of sky to a DVR,¹²² which configures the nine points-of-view into a 3x3 grid. A projector installed in the ceiling displays the image onto an adjacent wall. Viewed through a large internal window from a dedicated space, this mediated sky brings focus to the here-and-now by framing it as an artwork.

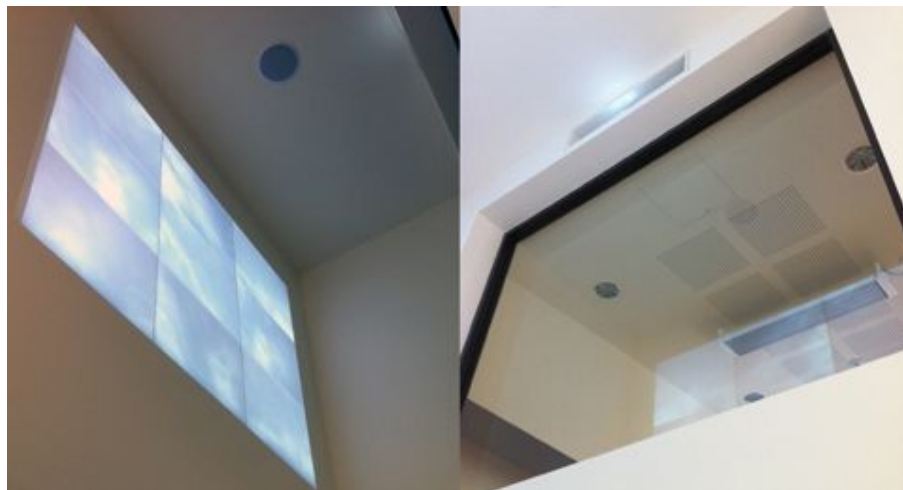


Figure 71: *Collective Presence*, 2010, interior view

121 This was the first time-based digital work commissioned by Arts Tasmania's arts@work program, which places public works in new building developments.

122 Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) are typically used in security applications for monitoring multiple cameras. It is used here to combine 9 images into a single output.

The decision to use nine cameras in this configuration was based on earlier strategies, which had explored the expanded view as an expression of continuity between time and space. Introducing a live element developed the work beyond reliance on representation to express these concerns. Rather than inviting viewers to engage in a present moment through the past, this approach evolved the project by *mediating the present*.



Figure 72: *Collective Presence*, 2010

By focusing attention onto the evolving pattern and subtle motion of atmospheric conditions, *Collective Presence* precipitates fluctuations between absorption and awareness. The potential for this perceptual shift to occur, between immersion in the illusion, and a foregrounding of reality, is increased by the viewer's reflection in the glass. This sensation, induced by the sudden contrast of seeing the image *through* the reflection, and seeing your 'self' *seeing*, activates awareness toward the condition of distraction.

The outcome of *Collective Presence* reinforced the development of the project's concerns toward creating work that articulates experience, as opposed to the expression of ideas. The effect of using a live image consolidated this approach. No longer did I view my role as an authorial one, but as a facilitator; open to finding ways of directing attention toward awareness of experience, and a recognition of being here, in the now.

The development of this live-feed work led to the discovery of work by other artists who had also used strategies of 'framing' the sky in an attempt to focus on the present. Yoko Ono's *Sky TV* (1966) consisted of a camera trained on the sky from the rooftop of the gallery, which transmitted a live image of the sky onto a television set. This work emerged at the time of the introduction of portable video technology. Similarly to the artists working under the Expanded Cinema banner, Ono was seemingly responding to the ideology and culture of mainstream commercial television by subverting its traditional use.



Figure 73: Yoko Ono, *Sky TV*, 1966

Some examples of work by James Turrell also involve a simple framing of the sky, in this case without the mediation of technology. Turrell creates significant structures in which he places apertures in the ceiling. Viewers are invited to engage with the sky through these frames, becoming absorbed in the spectacle of the evolving sky-scape. Although these works weren't a direct influence on *Collective Presence*, it is worth noting the difference in function and intent. Rather than seeking to absorb the viewer, immersing them in the hypnotic motion of a framed sky, or like Ono, subvert mainstream culture, I see the use of live-feed in the context of this project as a means of foregrounding the intersection between the actual and the virtual; directing attention to the condition of distraction. This is evidenced in the development of the next work that consolidates this as a strategy.

Developed by Dutch company Layar™, 'Augmented Reality' allows smart-phones to superimpose layers of location-specific information onto the live view of the device. Initially I saw this technology as a means of creating virtual site-specific works that could be positioned in and around the built environment, offering viewers an exploratory art experience.

Based on this proposal I received some development funding, but during the development phase it became clear that the current technology and the small size of the handsets created an underwhelming experience for this application.

Eschewing the gimmick that had initially seduced me I considered how I might advance the concerns of this project by using the 'location-aware' potential of this technology. The ensuing work, titled *You Are Here* builds on the outcomes of *Salamanca Place: insert time*, which through its site specificity had created a kind of temporal and spatial double take, conflating past and present. *You Are Here* also attempts to heighten the experience of time and space.

Using the 2010 winter solstice¹²³ as a point of temporal reference, I captured 12-hours of footage from a position high in the Salamanca Arts Centre, looking down onto Salamanca Place. From this simple document of quotidian detail and shifting light of a winter's day, I isolated twelve short clips from each hour between 6am-7pm. These clips were uploaded, and made accessible via the Layar™ application.

¹²³ I filmed from 6am to 7pm on June 21st, 2010.

Layar™ can be programmed to identify ‘points of interest’ (POIs) that trigger an action when a user enters a specific location. In conjunction with this, *You Are Here* uses customised code to identify the time of day that the user is accessing the clip.



Figure 74: *You Are Here*, 2011, video documentation

On entering the specified zone, a pre-recorded video clip coinciding with the current time of day plays on the user’s device.

The time of year the clip is accessed determines the viewer experience. If the clip is viewed on or near the solstice, the alignment of time and place results in an uncanny temporal shift: similarities between atmospheric conditions and daily activity at that time of year give the clip a live quality; a sense that you are seeing *this* place at *this* time when in fact you are viewing the past.

The sound of a passing car in combination with an empty street on screen – or vice versa as a car on screen passes silently – creates moments of realisation; suddenly *aware* of yourself *now*, viewing the *not-now*.

Alternatively, accessing the clip during the longer days of summer serves not so much as a marker of the present, but as a marker of change; an awareness of time through contrast, rather than through verisimilitude.

On completing *You Are Here* and again experiencing the tangible sense of temporal awareness elicited through the merging of the real and the mediated, I finally felt a level of clarity in relation to the project aims. It was through this *conflation* of temporalities that an experience of *presentness* could be identified, rather than being completely *absorbed* in the moment. This doubling effect engendered by *You Are Here* seemed to afford an awareness of the experience *of* the moment.

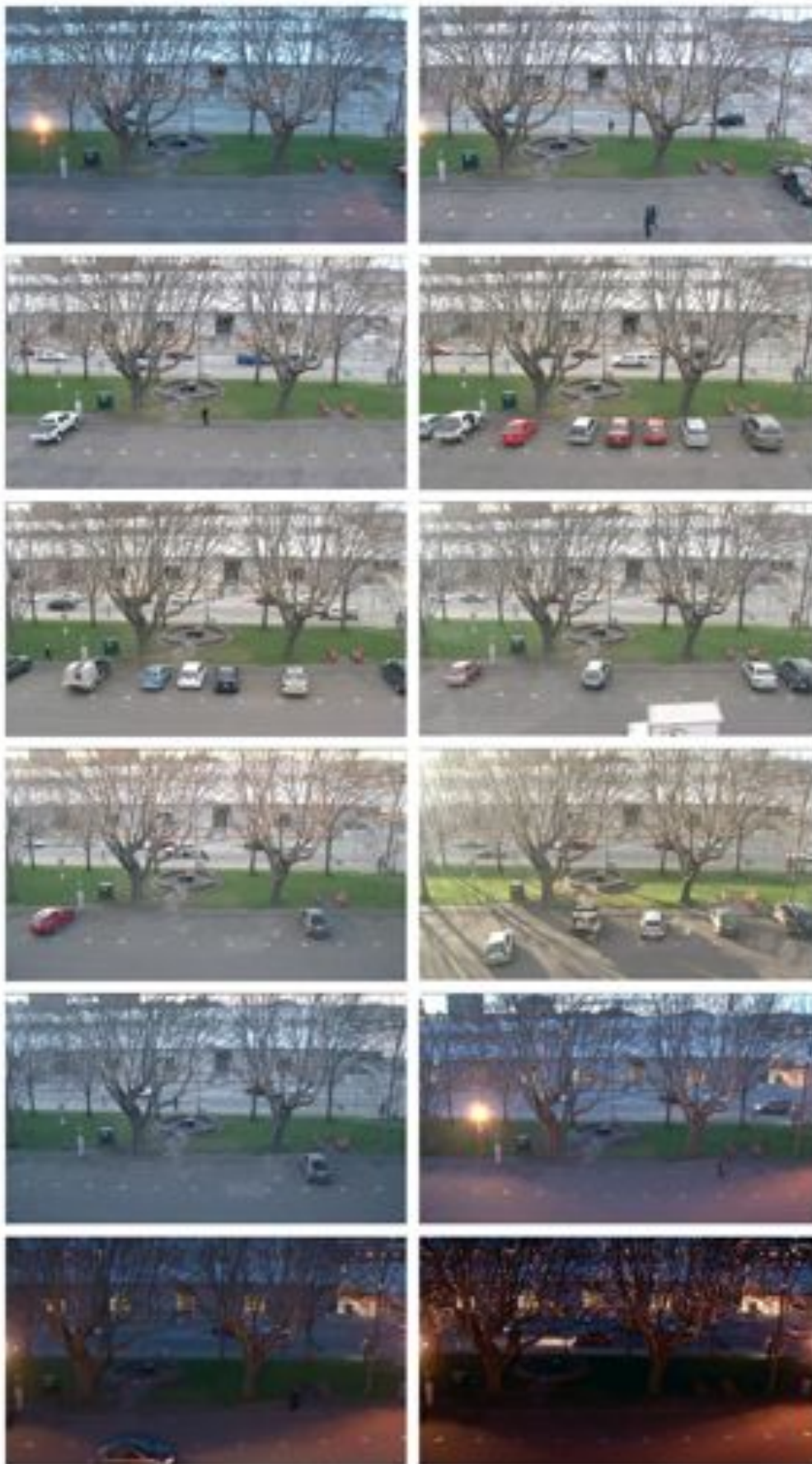


Figure 75: *You Are Here*, 2011, video stills

Full Circle

This notion of creating an awareness of presence rather than escaping into it had been developing in my work through various visual strategies. This guided my contextual research toward artists and filmmakers working in the field of Expanded Cinema. Engaging with the concerns of these artists, who, broadly speaking, were reacting against the ideology of mainstream cinema, resonated with my own initial concerns.

Although it was clear that the strategies I had used to arrive at this understanding weren't as radical, or as self-reflexive, using the moving image to create real experience over illusion was where my research had led.

While consolidating these outcomes I was invited to show some work as part of a week-long creative workshop, *Convergence Lab* (2011), at The Centre for The Arts, Hobart. The work was to exist within the site of 'the lab' and was designed to stimulate a dialogue between delegates around the broad theme of art and technology. I saw this as an opportunity to create a final work in the context of the project that might distil my findings and offer a logical point at which to conclude.

Approaching the process via my knowledge of the venue, the Tasmanian School of Art, my immediate thought was to use the Dechaineux Lecture Theatre as a cinematic space, and to find ways of challenging this typical use.

Building on strategies of immediacy and site-specificity that had defined the works leading up to this point I developed the work around the notion of live feed. From this point the work progressed quickly.

Titled *Reveal* (2011), my aim was to transform the theatre screen into a virtual window by presenting live image and sound of the space *directly behind* the screen. The nature of the scene would be undisclosed, although the possibility of a sound or image event occurring in the field of view that made it apparent, was possible.

My only interventions were to place a chair in the shot, as a kind of prop inviting a 'cinematic event'; and to open the sliding door of the artist's residence flats that are directly behind the screen of the theatre. This was a strategy to create the potential for an event, but it also created a materialisation of the gentle breeze; a hypnotic device designed to absorb the viewer in an engagement with the real.

Regardless of whether the audience knew that they were watching a live view of the hidden space beyond the screen, I was also interested in fluctuations between the anticipation that something may occur and an acceptance that it may not.

I saw this as a simple but relevant strategy: using the cinema space outside of its normal function, to further explore the shifts in awareness between presence in its conscious and subconscious states, and ultimately between illusion and reality.



Figure 76: *Reveal*, 2011, exterior view

Here, as I found myself back in the devoted space of the cinema that to some extent had initiated this exploration, I reflected upon the ambiguities of the journey that I had undertaken. On the one hand I had embarked on a linear and outcome driven search for knowledge; an understanding that had led me from the narrow illusion of my past, opening up a space for awareness.

And on the other, I had performed my own loop, arriving back at the place of departure, only this time viewing a sample of reality with open-ended possibilities, rather than an illusion with a definitive end.



Figure 77: *Reveal*, 2011, interior view

CHAPTER FOUR: Conclusion

This project was initiated because of a growing awareness that my lived experience was disconnected from my conscious experience. This disjuncture was seemingly reinforced by the production and consumption of commercial forms of the moving image, with which I was professionally involved prior to commencing the PhD.

I began by making work using the moving image that attempted to explore the passive and unconscious nature of my experience through imagery of the contemporary environment. Formally, I became interested in rejecting the linear structures and cinematic language of mainstream production in an attempt to dissolve the narrative impulse in the viewer.

By creating work without the resolution required by narrative, my objective was to focus the viewer on the experience of viewing, rather than the sequence of events leading toward an ending. By immersing the viewer in an extended moment I was attempting to bring them into the present and hold them there, as they gradually accepted the lack of resolution.

Although these initial works eschewed narrative techniques, it seemed that the legacy of creating and viewing countless narratives embodied these works with a cinematic anticipation. The combined effect of anticipation, immersion and duration created a tension in the work that I became interested in exploring further.

Through this exploration I discovered the film artists working within the Expanded Cinema movement in the 1960s and 70s and began to engage with their work. Recognising this heritage was important, providing a theoretical framework against which to compare and contrast strategies and outcomes to a project that until this point was based purely on a practice-led, experimental approach.

And while this seemed an oversight, if discovered earlier it may have taken the project away from its ultimate goal. As a result, working with similar concerns in isolation has enabled a hybridity to occur, allowing this re-examination to reflect a uniquely contemporary perspective.

Through this engagement I discovered that the Structuralists had reacted against mainstream cinema with a radical, anti-illusionist approach, designed to shock and disrupt the spectator's perceptual habits. This shifted the viewing experience from passive to active, and from an absorptive state of self-forgetting to a heightened state of self-awareness.

Conversely, my initial response to the 'closed' structure of narrative was to return to the viewer the means to experience the here-and-now by engaging in and accepting an extended moment. Yet rather than disrupt the experience of the spectator with anti-illusionist techniques, an early strategy was to take advantage of the habitual modes of viewing, subtly subverting narrative expectation. This was an attempt to divert attention from the outcome – from the inevitable resolution of narrative – and to instead replace it with a gradually unfolding moment.

Rather than heightening a sense of self-awareness, my aim was to offer a moment of relative stasis through immersion, allowing consciousness the possibility of a pause in its 'temporal flight'¹²⁴ and experience *this moment at this time*.

As the project developed I began to understand that although there was no resolution to these infinite works, no actual endpoint – they were still highly constructed illusions, designed with specific intent. This prompted a different approach to creating work. Rather than construct a diegesis for the spectator to enter, this new approach began by observing and recording moments of actual lived time.

The mobility afforded through new technologies¹²⁵ allowed me to engage in strategies of spontaneity, chance and duration, allowing moments to unfold over time and opening up possibilities for events to occur spontaneously. This approach increased levels of authenticity, and heightened awareness through anticipation. These were framed but unaltered slices of my experience that harked back to the 'actualities' of early cinema and the durational films of Warhol.

As discussed in *Chapter One*, the brief, quotidian scenes of the 'actualities' had the effect of heightening rather than dissolving awareness in their audience. This is the

¹²⁴ Cox, Gary. *How to Be an Existentialist*. London: Continuum International, 2009, p 32

¹²⁵ Smaller, lighter cameras with large storage capacity meant that I could have a camera with me at all times, and film for up to 12 hrs. The iPhone improved this further still.

effect that I experienced through taking this approach. Engaging with the world with no particular goal by simply being in a place heightened my awareness of that place, and an awareness of myself within that place.

Where these works differ from the ‘actualities’ of early cinema is through their relationship with the spectator. The first moving images were viewed by their audience as novelties, amazing them by simply replicating the fragmented and frenetic motion of modern life. In stark contrast, contemporary audiences are conditioned to a fragmented perception, and are no longer astonished by images that move. Early audiences also had no expectation of an unfolding development, and were content with the cinematic event itself. By contrast a contemporary audience is still conditioned to the narrative form but also to the fragmented ‘media bite.’ Attention is either short or absorbed in illusion.

By creating work without an instant ‘hook’ or narrative progression – work that is instead a simple framing of reality – it is possible that it may become charged with the expectation of the viewer, heightening awareness. It may also precipitate boredom or inattention. In this sense the work can be experienced as either a site of potentiality – an optimistic present that is open to the future – or, in reference to Cubitt’s previous comment relating to narrative cinema, a site of ‘fixity and closure’.

Although the development of these durational works produced only a small output of resolved work, the process allowed for a conceptual shift that led to the desire to strip away as much of the illusion as possible (within the field of the moving image). Rather than focusing on holding the viewer’s attention, I began to focus on opening up the work to the experience of the viewer, whatever the outcome. This led to the development of other strategies that also were intended to heighten awareness of the experience of viewing – strategies that integrated elements of the real with the virtual.

In particular, strategies of site-specificity and live-feed opened up the potential to experience what Heidegger might have described as ‘the moment of vision’¹²⁶: a pure presentness and intuitive awareness of a moment. For Heidegger this ‘moment’ arrives at an intersection, and these later works set up the opportunity for

126 Greaves, Tom. *Starting with Heidegger*. London: Continuum International, 2010, p 103

moments of intersection; moments that occur between illusion and reality, between virtual space and actual space, between absorption and awareness.

It was through developing and subsequently engaging with the project's later works, that I experienced for myself this tangible fluctuation between intersecting states. As I reflected on the body of work that I had developed, re-engaging with each piece in an attempt to find points of intersection, this tension between varying states of temporal awareness emerged as a common thread.

Peter Osborne, writing for the group exhibition *Time Zones* (2004) introduces an interpretation of this tension within contemporary spectatorship, further advancing my understanding of how these works functioned. In his essay 'Distracted Reception: Time, Art and Technology', Osborne identifies the contemporary gallery as a site of *attention* and *distraction*.

Osborne suggests that spectators seeking distraction from 'the cares and worries of the world'¹²⁷ in contemporary galleries, find the experience tinged with a level of anxiety. He argues that this is caused by the perceived pressure to be engaged (or distracted) by the work on display, in the knowledge that there is other work seeking attention.

This sets up a similar interaction as identified in my own work, with distraction and attention (substitute for: absorption/awareness; immersion/distance) blurring together in a complex and dare I say, distracting fashion.

Irrespective of the seemingly futile goal of finding a moment of engagement Osborne suggests that for art to function critically it is no longer simply providing a distraction from 'the cares and worries of the world but, increasingly from distraction (entertainment) itself'.¹²⁸ He asks,

How is art to be received in distraction without becoming simply another distraction, without entering another realm altogether – contemplative immersion – with no relation to other distractions, and thereby becoming the

¹²⁷ Osborne, Peter. "Distracted Reception: Time, Art and Technology." *Time Zones: Recent Film and Video*. Eds. Morgan, J. and G. Muir. London: Tate, 2004, p 69

¹²⁸ Ibid.

*vehicle of flight from actuality, from the very temporal structure of experience which it must engage if it is to be contemporary and effective?*¹²⁹

Osborne seems to be suggesting that to create effective work in a contemporary environment – an environment that is characterised by distraction – it is not enough to make work that simply distracts from the distraction, as this is not a reflection of a contemporary experience.

In concluding *All of a Sudden: Things that Matter in Contemporary Art* (2008), Jorg Heiser reiterates this point when he summarises that the key to effective and relevant gallery based film and video lies in something akin to the tensions and vicissitudes that have emerged through the explorations of this project, suggesting that:

*Rather than providing holistic, quasi-religious experiences or carefully ordered information about the state of things, they (film/video projection spaces) involve their audience in a productive double bind between active navigation of the exhibition and passive integration into the rhythms of image and sound sequences.*¹³⁰

This project set out with a simple and well-trodden premise: to invite in the viewer (and in myself) an engagement with the here-and-now. This was envisioned as a contemplative immersion – a distraction from the push and pull of an inherently fragmented and absurd existence.

By gradually opening my awareness to the *actual* experience of existence and allowing that to guide the work, the project has achieved what it set out to do, but with the here-and-now expressed as a dialectic of contemporary experience, rather than an illusion of a timeless present.

I consider my contribution to the field exists in the development of new visual strategies that direct audience attention toward this experience, by *combining* immersive strategies of illusion and representation with self-reflexive strategies of duration and repetition.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Heiser, Jorg. *All of a Sudden: Things That Matter in Contemporary Art*. Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2008, p 273

Through a seamless experience, these works afford the viewer an active *and* passive relationship with the work; an *unconditional* spectatorship not reliant on fixed structures requiring resolution. This enables a range of interactions with the work: an active construction of meaning, contemplative immersion through illusion or a self-reflexive awareness.

And potentially, at a point of intersection between immersion in the temporal rhythms of the work and an intrusion of the actual; a sudden burst of attention to the distraction; the spectator may encounter what could be described as a sensuous moment of presence.

Appendix A: List of Submitted Work

Sink (2007)

Single-channel HD video, video monitor, loop.

Es Muss Sein! (It Must Be!) (2009)

Single-channel HD video, wall projection, loop.

Frying Pan Island: axis (2010)

Dual-channel HD video, wall projection, loop.

Frying Pan Island: circumnavigation (2010)

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Meanwhile: spatial variation (2012)

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Appendix B: Bibliography

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Appendix D: Curriculum Vitae

Raef Sawford

www.raefsawford.com

Education

2007-13	PhD candidate, Tasmanian School of Art
2000	BFA (Hons), Tasmanian School of Art
1997-99	BFA, Tasmanian School of Art

Employment

2007-13	Independent artist & filmmaker
2007-11	Sessional lecturer (e-media & visual communications) Tasmanian School of Art
2003-06	Creative Director, Roar Film
2000-03	Film Editor, Roar Film

Selected Exhibitions

2012
Queenstown Heritage and Arts Festival: Queenstown, Tasmania
curated by Inflight ARI
Perspectus, Raef Sawford & Claire Krouzecky
site-based installation

2011
Convergence Lab: Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart
curated by Tess Dryza
Reveal
single channel live-feed
Hobart Wireless Waterfront, content development: Salamanca Place, Hobart
managed by the Tasmanian Electronic Commerce Centre (TECC)
You Are Here
location-aware video stream

Tasmania is an Anagram of Satan: Hell Gallery, Melbourne
curated by Inflight ARI
Interlude #3
2-channel HD Video loop

2010
Arts Tasmania Public Art Commission, Ogilvie High School, Hobart
project officer Nic Goodwolf
Collective Presence
nine-channel live-feed projection

Light Box Gallery: Salamanca Arts Centre, Hobart
 commissioned by Salamanca Arts Centre
Salamanca Place: insert time
 dual rotating 360° panoramic images

2009

Gallery 146: Arts Tasmania, Hobart
 curated by Raef Sawford
connect/dis/connect
 various video & print-based works

Glenorchy Open, Moonah Arts Centre: Moonah
 curated by Sean Kelly
Transmigration
 2-channel HD video, loop

Mosman Art Prize, Mosman Gallery: Sydney
Meanwhile...
 3-channel HD video, loop

Small Gallery (experimental space) CAST: Hobart
Meanwhile...
 single channel HD-video, loop

MONA FOMA, Salamanca Arts Centre: Hobart
 curated by Leigh Carmichael & Rosemary Miller
In Search of Lost Time
 video installation

2008

Summer Show, Plimsoll Gallery: Tasmanian School of Art
 curated by Professor Noel Frankham
Roundabout: full cycle
 digital transparency on light-box

My Favourite Australian, National Portrait Gallery: Canberra
 commissioned by the ABC
Bob Brown: a video portrait, Raef Sawford & Martin Walch
 single-channel HD video

Companion Planting, CAST Gallery, Hobart
 curated by Jack Robins
Sunshine Rd & Relativity Speaking
 both single-channel HD video

2007

The Reel, Gallery 6a: Hobart
 curated by Mish Meijers & Tricky Walsh
Transmigration & Browse
 both single-channel HD videos

Selected Production Credits

Storylines music videos (2012)

Ike Solomon / Canton Man / Two Grandfathers / Van Diemen's Land

Produced by Roar Film

Written & Performed by Mick Thomas, Jeff Lang and Tim Rogers

Filmmaker: Raef Sawford

Choose A Ride – NMVTRC Interactive YouTube campaign (2011)

Produced by Roar Film

Director / Editor: Raef Sawford

Bali High Wedding ABC documentary (2010)

Produced by Roar Film

Director: Varsha Sidwell

Camera: Matt Newton and Raef Sawford

Ceremony Film Australia Online (2006)

Commissioning Editor: Anna Grieve

Creative Director: Raef Sawford

From Wireless to Web Film Australia Online (2005)

Commissioning Editor: Anna Grieve

Creative Director: Raef Sawford

Film Australia's Wilderness (2004)

Commissioning Editor: Anna Grieve

Creative Director: Steve Thomas

Art Director: Raef Sawford

The Fishermen ABC 1hour documentary (2003)

Produced by Roar Film

Director: Steve Thomas

Editor: Raef Sawford

The Chorus SBS short film (2002)

Directors: Raef Sawford and Melinda Standish

Editor: Raef Sawford

Shacks ABC 4-part documentary series (2002)

Produced by Roar Film

Directors: Steve Thomas and Roger Scholes

Editor: Raef Sawford

Albert's Chook Tractor SBS drama (2001)

Produced by Roar Film

Directors: Steve Thomas

Editor: Raef Sawford

Grants, Awards & Commissions

- 1999 Clemenger Honours Scholarship (graphic design)
- 2000 Golden Key Honour Society
- 2002 Screen Tasmania grant to attend AIDC
- 2005 ATOM Award Best Educational Multimedia (*From Wireless to Web*)
- 2006 ATOM Award Best Educational Multimedia (*Uluru Media Guide*)
- 2007 Tasmanian Post-Graduate Scholarship
- 2010 Arts Tasmania Commission, public artwork, Ogilvie High School
- 2011 Selected by Arts Tasmania to attend Craig Walsh Master class

Collections

- 2010 Private collections
- 2008 National Portrait Gallery of Australia