

**Temporality and the Evocation of Fear and Unease in Selected  
Video Installations**

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**Declaration:**

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in Fine Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

\_\_\_\_\_ Patricia Driscoll

\_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2012

**Abstract:**

In this research I explore the evocation of fear and unease in selected video installations and how time impacts upon such evocation. For this purpose I consider the works of selected contemporary artists who deal directly with a form of time-based hyper-awareness linked to the experience of trauma, fear and panic. Amongst others, I discuss selected video artworks by Douglas Gordon, Ed Atkins, and South African artists William Kentridge, Kendell Geers and Berni Searle. I examine how such artworks engage with the expansion and collapse of time and experiences of being stuck or being absorbed in a significant moment. In undertaking this research I closely examine the mediums of film and video as well as contexts and the installation formats in which they are presented. I explore similar aspects of evoking unease in my own video installation titled *Night-light* and the supporting video work submitted for this degree. My previous creative experience has been in still photography in which I had become interested in exploring the capturing of time and movement and imparting an immersive temporal dimension or an extended moment in time in the still image. I see my exploration of the medium of video installation for the MA submission as an extension of such explorations in a new medium through which I further explore the concern with a temporal dynamic and its relationship to the emotion and experience of (personal) unease.

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## **Introduction:**

### **Temporality in contemporary art:**

Temporality involves the unfolding of time or speaks about the condition of being bounded in time. In their book *Themes of Contemporary Art: Visual Art After 1980*, Jean Robertson and Craig MacDaniel (2005: 33) point out that “[t]ime is a vital topic in contemporary art, addressed in a rich range of works that involve a variety of media, approaches and concepts.” Recent explorations in the visual arts frequently foreground the temporal nature of aesthetic experience as Grant H Kester observes in the following passage from his book *Conversation Pieces – Community and Communication in Modern Art*:

From Vito Acconci’s *Seedbed* to Dan Graham’s video projects to Adrian Piper’s “Catalysis” performances to Allan Kaprow’s happenings to James Turrell’s light installations, the viewer is called upon to participate in, move around, interact with, and literally complete the work of art in a myriad of ways. Here the “de-materialization” of the art object described by critic Lucy Lippard must be understood not simply as a defensive tactic designed to forestall commodification but also as a positive or creative moment, marked by an increasing emphasis on art as a process of collaborative interaction. This interactive orientation implies, in turn, an art experience that extends over time (2005: 53).

While artists such as the ones mentioned above do not reject the optical or the object-based condition of art entirely, they “tend to focus on the ways in which optical experience is conditioned by a given social context or physical situation and by the viewer’s participation” and represent a movement toward a “catalyzation of the viewer, the movement toward direct interaction, [which] decisively shifts the locus of aesthetic meaning from the moment of creative plenitude in the solitary act of making (or the viewer’s imaginative reconstruction of this act) to a social and discursive realm of shared experience, dialogue, and physical movement” (ibid: 54).

Such explorations in contemporary art that engage the viewer’s physical and cognitive interaction as integral to the artwork, i.e. that include him/her as a collaborator of sorts, were disparaged by formalist critic Michael Fried as “theatrical

art” in his critical essay *Art and Objecthood* (1967) in which he suggested that Minimalism had betrayed Modernism’s exploration of the medium. He felt that the Minimalists had compromised the quality of art by becoming too emphatic about the materiality of their works, which resulted in an interactive experience for the viewer – and thus introduced a form of “theatricality” to the visual arts.<sup>1</sup>

Ironically, Fried’s essay inadvertently focused attention on establishing a theoretical basis for Minimalism and underscored it as a movement based in phenomenological experience. Fried objected to such artworks for their unselfconscious immersion of viewers, leading them into a state of distracted attention (rather than focusing on formal complexity, the organization of harmonious colour relationships, etc). The “viewers become conscious of the mediating effects of light, space, and their own movement on their perception of the work of art. This surrounding phenomenological envelope becomes the “real” work of art toward which their attention is directed” (ibid).

In a chapter titled “Duration, Performativity, and Critique,” Kester points to the art of the 1960s and 1970s as a “relatively subtle movement away from the artwork as self-contained entity and toward a more dialogical relationship to the viewer” and examines contemporary artists who develop such an interest in the interaction between the durational and the dialogical. Such artists understand art as an “event” rather than an object – “an event, more-over, that is intended to produce a transformation in the viewer’s consciousness of the world” (ibid: 61-62). Film and video technologies have been used extensively in the light of such an understanding of art to create temporal works that engage with narrative and non-narrative strategies in exploring temporality and the structures of time: duration, speed, rhythm and direction. In the following section I will examine such explorations more closely as they relate to the medium of film and video and to practices of contemporary video installation.

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<sup>1</sup> Formalist critics such as Clive Bell, Roger Fry, Clement Greenberg and Michael Fried “elevated the visual per se into the dominant condition of art making” and rejected the representational, narrative function of art (Kester, 2004: 51).

### **Time in film, video and video installation art:**

Time is clearly central to the durational medium of film/video and video installation art in which it is “embodied [...] through optical illusions of movement.” With the invention of cinema in the nineteenth century, artists were finally able to produce a convincing illusion of moving images. In films and other media showing moving images (such as flipbooks and lantern slide shows), time appears to flow as it does in the actual world of the viewer, as Irene Natta notes: “In motion pictures the individual moment dissolves in a continuous narrative, whereas the narrative in a fixed image emerges from the individual moment depicted” (Robertson and McDaniel, 2005: 43).

Since its early beginnings, fine artists have chosen the simplest technique of using a single camera and filming a continuous event in one take, or have borrowed editing and montage techniques from commercial films and advertising to create narrative complexity. Film and video techniques have also been used to create temporal works that are non-narrative and plotless (ibid: 44-45). Considering the medium of film and video in a broader context of mass media, Robertson and McDaniel comment that:

Cinema and television became the dominant means for creating visual narratives for mass audiences over the past century. Although the plots in commercial films tend to be conventional, the way stories are told visually is extremely sophisticated because of the development of editing and montage techniques that can carefully shape a story shot by shot. We also have witnessed the proliferation of a highly condensed visual narrative from what Vicki Goldberg characterizes as “the stroboscopic story, told in a flash,” evidenced in movie trailers, music videos and television commercials (ibid: 43-44).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Art historian and critic Sven Lutticken (Douglas & Eamon, 2009: 58) addresses this issue in his essay *Liberating Time* (2009) warning against the cliché of overstating this phenomenon. He explains as follows,

While ideologizations do not automatically invalidate any form of artistic production, the overly rhetorical and abstract opposition between mainstream film and the ‘liberated’ temporality of film and video art has in fact led to facile and rhetorical stagings of artistic difference. The opposition between mass media cliché and liberating art has itself become a cliché and engendered a form of image-production whose recourse to slowness, “painterliness,” and non-diegetic or absent montage is frequently as problematic and impoverished as the mainstream spectacle – the Big Bad Other seeks to negate. The crucial question is how the “liberation of time” can become more than just advertising; how it may achieve some degree of reality, however ephemeral and intermittent.

Aligned to such media and their explorations of temporality, video art offers a reflection on our current ways of living and thinking about time.<sup>3</sup> Art historian Christine Ross comments that video art has been from the start a practice on and about time and that “early video (and video installation in particular) is best understood as a series of experiments with modes of *making* time; the medium of video functioned within the visual arts as a privileged means by which to “disrupt dominant conventionalities of time, notably acceleration and temporal linearity” (cited in Mondloch, 2012: 42). In her essay *The Temporalities of Video: Extendedness Revisited* (2006: 84), Ross situates her discussion “in the context of research from the last forty years that claims [that] the acceleration of history is one of the key symptoms of modernity and that this pace has meant the progressive absorption of time by space as well as a growing disconnection between past, present, and future.” Ross goes on to demonstrate how video art is significant in thinking about this phenomenon and I will return to her text later on in my discussion of temporal methods in video art that bring attention to the disappearance of the temporal experience of delay in our contemporary environment.

Curator Barbara London<sup>4</sup> also outlines the beginnings of video time exploration and links it to a modernist Greenbergian<sup>5</sup> preoccupation with media specificity in her essay *Time as Medium* (1995) in that this new exploration in the 1960s focused on the effects that were exclusive to video, namely time. London goes on to discuss broadly how time was manipulated in such works:

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<sup>3</sup> Today time has become increasingly perceived as problematic, as Chris Bohn eloquently points out in the editorial for the June 2012 issue of *The Wire*:

The ever-accelerating speed of communication throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century might well have shrunk time and space to the blink of an eye for the millions of Earth dwellers able to press Send or Receive on a nearby internet platform. The trouble is, few minds have gotten any quicker in their ability to process the data delivered to them at such an alarming rate. More than promoting dreams of world peace, love and understanding as envisaged by the entrepreneurial hippy pioneers of the Electronic Frontier, today’s access to lightning-fast global transmissions of information has blasted yawning canyons of incomprehension and anxiety through the vast mountains of knowledge on offer (340: 4).

<sup>4</sup> Barbara London is a video curator at the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She founded the Museum’s Video Study Centre and has written extensively about art and technology.

<sup>5</sup> Clement Greenberg (1909-94) believed that in order to fulfill the “essence” of art, each medium had to discover what was unique to it, for example, Greenberg decided that flatness and the delimitation of flatness, as well as paint and the canvas constituted the “essence” of painting (Carter and Geczy, 2006: 82-83).

In their experiments with the medium, video-makers pointed their cameras at the live picture on the monitor and discovered the recursion phenomenon popularly known as feedback. They colonized black-and-white sequences and rearranged the digital image on the screen by modulating the video signal. In addition, various forms of interactivity, such as using a magnet to warp a television image, added a new dimension of “nowness” to the exploratory works of these artists. A fuller study of time resulted from the interplay between the viewer, the live camera, and prerecorded video material. Time was speeded up, slowed down, frozen, and otherwise mangled within a context that allowed viewer participation. The ability to split time into segments and reconstitute them within the actual flow of the present moment is unique to video (London, 1995: 423).

The comparatively new technology of digital video allows for the manipulation of temporal structures – speed, sequence, and direction at the push of a button (Robertson and McDaniel, 2005: 36). Video, more than other mediums, seems to embody time in its inner workings. Michael Rush goes as far as to describe video as “electrical energy organized as voltages and frequencies in a temporal event” (2003: 95). Video is ideal for representing time as it records movement through time and such movements are open to manipulation in the extreme in editing platforms such as Final Cut Pro or Avid Video.

In video installations, time can be spatialized as well as represented. Michael Rush points out that the difference between video art and video installation art or media installation is that the latter “recognizes space outside the monitor,” and that installation also “enhances the exploration of ‘time’”:

If time can be manipulated in multiple ways within the single-channel video, the possibilities are expanded dramatically in video installations which utilize several monitors or projection surfaces, and often several tapes, vastly increasing the amount of imagery (2003: 125).

In this sense Swedish curator, author and professor Daniel Birnbaum (1963) speaks of time as being “installed” in space, especially with work presented in galleries or museums. Referring to video installation as the “other cinema,” he comments that it “emerges as an attempt to insert spatial modes into the temporal dimensions, and to “install time” in space. Installing time is a matter of choosing the right spatial mode,

the most adequate “schematism” allowing the translation of temporal properties into space” (Mondloch, 2010: 40).

In his recent book *Chronology*, Birnbaum offers another philosophically informed theorization of the ways in which time is spatialized and put on display in contemporary screen-reliant installations. Indeed, he assigns these artworks a paradigmatic status: “If cinema could produce what Deleuze called crystal-images<sup>6</sup> capturing for an instant the inner workings of time itself, then the temporal possibilities of the ‘other cinema,’ exploring more intricate forms of parallelism and synchronicity, are even greater” (ibid: 53).

Video art installations can also highlight the role of the viewer and discussing temporality in these terms, Kate Mondloch (assistant professor of art history at the University of Oregon) comments that post-1990 screen reliant installation art, scholars and critics “share an interest in the way in which “exhibiting” film and video in art galleries allows viewers a critical standpoint from which to better understand the intricacies of time itself in our media culture” (ibid: 40). Mondloch’s concern is, broadly speaking, with the spectator’s relationship to the work or how the moving viewer negotiates the contradictory durational impulses in the presentation of video installation. Extending on this, philosopher Peter Osborne considers gallery-based film and video in Bergsonian<sup>7</sup> terms which he sees as important because it “highlights the *constructed* – rather than received – character of temporal continuity” (ibid: 55). He explains as follows:

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<sup>6</sup> Henri Bergson’s theorizations on time are reconstructed and made contemporary by the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze (1925-1995) whose interest in the arts, particularly the cinema, continues the line of thinking about Bergsonian temporality and movement. His two volume philosophical study of the particular qualities of cinema are *Cinema 1, The Movement-image* (1986) and *Cinema 2, The Time-Image* (1989) in which he proposed new ways to understand cinema. In *The Time-image*, Deleuze explains that the “fragment” or “solitary image” has replaced narrative cinema’s way of describing events and that this is why a concern with time dominates films since World War II. He suggests that that since World War II there has been an inability to describe the nature of new spaces and situations which we now find ourselves in, promoting the practice of treating time as a subject.

<sup>7</sup> The philosopher Henri Bergson (1859 - 1941) differentiated between physical time and duration, the former being measurable by a watch or the movement of the sun, while duration unfolds in the unconscious, independent of surrounding space. Mary Anne Doane refers to Bergson’s theorising on time in terms of the resultant anxiety felt by people from the effects of time becoming standardized and externalized by the process of industrialization, modernity and capitalism “in his adamant reassertion of temporal continuity in the concept of *durée*” (Doane, 2002: 9).

The marked spatiality of the modes of display of film and video in art spaces... and crucially, the movement of the viewer through gallery space, undercuts the false absolutization of time to which cinema is prone (ibid).

Through the development of video installation art, time, the image and its spatial complexities are interrogated and creatively expanded upon to include different interpretations of their innate qualities. It is interesting to note that forms of media display are rapidly increasing as we continue to make interpretations of what it means to be at the “end of history and the end of art” (London, 1995: 426). In the words of Barbara London, “the arrow of time is bent” and we can no longer think of time as regular and unending. London cites Einstein’s theory of relativity<sup>8</sup> in relation to our future (which would include space travel), relegating time to the “overflowing dustbin of history” (ibid).

### **Temporality, fear, unease and trauma in contemporary video installation art:**

In their recent book titled *Time Out of Joint: Recall and Evocation in Recent Art* that accompanied an exhibition held at the Whitney Museum of American Art (May 22 – June 13, 2009), Luigi Fassi, Lucy Gallun and Jakob Schillinger examine “artistic practices that employ evocation as a mode of connecting the present with the past” (2009: vi). Featuring the work of emerging artists working in a variety of media, they explore artistic practices that employ evocation – “the calling forth of past emotions, desires, frustrations and memories into the present” – as a mode of connecting past and present. They use the word ‘evocation’ as derived from the Latin *evocare*, which literally means “to call out” and say that it is distinct from invocation in which historical facts are referenced as such and challenge “the conventional approach to history whereby the past is kept at a distance as historical fact” (ibid: 31). They go on to describe temporality in terms of Walter Benjamin’s *Thesis on the Philosophy of History* (1940) which posits two opposing views of how time unfolds, namely historicism and messianic historical materialism. Benjamin

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<sup>8</sup> *The Special Theory of Relativity* (1905), Albert Einstein: Einstein’s theory that our universe is a time-space continuum, that it makes no sense to dissociate time from the dimensions of space, exerted a wide influence. Today, we realize that time’s flow is not a fixed constant, and because of the relativity of time we always face a decision of what frame of reference to use. Since 1980 our concepts of time have been greatly influenced by newly emerging networks that offer instantaneous information (cell phones, news networks, the WWW) (Robertson and McDaniel, 2005: 49).

opposes historicism, a term that implies “a concept of time as homogenous and continuous, an empty time in whose steady (and endless) unfolding all events are recorded and contained” (ibid: 28). Messianic historical materialism is embraced by Benjamin and he argues that with this approach “the task of the historical materialist is to retain the memory of the past as it flashes up at a moment of danger and to cite this image in the here and now” (ibid). This second view of time brings elements of rupture<sup>9</sup> and crisis to the fore and “disrupts the historicist’s sense of any smooth unfolding of time and may mark the beginning of a new concept of time” (ibid). This second view that proposes the rupturing of conventional notions of time is central to the ideas I explore in this research and my own practical work. I examine different examples of video installation artworks that present and magnify this rupture to alter the dynamic moment.

Concepts of time are inextricably bound to concepts of space. Although the focus of this research is primarily on temporality, it invariably addresses notions of space as well. With my focus on video installation practice the relationship between time and space is of central importance. The ‘space’ to be addressed in such works is to be understood as both physical (the site of the video installation) and cerebral (in the thoughts and memories of the viewers).<sup>10</sup>

Fear has been described by South African artist and art critic Colin Richards as being “almost the master trope of our time” (Smith, Enwezor, Condee, 2008: 262). Even though crime, disease, disasters and predators are statistically less of a threat than

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<sup>9</sup> Fassi, Gallun and Schillinger (ibid: 34) refer to the concept of rupture as “a fundamental break or tear after which nothing is the same. Ruptures can happen on the level of the everyday. In order to create and bring about radical change, the constant suspension of the present in the name of the future must be broken, and the present transformed into a space of action: into “the now.” Ruptures break ideologically fixed notions of historical time, demarcated space, and personal relations, and can happen in each moment – on both the personal level of everyday practice, as well as on broader social, economic, and political terms.

<sup>10</sup> Fassi, Gallun and Schillinger’s comments on the relationship of time and space are worth mentioning here: Defining space has been a pointed debate for centuries: countering Isaac Newton’s more totalizing assumption of “absolute space,” Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz proposed that both time and space are not physical conditions in which we live, but rather modes through which we perceive and distinguish our surroundings. In other words, for Leibniz, space and time are *relative* concepts: they are understood only through the positions of individuals and objects and their relative distance and directionality to one another. Henri Lefebvre also distinguishes between these categories of material space and the representation of space, and introduces a third category: “spaces of representation,” or the way in which our conceptions of material space may change depending upon how the space is *lived* (ibid: 29).

ever before, people seem to be experiencing heightened levels of fear worldwide. Joanna Bourke<sup>11</sup> examines the landscape of fear in her book titled *Fear: A Cultural History* (2006) in which she looks at the past 200 years to consider fears from “diagnosed phobias to the media’s role in creating new ones” (Bourke, 2005: back sleeve). Bourke looks at philosophy, psychology and popular science and highlights our “inner fears,” considering why we are scared and why fear is such a powerful emotion. She comments:

A spectre is haunting humanity: the spectre of fear. Death stares unblinkingly at us. Danger dallies in everyday environs. Sometimes a scary person or menacing object can be identified: the flames searing patterns on the ceiling, the hydrogen bomb, the terrorist. More often, anxiety overwhelms us from some source ‘within’: there is an irrational panic about venturing outside, a dread of failure, a premonition of doom. There often seems no limit to the threats (ibid: 1).

Reasons for such feelings of cultural anxiety and unease are considered by looking at how technology such as cell phones, internet, TV and travel have become integral to our lives. Bourke argues that the notion of ‘real time’ and the increasing speed of technology has resulted in a cultural anxiety. Humans and animals are processed in vast quantities in the metropolitan centres in a kind of large capitalist machine. This processing arguably creates a trauma that is both underlying and unavoidable.

In my research I want to address the notion of fear and an associated unease as it features in selected contemporary artworks and examine how temporality in video installation art has been used to evoke fear and unease or remind the viewer of past trauma. Such artworks may use the durational medium of film and video as a means of engaging with past injustices or events that are re-imagined and brought into the present. These may be actual events that have been reworked or fictional accounts of traumatic experience. Whether actual or fictional, such works explore the boundaries between what is real or imagined. The concept of amnesia is central to this investigation as it seems to be a repetitive human defense mechanism against remembering difficult, sometimes painful experience. There seems, however, to be

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<sup>11</sup> Born 1963 in New Zealand, Joanne Bourke is an historian and professor of history at Birkbeck, University of London. Describing herself as a ‘socialist feminist,’ she has written on Irish history, gender history, working-class culture, war and masculinity, the cultural history of fear and the history of rape.

an attempt by the artists researched to combat this amnesiac tendency in the sense of what Walter Benjamin points out as follows:

To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it “the way it really was.” It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably (Walter Benjamin as cited from his “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” 1940, in Fassi, Gallun and Schillinger, 2009: vi).

Video installation art is a dynamic and rapidly changing medium. In the past fifty or so years since its creation it has gone through a series of important technological changes from film to video tape and more recently to digital modes of capture. It is also hybrid in nature, encompassing photography, cinema, performance, TV and sound. Access to and preservation of such durational artworks is a major concern for anyone wishing to study video installation and makes it’s dissemination difficult at times. I need to state at the outset that I have not seen several of the artworks discussed in this dissertation in their original formats (such as Douglas Gordon’s video installations) which means that I have to rely on close readings and interpretations of such works as related by viewers and critics who have seen the works first-hand. The aspect of research into video installation artworks is of necessity complex because it brings into question not only the video artwork (i.e. the screened image) but also the entire viewing context in which it is seen.

I began my research by examining material on structural film of the 1960s, an experimental film movement that started in the US and developed into structuralist/materialist films in the UK. Artists such as Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, George Landow and others pursued a simplified approach to film making where the shape of film was crucial and the content peripheral. P. Adams Sitney (born 1944), a historian of American avant-garde cinema, identifies different elements of structural film/video, most of which indicate some kind of temporal manipulation. These are:

-the flicker effect

- loop printing
- fixed-camera angle
- rephotography of the screen
- duration as a spatial strategy

Malcolm Le Grice (born 1940), an influential British film maker and theorist, adds the following concerns:

- celluloid as material
- projection as event
- duration as a concrete dimension (Le Grice, 1981: 88-89)

Further manipulation of time codes in video, alongside sound or lack thereof and the installation setting, can yield a highly manipulative medium where the artist can evoke intensity like fear, awe, reverence, sorrow, etc. It is argued that in some cases the moving image promotes the audience or viewer in a gallery setting to look at the work longer than they would at a still image (Gordon, 1998: 44-45).

The artists I look at in this research paper use elements of time in the structure and setting of their video artworks to connote fear and unease, uncertainty and crisis in various ways. Unconscious psychological elements in video, the dream, memory and time inherent in watching and studying video installation art all interest me and these themes prevail throughout my investigation.

The video works chosen for this paper could be described, in varying degrees, as conceptual,<sup>12</sup> i.e. works in which the idea and the means of producing it are

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<sup>12</sup> Conceptual Art has many manifestations and can be described in various ways. The following paragraph from Sol LeWitt's *Paragraphs on Conceptual Art* (1967) (Osborne, 2002: 213-214) characterizes the way in which my chosen artists' works, and especially Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*... may be viewed as conceptual:

I will refer to the kind of art in which I am involved as conceptual art. In conceptual art the idea of concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art. This kind of art is not theoretical or illustrative of theories; it is intuitive, it is involved with all types of mental processes and it is purposeless. It is usually free from the dependence on the skill of the artist as a craftsman. It is the objective of the artist who is concerned with conceptual art to make his work mentally

paramount. Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*, for instance, is especially complex in its conceptual dimension by way of its intricate relationship to cinema and testimony. There are many texts dedicated to this particular work. Kester mentions the "dematerialization of the object of art" in the quote used at the start of this introduction (a phrase termed by US critic Lucy Lippard) that characterizes much of Western art since the 1960s. It is this move in the making and understanding of art where the material nature of the work becomes less important than the ideas behind it (Rush, 2005: 125) that frames much of the following examination of video art works.

In Chapter 1 I briefly outline the terrain of video installation art and examine its origins and the context out of which it arose in the 1960s. I briefly consider important pioneers such as the Fluxus movement who preempted video art and Nam Jun Paik and Andy Warhol who explored the new medium and its potential for installation formats. With its multiple origins and the complex visual forms that it took, video art was initially characterized by a chaotic and anti-establishment spirit and changed the way in which the viewer negotiated with the art object. It also presented technological challenges to the museum. New technologies and expanded viewing environments since the early days of video art exploration have presented novel ways of displaying the moving image and I briefly touch on a few examples.

In Chapter 2 I briefly discuss the cultural phenomenon of fear and link this to the evocation of fear and unease in contemporary art. I consider how film, video and video installations can affect viewers emotionally and examine the idea of embodied spectatorship as an intense and affective state of emotion attainable through such works. Decontextualization, film editing techniques such as the jump cut and the loop used as forms of disjuncture and the effectiveness of sound are considered as important elements in the enhancing of an immersive experience. I go on to

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interesting to the spectator, and therefore usually he would want it to become emotionally dry. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the conceptual artist is out to bore the viewer. It is only the expectation of an emotional kick, to which one conditioned to expressionist art is accustomed, that would deter the viewer from perceiving this art.

examine the works of selected artists who have used film, video and temporality effectively in addressing themes of rupture, fear and unease. How time fits into the traumatic scenario is also considered in relation to the notion of the uncanny which can be understood as a delayed or deferred action where a traumatic event becomes traumatic after the fact.

In Chapter 3 I examine more closely the works of selected contemporary video installation artists who can be seen to explore temporality and the evocation of fear and unease. In the 1990s, Scottish artist Douglas Gordon explored the drawing out of the aspect of time in film in several of his video installation artworks and I examine especially his well-known work *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) to facilitate my discussion of video art, cinema, temporality and fear and unease. I have chosen to focus on the works of a few South African contemporary artists who have used film and video installation to evoke trauma, fear and memory through temporal manipulation and briefly consider their works in the context of current South African art production. The trauma of South Africa's apartheid past still resonates today and South African artists are often seen to address themes that explore the relationship of fear and time in this context.

Chapter 4 focuses on my own creative work submitted for this degree. In fulfillment towards the practical component for this degree I presented a video installation in the Substation gallery titled *Night-light* together with supporting preparatory video work. I used the format of video installation to create an immersive encounter for the viewer by presenting 7 projections based on my children asleep at night and scenes relating to my home environment. I discuss my concerns with setting up the images and soundtrack in creating a stimulating and affective experience that would resonate with the viewer and relate my ideas to the evocation of fear and unease as discussed in earlier chapters.

In the Conclusion I draw together my observations on temporality and the evocation of fear and unease in contemporary installation artworks.

## Chapter 1: Video installation art:

The origins of video installation art are complex and can be seen to derive from a mix of disciplines such as music, poetry, sculpture, painting, theatre, dance and technology, to name a few. Early forms of video installations have been linked to light shows that would immerse the viewer in a magical realm of the unreal. Examples of the first of such installations (or projections) are described by Tom Gunning in his book titled *Art of Projection* (2009) where he traces the first real media 'projections' to the phantasmagoria<sup>13</sup> presented in Paris at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century (2009: 24).<sup>14</sup> He describes how the apparatus was hidden from the audience, thus creating the illusion of magic and the supernatural as follows:

The phantasmagoria (like the movie projection system that ultimately derived from it) created its illusions primarily by concealing its means of projection. Thus it modernized the long tradition of magic shows, which created the impression of miraculous events by hiding the real processes from view, through the implementation of new optical effects. As an illusion, it worked directly on the people sitting in the audience, limiting their viewpoint, manipulating their perception either by withholding sensual information or by overstimulating the senses (the combination of limited sight due to the gloomy atmosphere while the ears were assaulted with eerie or unfamiliar sounds) (ibid: 28).

The phantasmagoria demonstrates our fascination with illusion and transporting ourselves (even if momentarily) to other fantastic realms or perceptual spaces. Screens of all sizes dominate our modern world, from our computers, to movie theaters and advertising screens. Television can now be watched on handheld monitors and ipads are being used in schools. These new technological gadgets can perhaps be seen as extensions of the earlier phantasmagoria with its mix of science, technology and theatricality. Video installation art, in my view, tries to understand and use these accumulated structures to unravel and understand our contemporary

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<sup>13</sup> Phantasmagoria were theatrical forms of entertainment. Using a modified magic lantern system to project frightening images (skeletons, ghosts, demons, recently well known dead people and nightmarish apparitions) onto walls, smoke and semi-transparent screens. They were invented in France in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that these phantasmagoria tended to create atmospheres of fright and terror.

milieu. As Stuart Comer, editor of *Film and Video art* (2009: 8), points out about such art forms:

Artists have used the camera, the screen, and the space in between. They have used magic lanterns, slide film, Super-8, 16mm and 35mm film, video on monitors, video on multiple screens, video projected to a spectacular scale on urban buildings and downsized to the smallest of portable devices. They have produced one-minute films, eight-hour films and videos streaming infinitely online. There are cameraless films, hand-painted films, films produced according to strict rules, and films that defy every conceivable rule. Artists have used the projected image as mirror, a weapon, an analytical tool, and *mise en abyme* in which the virtual and real unfold into one another with increasing complexity.

The term 'video art' as a distinctive subject in art history was first coined the 1960s and was initially pioneered as a new art form in the US and Britain. The first portable video cameras were developed and used by the US military for surveillance purposes in Vietnam in the early 1960s. Video cameras were also widely used for broadcast television, which was dominated by commerce and influenced by political pressures (Elwes, 2005: 3). Many early video artists using publicly available video technology for the first time, such as Nam June Paik,<sup>15</sup> felt that television was a means of social control and much of early video art was thus a direct reaction against the early beginnings of the video industry. Paik noted at the time: "[t]elevision has been attacking us all our lives, now we can attack it back" (ibid).

In his book *New Media in Art* Michael Rush<sup>16</sup> describes the context out of which video art emerged in America as follows:

The moving image had entered the common household with a vengeance: by 1953, two thirds of American households had televisions; and by 1960, it was up to 90 percent [...]. By the 1960s the total commercialization of corporate television had been accomplished, and, to media watchdogs and many artists, television was becoming the enemy. Americans were watching up to seven hours of it daily and a new consumer society was forming, generated by an advertising oligarchy, which is what keeps television going. In addition

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<sup>15</sup> Nam June Paik (1932-2006) was born in Korea, he trained as a classical pianist and became influenced by the work of John Cage. He moved to America in the 1960s making art by using TV monitors as part of performance works. He is often regarded as one of the first video artists.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Rush is a writer, essayist and critic who has contributed to the *New York Times*, *Art in America* and *Bookforum*. He has also curated award winning contemporary visual art exhibitions and has a doctorate from Harvard University.

worldwide political upheavals and dissident awareness, the student revolts in Paris, New York and many other parts of the world, and a sexual revolution all contributed to the cultural contexts in which video art emerged (2003: 84).

Even though the 1960s were a time of 'sexual revolution' in the West, video art is still laced with masculine narratives. Many books dedicated to the subject prefer to cite male artists as the first to have used video as art, and so writing about a history of video art is beset with difficult questions such as: who gets selected as being significant in the development of this art form and how has that history been shaped by institutions?<sup>17</sup> As Marita Sturken<sup>18</sup> points out, "the historical narrative of video art, which has been constructed in a brief twenty years, is thick with myth and follows the conventional narrative codes of history making" (Hall and Fifer, 1990: 102).

Most books that address the history of video art start with Nam June Paik as a seminal figure in creating some of the first video installations using TV monitors. In her essay *Video: Shedding the Utopian Moment* (1990), American video and installation artist and writer Martha Rosler comments about Paik's early explorations with televisions in art as an "interference with TV's inviolability, its air of nonmateriality, overwhelmed its single-minded instrumentality with an antic "creativity" (ibid: 45). Paik imported TV into art-world culture, identifying it as an element of daily life susceptible to symbolic anti-aesthetic aestheticism [...]" The proliferation of TV and new technology at this time was felt by many to threaten to strip humans of their natural curiosity. In becoming glued to the TV and its commercial messages people could easily be influenced by the new consumer culture – in the form of advertising and also through stereotyping in TV programming. TV is still regarded by some as the most powerful drug known to man.

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<sup>17</sup> Martha Rosler's essay on the history of video art sites this history as "utopian" and "distorted." She argues that like history, the writing of video art into art history is beset with bias.

<sup>18</sup> Marita Sturken is an author, scholar, critic and professor. She is Professor of the Department of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University's Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development. She has written extensively on the early histories of video art and community video.

In his book *The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects* (1967), well-known Canadian author and cultural theorist Marshall McLuhan (1911-80) drew attention to the social consequences of new communication systems and pointed out that the content of a television broadcast was less important than the new viewing habits it engendered. He commented that “the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” was the real “message” of technology, in other words, that television dictates behaviour (Elwes, 2005: 99). McLuhan believed that the artist’s role was to “tackle the medium “with impunity” and, through acute awareness of the media’s power to manipulate the senses, resist the mental restructuring forces of technology” (ibid: 112). His vision of global communication became a rich source of material and interest for artists working in the 1960s (Rush, 2003: 84).

In 1965 the first portable video camera and recorder, the Sony Portapak, became available to the public. This enabled artists to use video technologies in unconventional and personal ways as well as liberating TV and video information from homes and allowing for a more personal exploration of moving imagery. The early achievements of video art were, in the words of John G. Hanhardt (a curator and writer with a particular interest in media art), “to strip television of its institutional meanings and expose it as a powerful co-optive force in capitalist society” (ibid: 71). Hanhardt cites the Fluxus<sup>19</sup> movement as pre-empting video art in that TV’s authority and omnipresence was undermined by Fluxus artists, showing how it functioned as a medium and how it was shaping world views at the time (ibid: 73). Paik showed his first video tape (made with the early Sony portapak) at a Fluxus event showing imagery of Pope Paul VI’s procession recorded from a car

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<sup>19</sup> John G. Hanhardt describes Fluxus as follows: “Fluxus was a loose, anarchic association of artists formed around the mercurial figure of George Maciunas, its founder and leading advocate. Beginning in the late 1950s and extending through the 1960s and 1970s, Fluxus assumed a stance that can best be described as anti-high art. Its actions debunked the institutions of the art world with a playfulness and humor previously associated with dada and the seminal ideas of Marcel Duchamp. John Cage, who taught at the New School for Social Research in 1954, was a primary influence on Fluxus and a catalyst for the happenings that would occur later in that decade. Cage’s emphasis on the role of chance in artmaking and perception had a profound impact on a group of artists including Allan Kaprow, Wolf Vostell, Nam June Paik, Goerge Brecht, George Maciunas, Kick Higgins, and Jackson MacLow. They postulated a conceptual basis for Fluxus that resulted in events which highlighted that materiality of consumer culture. As with other anti-art movements during this turbulent time, this gave a distinct social edge to Fluxus, whose efforts were directed to overturning the gargon of art history and politics through subversive humor and irony” (Hall and Fifer, 1990: 73).

window in New York City. He displayed his own hand-held and spontaneous footage next to the official documented footage.

Andy Warhol is another artist who is often cited as one of the pioneers of video art. Warhol made a number of videos that were pioneering both in their content and viewing setting. One such example was *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* (EMI)(1966) described by Branden W. Joseph (author, essayist and professor of Modern and Contemporary Art in the Department of Art History at Columbia University) as:

An overwhelming expanded cinema production collaboratively orchestrated from 1966 to 1967. At the height of its development, the *Exploding Plastic Inevitable* included three to five film projectors, often showing different reels of the same film simultaneously; a similar number of slide projectors, movable by hand so that their images swept the auditorium; for variable-speed strobe lights; three moving spots with an assortment of colored gels; several pistol lights; a mirror ball hung from the ceiling and another on the floor; as many as three loudspeakers blaring different pop records at once; on or two sets by the Velvet Underground and Nico; and the dancing of Gerard Malanga and Mary Woronov or Ingrid Superstar, complete with props and lights that projected their shadows high on to the wall (Douglas & Eamon, 2009: 71).

The chaotic barrage of information that this installation must have produced was the first of its kind in this context and drew a considerable amount of attention and criticism. Currently it may not seem that unusual or interesting but at the time it was innovative. As Joseph further notes:

Today, at the outset of the twenty-first century, Warhol's formerly futuristic "brutal assemblage" has no doubt itself become outmoded. Yet, in its time, the EPI mobilized the conflictual, deterritorialized forces of electronic media toward the explosion of a newly developing, postinstitutional prison-world ... among the far-flung debris of which some, at least, would find it possible – less calmly, perhaps, but no less adventurously – to go traveling (ibid: 86).

As these examples demonstrate, video art's multiple origins and complex visual forms made for an uneasy relationship with the art museum. The chaotic and often anti-establishment nature of the new medium did not, at that time, suit the formal qualities that an art gallery or museum was used to supporting. Technologically, galleries were not equipped to deal with this new form of immersive video art. Not

only was viewing equipment (such as television screens, projectors, speakers) expensive to buy, it was also a new way of displaying image and sound that needed to be explored before it could be fully acceptable in the gallery setting (as it became in the 1980s).

Another difficult issue was the commodity value of video and installation work being produced at the time. How was the gallery to sell such work? This issue is still relevant now and in some instances galleries (especially smaller commercial galleries) prefer to stick to the static arts, which are much easier to install and sell. Margaret Morse, writing a contributing essay for the book *Illuminating Video: an Essential Guide to Video Art* (1990), states that video installation art is a “noncommodity art form” (Hall & Fifer, 1990: 154). Unlike a painting or a sculpture that can be separated from its production and is therefore commodifiable, video installation cannot. Morse (*ibid*) goes on to say:

While an installation can be diagrammed, photographed, videotaped, or described in language, its crucial element is ultimately missing from any such two-dimensional construction, that is, “the space-in-between,” or the actual construction of a passage for bodies or figures in space and time. Indeed, I would argue, the part that collapses whenever the installation isn’t installed is the art.

The time-based aspect of viewing video, the time it takes to watch, requires more participation from the viewer. In a gallery or museum, viewing time is leisurely and determined by the viewer but video has its own temporal agenda. It requires a dedicated viewer, willing to immerse her/himself in the installation presented, and perhaps spending a little more time than usual engaging with the artwork. The moving image can entice a viewer in a gallery setting to look at the work longer than they would at a still image and so inherently encourages an engagement with temporality. In an interview with Jan Debbaut, Douglas Gordon talks about his interest in the medium of the moving image and its ability to hold the attention of viewers of his work as follows:

And this issue of ‘time’ spent looking is one which I have been acutely aware of: that most visitors to galleries and museums spend little time looking at

paintings, or sculptures, or even photographs, but if you put a moving image in front of someone, there seems to be a bind that makes them stay that little bit longer – and this is what makes it interesting to me to use film or video – I ask them to stay a bit longer (Gordon and Dabbaut, 1998: 44,45).

Often video art can set up an ambivalent and multifaceted relationship with the viewer of the work, especially in a gallery setting. For instance, how long will s/he stay to watch the work, how much time does it take to appreciate the video? What does the viewer bring to the installation? The viewer or visitor to a video installation is, in Margaret Morse's words, "surrounded by a spatial here and now, enclosed within a construction that is grounded in actual (not illusionistic) space." Video installation involves an interactive engagement in that viewers can choose to move within the installation in their own way (Hall & Fifer, 1990: 156).

Video installation art changes the way a viewer negotiates with the art object and the gallery space or museum. As Chris Meigh-Andrews<sup>20</sup> points out in his book *A History of Video Art: the Development of Form and Function*:

Outside the context of television broadcast, video has been presented in galleries and has required and demanded a different attitude from its potential audience. Videotapes, shown on small monitors, grouped in multiples or presenting 'live' images from closed circuit cameras, presented a new viewing experience challenging common assumptions about the nature of art, of television and, increasingly, about its relationship to cinema and sculptures (2006: 199).

Artists working with video installation often seek to engage with the viewer spatially, as Meigh-Andrews further comments:

Video artists working with installation often sought to explore spatial and physical relationships in relation to screen-image content, frequently including numerous interactive elements. This 'participatory' dimension is of paramount importance in video installation, the audience engaging directly with the work at a physical and emotional level (ibid: 212).

Such a participatory experience is, however, not necessarily always or automatically a part of video installation. In her book *Screens, Viewing Media Installation Art*

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<sup>20</sup> Chris Meigh-Andrews (1952) is a British video installation artist, Professor of Electronic and Digital Art at the University of Central Lancashire, curator and author and writer of books and essays dealing specifically with video art and video installation art.

(2010), Mondloch examines the role of screens in artistic production since the 1960s alongside the kind of spectatorship it promotes, pointing out that viewers partake in a kind of “window shopping” when looking at video art and video installation art within a gallery context. Mondloch says:

While the audience’s expected time commitment is putatively preordained in the case of viewing non-installation variants of film or video (such as experimental film or single-channel videotapes, whose discrete duration implies some sort of closure, however unresolved), viewers routinely enjoy what one might call an exploratory duration in observing gallery-based media installations: that is, spectators autonomously determine the length of time they spend with the work. Largely unburdened by externally imposed timetables, museum visitors of film and video installations appear to be free to walk in or out at any time. As Fredric Jameson has observed about video in a different context, “We can always shut [it] off, without sitting politely through a social and institutional ritual (2010: 41).

While the moving image may capture the attention of the viewers it could just as easily be ignored or moved through at a pace that would not allow for an understanding of the work. As people become more saturated with the moving image in daily life, video installation becomes as vulnerable as any other medium to the new attention span of media savvy customers. Perhaps looking at a painting or sculpture becomes more meditative and thought provoking than the frenzied overused moving image that we are so used to.

The medium of video and video installation is subject to technological degradation and other issues relating to site-specificity and access. For example, when viewing a video installation artwork out of its original context, does it lose its original meaning and function? Video installations are most often created with a spatial and physical context in mind. This part of the installation is considered meaningful to the work in that it may involve the viewer in a spatial negotiation with the image/s and sound as well as the equipment being used, such as multiple screens, large speakers or light projections. Viewing the work on You Tube or on a computer after the event thus misses the full experience of the work in its original format. This argument adds to the view that video installations are in essence ephemeral and based on a

non-commercial system. Video tapes are also subject to deterioration and obsolescence, as are DVDs, and all electronic media may ultimately face a future in which it may be replaced.

Discussing this difficult issue that media installation art faces, Mondloch goes on to say:

Outside of contemporary exhibitions, it is difficult to observe many screen-reliant installations at all, much less to see them in their original configurations [...] This is due to multiple factors, including issues of site-specificity (which is, after all, a common dilemma for the majority of experiential and site-based artworks created since 1960) but also, and equally important, the problem of technological obsolescence. Media technologies are quickly outdated and media artworks are no exception; in many cases it proves impossible to operate or restore the technological apparatus, which, insofar as it served as a defining element of the viewer screen interface, was once central to the artwork's very meaning. While scholars and institutions are working diligently to address issues of preservation and access for museum-based media art, many thorny issues over artistic intention, ephemerality, and the commodity status of individual works remain unresolved. With limited opportunities for first-hand viewing of historic pieces, writing about this kind of artistic production requires patient review of archival materials, exhibition reviews, interviews, documentary photographs, and the like. Would-be audiences must also content themselves for the most part with (still) photographs documenting the initial installation of a given moving-image environment (ibid).

With the newness of the video medium in the 1960s, artists exploring it were initially preoccupied with its inherent formal qualities such as instant replay, camera movement, colour and possibilities with scale and the relationship to the viewer. Marita Sturken, in more recent times, cites intimacy as one particular quality of video art (Hall & Fifer, 1990: 117). Although a distancing is inevitable when viewing video on a TV or screen of some kind, the size of the screen and the instant image afford a certain immediacy and intimacy not found in painting or cinema in that there is a tendency to use the "monitor as a mirror" (ibid). In other words, an artist sets up the camera and performs or records the space before it in a very immediate way. Art critic Rosalind Krauss even points out that video art is inherently narcissistic when she says that "[s]elf-encapsulation - the body or psyche

as its own surrounding - is everywhere to be found in the corpus of video art" (ibid). However, this kind of intimate recording could also be used as a strategy to change the role of viewer/artist or to subvert the notion of public and private.

Disrupting the content via personal narratives using video technology in this way became a powerful way of reasserting individual accounts of reality (as opposed to the stereotypes portrayed on TV). Feminist video found its voice within this context. The well-known slogan the 'personal is political' became a common phrase with both activists and artists in an attempt to raise awareness and gain support for equality between men and women. The immediacy of the video medium was attractive to feminist artists working with autobiographical material. As Catherine Elwes points out:

A video image could be worked on directly in the privacy of home or studio with the monitor as a guide. The results could be made public or deleted at will. In spite of being heavy and cumbersome, portable video equipment was relatively easy to operate. Women could quickly master the technology and embark on the difficult business of introspection and experimentation without the intrusive presence of camera crews and generally male technicians. With erasure as easy as making a mark, the medium allowed artists unprecedented control over both the substance and the terms of their visibility (2005: 41).

Content of feminist video often portrayed women within traditional domestic settings, including the maternal wifely attributes that were often cited as a woman's best qualities. For example, Elwes describes the work of Martha Rosler's classic video *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975) which recreated a cookery programme, but made no attempt to entertain:

In the tape, the aproned artist stands behind a table on which an array of kitchen utensils is laid out. She selects each one in turn, holding them up to the camera and dully speaking their name. Dish, tenderiser and plate are enumerated like school role call whilst their function is briefly demonstrated but without ingredients. When it comes to knife, fork and ice pick, Rosler turns these familiar objects into domestic weapons and beats the air like a cool-headed murderess dispatching an invisible victim. When it is the turn of the ladle, she flings aside the imaginary contents creating a nightmare mess that would mark her as a failed housewife. The underlying threat of Freudian castration, of losing both symbol and member of manhood, is grimly

laboured as Rosler hacks out the inventory of women's repetitive domestic slavery serving up her anger in carefully measured culinary gestures (ibid: 42).

This example is just one of many in feminist video discourse. Other important examples are too many to list by name in this short chapter but include the subjective and personal female experience on the subject of men, children, love, the body and the power of speech in an attempt to subvert content regarding patriarchal culture, especially as exemplified by television and Hollywood film (ibid: 41-58).

During the 1980s and 1990s, noble ideological ideals of video art became diluted and irrelevant. Video art and video installation art was embraced by museums and galleries, becoming widely acceptable, commodifiable and mainstream. TV and mass media were no longer the enemy and its former roots as an anti-establishment art form were forgotten. Subjective personal views were seen as quaint and unsustainable in a postmodern cynical art world. The authenticity of video recording was called into question. As Elwes notes, "[b]etween postmodernist permissiveness and a recycled Marxist feminist attack on the image, video as deconstructive critique, revelatory or counter-cultural practice was no longer seen to be legitimate. Video was now impotent as a catalyst for change" (ibid: 162).

Although the origins of the video art movement became a thing of the past, new technologies and expanded viewing environments, including galleries, opened up novel ways of displaying the moving image. For example, American video artist Tony Oursler has been interested in portraying the human being with his/her fears, feelings and drives using actual projection surfaces as his figures such as self-made cloth dolls onto which the video image is projected. *Criminal Eye* (1995) confronts the loss of the body and identity in our media society. Writers Ulrike Havemann and Petra Kaiser describe Oursler's work as follows:

Projected onto a huge, smooth ball is a moving human eye. Sound bites from television programs can be heard and in the iris of the eye can be seen the blurred reflection of constantly changing television images. The terrifyingly

huge eye seems not to react at all to the visual or acoustic stimuli. On the contrary, it repeatedly and nearly uniformly follows the same course of movements. In circuits it feels out the limits of its radius of action. It does not react to the flood of images from television, not even by blinking or by tracking luminous stimuli (2003: 496).

Apart from the content of such a moving projection, the way of displaying it is unconventional and visually arresting. Many other recent video installations have used new technology to convey their ideas. Artists have even used state of the art medical technology (video endoscopy and MRI scans) to visually explore the insides of their body. Mona Hatoum (a Palestinian artist, who often evokes fear in her work through the visceral response that it elicits in her viewer), used video endoscopy technology to explore both the inside and outside of her body with the help of a physician. Writing a review for the online magazine *Zingmagazine.com*<sup>21</sup>, German writer and curator, Sabine Russ, describes Hatoum's installation *Corps Étranger* (1994) as follows:

Mona Hatoum achieves distressing pictorial effects by an extreme enlargement of bodily matter. In "Corps Étranger," 1994, a circular video screen installed into the floor is surrounded by a white cylindrical shell, which one can enter to follow the bizarre journey of a camera traveling through a body, a technique borrowed from medicine. Mucous membranes, hair, pupils, teeth - all are monstrously enlarged and the camera mercilessly plunges through the orifices of the body into moist pulsating tunnels. The voyage outside is accompanied by the sound of breathing, and the one inside by the sound of the heart. The images are fantastic and at the same time repulsive; because this "meat inspection" takes place on the floor one looks down at an anonymous mass (the body) almost as if it were litter or refuse. But then, with lowered eyes, one finds oneself in a kind of devotional position, and the cylinder simultaneously suggests a temple-like structure and a research laboratory.

Many artists now use video and video installation as part of their repertoire as well as other mediums such as sculpture, photography, painting and drawing, in some cases showing all different mediums in the same exhibition. In many ways the moving image combined with sound and installation can interpret ideas and convey them in ways that are only possible with this medium in that it confronts all the

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.zingmagazine.com/zing3/reviews/020\\_body.html](http://www.zingmagazine.com/zing3/reviews/020_body.html)

senses (except perhaps smell and touch). The successful moving image will always be arresting and given its early beginnings, in the form of phantasmagoria, holds an important place in the imaginations of artists and viewers alike. Video and video installation seems to address our world of dreams/nightmares and the realm of fantasy, which is such an important part of our psychological experience.

## **Chapter 2: Evoking Fear and Unease:**

### **The Cultural Phenomenon of Fear:**

Fear is a universal emotion but culturally informed. Fears change through time with expanded scientific knowledge and belief systems. For instance, in England fear of being buried alive was a major concern in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Fear, as an emotional experience and as a concept has a complex history, but there is a consistent presence of the fear of death and dying. Some of our contemporary fears include fear of crime and disease, 'rape' of the environment, the fear of terrorist attacks with the resulting close surveillance of our society and 'justified' torture, persecution of immigrants and fear of wars such as the recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. In our contemporary lives we are also numbed to the spectacle of violent death as it is routinely portrayed in mass media (Bourke, 2005: 32-36).

Organizations and powerful interest groups such as religious groups, politicians, psychological services, schools, the media and physicians rely on fear to generate income and support. For example, within Christianity it is still accepted that souls will be judged according to their actions in life creating a fear of death and resulting in law abiding citizens. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century preachers and sermons advocated fear as a method to reform sinners. As Joanna Bourke points out:

What incensed clergy most of all was 'backsliders' and 'doubting Thomases'. As one minister of the Free Church of Scotland lamented in the 1860s, many people attending church 'hear all our doctrine, sit at our feasts, and in outward life are blameless', but 'know nothing of the fear of God, or of the love of Christ'. There was little point in seeking to 'melt them by the tale of a Redeemer's love' or attempting to 'charm them into His alliance with description of His beauty'. This would be like throwing pearls before swine. 'We have need rather to mediate terror,' he ruled, causing these sinners in Zion to be afraid' (ibid: 45).

Fear can be a destructive and psychic force causing neurosis and other psychological disturbances. During the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century the discourse of psychoanalysis became a way of thinking about and experiencing trauma. This is

illustrated by the term 'post traumatic stress disorder' which is described as a severe form of anxiety suffered by those who have undergone trauma. The psychological effects of traumatic experience became as serious as the physical effects. Bourke (ibid: 375) notes that,

[p]sychological injury became more frightening than physical mutilation or ruin of a societies infrastructure. Rather than tragedy being interpreted as a moral event, it became the site of a 'psychic wound'. The relevance of psychology was no longer questioned: disaster discourse simply focused on the *type* of psychological model most applicable to understanding an individual's fears or a group's panic.

The notion of psychoanalysis and the psyche being a source of investigation was epitomized by the master of psychoanalysis (and neuroses) Sigmund Freud, and became a way of describing and medicalizing fear. Psychoanalysis posed that fear was not caused by an obvious threat of death but by an event that may have happened earlier in the life of a sufferer, for example in infancy. Fear originated from within the individual, not from without (Bourke, 2005: 249).

As much as fear can be debilitating it can also have positive elements; fear can be pleasurable too. Alexander Bain, a 19<sup>th</sup> Century theorist of the emotions, observed in his book *The Emotions and the Will* (1859) that,

A genuine fright is undoubtedly an experience of pure misery; but a slight fear, with speedy relief occurring in times of dullness [sic] and stolid composure, acts like a stimulant on the nervous system. In the flush of high bodily vigour, danger only heightens the interest of action and pursuit. In proportion as the reality of evil is removed far from ourselves, we are at liberty to join in the excitement produced by the expression of fear (ibid: 386).

The eighteenth century politician and philosopher Edmund Burke (1729-1797) wrote about the positive and transformative power of fear when he made the connection between the sublime<sup>22</sup> and fear in his early philosophical work on

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<sup>22</sup> Of the sublime, Burke (ibid) writes,

The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature, when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it. Hence arises the great power of the sublime, that far from

aesthetics: *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful*, first published in 1756. This book is often described as an important contribution to the study of aesthetics inspiring some of the great thinkers of the time. Burke describes terror as follows:

No passion so effectively robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear. For fear being an apprehension of pain or death, it operates in a manner that resembles actual pain. Whatever therefore is terrible, with regard to sight, is sublime too, whether this cause of terror, be endured with greatness of dimensions or not; for it is impossible to look on any thing as trifling, or contemptible, that may be dangerous (1958:57-58).

The phenomenon of fear evoking beauty or fascination, or vice versa, is just as relevant today. Jean-Francois Lyotard<sup>23</sup> (1924-1998), in his essay *The Sublime and the Avant-Garde* (1988), theorized a contemporary postmodern sublime. This sublime is related to an experience of time especially with regards to the “now” or the present moment, which Lyotard describes as impossible to grasp in that it is always disappearing into the past. Lyotard argues that the anxiety of not knowing what will happen in the next moment (or if there will be a next moment) is at the heart of the postmodern sublime. Lyotard reiterates Edmund Burke’s theory that fear or pain (especially its anticipation) creates a kind of pleasure. He says:

But there is another kind of pleasure that is bound to a passion stronger than satisfaction and that is pain and impending death. In pain the body affects the soul. But the soul can also affect the body as though it were experiencing some externally induced pain, by the soul means of representations that are unconsciously associated with painful situations. This entirely spiritual passion, in Burke’s lexicon, is called terror. Terrors are linked to privation: privation of light, terror of darkness; privation of others, terror of solitude; privation of language, terror of silence; privation of objects, terror of emptiness; privation of life, terror of death. What is terrifying is that the *It happens that* does not happen, that it stops happening.

Burke wrote that for this terror to mingle with pleasure and with it to produce the feeling of the sublime, it is also necessary that the terror-causing threat be suspended, kept at bay, held back. This suspense, this lessening of

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being produced by them, it anticipates our reasoning’s, and hurries us on by an irresistible force. Astonishment, as I have said, is the effect of the sublime in its highest degree; the inferior effects are admiration, reverence and respect.

<sup>23</sup> Jean –Francois Lyotard was a French philosopher and literary theorist. He co-founded the International Collage of Philosophy with Jacques Derrida, François Châtelet, and Gilles Deleuze. Lyotard addresses wide ranging subjects such as film, painting, psychoanalysis, Judaism and politics from within a philosophical framework. He is well known for his analysis of post modernity and its impact on the human condition. His books include *The Postmodern Condition, Just Gaming* and *The Differend*.

a threat or a danger, provokes a kind of pleasure that is certainly not that of a positive satisfaction, but is, rather, that of relief. This is still a privation, but it is privation at one remove; the soul is deprived of the threat of being deprived of light, language, life. Burke distinguishes this pleasure of secondary privation from positive pleasures, and he baptizes it with the name *delight* (1988: 99).

This removed fear/pleasure experience would explain why so many people love to watch scary movies. In his book *Images of Fear* (1990), Martin Tropp (professor of English at Babson College, Massachusetts) discusses how literary characters such as Frankenstein became a way of understanding the culture at the time and can be related to the way frightening films are so popular. He says:

Horror stories, when they work, construct a fictional edifice of fear and deconstruct it simultaneously, dissipating terror in the act of creating it. And real horrors are filtered through the expectations of readers trained in responding to popular fiction, familiar with a set of images, a language, and patterns of behaviour. Horror fiction gives the reader the tools to 'read' experiences that would otherwise, like nightmares, be incommunicable (Bourke, 2005: 388-389).

However, the blurring boundaries between the 'real' and 'fiction' can become disturbingly uncanny as witnessed during the 9/11 attacks and the accounts of the survivors and witnesses who noticed the similarity to scenes in movies such as *Godzilla* (1998), *The Towering Inferno* (1974) and *Independence Day* (1995). The boundary between reality and fiction comes up again and again, potentially turning fear and real tragedy into a pleasurable commodity. The live and broadcasted footage of the 9/11 attacks seen all over the world, made the attacks in 2001 into a spectacle, nullifying the horror and shock of the event. As Joanna Bourke points out:

But in 1993 and 2001, when the terrorist attacks were all too real, instead of arousing fear the mass media enabled people to cope with their terror by shrouding it in familiar fictive modes. On the one hand, 'real-time' television coverage of the attacks on the WTC and the Pentagon in 2001 provided many viewers with an illusion that they understood what was happening. In the words of a reporter for the *New York Times*: the images were terrifying to watch, yet the coverage was strangely reassuring because it existed with such immediacy, even when detailed information was scarce. Imagine how much worse the nightmare would have been if broadcasting had been destroyed (2005:359).

This confusion of reality and illusion in the contemporary world has been termed the “Alphaville Effect” <sup>24</sup> (Hirshhorn, 2008: 17). Chief curator Kerry Brougner (of the Smithsonian Hirshhorn museum in Washington DC, America) (ibid: 19) discusses this phenomenon as it relates to film in examining Jean-Luc Godard’s film *Alphaville* (1965):

Godard tells us two things in *Alphaville*: that the classic cinema is dead, but also that a new cinematic world has begun to take shape. It is an expanded cinema that constantly refers back to his own history and that can be found in any number of forms. Like *Alphaville*, it is a potential dystopia that intertwines technology and dreams and in which reality and illusion are often blurred. In this moving-image society, film has spilled out of the great movie place cathedrals and has spread into the city itself and into the way we live our lives. *Alphaville* is no longer merely a place in a Godard film or even the Sao Paulo community named after it. It is Paris, New York, and Tokyo; it is Berlin, Los Angeles, and Shanghai, places where technology has splintered conventional film into a thousand new kinds of cinemas. In our *Alphavilles*, cinema is confused with television and DVD, large LED screens and powerful projectors make buildings glow and shift, people connect through still and moving images on their computer screens, “reality” television shows and the nightly news use the vocabularies of fiction and drama, and the conventional frame has become a multi-layered window providing immediate entry into countless worlds, each layered over the other like geological strata. Movies and television shows are hand-carried in portable devices or found on the home computer screen, streaming in from some distant digital film vault and available at any time. We can download these films on an iPod or cellphone, a theatre in our pocket. With small digital video cameras and editing suite programs, we can all be film directors, the creators of dreams.

The pervasive influence of the media on our emotions is hard to discount.

We see tragedy everyday on the TV, through radio, the internet and newspaper headlines. Writing an introduction for the book *Kava Kava/ Facets of Fear* (2007), that accompanied an art exhibition with the same title <sup>25</sup>, documenting the work of

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<sup>24</sup> In his book on *Alphaville*, Chris Drake discusses the gated community built just outside the centre of Sao Paulo in the 1970s which is surrounded by guarded fences and protected by high-tech surveillance cameras. This neighborhood - itself based on a fictional setting - was advertised by its developers on several episodes of a Brazilian soap opera in which the leading man, an architect, visits *Alphaville* and praises the safety of the place, comparing it favorably to neighborhoods in American films. Drake notes that the “back and forth between image and reality is dizzying: from CCTV to soap opera, from European art cinema to aspirational Hollywood, and back again. Where does the utopian projection end and the dystopian reality begin (ibid: 17)?”

<sup>25</sup> *Kava Kava/ Facets of Fear* shows work from a diverse selection of artists using painting, drawing, photography and video as well as sculpture and multi-media to address the theme of fear from different perspectives creating a “complex exhibition constellation involving interacting threads of discourse” (Wiskemann, 2007: 9). For example, the fragile sculptures and documentary style drawings of Katharina Jahnke’s (1968) installations “references fear and the ambivalent relationship

twelve contemporary international artists who explore the phenomenon of fear, Ines Wiskemann further notes:

This generation is influenced more than any preceding generation by impressions and experiences conveyed through the media. It reacts much like a person suffering from an anxiety disorder who cannot cast off his fear and compulsively rekindles it again and again, like a wound whose pain he must feel constantly in order to affirm the existence not only of the wound but of himself as well. The entertainment industry responds reflexively to this need with an increased emphasis on programs that play upon prevailing fears. New pseudo-documentary media formats have emerged, culminating in reality TV, which presents isolated dramatic events as normal everyday phenomena. Examples of this trend can also be found on the internet. The [www.phobialist.com](http://www.phobialist.com) website maintains a list of over 400 scientifically identified phobias; the Google search engine currently shows forty-five million hits for the term “fear” and Amazon lists a huge collection of self-help literature under the same heading. This trend is also confirmed by business statistics. Global consumption of sleeping medications and tranquilizers has increased steadily over the years, and the market for anti-depressives is also experiencing a genuine boom (2007: 7,9).

Wiskemann discusses the notion of fear in contemporary art within Western culture and describes each age as having its own “emotional signature.” With the Age of Enlightenment and secularization the fear of God receded and was replaced by a belief that the world was “founded on rational principals and ruled by a fixed order based on natural laws.” However the unstoppable march of progress did not bring relief from the notion of fear (ibid: 5). As Wiskemann further notes:

While the triumphal march of science and technology initially brought better health and greater prosperity and created the basis for the secure world of the bourgeois, it led in the course of advancing industrialization to increasingly frequent social conflicts and political unrest, which in turn engendered new uncertainties and fears (ibid).

Despite this “progress” and improved medical and scientific knowledge there were repeated crises and existential angst. Wiskemann further comments:

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between the destructive and the beautiful that is inherent in fear” (ibid). The work of Michal Kosakowski (1975) explores the question of how the media breaks down the boundary between fiction and reality. In his video work *Just Like the Movies* (2004), through the re-enactment of “real historical events of September 11, 2001 in film with the aid of fictional images from disaster movies, he also examines the origins of and possibilities presented by the experience of fear without real danger as offered by the entertainment industry” (ibid). Another interesting perspective on fear comes from the work of Nira Pereg (1969), an Israeli artist, who investigates the “patterns of mutual trust, intuitive reflexes and the capacity to adapt to captivity and potentially threatening situations in a population of flamingos at a zoo” (ibid).

Despite improved standards of security, an above-average level of prosperity and the availability of insurance providing at least financial protection against all conceivable risks, a latent, constantly present sense of insecurity and vulnerability appears to have become a fundamental at both the social and personal levels. The Munich psychoanalyst Wolfgang Schmidbauer speaks in this context of a new “angst generation” (ibid).

Further to this, ecological concerns<sup>26</sup> due to human depletion of natural resources have become overwhelming. Overfishing, use of animals as food in unprecedented quantity, pollution, droughts, loss of rainforests, increasing random accidents, massive population growth and diseases are caused by our misuse of the environment. Changing weather patterns are causing more frequent hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, droughts and flooding with disastrous human consequence. As science replaced superstition and religious and secular magic it also introduced many more fears in the form of knowledge. Invisible microbes and bacteria were just as threatening as evil spirits and the creation of shrapnel, nuclear bombs and biological weapons are science’s gifts to modernity (Bourke, 2005: 5). More recently genetically modified food and the grey area of genetic modification of humans (Virilio’s stark vision of scientist turned artist in his polemic on art and fear comes to mind) add to the idea of man turned mad scientist.

There is an unprecedented fear of old age and aging resulting in vast numbers of people who opt for cosmetic surgery and use gyms and special diets in order to stay younger for longer.<sup>27</sup> Old people are tucked away in nursing homes or kept alive in

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<sup>26</sup> Rachel Carson’s stark and terrifying exploration of the use of agricultural pesticides on the natural environment sparked a new fear of chemical pollution. Her book *Silent Spring* (1962) brought the damage caused by pesticides into public view and highlighted how nature and by proxy the general public were being poisoned by big business in the name of profit. It is often cited as helping to launch the environmental movement.

<sup>27</sup> Joanna Bourke (Bourke, 2005:349) gives some examples of the response to the fear of aging, Advice books such as *How to Live 100 Years* (1978) and *Superyoung. The Proven Way to Stay Young Forever* (1998) belied their spectacular titles by offering sensible advice about the benefits of a sensible diet and regular exercise. The self-help book *Why Die Young?* promised ‘life extension and rejuvenation the natural way’ through dietary changes. In particular, the author singled out refined and manufactured foods as particularly pernicious, discouraging his readers from eating processed breakfast foods, ‘papier-mache [sic] mushy foods’ (meaning puddings and pies), tinned foods, ‘embalmed, highly seasoned artificially preserved concoctions which seduce the eye in the delicatessen shops’. *Stop Ageing Now! The Ultimate Plan for Staying Young and Reversing the Ageing Process* (1996) placed its belief in the consumption of a cocktail of vitamins (A, C, and D), beta carotene, chromium, zinc, calcium, magnesium, selenium, glutathione, coenzyme Q-10, ginkgo, garlic and soybeans. *Resetting the Clock* (1996) and *The Anti-Ageing Zone* (1999) prescribed Human Growth Hormone, DHEA, melatonin, oestrogen, progesterone and testosterone.

hospitals for large sums of money due to loss of family structure, traditions and social services.

In his book *On Ugliness*, the Italian semiotician, novelist, philosopher and literary critic, Umberto Eco, discusses different forms of ugliness, repulsion, fear and horror in visual culture from antiquity to the present. He cynically proclaims the horror in our contemporary everyday lives as follows:

In everyday life we are surrounded by horrifying sights. We see images of children dying of hunger, reduced to skeletons with swollen bellies; we see countries where women are raped by invading troops, and others where people are tortured, just as we are continually exposed to images from the not too distant past of other living skeletons doomed to the gas chambers. We see bodies torn apart by the explosion of a skyscraper or an aeroplane in flight, and we live in terror that tomorrow it may be our turn. We all know perfectly well that such things are *ugly*, not only in the moral but in the physical sense, and we know this because they arouse our disgust, fear, and repulsion – independently of the fact that they can also arouse our compassion, indignation, instinct of rebellion and solidarity. No knowledge of the relativity of aesthetic values can eliminate the fact that in such cases we unhesitatingly recognise ugliness and we cannot transform it into an object of pleasure. So we can understand why art in various centuries insistently portrayed ugliness. Marginal as the voice of art may be, it attempted to remind us that, despite the optimism of certain metaphysicians, there is something implacably malign about this world (2007: 437).

As negative as Umberto Eco may seem in this quote, fear and even terror, as discussed above (in relation to the sublime), is also an extremely motivating and positive force in our world. Joanna Bourke concludes in her book *Fear* (2005) that fear is a positive creative force urging us on to action and empathy with others and that it is “right to fear the pain suffered by others. ‘How shall I face the fear which threatens you?’, the lover asks his loved one” (Bourke, 2005: 391). She goes on to say that fear has the potential to be a civilizing emotion, forcing people to act within the law. Fear is a “stimulant that works in direct opposition to attempts to rigidly control our environment. We are right to fear. A world without fear would be a dull world indeed. It is sobering to contemplate a world where parents did not fear for their children or where death was as insignificant as eating a meal” (ibid: 390).

### **The emotion of fear and unease in cinema/film and video installation art:**

In his essay *Art and the Ineffable* (1961), W. E. Kennick expresses the conviction that words are incapable of expressing emotions in the same way that art does. He cites an argument put forward by John Dewey<sup>28</sup> (and others) that art has a way of expressing emotions that cannot be expressed in ordinary language:

Dewey says that we cannot “reproduce in words” the feelings that works of art gives us. Experienced events and situations have unique and unduplicated qualities that “impregnate” the emotions they evoke (313).

Kennick continues the argument by saying, “[f]or suppose I experience fear in situation –x. I cannot communicate or reproduce that feeling in language, at least not in ordinary or scientific discourse, because I cannot bring in all of the qualifications that would be necessary to do so.” Art arguably does have the ability to communicate emotions in ways that language cannot and on this point of language not being able to “reach such specification constituting the quality of an actual” artwork, Kennick quotes Dewey as follows:

Save nominally, there is no such thing as *the* emotion of fear, hate, love. The unique, unduplicated character of experienced events and situations impregnates the emotion that is evoked. Were it the function of speech to reproduce that to which it refers, we could never speak of fear, but only of fear-of-this-particular-oncoming-automobile, with all its specifications of time and place, or fear-under-specified-circumstances-of-drawing-a-wrong-conclusion from just-such-and-such-data. A lifetime would be too short to reproduce in words a single emotion. In reality, however, poet and novelist have an immense advantage over even an expert psychologist in dealing with an emotion. For the former build up a concrete situation and permit it to evoke emotional response. Instead of a description of an emotion in intellectual and symbolic terms, the artist ‘does the deed that breeds’ the emotion (ibid: 311).

Artists can “reproduce” these emotions. They “do the deed that breeds” these emotions, “they arrange their materials – words, gestures, pigments, tones, or what not – into “concrete situations” which evoke the emotions in question (ibid).

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<sup>28</sup> John Dewey (1859-1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer. His major contribution to art was his book *Art as Experience* (1934).

Both cinema/film and video installation have consistently expressed human emotions in unique and viscerally challenging ways. Films are dynamic rather than static and emotions are often evoked by dynamic visual and auditory stimuli that are external to the individual. I will look at how film and video installation art, in particular, has confronted the human emotion of fear (314).

Emotion is a phenomenon that, according to the famous Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein,<sup>29</sup> “is completely identical with the primary phenomenon of cinema. [In cinema] *movement* is created out of the performance of a series of incidents.” Known for his groundbreaking work in film and montage, Eisenstein notes that “[p]roperly structured as a series of uncomplicated incidents, montage calls on us to finish the actions mentally,” and for him “this internal movement of filling in the gaps is emotion, a movement of the soul” (Smith, 2004: 21).

In her essay *Cinema and Embodied Affect* (2003), Anne Rutherford (Senior Lecturer in Cinema Studies in the School of Humanities and Languages at the University of Western Sydney) addresses the relationship between cinema, the screen and the embodied spectator. Rutherford proposes that cinema (as part of the world we inhabit) has the potential to cause emotion that is more than just seeing but akin to experiencing something both through the body and mind. She explains:

The relationship between vision and body, the role of movement and tactility in that relationship, and the connection of this complex to affective experience must be central terms in the articulation of an aesthetics of embodiment. The understanding of this relationship stems from how the body or embodiment is conceptualized as the existential ground of perception (Rutherford, 2003: 4).

The embodied spectator refers to a person who is immersed or involved in a performance (for example a ballet or dance, a film, a video installation) in a physical, emotional and psychological sense – a perceptual experience involving “kinetic

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<sup>29</sup> Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) was a Soviet pioneering film maker and film theorist often described as the “Father of Montage” as he considered the single film shot’s value and meaning to derive from its juxtaposition to other shots” (Ben-Shaul, 2007: 11). Even though he produced seven films in his career, he has been influential to a great number of film-makers and film theorists.

vision and visual kinaesthesia," two terms which "form the pivotal points of two vastly different paradigms of visual perception which underpin understandings of (specifically) cinema based on different concepts of embodiment" (ibid). Rutherford explains these paradigms of visual perception as follows:

Both based on an understanding of ambulatory vision, or the visual experience of a person walking or moving through a space, the respective understandings of each of these models differ greatly in the place or the importance which they accord to the body in the process of visual perception. The theory of kinetic vision, or vision-in-motion, developed by 19<sup>th</sup> century sculptor, Adolf Hildebrand, stems directly from the laboratory of the physiologists and their affiliation with the motion studies of Marey, Muybridge and others. Hildebrand's model derives from an analysis of the biological mechanics of stereoscopic vision in the perception of an observer moving towards an object. In its application to cinema, the eyes of a beholder or observer moving through space provide the prototype of a perception of motion which is supposedly duplicated by the mobile camera's ability to simulate or represent perceptual cues of depth and movement. This analogy is extended with the assumption that, just as the camera is equated with the eye of the beholder moving through a physical space, so the spectator in cinema identifies his or her subject position totally with the point of view of the camera (ibid).

Although this model has been widely used by film critics and commentators it is largely based on the idea that seeing is mostly based on the vision of the actual eyeball. This is refuted by the perceptual psychologist James Gibson who believes that the anatomical structure of the eye itself is only just one component of the process of vision. In his theory of ecological perception, with its discussion of "haptic vision" (i.e. related to or based on the sense of touch), Gibson's emphasis is on "visual kinaesthesia" which he says "registers movements of the body just as much as does the muscle-joint-skin system and the inner-ear system" (ibid). Gibson puts forward that vision "picks up movements of the body or part of the body relative to the ground" (ibid).

For Gibson perception is an environmental process and what we perceive is not "data about the environment out there, but "the significance of surfaces in relation to our body"" (ibid). What this demonstrates is that watching a film can evoke extreme emotion, not only through vision and sound but also through perception, in

this way making our reception of watching a film that much more affecting and going a long way to understanding the far reaching consequences of how cinema (and ultimately moving visual and sonic environments) may affect our brains. As Rutherford further comments, “Gibson’s theory of ecological perception, with its discussion of haptic vision, provides the missing link between the theorization of vision and of embodiment. As such, he provides a crucial springboard to examine an understanding of emotion as embodied affect” (ibid).

Rutherford’s central question is how emotion<sup>30</sup> and its associated tactility relates to a discussion of the cinema and she comments that “[t]he movement of the spectator out of the here and into a somewhere else appears again and again as a motif in the attempt to understand the coalescence of perception and emotion in the embodied intensities which make up spectatorship” (ibid: 5). Citing the philosopher Sue Cataldi’s reading of perception “neither as a cognitive process, nor a biological process” but rather as involving “the position of oneself as an embodied entity in a meaningful way in relation to the environment and what the environment offers,” she discusses Cataldi as taking Gibson’s model of “situation of self in relation to the environment onto the level of emotion, arguing that we are simultaneously placed emotionally in relation to that environment.” Rutherford quotes Cataldi at length in her “re-working of the understanding of the affective axis of perception” and notes that it “provides the crucial link for our understanding of embodied vision”:

[a]t the site/sight of a cliff, we are thought to directly perceive it as a ‘falling off’ place, because ‘one’s body in relation to the ground is what’s getting attention’. But Gibson does not pay sufficient attention to what one’s body may be feeling in relation to that ‘ground’. Gibson’s example tends to ignore the fact that at the site/sight of a cliff, we are simultaneously placed thereby (there bi-placed) evocatively ‘in’ danger and emotionally ‘in’ fear. It is not simply that we passionlessly see cliffs as ‘falling off places’; it is also the case that we sense that cliffs are dangerous and that we are afraid of falling off them...Thus I ‘join’ the spectacle of a cliff ‘in a kind of blind recognition which precedes the intellectual working-out and clarification of the meaning’: falling-off place’ (Cataldi, 96-7) (ibid).

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<sup>30</sup> By emotion Rutherford means the motion away or moving out from the world (and the self) and is understood by a comparison with tactility and the permeability of contact between the self and the world, adequately summed up by the word haptic.

Cataldi is said to “elaborate on the felt bodily depth to the living of emotional meanings: she argues that emotions are “neither ‘purely’ mental nor ‘purely’ physical phenomena,” they “cannot be purely ‘subjective experiences,’ [seen as] purely ‘inner realities’ as they are felt in the depth of the flesh” (Cataldi, 90 & 114). She argues that “there are at least two ‘sides’ to every affective experience and neither...is intelligible apart from the other (Cataldi, 111). Rutherford thus underscores Cataldi’s claim that emotional experience involves what she (Cataldi) calls “communicatively intertwining the bodily flesh that we live with the flesh of the world” (Cataldi, 119) and her description of emotion as, by definition, a crossing and remaking of boundaries between oneself and the world. This definition of emotional intensity “understood by comparison with tactility and the permeability of contact and boundaries between the embodied self and world” leads her to consider skin as a pivotal concept in examining an “embodied spectatorship.” She describes skin as a “porousness between one’s self, one’s own body and the objects or images of the world” (ibid) and considers the field of cinema as one that aims to mobilize “the corporeality, the embodied responsiveness of the spectator. Cinema is not only about telling a story; it’s about creating an affect, an event, a moment which lodges itself under the skin of the spectator” (ibid).

The idea that cinema produces, in the embodied spectator, an intense and affective state of emotion is also explored by Giuliana Bruno, Professor of Visual and Environmental Studies at Harvard University. Her book *Atlas of Emotion* (2007) traces the development of film, architecture, art, travel, geography and mapping from the beginning of the industrial revolution up to contemporary times. Her theorizations of the cinematic are bound to the idea of the modern experience of the city, urban culture and travel. She says: “By changing the relation between spatial perception and motion, the new architectures of transit and travel culture prepared the ground for the invention of the moving image, the very epitome of modernity.”<sup>31</sup> The idea that movement, and therefore cinema, produces and contains emotion is

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<sup>31</sup> ([http://www.ville-en-mouvement.com/chaire\\_universitaire/telechargements/articles\\_parutions/publications/ville\\_avec\\_flux/conferences/Guiliana\\_Bruno.pdf](http://www.ville-en-mouvement.com/chaire_universitaire/telechargements/articles_parutions/publications/ville_avec_flux/conferences/Guiliana_Bruno.pdf): 1)

embedded in our language. Bruno gives the Latin root of the word emotion as an example,

The Latin root of the word *emotion* speaks clearly about a “moving” force: it stems from *emovere*, an active verb composed of *movere*, “to move,” preceded by the suffix *e*, “out.” The meaning of emotion, then, is historically associated with “a moving out, migration, transference from one place to another.” Emotion is, literally, a moving map (Bruno, 2007: 6).

In an essay titled *Motion and Emotion: Film and Haptic Space* (2010),<sup>32</sup> Guiliana discusses in some detail the idea of the haptic in relation to experience of the cinema and describes the idea of the haptic as follows:

As Greek etymology tells us, haptic means “able to come into contact with.” As a function of the skin, then, the haptic – the sense of touch – constitutes the reciprocal contact between the environment and us. It is by way of touch that we apprehend space, turning contact into communicative interface. As a sensory interaction, the haptic is also related to kinesthesia, or the ability of our bodies to sense their own movement in space (ibid).

In the discussion of the haptic in relation to cinema Giuliana also turns her attention to architectural space. The discussion is centered around how we inhabit architectural spaces and how those spaces fashion our lives and in turn how spectatorship of cinema has come to be relevant in this sense in that film occupies a similar space and is “used” even “worn out” by consumers, “[t]hus one lives a film as one lives the space that one inhabits – in haptic intimacy. In this psycho-physical domain of intimacy, one absorbs, and is absorbed by, moving images and their tales of inhabitation” (ibid).

Discussing Deleuze’s cinematic aesthetics, Robert Sinnerbrink (author and senior lecturer of philosophy at Macquire University, Sydney) discusses the conceptual challenges of Deleuze’s film philosophy, especially in his books *Cinema 1* and *Cinema 2* (see note 6), and takes the idea of affect to another level beyond the physical and emotional to include the very structure of our brains. The idea of affect is explored here in terms of “the crystal-image’s expressive ability – expressive not emotive”

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.pos.eco.ufri.br/ojs-2.2.2/index.php/revista/issue/view/24>

(Sinnerbrink, 2008: 90).<sup>33</sup> Sinnerbrink goes on to say that, “[a] Deleuzian account of affect [...] need not remain anchored within the more familiar psychological and phenomenological talk of emotions or lived experience, since it refers to forms of trans-subjective interiority” (ibid). Incorporating the text by Felicity J. Coleman (Academic and author<sup>34</sup>) *Deleuze’s Kiss: The Sensory Pause of Screen Affect*, Sinnerbrink describes Deleuze’s notion of “opsigns” and “sonsigns” and explains these as follows:

Opsigns and sonsigns express ‘pure optical and sound situations’ that are opened up once the sensory-motor schemata defining action-image sequences begin to break down. Under such conditions, vision is no longer extended into action, space is no longer a milieu for action and time is presented and experienced “for itself” [...] The analysis of these ‘crystalline’ image regimes can show us, Coleman claims, how ‘the screen creates a temporal topology of event-vectors of variable durational forces that Deleuze describes as capable of affecting the spectator’s “belief in the world” (ibid).

Sinnerbrink adds that although such beliefs are “open to ideological manipulation, the power of modern cinema, for Deleuze, is that it provides ‘reasons to believe in this world ... to believe in the [flesh of the] body’” (ibid). From Coleman’s *Deleuze’s Kiss* Sinnerbrink goes on to discuss Gregg Lambert and Gregory Flaxman’s *Ten Propositions on the Brain* which outline “ten conceptual variations on the theme of cinema and the brain” (ibid), following from Deleuze’s statement in an interview that “[t]he brain is the screen ... that is to say ourselves” (Mondloch, 2010: 1).

Sinnerbrink sets out his argument using Lambert and Flaxman’s propositions as follows:

In manifesto-like style, Lambert and Flaxman declare that it is ‘high time’ that we turn from the tired history of consciousness to the ‘incomparably more complex question of the brain’ (Ambrose and Khandker, 2005: 114). Not the brain of cognitive neuroscience or materialist theories of consciousness, of course, but Deleuze’s enigmatic Bergsonian thesis that ‘thinking itself is situated within a “*machine assemblage of moving images*” from which the brain is materially indistinguishable (ibid).

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.film-philosophy.com/2008v12n1/sinnerbrink.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> Felicity Colman lectures at the Manchester School of Art on questions of political aesthetics in relation to world cinemas, aesthetics, feminism, film philosophy, media theory, avant-garde and experimental screen media.

He goes further in describing the image/brain interaction as follows:

According to Deleuze-Bergson, the brain can be understood [...] as 'a kind of hiatus in the field of images, a synaptic caesura that perceives ("prehends") the world from a particular point of view on the universe (of images); it construes the world 'cinematically' by schematizing reality according to the sensory-motor schema of perception-images, and action-images. The habitualised brain, however, is captured by the narcissistic delusion of its own centrality, imagining itself as the organizing centre of the world, now construed as a theatre of action that stands at its disposal (ibid).

These arguments that take cinema and moving image environments to new levels of conceptualization relate important connections between ourselves, time and affect and the transformation that we may experience through art opening up new ways of thinking and feeling. The correlation between our thoughts, our brains and our bodies and the moving image environment can also be construed as disturbing as more and more imagery portray gratuitous violence, including the seemingly innocuous television programming aimed at children.

To experience fear and unease through video and film there is also an unconscious and willing act on behalf of the viewer. The viewer is immersed in the image and believes what is seen and heard with accompanying emotional response. Catherine Elwes explains this phenomenon in her book *Video Art, A Guided Tour* (2005: 13) in terms of a "suspension of disbelief" when she says:

All pre-recorded moving images depend on viewers activating an irrational denial of absence. They suppress the obvious fact that the apparent presence of a person on the screen is nothing but an electronic fabrication. In spite of the clever mimesis, there is clearly nobody there. Through the suspension of disbelief, viewers ignore the apparatus that creates the illusion and, instead, imaginatively read the flickering screen as a faithful representation of reality.

Elwes illustrates this point with the video work *Claim Excerpts* (1971) by Vito Acconci.<sup>35</sup> Although this example may be over 40 years old and our sensibilities

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<sup>35</sup> Vito Acconci (1940) was initially interested in experimental literature and poetry where he developed an interest in the powerful physical and communicative possibilities between author and spectator. In the 1960s he started performing in gallery spaces and recorded his actions in a series of films and videos. In his work of the 1960s and 1970s he expressed an interest in (described as "sometimes violent and disturbing") physical and psychological states (Gianelli & Beccaria, 2005: 22).

were not so used to the deceptions that moving imagery can conjure today, it does show how moving imagery can affect and confuse the viewer in terms of its realness. The work is described by Elwes as follows:

In *Claim Excerpts* (1971), Acconci mounted a monitor at the top of a spiral staircase. On it, viewers could see the artist climbing the stairs, cursing and brandishing an iron bar. An instantaneous judgment had to be made. Was Acconci really approaching or was this a pre-recorded joke on the viewer? Records suggest that most people erred on the side of caution and fled. The work exposed our unquestioning belief in the veracity of media information and the psychological process that enables audiences to routinely suspend disbelief before the flickering falsehoods of the video monitor. In Acconci's clever deception, the line between the real and the simulated became frayed, our sense of time past and present was unsettled (ibid: 16).

Conceiving of the concepts of simulacrum and simulation to describe our experiences of contemporary "reality,"<sup>36</sup> French postmodern philosopher and sociologist Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) proposed that "reality" does not even exist. In the philosophy of Plato, simulacrum is the name given to the false copy, which stands in contrast to the essence or Idea; it is seen as a debased copy, inferior to the original from which it is derived (Childers & Hentzi, 1995: 279). Baudrillard rejects this idea of the difference between appearance and essence or copy and original and gives new attention to the simulacrum as a key feature of contemporary life with its endless networks of media and advertising images which Baudrillard believes precedes any reality to which they may refer (ibid).

Baudrillard's notion of simulation is related to the simulacrum. It is a process whereby a representation of something real replaces the thing being represented (ibid: 280). For Baudrillard, this simulation or copy is just as real (if not more real) than the original. Childers & Hentzi, editors of the *Columbia Dictionary of Modern Literary and Cultural Criticism*, elaborate as follows:

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<sup>36</sup> The concept of simulation/simulacrum is borne out of the postmodernist movement, Nitzan Ben Shaul (ibid: 22) describes postmodernism and its relationship to "reality" as follows,

Postmodernists suggested that 'reality', if existent at all is always-already present in people's mind as textual fabrication. Moreover, if there is something termed reality, it is preceded by models or simulations that actually generate whatever is defined by them as 'reality'.

For Baudrillard, the simulation is not a fake, a mere copy of something real, for it has a power and meaning that in many ways exceeds that of the real. When we value the representation of something more than the thing itself – as we might enjoy a film about downhill skiing more than actually skiing, which involves greater expense, much travel and waiting and the fear of injury – we are participating in what Baudrillard calls the “orders” of simulation. Baudrillard sees history as a series of new orders of simulation, all leading to the disappearance or death of all meaning (ibid).

Baudrillard’s notion of simulacrum informs many contemporary films where reality becomes simulation (Ben-Shaul, 2007: 22-26). For Baudrillard, we inhabit a hyper reality since reality itself is an image. Although these theories are sometimes described as “far-fetched” (ibid: 23) the argument would explain why so many films and moving imagery have the potential to create intense feelings of trauma, fear and unease in their audiences as they are actually part of our reality.<sup>37</sup> In an essay titled *Realer than Real* (1987), Brian Massumi outlines in the first paragraph how the idea of simulation and simulacrum have come to effect our lives in a kind of “postmodern apocalypse.” He describes the atmosphere as “airless” which has “asphyxiated the referent, leaving us satellites in aimless orbit around an empty centre. We breathe an ether of floating images that no longer bear a relation to any reality whatsoever”. And yet these “floating images” (as discussed above) constitutes our reality and have a far-reaching impact on us.

In film editing a jump cut refers to two sequential shots of the same subject taken from camera positions that vary slightly and this causes the subject to appear to ‘jump’ position somewhat. Considered a violation of classical continuity editing that aims for seamless continuity of time and space in a film story, such jump cuts and related forms of discontinuity can draw attention to the constructed nature of a film. In Jean-Luc Goddard’s famous film *Breathless* (1966), the jump cut was used

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<sup>37</sup> In recent scientific studies it has been documented that magnetic resonance imaging brain scans of children exposed to dramatized violence on television, film and video games had shown similar reactions to those of children who had witnessed real violence. Developmental psychologist Wayne Warburton of Macquarie University in Sydney said some key impacts of violent media on children are very well demonstrated in research. Warbourton goes on to say, “they include increases in the likelihood of aggressive behaviour, increases in desensitisation to violence and an increase in the overall view that the world is more scary and hostile than it really is”. He also comments that, “The brain isn’t very good at differentiating between media and real-life situations, so we find very similar effects across all the main media -television, movies, video games and music.” <http://www.iol.co.za/scitech/science/news/dramatised-violence-affects-brain-like-real-thing-1.1323231#.T-LdieU2W2w>

deliberately to emphasize gaps in action and it has since been used in numerous films, at times as an alienating Brechtian technique (*Verfremdungseffekt*)<sup>38</sup> that draws attention to the unreality of the film experience in order to focus attention on the political message of a film rather than the drama or emotion of the narrative. It can, however, also impart a certain nervousness or anxiety to a film and contribute to a sense of fear.

The added feature of sound in film and video installations can also powerfully emphasize the unreality of a viewing/perceptual experience in order to evoke feelings of fear and unease. Sound is acknowledged as an important element in evoking fear in cinema and it can be a powerful tool in doing the same in video installations in significantly enhancing the viewer's immersion. As Mary Ann Doane notes, subjecting image to sound in film broadens the visual space beyond the screen and into the space of the movie theatre which in turn submerges the viewer (Ben-Shaul, 2007: 112). In many instances a modern film without sound loses its impact. Sound and music in film (and video installation art) provide immediacy and intensification of the visual image. It opens up a new or different perceptual experience or impression of the same material which can change its colour or essence.

The way in which film sound design is set up is revealing. In the cinematic experience the emotional thrill of fear (as in sending shivers up and down one's spine, or making one's hair stand on end or imparting goose bumps) is actively engaged with, as Steve Goodman points out in his book *Sonic Warfare 2010*:

The interplay of fear and threat is evoked by narrative tactics of tension such as suspense, a gradual buildup through delaying the arrival of the event whose occurrence resolves the tension, and surprise, working on the effect of

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<sup>38</sup> Bertold Brecht (1898-1956) was a German playwright, theatre director and poet. He became a Marxist in his twenties exploring theatre as a forum for political ideas. He formulated what he termed "epic theatre" which proposed that a spectator of a play should not identify emotionally with the characters or action on stage. Instead the theatre piece should rather encourage a critical and self-reflexive reaction in the viewer. In other words, the viewer should be explicitly critical and even suspicious of what is being reproduced. Brecht's principle of *Verfremdungseffekt* was significant in achieving this effect of distancing. It has been translated as the "defamiliarisation effect" or the "making strange effect". Brecht writes that it involved "stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them" (quoted in [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertolt\\_Brecht#cite\\_note-61](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bertolt_Brecht#cite_note-61)).

the unexpected, the unforeseen, a shock. Film sound modulates affect by tapping into and rewiring the line of attack, the line of flight, and the line of fright (Goodman, 2010: 73).

In creating fear or unease in film there are many instances of sound increasing this affect. For example, the strained, screeching, high-pitched and violent violin musical score for *Psycho* has become infamous and, in a sense, even clichéd. Goodman cites an example of how the viscerality of film, and sound, can create extremely affective states in the viewer. He discusses the use of “low-frequency infrasonic tones”<sup>39</sup> which he argues is effective in the activation of fear or anxiety (ibid: 66). This infrasound was used in the extremely violent French film *Irreversible* (2002) directed by Gaspar Noe which uses “ultragraphic sexual violence and a disorientating temporality to ensure maximum effect” (ibid). Added to these visual strategies the director magnified the sonic dimension by augmenting the sound with infrasound, particularly the sounds used by police to quell riots creating a nauseous tone. The director explains as follows, “[w]e added 27 Hz of infrasound... You can’t hear it, but it makes you shake. In a good theatre with a subwoofer, you may be more scared by the sound than by what’s happening on the screen. A lot of people can take the images, but not the sound. Those reactions are physical” (ibid). Goodman explains that this unperceivable sound can frustrate the necessity to find out what is causing the sound which then becomes abstract arousing anxiety due to the absence of cause or object. Without a cause or object the imagination produces one, which can create more fear than the reality (ibid).

Speech or the voice is also a powerful tool in evoking emotion. In the psychological horror film *The Shining* (1980) director Stanley Kubrick uses the voice of the character Jack to suggest his increasingly menacing personality change due to the overpowering influence of the supernatural forces that overtake him in the deserted hotel. His voice comes to represent the evil that possesses him. Kubrick masterfully combines elements of sound design with the film’s evocative imagery to convey the

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<sup>39</sup> Infrasound is sound that is below the frequency of hearing in humans. The “normal” limit that is heard is above 20 Hz (Hertz) or cycles per second. Studies have suggested that infrasound can arouse feelings of fear and awe in humans and since it is not generally perceived can also make people feel that supernatural events are taking place.

power of the hotel and the role it plays in transforming its characters. Gabrielle Ringuet enlarges on this in her essay *All Visual and No Sound Would Make Jack a Dull Boy* (2012):

The contrasts in performance between Wendy and Jack, particularly their voice qualities, play an integral part in establishing these shifts in character and situation. Without the mastering of performance and sound effects, such as carefully defined atmospheric noises and craftily manipulated voice over, the hotel would lose much of its personification within the narrative. The extra-diegetic music is also composed effectively for the film as it describes the sinister inner workings of Jack, as well as emphasising the overwhelming intensity of the supernatural environment. Without the precise construction of sound in correlation with the action on screen, *The Shining* would lose much of the dramatic psychological intensity evoked by the dialogue, sound effects and music.<sup>40</sup>

### **Explorations of time and the evocation of fear and unease in selected video installations:**

The young British contemporary video artist Ed Atkins recently used forms of disjuncture in examining the emotional mess of illness and death by “playing havoc with audio and visual synchronicity.” Atkins describes his point of view as one that “loves [the] emotive, awkward and messy.” He uses video, drawing, sound and music to create viscerally challenging work citing cinema, literature and music as his primary influences. Jumpcuts between locations of sound and voice<sup>41</sup> are one of the techniques he uses in his high definition videos to create a feeling of unease and fear. Atkins believes that disjunctures between sound and image upsets our need or desire for continuity and that cut triggers a “curious emotional resonance” (Ward, 332: 16).

Atkins describes how, in video, the illusion shifts to reality. He explains, “We are told it is just a recording, but in the moment of the voice we forget instantly! I think it’s so resonant because it’s a similar mechanism that allows us to cope with

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<sup>40</sup> <http://sensesofcinema.com/2012/feature-articles/all-visual-and-no-sound-would-make-jack-a-dull-boy/#2>

<sup>41</sup> A similar way to how David Lynch creates emotional effect through the disembodied singing in *Mullholland Drive* (2001). I will discuss Lynch and the uncanny a little further on.

mortality. We know we know, but when you get a terminal illness it must be so shatteringly real, such a rupturing of one reality by another – the one we registered off-screen, as it were.” For example, one of his works, *A Primer For Cadavers*, shows an image of the back of a head lit against the dark. The fixed camera angle appears distressed, the lens pulls back and the head shrinks, becoming fragmented and multiplied through various filters as they are fixed and removed. The simplicity of sequence alludes to structuralist film but the soundtrack contains an overload of music. A monologue that describes something corpse-like is spoken by the artist who sounds “resentful and drunk.” The artist describes the narration as follows, “it’s an aggressive voice, a physical voice, it describes a body you don’t necessarily want to think about. There is a level of intimacy with the audience which really needs the voice. You can get a lot closer to someone sonically than you can visually; with sound you can get inside their body, literally” (ibid).

Atkin’s work *A Tumour In English* (2011) is a book and a film sharing the same title. The book is written in the form of a self-help manual but has a menacing tone and “sets out to induce the most abhorrent growths” (ibid). The back sleeve of this book reads:

This book will change your life – It will conjure a tumour inside you... The dimensions of the tumour will be exactly proportional to the amount of the text that you read. A microscopic kernel of tumorous tissue has already shuddered into being because you have stubbornly read this far (ibid).

The film is concerned with the symptoms of disease. It shows the back of a head (a recurring theme in Atkin’s work) which finally turns to face the camera and speaks: “Would you mind checking the mole on my shoulder?” Atkins probes our fears of immortality and disease with an honest and direct yet uncomfortable brutality that perhaps we would rather not confront, making watching the video that much more frightening to encounter (we may not realise what it is about and feel tricked or surprised and not want to watch such confrontational material) and reinforcing the idea that these kinds of visceral fears are best explored by art. Audience

participation becomes crucial to these works and would seem to play upon our fears that are beyond our control but also within us (ibid).

South African artist Thando Mama's single-channel video *(Un)hea(r)d* (2002) also evokes a kind of fear by the suggestion of surveillance, segregation and a threatening Fanonian "Other" (Douglas & Eamon eds, 2009: 149). Mark Nash (head of the Department of Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art, London and specialist in contemporary art moving-image practices) included Mama's *(Un)hea(r)d* in the project *Commotion* which sought to return the single-channel video work to the cinema. Nash describes the work as follows:

In the film, a young black man talks in close-up into a video camera. The sound is indistinct, his voice slurs: "I'm not scared . . . listening to you . . . you know. I'm not scared . . . I'm not silent." We can only make out fragments of his speech. The sound reverses, the camera closes in on the man's face, the eyes fringed with elegant lashes: "Stuck here . . . speech black," we think he says. His distorted face turns away, then back to the camera and the audience. This work could be a monologue to a video security camera outside a gated community in South Africa. The distorted close-up of a man's face speaking into the camera recalls the incantations of Vito Acconci, whose monologues to video camera in the late sixties developed an aesthetics of paranoia and surveillance (ibid).

The surveillance origins (as already discussed) and uses of the video camera have continued to become more and more part of our everyday lives. Since the 1980s video cameras have been used to record the everyday movements of society. By 1985 the term "surveillance society" replaced the familiar term "information society" as crime and surveillance of it became an everyday routine (Bourke, 2005: 335). In photography, video and film there is an inherent element of surveillance and voyeurism or invasive looking. Technology has had a considerable effect in the way we look at other people and situations, as cameras have become small and able to capture and record events that are quick and unnoticeable, or considered private. For instance, we look at people in the street from a protected vantage point without them being aware of being seen. Images are recorded on screens in a room as we

enter a shopping mall or any public place in a city and in this way our privacy is invaded – public and private become conflated (Philips, 2010: 11).

In the foreword to the book *Exposed, Voyeurism, Surveillance, and the Camera Since 1870*, Neal Benezra (Director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art) and Vicente Todoli (Director of the Tate Modern, London) attempt to sum up our contemporary response to surveillance and media in a simple question and answer statement:

Have we become a society of voyeurs? The proliferation of camera phones, YouTube videos, and reality television would certainly suggest that this is so. At the same time, amid endless political debates about terrorism, the ubiquitous security camera has become one of the icons of our age. We watch, and we are watched (ibid: 6).

The recent film *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007),<sup>42</sup> directed by Paul Greengrass (1955), utilizes the imagery and equipment associated with surveillance to great effect. In many scenes in the film we are given parts of the narrative through surveillance systems - the kind in use by covert operations within intelligence agencies. This imagery gives the viewer an idea of how the public space of international relations is interwoven with the public spaces of the everyday in uncomfortable detail. In some scenes whole rooms are filled with screens showing footage of public areas, such as tube stations in London, and the detail that is transmitted to the screens is impressive and, at times, alarming.

This film seems to compress time and space to the level of paranoia and claustrophobia and yet it all comes across as believable in our contemporary global, fast-paced world. In the film the representation of the spaces of public interaction, the temporality of the editing, the visual use of technology and the loss of memory of

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<sup>42</sup> *The Bourne Ultimatum* was produced by Universal Pictures and was released on August 3, 2007, in North America, where it grossed \$69.3 million in ticket sales in its first weekend of release, making it the highest August opening in the U.S. and Matt Damon's highest grossing film with him in the lead. Although all three films have been commercially successful and critically acclaimed, *The Bourne Ultimatum* is the only film in the trilogy to have been nominated for any Academy Award, winning all three of its nominations for Best Film Editing, Best Sound Mixing, and Best Sound Editing at the 80th Academy Awards. The film was also well received in the hacker subculture, as it showed actual real-world applications such as the Bourne-again shell and Nmap.

the main protagonist due to trauma, set up a *mise en abyme* whereby time and space seem to melt into one another. Instantaneity and loss of memory become the presiding motifs which create a sense of fear and danger that draws attention to how technology is changing the way we experience time and space.

Giving context to the claim that history has accelerated and time has been absorbed by space (for example, we no longer have to wait for a letter, or for our photographic film to be developed and so the temporality of delay or waiting has become considerably reduced by electronic transmission), Ross quotes the sociologist Henri Lefebvre's argument put forward in his book *The Production of Space* (1974):

“[W]ith the advent of modernity time has vanished from social space,” stating more precisely that the apprehension of time has ceased to occur *within space*. In an era that values the economic and political uses of space, Lefebvre contends, time becomes an isolable and isolated category, fragmented for the sake of profit, recorded exclusively on measuring instruments, subordinated to itself, and destined to be disposed of without leaving any trace (Lefebvre, 1974: 95) (ibid).<sup>43</sup>

Temporalities such as duration and delay are being eroded by the contemporary functions of information technology which “seek to dissolve the obstacles of time and space through a logic of instantaneity and transparency.” Ross sees video art as contributing to the understanding of how durational time is becoming “increasingly manhandled and fragilized in (post)modernity” in its reassertion and production of “temporal extendedness and instantaneity.” She goes on to say that “it is not time but specific forms of temporalities that are being lost, transformed, enforced, and negated.” This loss of certain types of temporality is referred to by Ross (and others) as “presentism” and “the waning of time” (ibid). The curator and art critic Bruce Kurtz argues that the ‘nowness’ of viewing video installation art transforms events, even ancient history, into a flowing present. He describes the

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<sup>43</sup> At the beginning of the industrial revolution (circa 1870) the perception of time changed due to the process of modernity. Time became standardized as a result of the railroad system (which needed standardized time frames in order to function), there was a wide distribution of pocket watches in the 1890s, factories saw labour (the factory workers' movements) as units of time. Modernisation brought people to the cities, transport to the public and along with that, machines, infrastructure and pollution – a bombardment of activity. This development resulted in what some writers describe as ‘shock’ associated with the capitalization of the human being. Time became money as human movement and time were reduced to units of production.

characteristics, in his view, of video installation as “[n]ewness, intimacy, immediacy, involvement, and a sense of the present tense” (ibid: 87). Ross presents “decontextualization” and “the loop” as two forms of temporal strategies that deal with the above arguments in that they provide video art with an “historical awareness” and a “sense of futurity” to the image (ibid: 92). “Decontextualization” is described as “an aesthetic procedure [that] substantially redefines the mimetic understanding of the image. It does so by connecting three types of temporalities – instantaneity, extendedness, and mutability. Ross refers to Candice Breitz’s<sup>44</sup> video installation *Mother and Father* (2005) as an example to illustrate how the process of decontextualization works to reinvent narrative through sampling. She describes the installation as follows:

Appropriating from Hollywood films not sequences or fragments but mere instants of statements or phonemes uttered by famous actors (including Meryl Streep and Julia Roberts for *Mother* and Steve Martin and Dustin Hoffman for *Father*), Breitz digitally cuts these instants from their initial contexts, sets them against a black, neutral background, and then replays, repeats, and finally relocates them in the new context of installation, where plasma screens are arranged in “dialogue” with each other. Although the process of appropriation does have the effect [...] to disclose discursive constructs – here, American fantasies about motherhood and fatherhood – it can never be read merely as a critique in that the isolation and orchestration of the statements become the means by which a new version comes about. These versions are made from too many syncope’s to function as smooth narratives but are the equivalent, in visual terms, of DJ pirating and sampling, a way to reactivate the excerpted instants and turn them into talking heads that reply to one another and create, in this reorganization, new possibilities of meaning. Instantaneity, which Kurtz designated in 1976 as “the most powerful aspect” of video [...] is explored here in its narrative potential, as a way to reinvent narrative through the practice of sampling (ibid).

Ross makes little mention of Breitz’s sampled loops of sound. As the videos play out, the sound becomes more and more disturbing and loud. The short

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<sup>44</sup> Candice Breitz (Johannesburg, 1972) primarily works with photography and video. She is based in Berlin. Her modus operandi is summarised in the book *South African Art Now* as follows, “Breitz takes global pop consumerism as her broad subject, critiquing through linguistic and structural means its effects on individuals and society. Her artwork wittily harnesses the language of consumer promotion as a creative riposte to its frequent appropriation of artistic creativity” (Williamson, 2009: 258).

statements about motherhood and fatherhood become repetitively menacing and overwhelming, threatening to consume the senses of the viewer. Much in the same way as the visuals have been treated, the sound bites from the actors are looped and repeated but start to consume the space quickly to the point of saturation.

The process of decontextualization, Ross argues, is significantly tied to investigations of temporality and also “has the effect of separating the image from its referent or the represented action from its cause (ibid: 94), an idea that is linked to the concepts of simulation and simulacrum by the philosopher Jean Baudrillard (as briefly touched on earlier). Another critical way in which Ross describes video artists as having addressed the viewer through time is with “the loop” (ibid: 96). According to performance artist Marina Abramovic (1946)<sup>45</sup> the loop has introduced a temporal paradox in video both shortening and extending the length of the work. She explains further:

These days the young generation of video or performance artists excessively uses the video media loop form. It’s interesting to see how from the 90s until now that these loops have become shorter and shorter. From 7 minutes to 3 minutes, and now from one and a half minutes to 30 seconds. Time has become condensed more and more. What really is different is that the artists of the 1970s made long duration performances, but the artists of today by constructing video loops are producing the illusion of the long process performance without going through the experience themselves (ibid: 96-98).

Ross continues that the loop “extends an action, but only through repetition, one to be perceived by the viewer but produced by the computer and not through the actual performance of the artist” (ibid: 98). Mondloch’s assertion that the viewer has become privileged and determines the interaction between the artwork and themselves at their own pace and interest levels is extended by Ross as follows, “[t]his means that phenomenology is now solely on the side

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<sup>45</sup> Marina Abramovic’s performances are sometimes brutal and unnerving, some of them only reaching their conclusion when a member of the audience intervened. By seeking to affect the audience by testing the endurance of their tolerance by witnessing pain and danger, Abramovic highlights the viewer’s own sense of the present. Abramovic explains, “I’m interested in art that disturbs and that pushes that moment of danger; then, the public watching has to be here and now. Let the danger focus you; this is the whole idea - to put you in the focus of now” ([www.lacan.com/abramovic.htm](http://www.lacan.com/abramovic.htm)).

of the viewer who observes a scene through its digital repetition” (ibid). Ross defines the loop and by association its repetition as, “reconstituting the past with the possibilities it had and mak[ing] these possibilities available again to renewed repetition” (ibid). She concludes that,

[t]he loop – which has become one of the most important modes of presentation in video [...] allows for a temporal processing that can, if we follow the findings of recent cognitive research, lengthen duration experience precisely because the observer is solicited to attend to the passage of time and to allocate more attentional resources to processing time-related information. In other words, the loop, the potentially endless repetition of a short scene, may lead to an extension of time, at least at the level of judgement, perception, and experience” (ibid: 98-99).

“Decontextualization” and “the loop,” according to Ross, are two significant ways of bringing attention to time and the video image. Robertson and McDaniel further discuss the loop in relation to “endlessness” as a method in video art that can “frustrate any sense of forward progress (2005: 56). They describe it as follows: “In investigating the concept of endlessness, some artists have used the strategy of looping a video or film so that a fragment of it continuously repeats. Typically, the beginning and end meld seamlessly together, so that there is no starting or stopping” (ibid: 55). With reference to the artist Rodney Graham’s <sup>46</sup> *Vexation Island* (1997) they refer the use of repetition and endlessness:

*Vexation Island* (1997), filmed in Cinemascope, for example, presents in an endless loop, a nine-minute scene in which a character (the artist in a pirate’s costume) is out cold under a palm tree. He wakes up, only to have a coconut fall on his head, which knocks him back into unconsciousness. Ironically, while repetition often serves to fix an event in memory, in this case the falling of the coconut knocks the incident out of the poor pirate’s head, and when he wakes up again, it’s as if it were the first time. Michael Rush explains that *Vexation Island* is a “retelling of the Robinson Crusoe story which Graham, in the manner of other Conceptual artists . . . associates with theories of violence by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze” (Rush, 1999: 165) (ibid).

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<sup>46</sup> Rodney Graham (1949) is a Canadian born Conceptual artist who came to prominence in the 1970s.

### **Fear, unease and the uncanny:**

American artist Cecelia Condit (1947) explores and interrogates the tensions, fears and aggression between men, men and women, women and society and human beings and animals. She uses the idea of the fairy tale to reveal repressed fantasies and her video works have been given the term “feminist fairy tales” because they reinterpret the myths of feminine representations, revealing hidden forms of sexuality and violence. *Possibly in Michigan* (1983) seeks to portray psychosexual horror and disorientation using familiar domestic settings (such as the shopping mall and suburban home environments). Condit employs songs that seem overly pretty and sweetly menacing to replace conversations and role reversals to unsettle and disturb the viewer (Gianelli & Beccaria eds, 2005: 78). The films are unsettling because they seem twee, soft and painfully “feminine” and yet suggest violence and strangeness in their stereotyped portrayal of woman. In the over use of the so-called “feminine”, especially in the example mentioned here, Condit evokes the idea of the uncanny which is so often disturbing in visual imagery as well as in “real” experience.

The uncanny is an eerie sensation of having seen something before, its familiarity is felt as discomfiting and strange. In a Freudian sense the uncanny effect was “often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on” (The Uncanny, 1985) (Bourke, 2005: 361-362). The uncanny also refers to a kind of delayed or deferred action where an event that is traumatic only becomes traumatic after the fact. Jean Laplanche and Jean Bertrand Pontalis who wrote *The Language of Psycho-Analysis* (first published in 1967 and translated into English in 1973) describe deferred action as follows, “it is only *as a memory* that the first scene becomes pathogenic by deferred action, in so far as it sparks off an influx of internal excitation” (1973: 467) (Mactaggart, 2010: 105). Lacan’s development of Freud’s concept of the uncanny, which he termed “*après-coup*,” broadens the analysis “to assess how time fits into the traumatic scenario, and the subject’s

continuing inability to incorporate the state of affairs into its history” (ibid). Andre Green (1927-1912), the contemporary psychoanalyst whose interest in dreams was a key feature to his theorizations of experience in that they represented states of being or affect that put the nature of representation itself at risk, remarked that “the notion of *après-coup* (Nachträglichkeit) raises the question of knowing what the earlier anticipatory event [...] might have been” (ibid: 106). Green puts forward the notion of “shattered time” to deal with a “notion of time which has very little to do with the idea of orderly succession according to the tripartition past/present/future. One of Green’s ambitions was to incorporate the multiplicity of viewpoints on temporality back into psychoanalysis which he believed has been relegated to work on space (ibid). He confirms that “what is traumatic is not the raw event, but the re-awakening of an earlier incident which was believed to be finished with or over” (Green, 2002: 23) (ibid). Green believed that dreams provided a rich source of materials not ordinarily available in everyday life and that art is the only other area where similar affects may be achievable (ibid: 12) (ibid).<sup>47</sup>

In his book *The Film Paintings of David Lynch* (2010), Allister Mactaggart (lecturer in Film Studies and Art History) discusses these ideas in relation to art with specific references to cinema and trauma:

For art ‘thinks’ or, as Freud termed it in relation to dreams, ‘transforms’ a wealth of information to reactivate scenes of trauma, to permit some form of forgetting and remembering in the viewer. And the particularity of film is that this process, or object of cinema, permits access to images, sounds and word- presentations that are usually found in dreams (ibid).

Linking up to the idea, which Giuliana Bruno proposes, that architecture, film and affect are all intimately connected, the uncanny effect is an important part of imagery dealing with familiar environments where threat – perceived as an external element – is in fact within the home all the time.

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<sup>47</sup> Dreams often seem to break down of the structure of time. The fracturing of time in video art which seeks to depict fragments of time in a state of confusion or collision can be seen to represent this temporal structure where meanings are fleeting and transient (Robertson & McDaniel, 2005: 51).

Anthony Vidler, Professor of Architecture at The Cooper Union, New York and author of *The Architectural Uncanny* (1992) (as well as essays and contributing articles in books on art and film) describes the uncanny as follows:

Aesthetically an outgrowth of the Burkean Sublime, a domesticated version of absolute terror ... its favorite [sic] motif was precisely the contrast between a secure and homely interior and the fearful invasion of an alien presence; on a psychological level, its play was one of doubling, where the other is, strangely enough, experienced as a replica of the self, all the more fearsome because apparently the same (Mactaggart, 2010: 125).

The home environment is the place where a person can feel safe and secure. However because of this expectation of protection it is also the place where a subject can undergo the worst experiences. The relationship between the home and trauma is especially evident in the films of David Lynch who explores an important aspect of the uncanny – the fear of invasion into the supposed secure domestic environment from a force that may be in the house all the time (ibid).

Mactaggart describes the use of the uncanny in David Lynch's 1996 American psychological horror film *Lost Highway*,

[...] It is no wonder that the suburban houses in Lynch's work should contain horror and terror, and that is why they are so uncanny, as their domestic comforts are amplified to such a degree that a parallel discomfort comes into view. The perceived safety of the house is always under threat both from without and within. In *Lost Highway*, for instance, the Madison home is one in which the exterior structure offers no security against the 'invasion' which is produced by the introduction of the video tapes into the domestic space. The technological instances of Fred's mental state 'show' that the danger is in the house all along. The supposedly safe interior, the home, is the site of Fred's violent jealousy and murderous rage. So while the initial threat appears to come from outside, the spectator experiences the same strangeness of the videos by becoming aware of the 'performative twisting' of Fred's mental state commingled with the architectural structure of the home (ibid).

### **Chapter 3: Contemporary video installation artists exploring temporality and the evocation of fear and unease:**

In the 1990s the video installation artist Douglas Gordon was particularly instrumental in bringing attention to issues relating to temporality and the evocation of fear and anxiety in contemporary video installation art. His video installations dealt very overtly with the idea of film and pushing the medium to extremes in drawing out the time aspect of cinema. Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* is an excellent example to examine in the context of the cinematic and in his essay titled *Life Itself! The 'Problem' of Pre-Cinema*, film curator Ian White has the following to say about Gordon's work:

The making and distributing of feature films – industrial cinema – provides the form and/or content for a number of artists' work, or becomes a model of exhibition for it, to varying degrees. [...] In Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* 1993, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* 1960 is slowed down to a duration of twenty-four hours and projected onto a screen in the gallery. We cannot watch the film in full; it becomes an object of consideration rather than a narrative entertainment. It manifests its acritical reverence for industrial cinema and for this particular example of it, by turning the original film into a quasi-religious object of worship (Comer, 2009: 22).

The works of Douglas Gordon that I will briefly examine here facilitate the discussion of video art, cinema, temporality and fear and unease. I have chosen the video installations, apart from *24 Hour Psycho*, that appear to rework archival footage of situations of death and psychological disturbance in ways that incorporate what Christine Ross terms "decontextualization" and "the loop." At the time of their initial exposure they were pioneering artworks and in most cases, from the reviews that I researched, they seemed to affect the viewer in viscerally challenging ways.

It was important to me to look at South African contributions to the contemporary video arena in that they can perhaps be seen to address South Africa's traumatic past in ways that significantly connect this past with the present. At least, this is what I hope to demonstrate in my examination of their works. Some artists choose

to confront the issues of apartheid, trauma and memory directly, as in the case of William Kentridge, while others seek to portray elements of South African society today that are traumatic and violent, as do Berni Searle and Kendell Geers, the latter seeming to have become interested in representing violence and fear because of his experience of having lived in South Africa (he now lives and works in Belgium).

### **Douglas Gordon:**

The works of Scottish artist Douglas Gordon (b 1966) <sup>48</sup> include a diverse range of media: video installation, photography, texts, and sound. His work in the 1990's was pioneering in the realm of video installation art with his innovative use of 'found footage' manipulated in ways that involve changes of the speed of the film, endless repeating of scenes or cropping elements in the frame to disrupt the viewing. Gordon's manipulations are sinister and troubling and evoke ideas about memory and trauma.

The interaction of an audience with his work is very important to Gordon. He has mentioned that although there is an intention in his work it is the conversation or dialogue that the work may encourage which is of primary importance to him. The video installation pieces I am discussing were exhibited with the information that they came from found footage that was therefore understood as not having been created by the artist himself. In an interview with Jan Debbaut, Douglas Gordon discusses his work in terms of found footage and the reasons for claiming to use found footage as follows:

When I'm questioning myself on these issues (modernism and postmodernism), I come back to this issue of authority. And, in the same way I'm criticising genius, I also have an aversion to authority. Not authorship, per se, but the authority that goes with it [...] You know, there are some works that I made which I claimed were using found footage, but it was really material that I had shot myself, or texts that I had written myself. I was happy with the images or text, but it seemed more convenient for me to hide

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<sup>48</sup> Douglas Gordon was born in Glasgow, the first of four children. His mother became a Jehovah's Witness six years after Douglas Gordon was born and as a child Douglas was involved in her congregation giving bible readings and preaching door to door. As a teenager Douglas Gordon became interested in art and is exposed to filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Francois Truffaut as well as B movies and films noir. Gordon goes on to attend art school in Glasgow from 1984 to 1988 and then studies further in London at the Slade School of Art from 1988 to 1990 (Biesenbach, 2006: 12-13).

behind the disguise of found footage, in order that viewers might be able to look at these things, or read these things without the authority of the artist, or the prejudice that someone can carry to an idea if they think it has come from an artist (Gordon, 1998: 52).

While Gordon himself has not directly said that his work creates feelings of anxiety and fear through his use of temporality within the structure of the video itself, other writers such as Katherine M. Brown and Philip Monk have written extensively on both the evocation of fear and anxiety in his works and how the slowing down of footage, which is prevalent in the video works, can make the viewer feel something that is sinister and unnerving.

I have chosen to focus on the works of Gordon's that I feel do this most effectively. They all share the use of slowed and/or repetitive footage with a feeling (and subject matter) of unease, fear, anxiety and confusion. The installation environment, the slowed and repetitive footage and subject matter engage the viewer in what I sense to be a state of voyeuristic fearing. There seems to be a multi-layered effect happening – between original and re-appropriated – inner and outer realities – past and present. There is tension between these polarities that seems to be left purposefully unresolved in their portrayal of the human condition.

***Film Noir (Perspire), Film Noir (Hand), Film Noir (Twins), Film Noir (Fly), Film Noir (Fear) (all 1995):***

The footage in Gordon's films listed above is not easy subject matter to view and portrays, other than *Film Noir (Fly)*, psychiatric patients in different stages of therapy or some kind of stressful psychiatric event. In all the above-mentioned works Gordon has slowed, repeated or magnified (by cropping) the material which has the effect of intensifying and bringing otherwise unseen details into focus, opening up the work to an uncomfortable scrutiny and facilitating personal reflection by the viewer. Katrina M. Brown describes the footage in terms of crisis as follows:

Witnessing crisis endured by others from the comfort of a known, safe environment is a mainstay of popular culture, from the comedy sketch to the

thriller. This publicly acknowledged taste for horror, the idea of fear as entertainment, was something Hitchcock undeniably played to and has been a preoccupation of Gordon's, particularly evident in those works that feature psychiatric patient studies. Our undoubted if unpleasant readiness to be compelled by that which we find unsettling underscores much of Gordon's work [...](2004: 48).

The *Film Noir* series appropriates archival medical footage dating from the period of time immediately after the Second World War (ibid). These works seem to embody the unknown internal workings of fearful, anxious thoughts materialized both in bodily and facial expression and in the film and video itself by use of looped, slowed footage and fixed camera viewpoints which directly pull in the viewer to share and/or contemplate the state of fear and anxiety itself. Katrina. M Brown describes the installation set up in the Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven (1995) as follows:

A number of films found there form the basis for a group of works sharing the title *Film Noir* (all 1995). The footage in this instance dates from the period immediately after the Second World War, documenting the movements of different parts of the body of one man following insulin coma therapy. He was one of many thousands who suffered psychological damage during the war to be subdued with high doses of insulin and later retrieved from the resultant coma with sugar. Gordon recounts that "when they come out they are basically rebirthed and exhibit every stage of the new-born child." The patient chosen by Gordon is anonymous and only ever seen in part – the films focus separately on his hand, his head, his eyes, each presumably intended to be studied as signifiers of his inner mental state. These details are shot so close up that at times they appear like an abstract monochrome composition. It is powerful stuff that Gordon hoped would be 'potent without being shocking' (ibid).

This exhibition and installation in Eindhoven (1995) seems to expand on human suffering to include all suffering. Among the films focusing on the human body and face Gordon includes *Film Noir (Fly)*, a work which magnifies the death throes of a household fly.<sup>49</sup> The fly is seen in black and white, in extreme close up, and on this

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<sup>49</sup> In an interview with Jan Debbaut, Douglas Gordon (Gordon and Debbaut, 1998: 44) talks about this particular film as follows: "This was an image of something that we see killed every day. We see them dying in corners of rooms at home; we don't care about them. Some of us even tortured these things as part of a 'game' to play when we were children. But seeing something like this in a museum becomes a much more distressing game to play."

occasion, on a large screen. Brown (2004: 49-50) describes the effect of the juxtaposition of human and insect video imagery:

The installation in Eindhoven comprised six pieces in total, five using this disturbing footage and one, projected on a screen of the same size as the others, showing a dying fly. The inclusion of *Film Noir (fly)*, the juxtaposition and implied equivalence of human and insect, gave the installation an extreme tension, both subjects utterly objectified, the man seen only as disembodied parts. Watching the dying twitches of the fly recalls the innocent cruelty of childhood curiosity rather than scientific observation, but a sense of inhumanity is common to both sets of images. *Film Noir (Hand)* seeks signs of inner life in the subject's fingers, while *Film Noir (Perspire)* focuses on his sweat-covered brow and one closed eye. In the extreme close-up of *Film Noir (Fear)* the patient appears awake and terrified by we know not what. *Film Noir (Twins)* uses two screens, one vertical, the other horizontal to present two sequences of images showing the man's face, as he endures a range of emotions that may be anxiety, fear, confusion.<sup>50</sup>

Sound has been removed in these works and this draws attention to the psychotic state by an overemphasis of the scopic drive, thus implicating the viewer in the spectacle of trauma. Silence can be used as an aesthetic tool to demarcate or frame the subject of sonic importance. Goodman explains the implications of silence as follows:

[I]n the history of musical aesthetics, silence, from John Cage onward, has been conjoined to the virtual in that it constitutes the shadow of audition, the nonconscious background, perceivable only through absence and with only a negative possibility of entering conscious attention. Silence [...] is sound in potential, unactualized (Goodman, 2010: 191).

Gordon's video installations evoke another version of this "unactualized" sound which sets up eerie aesthetic resonances in the viewer's imagination. Silence can also connote a quasi-spiritual and nostalgic feeling in creating a near religious feeling of film and image worship in a gallery setting.

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<sup>50</sup> This description of Gordon's work calls to mind Paul Virilio's disturbing book *Art and Fear* (2000) in which science, medicine and art are combined in a futuristic apocalypse of mad scientist as artist, i.e. where the human and animal body is completely objectified in the name of experimental research, progress and human perfection. The manipulation of bodies in Gordon's works seem to form a branch to what Virilio says is happening to humanity and could provide a beginning for commentary on what can happen to living beings in the name of genetic engineering if not checked. Gordon states in an interview with Katrina M Brown (Brown, 2004: 44) that "[i]t is surely the case that every human being is interested in neuro-psychological phenomena because, statistically, every family has had, or will have, some experience of dysfunctional behaviour. So it's something we live with. We can be fascinated by this subject and we can be terrified of it. So for me, fear and repulsion and fascination are critical elements in both the world of science and the world of cinema. We can be attracted to the spectacle of cinema while watching something completely repulsive."

### **Trauma and Repetition, *10Ms -1* (1994):**

*10Ms -1* is an archived video document of a man unable to stand up. His failing attempts to stand are played over and over again in this video. This footage portrays a man suffering from various mental conditions and the installation format involves the viewer directly in that it forces a physical engagement with the image in the way that the screens are set up. Katherine Brown (Brown, 2004: 42)

describes the piece as follows:

Like *Trigger Finger*, *10 Ms -1* (1994) uses footage that records and observes the body as conduit between past and present, its actions becoming a physical manifestation of mental scars inflicted by some unknown past event. It presents unaltered footage of a young man dressed only in underpants in a room sparsely furnished with a metal bed frame and a screen, just enough information to imply some kind of medical institution, though at first sight the man appears to be in good health. The film records his painful attempts to walk, before falling over, and his subsequent almost unbearable inability, despite repeated attempts, to stand again.

Screens are placed on the floor, in the middle of the space, propped against a black pole. It is large enough to depict the young man almost life-size. One can walk around the screen, or between the projector and screen, inserting oneself in the image as a shadow/negative presence.

Gordon has used such physical proximity to the screen in several of his works, describing the strategy as follows: "You have the opportunity to do something you're never allowed to do in the movie theatre – touching the screen. In the theatre usually you keep a distance. And the metaphor of distance is the metaphor of voyeurism. But when you get closer and closer you can actually take the sadist's part, if you're close enough to get involved."

The repeated imagery in Gordon's video installations seems to suggest a situation of being stuck and of something that repeats itself in the mind. Like a stuck record the man struggles to get up but can't. It is as if his body has shut down in response to fear and cannot mobilize to stand and escape his situation. We know not what makes the man in the *Film Noir (Fear)* so disturbed in his facial expressions; once again we are unable to see past the frame and as his face is framed leaving no space for escape so the viewer is also stuck with this view. Gordon's work could seem to represent, in psychiatrist Henry Krystal's words, the "aftereffects of catastrophic adult psychic trauma, that is, those aftereffects that represent a continuation of the traumatic process" (Caruth, 1995: 81). The repetition in the form of looped

imagery is a form of temporality. It serves to exaggerate the elements of time inherent in moments of fear, pain and trauma. As Krystal (ibid) comments, the memory of a past trauma is repeated in an aftereffect that continues and takes up time again and again.

### **24 Hour Psycho (1993):**

*24 Hour Psycho* brought Douglas Gordon much publicity as an artist. Its simplicity is disarming and the work itself is disturbing. It is multi-layered in the most simple yet surreal way and it could be argued that it changed the face of cinema and video art.<sup>51</sup> It is based on Alfred Hitchcock's Film Noir horror movie/thriller *Psycho* (1959) which Gordon slowed down so that the original 109 minute film plays out over 24 hours (2 frames per second). The change is at the same time subtle and dramatic and a new artwork is created from the original by the shift in tempo, the removal of sound and the recontextualisation.<sup>52</sup> Time thereby becomes a central theme and, at the same time, the film evokes a feeling of tension and anxiety. The relationship between the original *Psycho* and *24 Hour Psycho* is ever-present and complex. The slowing down of the footage, as a technique, works very effectively in this particular film because of the overriding element of fear and terror embedded in the original.<sup>53</sup> Gordon's work objectifies the original. It renders the feelings of

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<sup>51</sup> Taubin comments: "Just as *Psycho*, in 1960, marked a final staging post in the history of the studio system as the basis for the Hollywood film industry, *24 Hour Psycho*, like an elegy, marks a point of no return for the cinema itself" (1996: 72).

<sup>52</sup> Katrina M. Brown describes Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* as follows:  
[...] he created a large-scale video projection, *24 Hour Psycho* (1993), which slowed down Alfred Hitchcock's classic film of 1960 so that it would last a full day rather than the original 109 minutes. Instead of the standard 24 frames per second speed at which a film is projected, Gordon's projection is viewed at almost 2 frames per second, so that the movement between each is just evident. It is screened without sound, creating an eerily still atmosphere in the midst of this well-known dramatic film. The effect is extraordinary, achieved through an awareness of the established convention, in both television and cinema, that slow motion tends to indicate extreme gravity and significance (2004: 21).

<sup>53</sup> *Psycho* is a notorious film. In an article on the film and its director, Nigel Andrews states the following:  
In the intervening years *Psycho*, the throwaway movie, has become a milestone, a masterpiece, a cultural artifact for eternity. Its fascination is worldwide and inexhaustible [...] Like any great work of art, *Psycho* never stops asking questions or provoking us to hazard answers. It is classic horror, since it makes us jump out of our skins half a dozen times. Yet it starts by seeming classic in another sense: a linear, logical, near Aristotelian tale of a woman in love who steals money to build a future and then, at the last possible moment, repents. But she finds it isn't the last possible moment after all. It is too late. In the act of literally and metaphorically cleansing herself – in the shower – she is naked.

Andrews goes on to discuss this scene in relation to Hiroshima in its excessiveness and the 'banality of evil':  
Asked by Traffaut what drew him to Robert Bloch's original novel, published in 1959, Hitchcock replied: "The thing that [...]made me decide to do the picture was the suddenness of the murder in the shower scene, come, as it were, out of the blue." Out of the blue. Like a falling bomb. The very sequence of the shower murder is an atomisation of

terror and horror abstract and conceptual (and perhaps all the more menacing). The work also seems to speak to audiences in an ethereal and unconscious way: in the future, our dreams, our psyches and in our everyday lives.

### **The Unconscious in Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho*:**

The complex connections and relationships between the original *Psycho* and *24 Hour Psycho* is significant. Philip Monk has dedicated an entire book to Gordon's re-appropriations of Hollywood films in which he adopts a psychoanalytical approach to grapple with the concept of the unconscious as it is seen to relate to Gordon's work. For instance, Gordon has 'displaced' the sound of the original film *Psycho*, obliterating language and rendering the work silent, which, as Monk (2003: 74) puts it: "dwells within Hitchcock's film like the mother who is absent within *Psycho* [...]" This creates a powerful psychological dynamic in the viewer as he/she attempts to fill in for themselves remembered dialogue of the original while watching Gordon's re-imagined version (ibid: 72). A madness (or inward looking reflection in that we talk to ourselves) that is very much part of the original *Psycho* comes to the surface, first with the doomed Marian Crane talking to herself after she has stolen money, and then in the demented ventriloquism of Norman Bates. Monk writes about *24 Hour Psycho* as engaging the unconscious of the spectator (which possibly would make Gordon's words about 'conversations' with his viewers ring true), in that it "suspends" the image, opening "up a gap in our experience that, at one and the same time, is the site of our perception of film and the place where our unconscious operates"<sup>54</sup> (ibid: 73). He continues:

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film grammar: 75 cuts in 45 seconds. The nuclear disintegration of form. This was a new kind of horror, spring-cleaned with the squalor of the everyday [...] Everyone, even the victim, had grown up. You could look into *Psycho* as you looked into your newspaper. Terror was right here, on your breakfast table (Andrews, FT, March 20, 2010, Life and Arts).

<sup>54</sup> In a note in Monk's chapter on Douglas Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* he describes how psychoanalysts Lacan and Freud theorise on the locality of the unconscious:

Lacan has written on the place and temporality of the unconscious, which differ from those of logical space and time. On its place: "The primary process...must, once again, be apprehended in its experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that non-temporal locus, I said, which forces us to posit what Freud calls... *die Idee einer andere Lokalitat*, the idea of another locality, another space, another scene, the between perception and consciousness." On its temporality: "The unconscious is always manifested as that which vacillates in a split in the subject... The appearance/disappearance takes place between two points, the initial and the terminal of this logical time – between the instant of seeing, when something of the intuition itself is always elided, not to say lost, and that elusive moment when the apprehension of the unconscious is not, in fact, concluded, when it is always the question

The slow motion of *24 Hour Psycho* places us in a different temporal universe where there are no privileged moments. In Gordon's version, the shower scene – the epitome of montage in *Psycho* – is not more significant than any other. In fact, "scene" makes no sense when plot construction dissipates and montage is elided through protraction. Montage is the first victim of slow motion; the naturalistic duration film fictionally promotes is the second. With no privileged moments *24 hour Psycho* reproduces the double-bind space of no single traumatic event. But it also installs us in the reality in which the psycho strikes in the heart of the everyday, in the banality of what Gilles Deleuze calls the "any-instant-whatever"<sup>55</sup> (ibid: 76).

This passage addresses the steady and invasively creeping fear in the everyday moment that Hitchcock's original *Psycho* and Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* both capture, i.e. the reality that at any given moment or at "any-instant-whatever" someone is experiencing trauma. *24 Hour Psycho*, through its temporal and spatial deconstruction, becomes at once banal to the viewer yet also disturbing, insinuating itself continuously like "the organ perfecting a new reality" (Deleuze, 1986: 8). Deleuze speaks of cinema as having the capability to change and create what reality is to a viewer, to our collective viewership. These shared experiences of watching films become part of our collective unconscious and therefore become a new, shared reality. *24 Hour Psycho* plays on this notion of a collective film knowledge and furthers Hitchcock's successful attempts at creating dis-ease in the audience.

### **Selected South African Contemporary Video Artists:**

There is an associated violence with perceptions of Africa, "an association haunted by the ancient specter of primitivism and stereotypical views of Africa" (Smith, Enwezor, Condee, 2008:264-265). In addition to this associated violence in the context of the African continent as a whole, apartheid and its legacy further clouds and burdens the perceptions of South Africa as a country on this continent. Njabulo Ndebele<sup>56</sup> describes this in terms of "obscene social exhibitionism":

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of an 'absorption' fraught with false trails." Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* (Monk, 2003: 225).

<sup>55</sup> Deleuze says: "The any-instant-whatever is the instant which is equidistant from another" and can relate to the domestic, the everyday, the expected norm (Deleuze, 1983: 6).

<sup>56</sup> Njabulo Ndebele (born in Swaziland in 1948) is a writer, teacher and academic. His father was a playwright and teacher publishing the first ever Zulu book of drama in the 1940s in Lesotho. Ndebele became Vice-Chancellor and Principal of the

Everything in South Africa has been mind-bogglingly spectacular: the monstrous war machine developed over the years; the random massive pass raids; mass shootings and killings; mass economic exploitation the ultimate symbol of which was the mining industry; the mass removals of people; the spate of draconian laws passed with the spectacle of parliamentary promulgations; the luxurious life-style of whites; servants, all-encompassing privilege; swimming pools, and high commodity consumption; the sprawling monotony of architecture in African locations, which are the very picture of poverty and oppression. The symbols are all over: the quintessence of obscene social exhibitionism (ibid: 252).

It is against this backdrop that contemporary South African art emerges. As negative and oppressive an image that the above description portrays, art in South Africa, in the words of Okwui Enwezor<sup>57</sup> (Williamson, 2009: 16), represents “one of the most dynamic and vigorous spaces of artistic practice.”

Since the advent of democracy in South Africa in the nineties, the field of art in this country has been in a state of constant invention. The release of political prisoners by then president F.W. de Klerk in 1989 and 1990 and the shift from apartheid to post-apartheid politics also saw a change of attitude towards South African art; contemporary artists gained acceptance and recognition in the international art market (ibid). This was an important time for contemporary art following the period of isolationism from the international community during apartheid in the form of cultural boycotts.<sup>58</sup>

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University of Cape Town, he holds numerous honorary doctorates from universities around the world. His publications include *Fine Lines from the Box: Further Thoughts About our Country* (2007); *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (2003); *Death of a Son* (1996); *Rediscovery of the Ordinary: Essays on South African Literature and Culture* (2006).

<sup>57</sup> Okwui Enwezor (born in Nigeria in 1963) is a curator, art critic and educator specializing in art history. Enwezor founded the critical art publication *NKA: Journal of Contemporary African Art*; he contributes to numerous art journals such as *Frieze*, *Artforum* and *Third Text*. He has held academic positions at the San Francisco Art Institute; Columbia University and New York University amongst others. In 1997 he directed the second edition of the Johannesburg Biennale *Trade Routes*. He has recently been appointed the Artistic Director of the 2012 Paris Triennial.

<sup>58</sup> Lize van Robbroeck, editor of *Volume two of Visual Century: South African Art in Context* (2011), discusses the exclusion and isolation that South African artists faced during apartheid,

Between the end of the Second World War and the Soweto uprisings, South Africa was increasingly isolated from the international world as a result of its policies of racial discrimination and extreme social engineering. Against a backdrop of decolonization and the Cold War, the apartheid state adopted increasingly severe repressive measures to subdue internal revolt and international pressures. These had significant consequences for the art of the period, as artists were harassed, banned, excluded from institutions, censored and forced into exile.

She further notes,

Although South Africa experienced an economic boom in the 1960s, which led to a proliferation of new galleries and a radically expanded art market, the local art scene started showing the effects of the imposition of the first sanctions against the country, along with increasing censure from a post-war world intent on overcoming the racist

However, this new opening up to international group exhibitions of South African art practice was fraught with a sense of artificiality and idealism. As Okwui Enwezor (ibid) points out:

It is, of course, no surprise that such group exhibitions about post-apartheid South African art tended to elide the clear differences inherent in the work of black and white artists. The international exhibition system, rather than address these differences critically, oftentimes ignored or glossed over the remarkable contradictions that defined post-apartheid South African art, overlooking or muting the apparent aesthetic ideology that separates African and European models of modernism. For example, rarely were the disparities in modes of working, conceptual systems, and even educational training between black and white artists explored as part of the heritage of post-apartheid contemporary art. In fact, very seldom was the question ever asked about the precise designation of post-apartheid art, or what exactly unifies a one-time segregated culture into a singular, undifferentiated whole.

The convenient reinvention of South Africa as a multi-cultural, multi-racial ‘rainbow nation’ or a ‘new’ South Africa is still problematic, involving a kind of amnesia, forgetting or a ‘glossing over.’<sup>59</sup> The international simplification of South African contemporary art practice during the nineties is in some ways understandable. The deep complexities and tensions are still being identified and grappled with in different ways in art practice today. In South Africa, group exhibitions started to address the complexities of the post-apartheid phenomenon. For example, curator Jane Taylor’s exhibition *Fault Lines* held at the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town in 1996 “questioned the very credibility of the idea of the rainbow nation as a useful reference for the making of art” and was concerned with “disparities and contradictions, gaps, elisions, cleavages, ruptures, and contingent spaces and forms that informed not only South African art but the post-apartheid self at that time” (ibid: 17).

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discourses that led to the Holocaust and other Nazi excesses. Increasingly cut off from major international art events and movements, and from an international postmodern culture that was responding with complex irony and anxiety to a world threatened with imminent atomic destruction, South African art remained relatively parochial, conservative and overwhelmingly white... (Robbroeck, 2011: 3).

<sup>59</sup> The idea that the past must never be forgotten has become a powerful theme in contemporary South African art (Williamson, 2009:79). The term “rainbow nation” was created by Archbishop Desmond Tutu referring to post-apartheid multiculturalism in South African society but has become somewhat of a cliché.

A discussion of South African contemporary art must include reference to the significance of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and its decisive role (with specific reference to violence) in reflecting on and dealing with the trauma of the past. The TRC was set up in 1995 under Archbishop Desmond Tutu with the aims of its hearings being, in the words of David Koloane<sup>60</sup> (Herreman, 1999: 19), to “investigate human rights violations committed during the apartheid era.” The TRC hearings attempted to expose the violations of those who had suffered under apartheid as well as calling forth perpetrators and their testimonies of crimes against humanity committed in exchange for amnesty before the law. These grueling testimonies were broadcast nationally. The controversy surrounding the TRC hearings was that while the country learned the truth about what was happening under apartheid the people who had killed and tortured others were excused.

Recalling the evidence given by a high profile white security policeman, Dirk Coetzee, artist William Kentridge (Williamson, 2009: 90) notes: “He said he came home every day stinking of blood and dynamite from blowing up bodies. His wife was worried, because immediately after he came home he would have a shower and she thought that he was having an affair with another woman and was showering to get rid of the smell of that other woman.” In his own works Kentridge responded to such testimonies by weaving them into his theatre and film productions. *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1997) and *The History of the Main Complaint* (1996) are works that directly relate to the TRC hearings and deal unflinchingly with the

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<sup>60</sup> David Koloane is an important figure in South Africa’s art community. Sean O’Toole describes his contributions and relevance as follows,

Co-founder of Johannesburg’s first black art gallery in the late 1970s, David Koloane’s biography reads like a potted history of contemporary black visual art in South Africa. In the 1960s he was a young apprentice with the Polly Street group of artists (“it was basically the first place where black artists could come together under one roof in Johannesburg,” says Koloane); between 1974 and 1977 he served an apprenticeship under Bill Ainslie at the Johannesburg Art Foundation; and in July 1982, Koloane was the visual arts coordinator of a pivotal rally of arts and culture workers, the Culture and Resistance Festival held in Botswana (Arttrhob, 2003: archive 71).

More recently, Koloane is credited with co-founding (along with Robert Loder) The Bag Factory studio and gallery space in downtown Johannesburg. Also, and quite significantly, he curated the South African component of an international retrospective of African art, ‘Seven Stories About Modern Art In Africa’, staged at London’s Whitechapel Art Gallery (1995) and later shown at the Guggenheim in New York (1996). Koloane’s selections for this show evidenced his uncompromising view of how South African history has influenced this country’s artistic output.

violent history of this country and foregrounds it as something that cannot be pushed aside.

Since the new millennium South African art has become more focused on the individual as imperatives to engage with the political discourse (in terms of the struggle politics of the past) have become less urgent. Activist and former lawyer Albie Sachs' text *Preparing Ourselves for Freedom* (1989) resonates here. He argues for artists "to go beyond using art as a tool of political discourse, and in a sense to perform their duty by allowing the work of the imagination to be expressed in more complex ways" (ibid: 19). Many contemporary South African artists have done just this and have gained deserved global recognition in the contemporary international art scene. However the global popularity and success of contemporary South African art is still beset with contradictions and complexities. The gap between rich and poor continues to widen and the architecture of apartheid still, for the most part, continues to impact on society and life in this country. Trauma and fear are present in the everyday as unemployment, corruption, violent crime and AIDS continue to spread. In 2008 the horrific xenophobic attacks on foreign Africans brought the brutality and intolerance still inherent in our society into sharp focus. Okwui Enwezor describes how this happened and refers to "the artists responsibility" in this context when he says:

I want to reflect on the responsibility of the artist during this period of tension, uncertainty, doubt – in fact, the crisis of the post-apartheid model that succeeded Mandela. At a time when a significant number of South African artists, such as David Goldblatt, Sue Williamson, William Kentridge, Marlene Dumas, Zwelethu Mthethwa, Guy Tillim, Santu Mofokeng, Berni Searle, and a group of younger ones, such as Robin Rhode, Tracey Rose, Candice Breiz, Kendell Geers, Mikhael Subotzky, Moshekwa Langa, Pieter Hugo, Mustafa Maluka, Nicholas Hlobo, and others have gained solid visibility in the global field of contemporary art, it is the irony of this boon to contemporary South African art (having moved from pariah status to normal global player) that the country is today engulfed in one of the nastiest forms of xenophobic violence against African migrants living in South Africa (ibid: 20).

Colin Richards (Smith, Enwezor, Condee, 2008: 250-289) writes about the “aftermath” of apartheid and discusses what he refers to as the “South African imaginary.” The xenophobic attacks reminded us of that horrific and terrifying symbol of violence and death, namely the burning tyre and Richards (ibid) describes this image as has having become “part of our traumatic imaginary.” He goes on to quote Winnie Mandela’s notoriously inflammatory words about the “necklace” which caught the attention of the world: “We have no guns – we have only stones, boxes of matches, petrol. Together, hand in hand, with our boxes of matches and our necklaces<sup>61</sup> we will liberate this country” (ibid).

This South African “traumatic imaginary” appears again and again in art dealing with trauma, fear and unease. In her video work titled *Lull* (2009), Berni Searle uses the tyre as a symbol of restlessness and violence as a result of the growing and unbridgeable gap between rich and poor people in South Africa. Kendell Geers’ references to violence in apartheid society include the use of razor wire, flashing danger lights and broken glass. William Kentridge’s character Soho Eckstein presents a “symbol of self-satisfied blinkered existence,” as Sue Williamson puts it in the quotation below:

One of the most sustained and emblematic creations in the history of South African contemporary art is William Kentridge’s fictional, pinstripe-suited character Soho Eckstein, described by the artist as “a property developer extraordinaire.” Eckstein is the archetypal rapacious white businessman, who first appeared in one of Kentridge’s earliest animated films, *Johannesburg, Second Greatest City After Paris* (1989), attempting to solve the annoyingly visible problem of the city’s poor by literally throwing food at them ... As in all of Kentridge’s films in which Eckstein plays a leading role, the character is a symbol of a self-satisfied blinkered existence, of willful white blindness to black pain (Williamson, 2009: 138).

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<sup>61</sup> Necklacing (sometimes called necklace) is the practice of summary execution carried out by forcing a rubber tyre, filled with petrol, around a victim's chest and arms, and setting it on fire. The victim may take up to 20 minutes to die, suffering severe burns in the process (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Necklacing>).

In her essay *Live from South Africa*, writer Roselee Goldberg<sup>62</sup> discusses the 'emotional' content of South African contemporary art as follows:

Generations of South Africans had accumulated a collective theater of mental images that are the very basis of their distinctive character and identity. These include Nelson Mandela walking to freedom as he exited the gates of the Victor Verster Prison 1990, the final dismantling of apartheid manifested in a new constitution when he became president in 1994, and the traumatic staging of the Truth and Reconciliation commission hearing of the 1996 to 1998. Politics, in this multicultural maelstrom of vocal, voluble, and articulate individuals, is a highly emotional expression of social consciousness. Emotional content characterises the work of many South Africans artists. Whether Marlene Dumas, William Kentridge, Berni Searle, or Steven Cohen, the starting point of a painting, drawing, video, or performance often begins inside a wellspring of pain and erupts forcefully, as though the inhumanity of extreme repression can only find relief in aesthetic expression (ibid: 102).

Liese van der Watt discusses both Minnette Vari's and Kendell Geers' works in her thought provoking essay *Witnessing Trauma in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Miller, K & Hill, Shannen, 2005: 29). She talks about the "responsibility of whiteness" (ibid: 4), especially in new generations, to address and confront issues of the past with regards to apartheid. She examines the "grid" of trauma studies that relates to the Holocaust and quotes Dominique LaCapra thus: "The grid of the Holocaust is one that you also see elsewhere. It involves the victim, perpetrators, bystanders, collaborators, resisters, those in the gray zone, and those born later" (ibid: 29). Van de Watt relates this "grid" to the South African situation, though she does mention that they are not the same (this is an area of controversy) but share certain similarities stated by LaCapra. Watt seems to call for a "responsibility" of the white artist to address issues about their past and how to devise "productive ways to deal with South Africa's traumatic past" (ibid). Theodor Adorno's<sup>63</sup> plea for a "critical

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<sup>62</sup> Roselee Goldberg was born in Durban, South Africa and studied Fine Arts and Political Science at Wits University, Johannesburg. She is widely known for her contribution to Performance Art and wrote the text *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present* (1979) which is used as a key text in teaching performance art in universities. Additionally, she is a curator, writer, critic and art-historian working with prominent contemporary multi-disciplinary artists as well as galleries and museums such as The Guggenheim and The Tate Modern to name a few. Goldberg is the founder of PERFORMA which she describes as follows (<http://performa-arts.org/blog/who-we-are/letter-from-the-director/>), PERFORMA is "a non-profit interdisciplinary arts organization, to establish a distinctive biennial for the vast array of high caliber performance by visual artists from around the world."

<sup>63</sup> German sociologist, philosopher and musicologist known for his critical theory of society (and a leading member of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory), Theodor Adorno (1903-1969), posed questions about the "responsibility of aesthetics."

and reflexive function of art” is used as a basis for a discussion of how Kendell Geers and Minette Vari, in her opinion, do this in their artworks in relation to South Africa and its recent past.

Kendell Geers is an artist who has dealt with politics very directly in his work but he is also quick to point out that his work is also about “the human condition.” Van de Watt maintains that Geers’s art is borne out of his experience of living in South Africa:

Geers’s art is distinctly informed by a South African context, which becomes especially visible when exhibiting in that country. Undercurrents of violence and fear are always present in his art practice, born out of a political climate that was characterized by the subtle and not-so-subtle threat of terror. While these works [*Self Portrait*, 1995; *Terrorealismus*, 2003; *S/laughter*, 2003] do not explicitly reveal or address the terrors of the apartheid past, they address the alienation of the self in an altered present (ibid: 35).

Geers’ work is indeed indicative of a trauma that travels beyond the confines of our own South African past. His video installation *Empire* (2002) uses the “Western” icon of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the twin towers in New York to evoke fear by using a disturbing structural and temporal manipulation of the video that is linked to the very concept of fear and terror itself (discussed in more detail further on).

Trauma and fear are international concerns. Colin Richards points out that trauma is a global phenomenon in the following passage:

When we examine South Africa’s history, we find, like in many other places of trauma, that through the critical practice of culture history is not only brought alive and given urgency, but is, most importantly, a vital way these societies humanise and define their common interests, even if those interests rest on the daily reality of unbridgeable differences. Enwezor’s reference to trauma suggests a common experience with people from other parts of the globe and runs counter to the parochial notion of “exceptionalism” that South Africans are so vulnerable to evoking in regard to themselves. Trauma is clearly a contemporary reality and almost the master trope of our time (Smith, Enwezor, Condee, 2008: 262).

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He says, “after Auschwitz it is barbaric to continue writing poetry.” The problem with images of trauma is that people may get aesthetic pleasure out of the representation of horror, pain and suffering (Miller, K & Hill, Shannen, 2005: 28).

### **Kendell Geers (1968):**

Geers' birth date, as shown above, is apparently fictitious. In a podcast on YouTube Geers (Geers, 2009: Baltic Bites <sup>64</sup>) describes time as "a central theme in his work." One way of obliterating time, he says, is to change one's own birth date which gives one the freedom to determine one's "own point of origin." The art of Kendell Geers provokes the senses. His work feels blunt, angry, sincere, ugly and traumatic and explores themes relating to South African society such as violence, crime and trauma. Geers states his position of being a contemporary South African as follows:

Since the fall of apartheid, South Africa has been struggling to come to terms with its violent history, struggling to find a balance between building a future and addressing the imbalances of the past. We are haunted by history, crippled by guilt, emotionally destroyed by the shadow of a system that was officially declared a crime against humanity (Geers, 2007: 134).

Geers's installations tend to assault the viewer with sound and visuals. He tries to disturb the status quo and to provoke feelings of physical and emotional disorientation in the viewer. He highlights human fragility and at the same time involves the viewer in the process of being aware of the act of looking. This offers an enhanced renegotiation of reality and perhaps jolts private memories of the viewer's own experiences of fragility or fear.

*Present Tense* (2003) is a work that directly communicates ideas about time and disturbance. Colin Richards describes the work as follows:

The words "hell" and "sell" are presented in *Present Tense* (2003), via an inverted digital clock in the church of Hagia Sophia in Istanbul, referencing a deep history of Christian/Muslim conflict brought up to date by the current war in Iraq (Perryer, 2004: 122).

Apart from the above described installation setting which situates the violent context in which to view *Present Tense*, the work also directly communicates ideas about time. For instance, a person viewing the work at 11:34 would see that the upside down digital numbers spell "hell." Seeing the word "hell" displayed on a digital clock in a church is disconcerting and suggestive of apocalyptic time.

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<sup>64</sup> <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=On-ugqlaMvc>

Geer's *Empire* (2002), mentioned earlier, suggests, by its identical title, a reference to Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1967). Warhol's work is an approximately 8 hour long video of the Empire State Building filmed at night with a fixed camera angle over a long period of time and displayed unedited and slowed down from 24 frames per second to 16 frames per second (Comer, 2009: 79).<sup>65</sup> Though the imagery in Geers's *Empire* is not the Empire State Building, it shows footage of a similar iconographic status, the now destroyed Twin Towers of New York. Geers structurally alters the video imagery and presents the "action" in the video within a built up post-apocalyptic night scene of other buildings.

Having not had the opportunity to see this work first hand as it was displayed in an exhibition setting, my viewing experience of *Empire* was very limited, first at the Johannesburg Art Gallery where I viewed the work on my computer screen and later on You Tube. This viewing experience, while out of context of an exhibition installation, still conveyed an ominous quality. The original visual and auditory impact of *Empire* must have been explosive and disturbing when seen in a more formal installation setting.

The video begins with a view of a nighttime, grimy city landscape. Within this scene there appears - in a sort of de-collage-type cutaway - another "screen" (the image of a screen) depicting a bright blue sky, which could be the view of a surveillance camera and contrasts sharply with the nighttime setting. The whole screened image appears to be still. Nothing happens for a while except for a flashing line at the top left of the screen, which makes the viewer aware that a video is running. Thick and dark moving smoke slowly enters the smaller cut out "screen" from the left. The sound to this image is caustic, like processed compressed static and drones unpleasantly, insistent and loud. It comes in rhythmic bursts of intensity after an initial period of ominously low-toned droning. Patrick Codenys, a member of the

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<sup>65</sup> Warhol's *Empire* has been referenced often, for example, by Douglas Gordon *Bootleg (Empire)* (1998), neon sign, mirrored steel; Wolfgang Staehle created *Empire 24/7* (1999) which consisted of live webcam images of the Empire State building streamed live on the internet (Comer, 2009: 135).

Belgian band *Front 242*,<sup>66</sup> created the soundtrack for the video to convey an industrial sound full of threatening undercurrents and tension. The slowed down imagery in combination with the developing sound builds up to create an atmosphere of foreboding. Densely erupting smoke is the main subject as it slowly fills the pictured screen within the larger actual screen. The fixed camera angles within both the actual and represented frames allow for a powerful compositional device that distances the viewer from the action and makes him/her aware of viewing screened events, in this case found media footage of the September 11 attack on the World Trade Centre in New York in 2001. The smoke mysteriously implodes, i.e. it appears reversed and yet the structural manipulation of the footage is not immediately obvious (until the end). Slowly, toward the end of the video, the full image of one of the twin towers in the 9/11 attacks comes into view, played in slow motion and in reverse. It reveals a powerful and shocking exploration of time's arrow through a restaging of the terror attacks in New York. Slow motion increases the horror of the event and the reversal of the footage is mesmerizing to watch. Having seen the footage of this destructive event on TV at the time of the attack, shock and terror is re-evoked through the display and structural manipulation of such visual material.<sup>67</sup> The video unexpectedly ends with a view of a twin tower already crumbling but does not show more, thereby disrupting the direction of time and confusing the sense of beginning and end.

Repetition as a form of temporality would appear to keep the past alive. With *Empire* this particular trauma is brought into the present again and again, keeping the moment alive for fresh interpretation or future reference. Repetition can also

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<sup>66</sup> Front 242 started in 1981 in Belgium and began as a pioneering band using raw electronic and found sounds. Its distinctive sound was a "cold, synthetic brand of dance music" which had "physically charged qualities from sounds recycled from the media and television" (<http://www.front242.com/site/content/band.asp>).

<sup>67</sup> The slowed image of this destruction is disturbing but I could not help but be drawn in by the Geers's reworked imagery, awed by the sheer enormity and shock of what happened displayed again and in slow motion. The world is still mesmerized by images of 9/11, as they were at the time of the event, and these images have taken on meaning beyond the events recorded. In the book "How Images Think" by Ron Burnett (Burnett, 2004: 15) discusses this idea:

The images of the destruction of the World Trade Center by terrorists were not static; they immediately became part of a dynamic, ongoing historical process. It is precisely because images are the product of a particular moment that more must be added to them than is ever present in the images themselves. This excess, which is often seen as somehow interfering with the meaning of the image, is a necessary staging ground for interpretation and analysis (Deleuze, 1986; Eco 1984).

make a scene appear monotonous and everyday, it can numb and make images seem banal. It can give rise to feelings of disturbance in the viewer as these opposing tendencies surface. Repetition in the viewing of traumatic events has been discussed in detail by Hal Foster in his book *The Return of the Real* (1996). Foster mentions this aspect in his essay on Andy Warhol's repeated images of trauma, specifically in his "Death in America" silkscreens on canvas, as a form of dealing with and trying to 'understand/grasp' trauma. Foster aligns Warhol's images with Jacques Lacan's definition of "the real" in terms of trauma, citing Warhol's *Death in America* series as being "contemporaneous with Lacan's seminar titled "The Unconscious and Repetition" (1964)." Foster explains:

The theory of trauma in Lacan is not influenced by pop. It is, however, informed by surrealism, which here has its deferred effect on Lacan, an early associate of the surrealists, and below I will intimate that pop is related to surrealism as a traumatic realism (certainly my reading of Warhol is a surrealist one). In this seminar Lacan defines the traumatic as a missed encounter with the real. As missed, the real cannot be represented; it can only be repeated, indeed it *must* be repeated. "Wiederholen," Lacan writes in etymological reference to Freud on repetition, "is not reproduzieren"; repetition is not reproduction. This can stand as an epitome of my argument too: repetition in Warhol is not reproduction in the sense of representation (of a referent) or simulation (of a pure image, a detached signifier). Rather, repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic. But this very need also *points* to the real, and at this point the real *ruptures* the screen of repetition. It is a rupture less in the world than in the subject – between the perception and the consciousness of a subject *touched* by an image (Foster, 1996: 132).

Foster continues in his discussion of Warhol's works such as *White Burning Car III* (1963) and *Ambulance Disaster* (1963) where he speaks of the ruptures in the screenprinting process of the repeated images as 'pops':

"What is repeated," Lacan writes, "is always something that occurs... as if by chance." So it is with these pops: they seem accidental, but they also appear repetitive, automatic, even technological (the relation between accident and technology, crucial to the discourse of shock, is a great Warhol subject). In this way he elaborates on our optical unconscious, a term introduced by Walter Benjamin to describe the subliminal effects of modern image technologies. Benjamin developed this notion in the early 1930s, in response to photography and film; Warhol updates it thirty years later, in response to the post war society of the spectacle, of mass media and commodity-signs. In

these early images we see what it looks like to dream in the age of television, Life, and Time – or rather what it looks like to nightmare as a shock victims who prepare for disasters that have already come, for Warhol selects moments when this spectacle cracks (the JFK assassination the Monroe suicide, racist attacks, car wrecks), but cracks only to expand (ibid).

Geers' *Empire* would seem to underscore what Foster identifies above, especially with regard to the repetitive use of media footage, the spectacle and the commodity-sign of the destroyed towers. Geers's work, for me, references the age of global broadcast television. The crackling and slowly repeated display of this footage becomes representative not only of the trauma of that moment but of global trauma and personal vulnerability.

### **William Kentridge (1955):**

One of the leading figures in contemporary art in South Africa, William Kentridge's work is deeply and inextricably linked to South Africa's troubled history and how that manifests in contemporary settings. Although his work is political, it is also poetic and concerned with the psychological through its focus on the unconscious and memory. His animated films create a hetero-temporality<sup>68</sup> which differs from our 'normal,' linear experience of time, evoking the sometimes uncanny temporality of dreaming and memory that can feel obscure yet strangely familiar. In *Film, Video, and New Media* (2009) writer and art critic James Rondeau describes Kentridge's animated work as follows:

Kentridge creates his animated films through a time-consuming process of overlaying, redrawing, and erasing marks on a small number of large charcoal and pastel drawings. He alters the image for each shot, leaving obvious traces of past states in nearly every frame; this layered effect inadvertently becomes a metaphor for the impact of historical memory on the present. As Kentridge has stated, "the very term 'new South Africa' has within it the idea of a painting over the old, the natural process of disremembering, the naturalization of things new." Although South Africa serves as his primary source, his analysis and the works it informs contain allegorical narratives that incorporate universal themes of good and evil,

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<sup>68</sup> A Foucauldian term used to express a multi-temporality that is not described by clocks and set times for doing things. It describes rather a non-linear way of thinking and experiencing time, for instance, Henri Bergson's concept of *duree* (duration), or experiencing Freud's timeless unconscious in the form of a dream where time becomes without boundaries and seemingly floats or lingers.

power and freedom. Kentridge explained, "I have never tried to make illustrations of apartheid, but the drawings and the films are certainly spawned by, and feed off, the brutalized society left in its wake. I am interested in a political art, that is to say an art of ambiguity, contradiction, uncompleted gestures and uncertain endings" (2009: 30).

The animated video *History of the Main Complaint* (1996) is a somber and unsettling work. Part of this animation shows the internal workings of the body of the main character, Soho Eckstein, an industrialist who also resembles Kentridge in appearance. We see him in a hospital bed surrounded by doctors and ultrasonic machinery used to examine inside his body in an attempt to find out what is wrong with him. He is asleep or unconscious as his body is probed and his unconscious or memory is unveiled in a series of drawings that represent things that have happened to him in the past, traumatic memories that perhaps have not been fully processed. His fear is palpable and a tension is created by the dis-ease that is evoked both by the imagery and the sound.<sup>69</sup>

Time and change is a theme that runs through all of Kentridge's animated works and especially so in *History of the Main Complaint*. Its method of creation is slow and very evident in the film. Made from 21 charcoal drawings that were erased and redrawn and then photographed in 16mm and 35 mm film, the work imparts a feeling of unease and darkness in its greyness, the charcoal drawing leaving behind smudged traces of the drawn animation process. These traces give the work a ghostly and unreal visual aura and convey an oppressive mood. The troubled representation of a man's past is echoed in the functionings and ailments in his body and we find out about his memories through a physical medical examination of his inner self.

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<sup>69</sup> Professor Jane Taylor presented a lecture on this work during a course offered at Wits in 2008 and I was lucky enough to see the work projected onto a big screen with accompanied good quality sound. At the National Arts Festival held in Grahamstown in 1997 I also had the opportunity to view a performance of Jane Taylor's, namely William Kentridge's and the Hand Spring Puppet Company's extraordinary and powerful *Ubu and the Truth Commission*. This was perhaps one of the most influential performances that I had seen in addressing direct experiences of living in South Africa during that time and has influenced my work since then. The same gravitas of *Ubu and the Truth Commission* is present in the *History of the Main Complaint* although the latter work is more contained and screen-based rather than performance-based and created solely by Kentridge through the process of drawing and erasure with charcoal.

The indigestible, unprocessed nature of his memories seem to be the cause of his unconsciousness. He sees people getting beaten to death on the side of the road, animated both in the imagery of a man being beaten to death and ultra-sonically as the blows suffered by the man are recorded in his body as broken areas marked with a red X. Further down this road he drives into a man with his car as seen through a windscreen. This too is recorded as an image of the event followed by ultra-sonic images of severe medical traumas. After this point Soho Eckstein wakes from his coma and the scene returns to his office.

Walter Benjamin (Fassi, Gallun & Schillinger, 2009: vii) points out that past memories that come to the surface (or flash up) during a moment of danger are ways in which humans can remember the past and this is essential to our view of history. It is when these memories are not processed or do not come to the surface that we fail to recognize things the way they were or are, or to think about them at all. Kentrige does not allow this amnesia to happen to Soho Eckstein in his unconscious state in the hospital bed, but at the end of the film we see the character Soho in his office processing and responding to his industrialist data – telephone, typewriter and calculator as if nothing has changed.

The film sets up the expectation that Soho's character would be enlightened or relieved by his experiences in hospital, but this expectation is thwarted when we see the robotic and unflinching nature of Soho at the end of the film. In reference to the condition of a "new South Africa," Kentrige seems to suggest that the memories or acknowledgements of past traumatic events can never lead to a catharsis. At best the deadly recollections brought to the surface may allow a physical recovery but not an emotional or spiritual one. In this sense *History of the Main Complaint* is a stark commentary on the aspirations (and results) of the Truth and Reconciliation hearings.

Sound is key to this animation. Sombre voices in the form of Monteverdi madrigals set the tone and lend a melancholic sound.<sup>70</sup> The work evokes loneliness, regret, trauma, time, memory and hopelessness. It captures a type of amnesia or purposeful forgetting that is relevant to the corporate saying advocating: “business as usual.” Soho Eckstein is also a victim of apartheid’s legacy, though not in the deadly way of the brutalized victims that pop up in his unconscious throughout the animation. He is not directly brutalized but the mentally repressed images will not go away and make him mysteriously sick until he recognizes them, albeit unconsciously. The work ends unresolved as if the memories that have been accessed do not unburden the character but do wake him from his unconscious state.

Kentridge has created a powerful representation of the possible processes of memory and trauma in the unconscious and how this can relate to the physical self. The film represents trauma and fear in the psychological realm and takes the viewer into a strange internal and a-temporal world of past events lodged dangerously in the body and mind.<sup>71</sup>

### **Berni Searle (1964):**

Searle’s work is potent yet quiet. She addresses issues that relate to trauma and fear, belonging and time. Sophie Perryer points out some of the recurring themes in her work:

[...] the flow of water, the passage of time, the ebb of memory, the rise and fall of people and nations. As always Searle anchors her work firmly in her own cultural heritage, yet her lyrical and abstracted imagery transcends the specific to speak with resonance of belonging and displacement, nationalism and xenophobia (2008: 7).

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<sup>70</sup> The composer Monteverdi was an influential composer of madrigals after 1600. His madrigals show the influence of “monody,” a term referring to poetry in which a person laments another’s death.

<sup>71</sup> To view this work on the internet visit the following website: <<http://thedissolve.net/video/27-history-of-the-main-complaint-1996>>

Searle's SD digital video, double-channel projection titled *Mute*, 2008 deals with the racial conflict experienced during the xenophobic attacks<sup>72</sup> that took place in South Africa in 2008. The violent attacks on non-national Africans aroused national and international shock and condemnation. This video preceded the *Black Smoke Rising* series of which *Lull* is part. *Lull* is a meditation on the tensions in South Africa brought about by the extremes of poverty and wealth in our society. In her press release for the *Black Smoke Rising* series Searle writes:

In South Africa, as the gap between rich and poor continues to widen, the frustrations and levels of desperation will continue to grow. These simmering tensions have the potential to erupt, and, as in the video, black smoke threatens to engulf the garden. In *Lull* and *Water's Edge* there is a temporary abating, before the storm. <sup>73</sup>

Searle's work speaks directly and indirectly of her experiences in South Africa. Some of her video installations, as in *Snow White* (2001), a double channel video projection, deal with being a coloured woman and what that may mean in South Africa and in a racialised world in general. Clearly referencing the fairy tale of snow white, the video focuses on Searle's own kneeling body and movements while she is slowly coated with layers of white flour during an act of kneeding dough on the floor. Water also continues to drip onto her from above. She evokes a sense of vulnerability in the sense that she exposes herself to the viewer's gaze but at the same time it is an awkward act to watch. She seems unconcerned about this voyeuristic gaze (though she is obviously aware of this) and behaves in a way that imparts a sense of self-awareness in the viewer's watching of the installation. It is not unpleasant to observe her in her actions but in her innocent yet knowing manner it is also slightly uncomfortable. Searle uses a fixed-camera angle to enhance the simplicity and impact of her video work. While much of her work deals with racial issues, her work *Lull* sets up an unnerving prediction of possible outcomes to inequality. This is evoked through the juxtapositioning of an idyllic garden and the violent South African symbol of a burning tyre.

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<sup>72</sup> The Xenophobic attacks, in South Africa, which began in 2008 evoked feelings of horror and helplessness in South Africans as foreign Africans were attacked and some killed apparently due to competition for scarce resources.

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.michaelstevenson.com/contemporary/exhibitions/Searle>

**Lull. 2009, Single channel HD video projection, 7 min 33 seconds:**

I saw *Lull* on exhibition at *Space: Currencies in Contemporary African Art*, Museum Africa, Newton, Johannesburg (2010). It was installed in one room in the large exhibition space showing work from a diverse group of contemporary African artists. A large screen filled most of the wall opposite the entrance of a darkened windowless space. At first viewing the work falsely set up a sense of well-being and tranquility as one sees a lush garden in which the artist is shown sitting on what looks like a swing. The imagery of the garden is dream-like and still, quiet and peaceful. Gardens and tranquil settings have, in general, been thought to belong to the wealthy and privileged. Gardens represent our existential need for nature and refreshment, the Garden of Eden being the most famous example as a signifier of well-being and abundance.

Searle is shown sitting in a swing made from a tyre attached to a tree by a rope, a common form of swing construction in South Africa. She sits with her back to us in what appears to be a natural setting in a park-land. The view is shot throughout from one angle and begins by capturing gentle movement of trees, grasses and Searle's gentle swinging movements. We hear the cries of hadedas,<sup>74</sup> Searle's quiet humming and the sound of a breeze as she swings for some time and then walks slowly out of the frame. The imagery then fades to a burning tyre swinging fervently from side to side with fire and smoke consuming the frame. We are left to watch and listen to how the fire and smoke violently rupture the tranquil landscape. The different pacing of the initial scenes of a tranquil landscape and the following images of a furiously burning fire is made very obvious. The sound of the burning fire overtakes the more tranquil sounds and the black smoke emanating from the burning rubber threatens to take over the full frame of the image. Searle appears briefly at the edge of the frame looking out over the water as if in a dream. We still hear bird song but the fire and smoke dominate and the tyre eventually drops off the rope as the smoke takes over and engulfs the frame completely. In its final

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<sup>74</sup> The Hadedda Ibis (*Bostrychia hagedash*) is a large heavy brown bird native to South Africa. It makes a loud penetrating and recognisable *haa-haa-haa-de-dah* sound when flying overhead hence the common name *Hadedda*.

images the work presents an apocalyptic vision of environmental pollution and destruction and powerfully evokes the voice of indignation as expressed through the potent symbol of the burning tyre. Searle herself speaks in this context of the severe “levels of discontent among the poor in the country” (Searle, 2009).<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> For a series of video stills from *Lull* see the website: <[http://www.bernie-searle.com/Bernie\\_Searle/Lull.html](http://www.bernie-searle.com/Bernie_Searle/Lull.html)>

#### **Chapter 4: My own creative work: *Night-light***

In their book *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective* (2011) Hilde Van Gelder and Helen Westgeest discuss photography (and moving image environments), and in a section titled *Self-reflective Photography* (190-226) they discuss psychoanalytic theories in photography with specific reference to dreams, the uncanny and the unconscious. They comment that “since dreams provide a glimpse of the unconscious it is not surprising that definitions of the unconscious also stress shifts in traditional concepts of place and time” (Van Gelder and Westgeest, 2011: 219). Related to this concept of an alternative place and time is the idea of fantasy. Explored by the renowned theorist of the still and moving image (and conceptual artist) Victor Burgin (1941), the idea of fantasy is said to be located between the conscious and the unconscious. For example, in a daydream the unconscious is given a “temporal, spatial, and symbolic form by the conscious,” creating a type of staging in that lost objects or moments are dreamt about and given a particular narrative and spatial arrangement (ibid).

This description of fantasy as located between the conscious and the unconscious relates closely to my intention of evoking unease in my video installation. I see my work as representing a form of dream, temporary and fleeting. Using my own home environment as subject matter, I wanted to create another or a different sense of time and place within the boundaries of my familiar space. This idea of fantasy and daydream also relates to the concept of the uncanny as already mentioned in Chapter Three. Freud’s uncanny seems to arise from fears and anxieties in the familiar environment (ibid). Author and film theorist Laura Mulvey discusses the uncanny in relation to moving imagery in some detail in her book *Death 24x a Second* (2011) where she relates it to the concept of uncertainty or a moment of doubt (Mulvey, 2011: 42). Mulvey looks at both Freud’s ideas of the uncanny and German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch’s interest in an “uncanny effect,” a term that

Jentsch coined 13 years before Freud's investigation of the subject of the uncanny.<sup>76</sup> Jentsch's uncanny is aroused by the new and unfamiliar, for example with automata or waxworks (very real looking models and replicas of human beings) (ibid: 37). Freud dismisses Jentsch's theories but Mulvey brings these two theories into unison when she says, "Jentsch's argument then meets Freud's uncanny, the persistence in the human mind of belief in the supernatural and the return of the dead" (ibid: 42).<sup>77</sup> The relationship between the home (the familiar environment) and trauma is an important aspect of the uncanny as discussed earlier. More pointedly, threat and the fear of invasion into a secure domestic space are the elements that underlie my video installation titled *Night-light*.

My own children and family environment (home and garden) are the primary subject matter in my use of the medium of video and exploring the evocation of fear and/or unease through filmic, audio, editing and installation techniques. The main focus in my video installation is on my family asleep at night. I set out to film close up views of my children asleep in their beds, their breathing being the main sound element accompanying the projections in the installation. The soundtrack was arrived at by overlaying recordings of my children breathing while in deep sleep. These sounds being quiet, I needed to amplify the recordings considerably and with it came the capturing of background noises of nighttime static. From the sound samples I chose sections that I felt would work well in terms of clarity and rhythm to accompany the images, i.e. I chose sound bites that would best align with or reflect what was happening with the slight movements and the editing. I then slowed this sound down and looped it as I did with the moving images, sometimes cutting in bits that I found effective to add. The quietness of the recording amplified at more than 500 percent created an immersive auditory environment that was further enhanced by layering three such recordings at the same time to create a

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<sup>76</sup> Laura Mulvey (1941) is a professor of Film and Media Studies at Birkbeck, University of London. She is described as a feminist film theorist and writes extensively on visual media and film including *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989), *Citizen Kane* (1992) and *Fetishism and Curiosity* (1996). Ernst Jentsch (b1867) was a German psychiatrist and author who coined the term "the uncanny effect" 13 years before Freud formally investigated the subject of the uncanny.

<sup>77</sup> Boltanski works with the idea of imagining the dead in the series titled *The Dead Swiss* (1990).

multi-directional track. I used three speakers positioned at opposite points in the main gallery space to achieve maximum surround auditory effect. The breathing sounds together with nighttime images of the immediate home environment (garden and street scenes) imparted a strong sense of surveillance and/or voyeurism, thus invoking the notion of threat. My aim at the outset was to explore, through a series of videos, the feelings I have around protecting my family and our vulnerability to outside elements that are, to a certain extent, beyond my control and to try to convey a sense of expectation through evoking an ongoing presentness.

Having worked exclusively in still photography in my previous creative work (before embarking on the MA degree), many of my past photographic projects were nevertheless concerned with the notion of temporality as captured through still photographs and I often linked the perception of time in these images with movement in space.<sup>78</sup> Having explored large-scale colour photography in this way, it seemed appropriate to use the practical component of the MA research as an opportunity to explore the time-based medium of video. The medium was completely new to me and it allowed me to treat the creative research component as an explorative extension of my previous concerns in photography.

In a group of video works displayed on monitors with earphones in the smaller upstairs room of the Substation gallery space I displayed my preparatory and more experimental attempts in trying out video as a time-based medium. They were essentially initial tests towards arriving at the imagery for *Night-light* and were based on being with my children in the garden and around the house and seeing what I could draw from such explorative imagery. Editing was new to me and I therefore played around with the medium quite loosely while keeping in mind what I was aiming for in using footage of the home environment. I wanted to create feelings of tension through moving images that would foreground the temporal.

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<sup>78</sup> For instance, in 2011 I exhibited a series of photographs (*A Means to an End* at Gallery MOMO) that explored the abattoir as a place of excessive time codes and processing in the form of the assembly line. I attempted to document temporal features in this traumatic space to convey a visceral experience of the abattoir and made use of long shutter speeds in recording both movement and stillness in these environments. This approach, I believe, lent the images a sense of time within and beyond the frame.

These very short videos were to be like brief memories of being in and around the domestic environment, though in a somewhat destabilized and unsettled sense where strange feelings may be evoked, i.e. not in an idyllic sense. I started my video filming with the most basic of machines, the Sony handycam, a small and compact camera commonly used in capturing family events, but I consciously focused on things that were not run of the mill happy family events. I based my material (including sound clips) on alarms going off, violent highveld storms, upset children, a child asleep, home surveillance cameras and garden scenes that I tried to infuse with temporal qualities, both in my method of shooting and then in the editing platform. I wanted the short videos to be ambiguous and to create a sense of uncertainty for the viewer about what was happening in the filmed clips. As my first attempts at trying to document my idea of temporality and the evocation of a sense of unease, they were also largely based on chance and capturing a particular moment of unease within a family environment. For the sleep images in the *Night-light* installation I used a high definition professional stills and video camera (the Nikon D800) which is far superior in image quality and handling options to the Sony handycam and requires a less spontaneous way of shooting.

It is worth mentioning the photographs by Sally Mann in her book *Immediate Family* (1992) in the context of my own explorations in these preparatory works.<sup>79</sup> Her photographs are very evocative depictions of moments in family life in natural settings (Virginia, America) where children seem to be free to go and do as they want. The images are of her own children and seem to conjure a paradise of childhood but also include uncomfortable moments that often come across as highly ambiguous. For example, in *Jessie's Cut* (1985) a boy lies bleeding from a stitched-up cut to his face. His head is covered with a white sheet evoking an uneasy sense of death. These black and white images impart a sense of human vulnerability and fragility that is almost painful to look at and present a strong sense of time and place

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<sup>79</sup> Sally Mann (1951) is one of America's most well know photographers and has exhibited around the world. She is represented in major museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Whitney Museum and Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography. She was nominated "America's Best Photographer" in 2001 by *Time* Magazine and has had 3 documentaries/films made about her life and work. She was born and lives and works in Lexington, Virginia, America.

that recalls adult memories of one's own childhood. Mann herself states that her work is "about everybody's memories, as well as their fears" (Mann, 1992: inner sleeve).<sup>80</sup> While these photographs are unlike my videos in presenting images that tell stories, they have certainly influenced my current work in an attempt to convey a sense of vulnerability, of time passing and unease. Despite the extension of time in the refusal of the static still photograph, the conventions of still photography are still present in my work, especially in preserving the temporality of the pose. The experimental precedents of 1960s video work such as real time, duration, endurance and fixed camera angles are central to my framing of the subject matter. In a sense I wanted to take the photographically derived image to its limit through creating a time-based portrait in evoking an ongoing moment (Green and Lowry, 2006: 69).

There is an element of the voyeuristic and also a sense of vulnerability in watching a person asleep and one is inevitably reminded of Andy Warhol's 1963 film title *Sleep* in which he took long shot footage of his friend John Giorno sleeping for 5 hours and 20 minutes. One of Warhol's first experiments with film and created as an "anti-film," the work represents the mundane through a process of reduction, namely through framing and duration. There is a mood of suspense in watching such images in that the viewer keeps wondering what new aspects may be revealed. The familiar is alienated and becomes strange so that our appreciation of it is heightened. One anticipates something to happen. The cuts in the video clips also play a certain part in creating tension in that they disrupt our settling on a field of vision. I similarly play with a process of reduction, jump cuts and the loop in the orchestration of my installation as a form of alienation of the familiar. The visual simplicity and the slow and gradual movement of the images allow for an intensified focus through reduction. I felt strongly that such deliberately reduced imagery could effectively immerse the viewer into what would seem like a realm of timelessness.

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<sup>80</sup> To view some examples of Sally Mann's black and white photographs of her children see her website: <<http://sallymann.com/selected-works/family-pictures>>

On entering the main Substation gallery space in which I exhibited the *Night-light* installation, the visitor encountered 7 large video projections back-projected onto white bedding sheets hung loosely on metal clothing rails. The rails were positioned at various angles within the central gallery space so as to allow the viewer the opportunity to move through the projected images and to experience the installation fully in the round. The projected images could be viewed from the front and back as one moved amongst the screens. My aim was to accentuate the spatial dimension of the installation as fully as possible by taking charge of the room as a whole rather than presenting projections onto the gallery walls. I wanted the viewer to physically move through the artwork and enter into a spatial encounter that would stimulate an absorbing experience.



View of the exhibit *Night-light* (2012) at the Substation, Wits University

I have looked at some of the work by Swiss installation artist Christian Boltanski in which he deals very effectively with memory, amnesia and identity by using found photographs, archives, clothing and, in some instances, video. His works conjure up feelings around the holocaust, religion (Christianity and Judaism), death and childhood and he discusses his way of conceiving his exhibitions as a spatial and quasi-religious experience. Many of his exhibits are evocative of churches in that he

creates a darkened and meditative space in which to view the work.<sup>81</sup> In terms of my own ideas for the exhibit in the Substation I too wanted to create a darkened and ethereal atmosphere evoking a sense of temporality, ghostliness and impermanence.

The Substation space has a very high ceiling and the viewer enters from a doorway a few steps above the level of the gallery space, i.e. he/she accesses the space with an elevated view of the room. This allows the viewer to gain an overall impression of the installation at one glance and then to step down and move amongst the screened images. I wanted the darkened space and the sound of breathing to impart a subdued mood of sleep and a dream-like state where the worlds of the real and fantasy start to overlap. I chose to use sounds that would remain subdued and in keeping with the portrayal of sleep and dreaming.<sup>82</sup> Amplified sounds of breathing can have a claustrophobic effect in bringing awareness to one's own involuntary breathing and its rhythm and as an ongoing and repetitive sound it underscores the temporal dimension of the installation. As such, the sound element was an important aspect of the installation in creating an embodied experience beyond the visual. Like the heartbeat, breathing calls up the basic rhythms of one's own body an essential function of our life and significant to our survival.

The breathing soundtrack is not always smooth and evenly paced. I wanted there to be slight disjunctures in the pattern of the sounds. For instance, one of the speakers

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<sup>81</sup> Boltanski describes the way he thought about his exhibitions with regards to spatial and emotive detail as follows,

I think it dawned on me in 1985-86, when I started working with space and thinking in terms of how the visitor would enter a place and move about in it [...] That's when I began making chapels. For me, an exhibit isn't just what you show; it begins as soon as one enters, in the way the visitor pushes the door open. For a group show at the Stadelijk Museum, I once asked for a door to be installed with a doorman at the entrance to my gallery, because having to make the effort of pushing open the door, and having it close behind you, transforms the way you take things in. When I'm thinking through an exhibition, I ask myself a lot of questions: where the door is going to be, how the space is going to be seen. Whether it will be sunny outside or not completely changes how the exhibit is seen. To go back to the comparison with churches, when you're in Italy, in the sun, and you enter one of those cool, dark churches, it makes for a big contrast. What interests me isn't just what's on the wall, but what the visitor experiences: how they'll enter, how they'll feel. More and more – in the performances, of course, but also in my exhibits – the audience become like actors. Wandering around in the dark becomes an element of the work itself, and I make it so that the visitor experiences different physical sensations. He enters a large gallery: there's a small corridor. He has to walk down five steps: he's in another large gallery... (Boltanski, 2009: 129-130).

<sup>82</sup> As Steve Goodman points out by quoting Simon Reynolds that sound art or "the noise effect" has made a recent come back manifesting in artists trying to achieve the "shock effect" uselessly by "their pure noise laden with content of tediously 'transgressive' nature (all the old clichéd faves of vileness and violation: serial murder, neo-Nazis, yawn...). The blindingly obvious fact is that no one shockable is within earshot; there's no disruption or challenge in these scenes, because they're screeching to the converted" (Goodman, 2010: 8).

amplified a moment when the breathing became louder and played out through the speaker like a small burst of breath but then returned a more subdued pattern of breathing. The soundtrack would hopefully shift the viewer/listener into a dream-like state where attuning to a reassuring rhythm would be calming and measured but the slight disturbances would introduce an edge of urgency at times. Bringing breathing sounds to the fore can in this way absorb one into regulating one's own breathing and 'tuning into' or listening to oneself. I wanted the soundtrack to provide a reflective moment where an inner experience would be stimulated by cutting the viewer off from the outside world. I felt that the soundtrack could enable an intense immersion in the instant and allow the viewer to enter a distinct rhythm or flow of time.

Dealing with images of sleep clearly invokes dreams and the unconscious and in my work I intentionally explore the boundaries between what is real or imagined/dreamed through my manipulation of time-based images. In her book titled *Visualizing Feeling: Affect and the Feminine Avant-garde* (2011), Susan Best observes that film theorists such as Jean-Louis Baudry have posited the dream as one of the key metaphors for the cinematic experience. She notes that Baudry "argues that the film apparatus (by which he means the whole ensemble of human and mechanical elements that make the film experience possible) mimics the psychic apparatus during sleep: separation from the outside world, inhibition of mobility, a confusion of representation and perception" (Best, 2011: 134). In my installation I wanted the audience to enter an experience that would emulate sleep and dream and I aimed to use the medium and form of video to induce such an experience. In the following description of the individual video works presented in the installation I hope to further demonstrate how I have attempted to shift the viewer into a dream-like space.

The first image to be encountered on entering the space is that of a nighttime street scene outside our home with a flickering, yellow streetlamp illuminating the trees, titled *Street*, 2012. I filmed this scene for a few minutes on a tripod in a single take

and not much movement is apparent from this still image. It evokes the viewpoint of a surveillance security camera in its directed focus on the street.

In recording the time-based close-up portrait shots of my children asleep I explored various lighting approaches to achieve a certain claustrophobic mood and to enhance a sense of a lingering view. The title *Night-light* itself alludes to the dim light burning at night, especially for children when they are afraid of the dark. To the right of the first screen of the street scene one encountered an image of my son asleep that I filmed using an infra-red lamp to lend a very warm glow to the image. The light was very uneven and I found in the editing platform that extreme cuts could be used to emphasize a temporal shift in the video. For instance, even though I had slowed the footage down considerably (the image does not seem to move that much) the many jump cuts lend the appearance of speeded up time. It seemed an appropriate way in which to evoke the condition of deep sleep known as REM.<sup>83</sup>



*Red*, looped video, sheet, projector, metal clothes rails and curtain hooks, sound, dimensions variable

To the left and slightly behind this video, i.e. more centrally positioned in the Substation main gallery space, is the work *Close-up*. This image shows close up views of my daughter asleep and captures movement through slow camera panning

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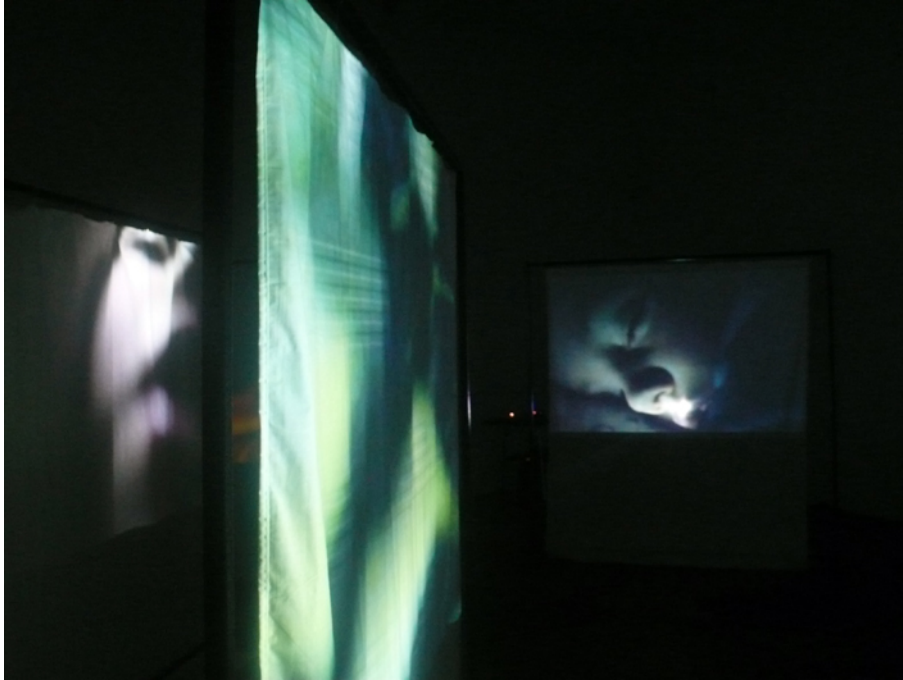
<sup>83</sup> REM stands for rapid eye movement and is a normal stage of sleep characterized by rapid and random movement of the eyes. People usually most vividly recall dreams that occur during this stage of sleep. During REM the activity of the brains neurons closely resemble that of the neurons during waking hours.

from one side of her face to the other. The lighting is stark and cool (blue hues) with not much coloration (other than the red of the child's lips). The image is more abstract than others in that it shows less of the child's features, largely due to the high contrast of light and dark. The loop of the video is emphasized as the views are repeated over and over at a very slow speed. Recording footage like this required me to film for quite some time and I found that only moments in this long filming process were visually interesting enough to work with. Out of 15 minutes of filming this particular work I used only 30 or 40 second of footage and I edited it based on my idea of what makes a good photograph in terms of composition.



*Close-up*, looped video, sheet, projector, metal clothes rails and curtain hooks, sound, dimensions variable

Behind and between both *Close-up* and *Red* I placed the work titled *Garden*. Filmed in my garden at night using a strong torchlight I wanted to include a stalking or 'predator-like' scene as seen, for example, in the American thriller film *Manhunter* (1986) directed by Michael Mann. Mann's use of colour in this movie is highly stylised in an attempt to engage his audience emotionally. For instance, lurid greens are used in the more unsettling and disturbing scenes. In my video clip I wanted to evoke the nightmarish dream and tried to similarly create an unsettling scene that would evoke surveillance and threat.



View of *Garden*, looped videos, sheets, projectors, metal clothes rails and curtain hooks, sound, dimensions variable

A work titled *Back 2010* is positioned behind the above and shows an elevated back view of a child running along a stretch of green lawn. This work is slowed down and in its looped repetition of the running child it evokes the feeling of being trapped and unable to escape. Recorded just before a particularly heavy thunderstorm, the mood is gloomy and the subdued colour creates a strong sense of atmosphere. The child was in fact scared and hurrying towards the house and away from the oncoming storm and thus, especially in slowed motion, displays the body posture of trying to escape.

The video displayed directly behind *Street* was my first successful attempt at visually recording my daughter asleep. The camera was set to drop every other frame in facilitating very low light conditions, thereby achieving a lyrical and somewhat slowed down feel to the capturing of the footage. Adding to this I used a flickering tea-light candle to introduce a soft and shadowy light. With the imagery only half filling the frame I wanted this video to convey a sense of fleetingness and impermanence.

The images described above do not need to be viewed in a particular order although the viewer would inevitably encounter them in this way by moving through the passage set up by the screens. The final video of my son asleep titled *Blue* presents a more complete image within the video frame. I used a camping head torch on a white light setting in recording his slight movements over a period of time in the middle of the night. The blue tint of the light evokes a quietness and serenity.



View of *Blue*, looped videos, sheets, projectors, metal clothes rails and curtain hooks, sound, dimensions variable

As already mentioned previously, Sigmund Freud isolates the idea of “*Nachträglichkeit*,” or deferred action (*après coup*) as significant to thinking about psychological development and outcomes. The traumatic effect of an event is seen as the communication or relation between two events that occur at different times (Doane, 2002: 36), thus connecting one event with another. Freud discusses the unconscious as being timeless as Mary Ann Doane points out in the following section:

In his 1915 metapsychological paper “The Unconscious,” Freud made it quite clear that the unconscious lacks a concept of time: “The processes of the system *Ucs* (*unconscious*) are timeless; i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all. Reference to time is bound up, once again, with work of the system *Cs* [Consciousness].” The same negative characteristics are reiterated in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. The unconscious is described in *The Interpretation of Dreams* as a storehouse of contents and processes that are

immune to the corrosive effects of temporality. In fact, according to Freud, the idea that wear and tear are fundamental effects of time is a commonly held but mistaken one (ibid: 36-37).

Freud's unconscious is "outside of time" in that the unconscious stores memories which remain as clear for the child as they do for the adult (ibid). These theories about the unconscious and temporality are interesting to note here as video and film 'store memories' in a way that could be compared to the workings of the unconscious. Materially, film and video are not subject to the forgetfulness that memory often is. Although there is degradation of film and video in different ways it is a much slower process than our human tendency to suffer (and benefit) from amnesia.

Having my immediate family members as subjects in my videos posed certain limitations to filming. Employing an assistant camera person (as I had initially intended to do) would have felt overly invasive in such a personal context and the filmed video pieces do take on a kind of testament to my own internal affairs, my relationships with my children and my place in the home and the world as a mother. In many ways the video work is part performance, part testimony to a time that will soon be over (once my children have grown up). Elwes' discussion of the performative qualities of video relate closely to my own experience of the new medium of video when she says:

There continues to be a strong link between performance art and video... Documentary photography is capable only of capturing a series of frozen moments and is inadequate to the task of recreating a time-based event that is founded on flux, change and multiple points of view. With its ability to record long events and its status as a factual medium, video now took on the job of fixing performances that were, in essence, ephemeral (Elwes, 2005: 9).

Through video I hoped to capture a sense of unease but also of passing time. Having growing children is a constant reminder of the passing of time and directly links to notions of memory and loss.

Everyday moments are important to what I am exploring in my work. I did not attempt to film anything out of the ordinary but rather the events that happen on a regular basis with the hope of producing work that could represent the durational present or the now with its inherent incompleteness. In doing so I also felt that the works could communicate effectively with an audience. Writing a review of an exhibition at MOMA for *Artforum* (2012, vol. 50, no. 5: 2011), art critic Hal Foster caustically remarks that “one person’s punctum is another’s yawn.” His remark can be pointed to the act of looking at photographs or videos filmed by other people of their own family members, which carry certain sentiments that are not necessarily shared by all viewers. This is a factor that I was acutely aware of in finding a way to present my images that would also resonate with the viewer. I wanted to use images of my own family and memories in a way that could possibly have meaning for the viewer. While the images of my children are highly personal, they are also able to touch the viewer and provoke their associations. I did not want to present the personally significant as something that is particular or meaningful to me as artist alone. I wanted the experience of the installation to be affective in setting off associations in the viewer and it was therefore important to stimulate sensory dimensions in the installation.

While recording my imagery for the installation, the question of how to install time in the video work itself became paramount. I consulted texts by the Russian/Soviet director Andrei Tarkovsky<sup>84</sup> (1932-1986) on how he sought to construct time within his films. Tarkovsky sees time as being imprinted on the film itself (he refers to the film negative) before the editing process is started. He sees time as a kind of rhythm within the shot itself and the editing process, for him, is the bringing together of these time-imprinted segments of film (Tarkovsky, 1986: 119). Tarkovsky finds the montage techniques of Eisenstein distasteful, such as the battle scenes on the ice in the film *Alexander Nevksy*. He considers them a failure in the

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<sup>84</sup> Tarkovsky was a filmmaker, writer, film editor and theorist and theatre and opera director. His films include *Solaris*, *The Mirror* and *Stalker*.

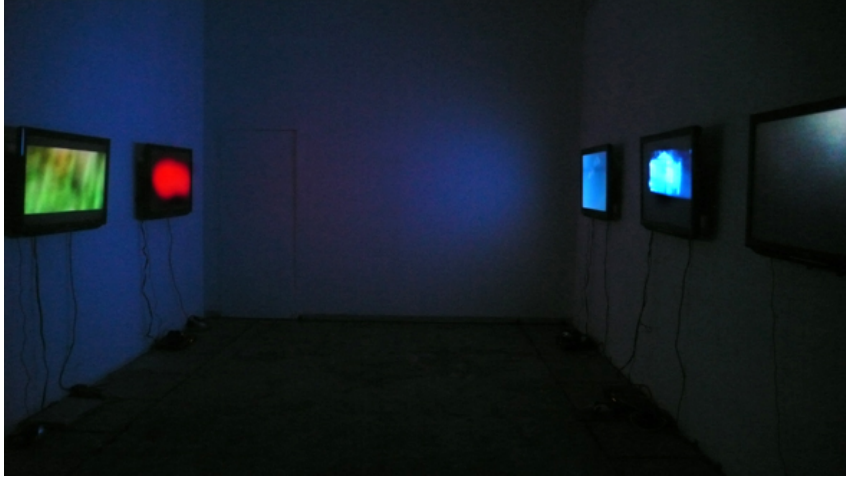
sense that the scenes do not contain an “authentic time-sense” and are put together “any old how” (ibid). In rejecting the principles of “montage cinema” he says:

[T]hey do not allow the film to continue beyond the edges of the screen: they do not allow the audience to bring personal experience to bear on what is in front of them (ibid: 118).

Although I often found Tarkovsky’s writings difficult to follow, his thoughts seemed well suited to my idea of capturing temporality in a video sequence. In practice it was however difficult to realize and I relied, in some pieces more than others, quite heavily on editing in order to explore the marking of temporal shifts. But I still tried to capture what I thought Tarkovsky was explaining in the actual shooting of footage. While Tarkovsky is concerned with imprinting time onto the film stock itself (which I try to do in my photographic images where I use analogue film) my process in shooting video or even digital still images is different in that film is not used. Although similar by way of using aperture and shutter speed to record imagery, the digital format requires a somewhat different approach. In using analogue still photography film I try to go ‘beyond the surface’ by using time exposures and very small apertures with the associated long depth of field. In using video, however, this approach did not yield the results I was used to with film. Instead, I found that using the camera more intently in recording the surfaces of things and playing with this more ‘malleable surface’ of the picture plane could yield images that I could further manipulate afterwards to obtain the visual effects that I was looking for. Further to this the images placed together in a gallery space became the work as a whole rather than individual videos. The videos worked in tandem and were to be experienced as such. I was very aware of the need to present a cohesive work in which individual projections would ‘speak to each other’ by way of tempo and rhythm, colour, light and dark etc.

Working towards realizing the installation was an enriching experience and the Substation gallery space lent itself ideally to what I wanted to achieve in setting up an affective experience. The research on installation artworks by other artists proved to be particularly valuable in broadening my outlook on my own creative

work and imagining creative ways in which to think more spatially and experientially about my work. I responded positively to the challenges of conceiving of the installation as a whole and seeing it as a short-lived presentation that in itself speaks to the idea of temporality.



View of the upstairs room showing preparatory work for *Night-light* (2012) at the Substation, Wits University

## **Conclusion:**

Temporality is an evasive subject. It folds, twists, doubles in and out of itself. In a phenomenological sense it creates our sense of subjectivity, it creates memory, forgetting, self-reflexivity and death. In a book titled *The Politics of Time* (1995), Peter Osborne states: "If temporality is tied existentially to the anticipation of death, and death comes from the other [...] so too must time: it is recognition which temporalizes time out of the fear of death" (Osborne, 1995: 108). Time is interwoven with the human fear of death. Fear and time are joined in a complex and final way.

The past is also part of the way in which we temporalize our lives, the past is enticing and as humans we constantly reflect on it. It guides and dictates our behaviour in the present. We are guilty, regretful, traumatized by events that happen in the past. Additionally and paradoxically we also have the ability to forget which can be a frightful and disturbing trait – the power of oblivion. The past that we try to deal with is constantly slipping away. Past is consciousness, it makes up who we are. It is no wonder then that time itself has become such a well explored subject, especially in the field of video installation art. Following on from film's treatment of images in relation to time (as explored by Gilles Deleuze in his theories dealing with what he calls "crystal images" capturing the structure of time itself), video installation artists have an even freer mode (multi screens and alternative forms of narration and synchronicity) in which to develop and explore the nuances of temporality (Birnbaum, 2005: 40). This aspect motivated me in wanting to examine the medium of video installation art more closely. Starting out in briefly outlining the terrain of video installation art and examining its origins and the context out of which it arose, I tried to throw some light on the multiple origins and complex visual forms that this new medium has taken and how new technologies and expanded viewing environments have impacted on it.

In considering the cultural phenomenon of fear and linking this to the evocation of fear and unease in contemporary art, I went on to examine how examples of film, video and video installation art could be seen to affect the viewer emotionally and also explored the idea of embodied spectatorship as an affective state of emotion attainable through such works. I considered decontextualization, film editing techniques such as the jump cut and the loop used as a form of disjuncture, and the effectiveness of sound in the enhancing of an immersive experience in such works. Themes of rupture, fear and unease and how time fits into the traumatic scenario in such works was also considered in relation to the notion of the uncanny. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud claims that organic organisms have an inbuilt drive to return to an inorganic state, i.e. life, and that this is only a detour between an original state of death and the future inevitability of death. Freud discovered this “death drive” while researching his idea of “repetition compulsion” which is the tendency of certain patients to return to the most traumatic experiences over and over again. Freud argued that death is a principle of repetition. The loop in video installation, with no beginning or end, illustrates this drive to return to an inorganic state. My reasons for choosing to focus on temporality and the evocation of fear and unease in my research into video installation has its basis in the idea of time, death, repetition and oblivion. In a sense my own exploration with video installation in *Night-light* is an attempt to capture and preserve for myself a moment in my existence that will come to an end. Time hurts, it represents loss. The inevitability of this outcome is personally difficult to comprehend and exploring these ideas will certainly leave me with an intensified recollection of these moments when they are no longer present. I hope to have gained a richer understanding of the subject of time within my work both photographically and in the medium of video installation. Certainly I have gathered that video installation can be extremely complex and multifaceted and I feel as if I have learnt a tremendous amount about the moving image, sound, technology and installation. As a spatial medium, video installation presents a rich opportunity to experiment with perception, light, images, sound, space and critically engage with how a viewer may receive the work. This has been an area of growth in my practice as my previous photographic work displayed in galleries

followed the more conventional, standard arrangement for photographic display. It has been a challenge for me to break out of and extend such a format of working.

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