MESH ISSUE #18:
EXPERIMENTA VANISHING POINT
EDITED BY LISA GYE

EXPERIMENTA
where creativity and technology meet

INTRODUCTION

BY LISA GYE

The media arts of the 21st century have a genealogy that includes such antecedents as the Phantasmagoria, the hippodromes (or spectacle theatres) and the Luna Parks of the 18th and 19th centuries. These were places where people went to be engaged, fascinated and confounded by the spectacle of the illusion. It was at these places, alongside the freak shows and carnival rides, that spectators could see such technologically based forms of popular entertainment as the diorama, the stereoscope, the praxiniscope and Pepper's Ghost. This is a genealogy of *affective* media – spectacular events that move us in surprising, unexpected and mysterious ways.

Each of the essays in this collection draws our attention to the illusory and spectacular nature of media arts and the ways in which we are affected by them.

THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING WE CAN EXPERIENCE IS THE MYSTERIOUS. IT IS THE SOURCE OF ALL TRUE ART AND ALL SCIENCE. HE TO WHOM THIS EMOTION IS A STRANGER, WHO CAN NO LONGER PAUSE TO WONDER AND STAND RAPT IN AWE, IS AS GOOD AS DEAD: HIS EYES ARE CLOSED.

Adrian Martin shows us how the films of GusVan Sant and Charlie Kaufman transcend the formal restrictions of plot and character and draw on a tradition of event and spectacle, where 'what matters, ultimately, is the intensity of a film' and 'the resonances it sets off in you'. Melinda Rackham, in her *Manifesto for 21st Century Immersive Works*, writes of her desire to be seduced by the affective properties of light and sound. Inger Mewburn contemplates 'the affective relation that is embedded in the act of recognition of the self-made-strange' in responsive architecture. Joel Zika, Vince Dzekian, Anita Callaway, Martyn Jolly and Trish Pringle all recollect past media that have helped to provide them with insights into the affective operations of more recent media based works.

I hope that you will be affected by this collection of writing – that it may move you in some unexpected and interesting way - and that it will open up for you more questions than it answers. As Albert Einstein reminds us:

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed.

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DRIVEN

ADRIAN MARTIN

There is a pair of terms that fix, in a very unhealthy way, the horizon of what we think and say about movies at the present time. I am speaking of the idea that a movie can be only one of two things: either *plot-driven* or *character-driven*. Many great films, however, are neither plot-driven nor character-driven. But they are driven. By what?

WHAT MATTERS, ULTIMATELY, IS THE INTENSITY OF A FILM, NOT NECESSARILY AS A 'STORY ABOUT PEOPLE', BUT RATHER AS AN EVENT, AS SPECTACLE, AS FORM AND AS GESTURE – AND THE RESONANCES IT SETS OFF IN YOU BY ALL THE MEANS AT ITS DISPOSAL.

One of the most important films released commercially in recent years is Gus Van Sant's *Elephant* (2003). It is a creative re-imagining of the tragic murder spree by two teenagers at Columbine High School in America. We see this devastating event only in the final minutes of the film. The rest of it is about what leads up to that moment – the period of hours in which parents take their kids to school, staff arrive, classes begin, people move from one room to the next, and so forth. It is a not a film which, in sociological terms, sets out to explain anything about this horrible event. Instead, the film uses a particular and specific power of cinema, *descriptive* power: it shows, it traces, it unfolds a certain space and time.

Space and time in *Elephant* are not just abstract, theoretical words. Shot after shot, Van Sant shows us kids walking down corridors, turning and saying 'hi' to each other, going from one zone of the school to another. We get, hypnotically, a physical map of the school. Many of the shots are in Steadicam and slow motion: the images float. And the sound is just as remarkable, going in and out of different ambient noises, snatches of music, strange unidentifiable and unlocatable sounds. As we keep watching, we realise that odd things are going on in the temporal structure of the film. We keep looping back, over and over, in a way that is hard to fit together with precision.

Elephant is *event-driven*: it does not tell a story, it *describes an event*, looking at this event (the event of the massacre), circling it, coming at it from different angles, turning it over and contemplating it in different ways. It is *spectacle-driven*, preying on a certain kind of dread-filled suspense created within us as spectators. Having an inkling of what is to come at the end means that every footstep, every slow-downed second, every turn of someone's head or odd explosion of noise creates a growing atmosphere of anxiety. Here again, Van Sant is exploiting, in a masterful way, one of the most basic and powerful properties of cinema as a medium: cinema not only gives us things to see, it also plays on our mounting desire for this spectacle to at last *deliver* itself to us. Suspense or tension in movies do not have to concern a specific, personalised hero in danger or a central conflict; they can come purely from the movement of a camera, the rising arc of a sound, a gradual change in the colour palette of the screen, the choreography of a body.

Elephant is *form-driven*. The large-scale form of the film, the central formal idea which drives and generates the whole work and its unfolding logic, is in that literal and conceptual action of circling: walking around and around in space, winding back and forth in time – all of this contemplation and description traces a shape that forms itself in your mind as you watch the film, what Nicole Brenez calls an *architectonic form*, a form with stresses and balances, energies and intensities. [1]

What is happening in contemporary cinema? It is clear that new tendencies and experiments in popular storytelling have much to do with the digital age of video games, interactive art and hypertext writing. In the process, what was once considered formalist, avant-garde or hyper-modernist is becoming increasingly popular and everyday. When fervent subcultures grow up around tools like Machinima – which allows the customising of digital games so as to reinvent stories or non-stories using given elements of décor or character-types – we are entering a new consciousness about the possibilities of content and form in narrative.

Take, for instance, the *levels* in video games – working through one level before going up to the next. There are now Hollywood films that try to mimic this structure (like *Thirteen Ghosts* [2001]), but these are weak, literal-minded attempts at doing something that movies have always done in a rich and varied way. In cinema, there is a structure I call the *plateau narrative*. This is when you stay with a certain scene, situation or milieu for quite a while: you are in no hurry to drive the plot along, you are looking around, soaking up the atmosphere, exploring the nooks and crannies. Stanley Kubrick adored this kind of structure, as do Víctor Erice and Chantal Akerman. They might make a film with just a couple of plateaux, or with very many. How do they get from one plateau to another? Well, it is like in a video game, only better: you have what in fiction is called a *move*, some major disturbance or transformation that suddenly shifts all the elements of the story and shoves them violently into the next stage. This is nothing like the traditional three-act dramatic structure.

Or take another basic staple of video games: how the action can play out in some multi-levelled structure, like a haunted mansion or an abandoned hotel, full of secret passages, trap doors, and so on. This kind of structure completely takes apart and rearranges traditional linear story logic. It is as if the story is in pieces - and now these pieces lay around waiting to be activated behind this door here, glimpsed through this window, or entered in that room over there. These rooms can be taken up in different ways, in different orders.

We can find this motif in many great art films of the past four decades, where it is called the House of Fiction – used with inexhaustible inventiveness by filmmakers including Jacques Rivette (*Céline and Julie Go Boating*, 1974), Jean-Luc Godard (*Detective*, 1985), Wim Wenders (*The Million Dollar Hotel*, 2000) and Raúl Ruiz (*Hypothesis of the Stolen Painting*, 1978). In one of the best recent examples, arch-formalist Roman Polanski's horror-fantasy *The Ninth Gate* (2000), the House of Fiction becomes a Library, which is in fact one of its classic forms: each book is a gateway to a world, and the film traces the wandering between and among all these different worlds, and the movement from one level of a cosmic conspiracy to another – a kind of re-invented video game which re-finds the broken link between modern-day digital computer aesthetics and forms like Baroque art and the Gothic novel.

A CHARACTER CAN TURN OUT TO BE SOMEONE YOU COULD NEVER HAVE IMAGINED THAT THEY WERE, THUS SOLVING EVERYTHING – OR WRECKING EVERYTHING.

I have already mentioned *description* in a film, as posed against narrative. Description is what happens when you linger on a plateau, before a plot move: dwelling on that plateau, you deepen, intensify the gaze into the scene. But then the plot move comes to quicken or completely alter that slow, seeping process of transformation. So there is a dialectical play of two speeds, the slow and the fast. In the computer age, we are seeing not just endless 'fast fiction' (as some lament and others celebrate) but also an expansion of the plateau, of the description phase.

Linking/hyperlinking to something can be a sudden, total break, or it can equally serve as a kind of infinite parenthesis, like the opening up of a window in the image or a set of footnotes in a text. Numerous contemporary pop movies are obsessed with descriptive parenthesis, leading to what I think of as the *file card* device. When a character is introduced, like in the film *Amélie* (2001), we open up a background file in breakneck montage: where that character comes from, her likes and dislikes, recurring dreams, hopes and ambitions, and her dozen little neurotic tics, traits and tags.

But now let us go back further than the digital craze of today, back to narratives based on structures of dreaming, free-association, unconscious logic. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004), written by Charles Kaufman (a true modern auteur in his own right) and directed by Michel Gondry, is a film about an experiment on Jim Carrey's brain – an operation to erase his painful memories of a love gone wrong – which itself starts going wrong, in several fascinating ways. Kaufman and Gondry have gone back to that great, semi-popular explosion of art cinema in the '60s for their inspiration. I suspect that they are interested, above all, in the architectonic forms of '60s cinema: those deranged montage machines that jump back and forth between past, present and future, often inside an individual subjectivity that is in some way disturbed, fractured, unclear. [2]

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind generates its narrative by adding to that '60s legacy and inspiration something very current, as well as something very ancient. The modern part is a psychoanalytic awareness of *denial* mechanisms, of black holes and revisions, lies and repressions, which attack and eat away at conscious memory. Carrey's mental world keeps disintegrating and regenerating, erasing itself and revising itself, going over the same material but in different ways, from diverse angles.

Yet there is also a childlike, almost innocent dimension to this film. This is its ancient quality, a sort of surrealism that existed long before a 20th century movement of art and thought called itself Surrealism. In surrealist narrative, the weight of an obligatory storyline can be let go at any time. A character can wake up at any point of the tale and declare, 'it was all a dream' – a move also carried out, with delirious consequences, by De Palma in his remarkable *Femme Fatale* (2002). A character can turn out to be someone you could never have imagined that they were, thus solving everything – or wrecking everything. Kaufman is another connoisseur of the bold narrative move that shifts plateau – and it is more often than not a surreal, unexpected move, the opening up of another world, or a world within the initial world. Every Kaufman script (including *Being John Malkovich* [1999] and *Adaptation* [2002]) is about the possibility of multiple destinies: the double life of your alter ago, the past self of which you are now a reincarnation.

This is a narrative cinema of the 'what if' - speculative fiction. What-if stories often work on suggestion – and, little by little, the trickle of such suggestions creates a psychic swirl that drives the story with a logic of the unconscious. Filmmakers today keep playing at moving the borders between their nominal real story and the what-if speculation hidden inside it. Where does one end and the other start? In the films of David Cronenberg, for example, characters might suddenly wake up from a nightmare – but, even on repeated viewings, we can't figure out exactly at what point that nightmare started. David Lynch loves inventing every kind of situation of dreamy reverie: floating off on a song, putting your head down to nap, trying to catch a distant recollection ... and then suddenly we are in another world as surely as Alice went through the looking-glass, but without any discernible end to the hallucination. The film itself has transformed, *anamorphosed*. [3]

FILMMAKERS TODAY KEEP PLAYING AT MOVING THE BORDERS BETWEEN THEIR NOMINAL REAL STORY AND THE WHAT-IF SPECULATION HIDDEN INSIDE IT.

What matters, ultimately, is the *intensity* of a film, not necessarily as a 'story about people', but rather as an event, as spectacle, as form and as gesture – and the resonances it sets off in you by all the means at its disposal.

This is a reworked and updated version of material presented as a Keynote address at the ATOM Conference "Story: Image, Technology, Education".

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Adrian Martin is film critic for *The Age*, the author of R*aul Ruiz: Sublimes Obsesiones* (Altamira, 2004), *The Mad Max Movies* (Currency/Screensound, 2003), *Once Upon A Time In America* (BFI, 1998) and *Phantasms* (Penguin, 1994), and co-editor of *Raul Ruiz: Images Of Passage* (Rouge Press, 2004), *Movie Mutations* (BFI, 2003) and the film journal *Rouge* (www.rouge.com.au). He is presently finishing a Doctorate at Monash University.

NOTES

[1] See Nicole Brenez (trans. Adrian Martin), *Abel Ferrara* (Illinois University Press, forthcoming).

[2] See my essay "Off the Rails: Introduction to a Speculative History of Mental Imagery in Cinema", *Mesh*, no. 11 (Spring 1997), http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh11/11mart.html

[3] For a full discussion, see my *The Artificial Night: Essays in the Cinema of Poetry* (Amsterdam University Press, forthcoming).

SEEING NOTHING

PATRICIA PRINGLE

PROLOGUE

Some definitions of 'transparent'

1. Clear, easily seen through or understood, easily discerned, frank, open.

2. *In computing, etc:* Of a program or process: not revealing its presence to the general user. [1]

Such ambiguities are grist to the mill of the conjuror.

THICK AND THIN AIR

Magic shows used to attract enthusiastic audiences to theatres and music halls. The simultaneous decline in their popularity and the expansion of cinema are well documented. [2] Trick photography and later the movie camera were able to recreate visual illusions by manipulating time, and the editing process made the magician's techniques redundant. Magical performances themselves had no magic when captured on film, which by itself could fill the air with illusive thickenings and gatherings of matter.

But one part of the spatial disturbance – the magic that is lost by film – still lingers very close to us, for its cultural significance extends far before and beyond its manipulation in Victorian magic shows. It is the brief ecstatic (and possibly erroneous) sensation of lucidity that we feel when something draws our attention to thin air.

Imagery of thick and thin air is deep in the Western mind. Thick air lies nearer to the earth, filled with vapours and miasmas. It is here that spectres exist, in a

Pepper's Ghost

fog of suggestion and unspecified crimes. Thick air is deceptive and suggestive; it holds germs and spreads infection. The air of cinemas is thick. (In the polio-fearing cinema of my childhood a commissionaire stalked the aisle, spraying us with a Flit gun during the performances.) Thick air is active, and promotes dissimulation.

Thin air on the other hand is free from earthly matter. Thin air is where emptiness is; the perception of absolute transparency, with no trace of the milky beam of the cinema projector or the opacity of the screen that is needed to catch the image. Here we are not 'seeing ghosts' but 'seeing nothing'.

I'm not talking about 'not seeing', as when one fails to notice some shadowy or camouflaged entity, nor about staring into velvet blackness, nor about the field behind the eyes in which our mental images may hang, nor yet about the visual hallucinations that can rise up when visual cues are cut off, as with the Ganzfeld. I am talking about the moments when, looking at something that is empty, we are aware that we are seeing an emptiness that is bounded by objects. It is a sensation that emphasizes the more-than-2-dimensionality of the world. It resonates in 17th century Dutch interior paintings, for example, or in the stereophotographs that became so popular around the middle of the 19th century.

This date brings back the period just before the explosion in popularity of optical magic tricks that characterised the later 19th century, the heyday of Pepper's Ghost, magic lantern slides and other proto-cinematic phenomena. But at much the same time in the 1860s that Professor Pepper was patenting and staging the famous 'Ghost' illusion, another less obviously spectacular effect was also noted as a novelty that might have a future in the production of curious stage experiences.

Pepper's arrangement conjured up melodramatic spectres who seemed to walk on stage among flesh and blood actors. It worked by harnessing the ability of a sheet of polished glass to act as a semi-transparent mirror under specific lighting conditions. The actor playing the ghost, hidden out of view in a black-walled pit below and in front of the stage, would appear to be on stage behind the glass. An air of dimness in the figure of the ghost verified its insubstantiality. In theory the virtual image was being taken for reality by an audience who did not know that the glass was there. However, knowing how the illusion worked did not detract from its enchantment. Indeed it was part of the charm. Audiences paid their entrance fees to see and hear the demonstration of the phenomenon, rather than to be hoaxed. For a period, the Ghost illusion found a place in theatrical pantomimes and melodramas, but the difficulties of staging it kept it tied to its cameo role, an obvious 'special effect'.

The alternative version used the same optical principles in an inversion that could not be spoken about in the same way. Rather than reflecting a ghostly presence, this arrangement reflected nothing out of the ordinary. It manifested emptiness, reflected absence, demonstrated that there was nothing at all there.

Jim Steinmeyer, a modern designer of conjuring apparatus, has described the second ensemble as creating for nineteenth century magicians 'an optical formula for invisibility' (Steinmeyer, 2003: 77). Variations on the technique were the basis of many great optical conjuring illusions of the later 19th century. Basically, mirrors were arranged to reflect a continuation of normality - perhaps something as dull and undifferentiated as the pattern of the carpet or a blank wall. Innocent observers, unaware of the presence of the mirrors, would not realise that the space they were looking through was actually a virtual image of emptiness laid over the true space behind. [3]

And of course behind the mirrors was the thing that must not be seen - the "vanished" assistant or object - concealed in a wedge of space that was rendered invisible by appearing to be transparent. The edges of the mirrors, which are going to give the trick away, would be incorporated in the overall setting, so that their junctions were masked by plausible horizontals and verticals, such as the legs of a table, the grid of floor tiles, the rectilinear framework of a cabinet or a box. The illusion of emptiness was created by the apparent extension of normal perspective through and beyond the invisible volume. It needed careful lighting, but unlike illusions where spectres were conjured up out of darkness, it was an illusion in which light, clarity, transparency and emptiness were incredibly and emphatically present, bound up in a disingenuous manipulation of the relentless Renaissance linear perspective that places the vanishing point at infinity.

One acclaimed early version was called *The Sphinx*. In this routine, the conjuror carried a small box to a bare table. The box was opened to reveal that it contained a living human head which opened its eyes and carried on a conversation with the conjuror despite its lack of corporeal existence from the neck down. All the while the audience could clearly see the bare floor below the table stretching back to the rear curtain. When the box was closed and re-opened, it revealed only dust, the disembodied head having now compounded its impossibility by disappearing into the clear and empty air.

In another larger and more complex illusion known as *The Walker Illusion or The Blue Room* [4], it was again the brightness and the 3-dimensional emptiness of the space that struck one observer:

This is the best illusion I have ever seen.... [Objects] evolved out of empty space, afterwards changed into other shapes, and finally vanished altogether in full sight of the audience and under a brilliant gaslight....On an empty chair a human being was gradually evolved, who would, after coming to the footlights and performing his part in the sketch, return to the chair and gradually disappear. The chair was picked up and examined. (Hercat, 1903: 96-7)

The Sphinx Illusion

The interplay between real and virtual images constructed and reinforced the sensation that boundaries between worlds had been dissolved. To audiences accustomed to the fadings and dissolvings of the images thrown in darkness by a magic lantern, it was the substantiality and fleshiness of the performers that left them dumbstruck, not their ghostliness. In the routines that were invented to display the illusion, the characters often drank from real glasses of wine, lit cigars that could be smelt, or left some object behind them when they departed, leaving a visibly transparent emptiness charged with their absence.

TRANSPARENT EMPTINESS

What is it like to see nothing? Not a fog, or a blur, or a shadowy form but clear, see-through, nothing?

A few years ago I set up a version of the Sphinx illusion at home in order to film it. (In case anyone is still confused, the assistant is kneeling under the table, with his/her head through a concealed opening. Mirrors set between the legs of the table are hiding the body of the assistant from view.) My version was the simplest of all, using one mirror. Its effect on me was surprising and unexpected. Even when the occupant was not in place, and no head was on the table, the space between the legs of the table took on a quality of heightened reality – it was brighter, more lucid, more *empty* than seemed natural. I imagine that part of this quality was due to the sparkling cleanliness of the mirror's surface which is essential for the trick to work because any mark on the glass reveals the plane of the mirror. Part was due also to the demands of the lighting, for in order for vision to flow without a check the real and virtual spaces must appear to be in a natural balance of illumination, This can look unbalanced through the lens of a camera, which picks up the mirrors as bright spots that suck the light of the room in to them, or as dark voids. Stage magicians often surround mirror tricks with shimmering materials which seem

to contain their own fields of light and darkness to distract attention from these inconsistencies in the web of reality that they present. I, working by trial and error, adjusted the lighting so that the effect was working for the camera, and then found that I had created a cube of hyper-clarity. It sat in my room like a prism of crystalline air, marginally brighter and more real than the reality around it.

The effect was disturbing. The volume of vacant space seemed to be set outside of everyday time and filled with the plenitude of emptiness. It was so compelling that several times I would reach to it and be slightly surprised to re-discover that it wasn't really there, but just a trick of the mirror reflecting the emptiness around it. It had the liquid clarity of the sensations that are called up by certain phrases - 'The Lark in the Clear Air', perhaps – effortless, endless, ungraspable, constantly happening but never moving. It was not a fleeting sensation, it was there every time I glanced at it, and each time it left me with the sense that my eyes had been pleasantly released from some unnoticed state of tension.

It was beautiful. It was a trick. It was beautiful. It was a trick.

THE EFFECT WAS DISTURBING. THE VOLUME OF VACANT SPACE SEEMED TO BE SET OUTSIDE OF EVERYDAY TIME AND FILLED WITH THE PLENITUDE OF EMPTINESS.

TOO SUBLIME

In 1865 the Sphinx illusion was received by its audience as an exquisitely baffling and disturbing one. This was not because of the fiction of the bodiless head - no-one thought for one moment that a horrendous medical experiment had taken place. Rather than being sensational in a lurid sense, it aroused exquisite feelings of hesitation, uncertainty and fascination; a struggle to grasp something at the edge of comprehension, a brush with infinity or with the 4th dimension. Reviews spoke of the silence that followed the act, before the applause (Steinmeyer, 2003: 84).

No illusion could be sustained at such a pitch of emotional tension for long; later versions became comedic and self-parodying. The Sphinx ended up in the funhouse. By the end of the century it was 'probably the most common of all the illusions which depend upon mirrors' (Hopkins, 1898: 69). Other mirror illusions that worked on the same basic principle became incorporated in acts that had their audiences in fits of laughter, as wilder and wilder transformations, vanishings and appearances were achieved. [5]

WATCHING A MAGIC SHOW

In contrast, there can be something stultifying about sitting through an old-style magic show in a small theatre today. Most tricks are based on the laws of physics though they may appear to demonstrate the conquering of such laws, so the magician's routine is at its heart a string of demonstrations, like a contortionist's act. The tricks have no location other than the stage. The curious props arrive, are exploited, and returned to the wings and to oblivion.

For pragmatic reasons, the classic acts are often carried out in front of a curtain or backdrop whose indeterminate surface may be participating in the act by concealing something behind it, camouflaging objects in front of it, or confusing our sense of depth by its pattern and texture. It marks the back wall of its own reality, the world in which this logic applies. The space of the conjuror's stage appears shallow, like a low-relief or a frieze. The conjuror and assistant face front while gesturing sidewards, spreading their act out in front of us like a screen for the eyes of the audience to scan laterally, rather than probing into the occluded depths.

In such a context, the moment when we are called on to look deep into a bright emptiness brings a startling shift of orientation. The eye skids forward, unstopped, momentarily piercing the thick folds of our immediate field of vision and escaping beyond, as the conjuror invites us to look into the proffered empty cabinet and see nothing. The moment is brief, but the ecstatic sensation hangs in the memory like an afterimage.

It is a moment when we are quite vulnerable to manipulation.

THE CONJUROR APPEARS TO FADE

The persona once created by an old-fashioned illusionist no longer seems relevant for today. We haven't much interest in conspiring in a pretence that we are watching a demonstration of unnatural powers. We acknowledge that the performer is dextrous and ingenious, but we don't really want to watch routines. We would prefer to be left alone with the apparatus and the sensations, and not distracted by all that patter.

What are the differences between then and now? One is that what was once kept secret - the method, the apparatus, the technology - is now brought forward and examined. A trick that might once have been considered to work by deceiving the senses is now recast as a way in which we may perceive ourselves perceiving, which at this moment in history is considered to be a profound experience. Consequently a surprising amount of the physics and the "philosophical toys" that once underpinned the illusionist's work have shifted into the relative silences of the art gallery.

In the category of "seeing nothing", several recent, thoughtful, proposals for contemporary memorials have used the experience of emptiness to touch on the sublime (in the Kantian sense) by reflecting, or reflecting on, emptiness itself. I'm thinking here of specific works in which the exposure of concealment, extraction and erasure must inevitably, given their context, be interpreted as references to the magnitude of what has been lost, as the moment of initial perception opens the observer to an oscillating flood of complex thoughts. The risk, acknowledged by the artists, is that their redemptive limpid beauty may paradoxically be obscuring the ugly and terrible things that should not be hidden. For example, some proposals for Holocaust memorials have been accused of being almost too beautiful conceptually, bringing closure to wounds that perhaps should never be allowed to heal. [6] These works are big things, in every sense, and no laughing matter.

Between the extremes of the old conjuror's secretive trickiness and the grandiose beauty that can make some of the new sublime overbearing, sit brief enchantments and smaller epiphanies in everyday moments. The small mirror, hung just high enough so that it never reflects the person, might give something to be going on with, a glimpse of empty air.

THIS IS THE BEST ILLUSION I HAVE EVER SEEN.... [OBJECTS] EVOLVED OUT OF EMPTY SPACE, AFTERWARDS CHANGED INTO OTHER SHAPES, AND FINALLY VANISHED ALTOGETHER IN FULL SIGHT OF THE AUDIENCE AND UNDER A BRILLIANT GASLIGHT....

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Patricia Pringle is a Senior Lecturer in the interior design program in the School of Architecture + Design at RMIT University. Her doctoral research explores ways in which modernity's new empathy with space, both imaginative and visceral, was manifested in popular amusements and entertainments of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. She is particularly interested in those that dealt with 'impossible' feats, such as defying gravity or vanishing, and in the ways in which such aspirations continue to shape spatial desires today.

NOTES

[1] Paraphrased from the 1993 edition of *New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*

[2] The most comprehensive survey is still *The Magician and the Cinema* (Barnouw, 1981)

[3] Steinmeyer (2003) attributes the first articulation of the general principle of using a mirror to hide something to Joseph Maurice in 1865, in one of many patents that followed the *Ghost* illusion in 1863. The first specific description of its application was in Tobin and Pepper's1865 *Protean Cabinet*. Tobin and Stodare patented the *Sphinx* illusion later the same year. For an outline of the developments in optical conjuring illusions through the patents that were filed for them, see also Rees and Wilmore, 1996.

[4] Also known as *Metempsychosis*, it was developed by Pepper and Walker and patented in 1879. It includes elements from both the *Ghost* and the *Sphinx* illusions.

[5] These were the type of magical skits that George Meliès was presenting on stage in the 1890s.

[6] Specifically, proposals by practitioners such as Dan Graham, Rachael Whiteread or Daniel Libeskind for Holocaust memorials. The dilemma is discussed in *At Memory's Edge* (Young, 2000)

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UNFAITHFUL MIRRORS: NEW ANIMATE ARCHITECTURES AND THE 'HAUNTING' OF THE SURFACE

INGER MEWBURN

In the emerging field of 'interactive architectures', the movement of bodies can become transformed and played back through surfaces mobilised by means of digital technologies. These architectures can create highly sensual and engaging connections to the body which challenge the idea of the skin as an absolute boundary between body and world. When interacting with animate architecture, people have reported a sense of being 'doubled', a feeling that they are somehow inside these digital interactive surfaces at the same time as standing in front of them. They also talk of an uncanny sense of presence, as if the walls themselves have come alive. Spatial dislocation of the body upsets the grounding and orientation role that we normally expect architecture to play in relation to our bodies. How does this ungrounding of the body come about? And how might these feelings of spatial uncertainty become implicated in the sense of a living presence that seems to haunt these surfaces?

The Responsive Wall

Aegis Hyposurface

Amongst recent examples of digitally enabled surfaces, Decoi's *Aegis Hyposurface* has triggered a significant amount of discussion amongst the international architectural community. The *Aegis Hyposurface* is a wall of pneumatically mounted metal triangles, 8 metres across by 7 metres high, which undulates, sometimes frantically, when activated by data captured from a moving body. When programmed well it moves in sympathy with the passer-by, not as an exact reflection but a translation of their movement into corresponding data driven ripples of pattern on its skin. The wall has an ability to exhibit an unnerving quickness of response from inert flatness to ripples of up to 60km/hr within milliseconds. However, it is the affective tone of the live experience that is the most important and perhaps most elusive quality of the *Aegis Hyposurface*. It is easy to see the excited and nervous reactions of people to the piece on film footage [1]. When a small section of it was activated for an audience at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 2000 many people jumped back, gasped instinctively and then nervously laughed at their collective display of unease. [2] Mark Burry highlights the difficulty of understanding the piece without experiencing it, claiming that the image does not capture the 'inherent intellectual engagement if not *compulsion within the experience of the wall*. The sensation of air movement caused by the wall's mad fibrillations, the palpable shock of the pistons slamming home in certain instances, all hint at effects bordering on trauma, a Synaesthetic transfer device' [my italics] (Burry, 2004:16).

By making reference to synaesthesia to describe this experience Burry suggests that the dramatic contortions of the surface are able to be felt inside the body as an empathetic shiver which implies that the wall is capable of contagious transmission of feelings - from surface to skin. [3]

Intrigued by the tales of this surface I created my own piece of interactive architecture in collaboration with Dr Nigel Stewart in 2003. [4] This piece was a conscious re-creation of the then inactive water wall at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne. [5] The *Responsive Wall* was a projection of a moving shower of blue particles of "digital rain". This digital rain responded, in a slightly dreamlike delay, to the presence of the passer-by. The passer-by could see their own body as a distorted, sepia toned ghost moving inside the latex surface on which the rain was projected. [6] The responsiveness of the particles enabled a passer by to "catch" the rain by standing still. Holding and then letting go of the digital rain was effected by moving, which caused the particles to change their behaviour. After an encounter with the movement of the body, the particles became red and their movement changed from being part of a fast running stream to a viscous swirling cloud. This mutable digital materiality recalled the changeable quality of the original water wall at the National Gallery, which is hinted at in a monograph about the building that was published soon after its completion:

This is the great curtain of water that falls continuously over a wall of glass where it slides in thin streams, sluices quickly in broad masses of rivulets. Slipping, running, here and there lazing and then rushing on suddenly, the water curtain creates moving, ever changing patterns of gentle energy in a perpetual vista of fluid light and motion. (Tennison and Grey, 1968: 15)

As activity in the space increased, a slow moving puddle of red particles would grow; a visible trace of the presence of just passed moments. Many people reported that the movement of the rain on the wall made them feel as though the wall itself had a 'life of its own'. [7] They also spoke of a tingling, tactile sensation - like rain falling on their skin. Some suggested they felt confusion as to whether the rain was falling on their skin or the whether the wall had reached out to stroke them. Others commented on how this tactile sensation produced a feeling of being simultaneously translocated inside the surface, at the same time maintaining an awareness of standing in front of it.

SPATIAL TRANS-LOCATION, THE FEELING OF BEING IN TWO PLACES AT ONCE, CAN BE COMPARED TO OTHER EXAMPLES OF UNCERTAIN SPATIAL RELATIONS THAT EXIST IN THE HISTORY OF ARCHITECTURE.

Spatial trans-location, the feeling of being in two places at once, can be compared to other examples of uncertain spatial relations that exist in the history of architecture. The ever mutable Rococo mirror is a particularly extreme example of deliberate destabilising of architectural form and surface. In the Amelianborg pavilion mirrors are employed to dissolve the clarity of the geometric form of the room at the same time as they compose new, entirely virtual, spaces in their depths. These mirrors are not a single pane of glass but a lattice composition of smaller panes with chamfered edges that make a visual connection to the grid of the panes of glass in the doors, deliberately blurring the distinction between inside and outside. [8] The mirrors are artfully located, on the chamfered edges of the otherwise square plan, in order to obliquely reflect one another. [9] Movement past their cut glass edges causes the perception of the formal envelope of the building to waver uncertainly. Where the physical space of the Amelianborg stops and the intangible virtual spaces in the surface of the mirrors begin becomes vague, while other potential Amelianborgs continually expand and contract with the movement of the body. Somewhere, in this virtual suspended volume, you can encounter yourself in the act of being transformed, reversed, turned sideways and multiplied endlessly. The matter is further complicated by the unexpected orientation of the reflection, a mismatching of the internal proprioceptive sensation of the position of the body in relation to the mirror. What these mirrors show us is an *unfaithful* reflection, one that we cannot entirely feel we own because it is no longer strongly attached to the space we are actually standing in. These mirrors have an "inflected" quality - they create virtual spaces in which the physical world is distorted and made strange. The inflecting action of the Amelianborg mirrors works to disrupt a clear and legible perception of spatial boundaries, allowing us to fall – if we wish – into the intangible virtual space of the surface.

The Amelianborg pavilion is an example of a deliberate merging of physical and virtual spaces and the spatial confusion that it can provoke can be described in terms of the uncanny. The feeling of the uncanny is also a way that we can come to understand the reactions to the *Aegis Hyposurface* and the *Responsive Wall*.

The uncanny is a feeling first explored at some length by Freud in 1919. In German, it is "unheimlich", which translates in English to unhomely. In general usage it has come to mean a particularly unsettling experience that can be described as "eerie" rather than the more emotionally laden "fearful". Freud's account of the production of feelings of the uncanny contains a few descriptions as to how it might be provoked. The first involves a feeling of intellectual uncertainty when attempting to discern whether an inert and seemingly lifeless object, like a doll, might actually be animate or alive. The connection to the uncanny effect of the animation of architectural surface, which we are accustomed to experiencing as inert, is fairly obvious. However, this intellectual uncertainty does not entirely account for the sense of "liveness" or presence that has been described as forming part of the experience of the *Aegis Hyposurface* and the *Responsive Wall*. The inflecting action of the Amelianborg mirrors might offer another part of the explanation.

The disconcerting effect of the *Aegis Hyposurface* or the more benign feelings of a sense of liveness reported about the *Responsive Wall* seem to stem partly from a feeling that the surface is alive in relation to the self: a kind of unfaithful mirroring similar to that encountered in the Amelianborg pavilion. Freud singles out the figure of the double for special attention in his essay on the uncanny. He is not able to account for 'the defensive urge that ejects it from the ego as something alien' entirely through his theory that the double somehow conjures up repressed memories or frustrated strivings which have not come to pass (Freud, 2003:143). He searches for another explanation that might explain the uncanny effect of the double through the process of psychological development in the child, describing it as '...a harking back to single phases in the evolution of the sense of self, a regression to times when the ego *had not yet clearly set itself off against the world outside and from*

others' [my italics] (Freud, 2003:143).
Freud links the fear of the double to infantile regression and the compulsion to repeat which he states is evidenced in the behaviour of young children. [10] Freud's explanation rests on the concept of the ego that seeks to maintain itself separately from the world. This objectification of the ego-self has been re-evaluated by subsequent theorists, particularly the 'intersubjectivists' Psychologists such as Daniel Stern argue that the differentiation between self and other starts at (or even before} birth and that the infant actively seeks "ways of being with"the world rather than the protective action of closing off from it which is suggested by Freud (Stern, 1985:6). However, Freud may be right in thinking that the uncanny effect of the double is linked to infantile experience because, according to the intersubjectivists, the infant's "ways of being with" remain into adulthood and run deeply through all human experience. One of these "ways of being with" is the relation between mirroring and the process of relating self with others. Ellen Dissanayake points to the instinctive mirroring between mother and child that happens in baby talk. [11] This is a process of repetition and difference that mother and child engage in to facilitate a process of "attunement" with each other.
This idea of attunement to another is, perhaps, the key to understanding the affective nature of interactive art like the *Aegis Hyposurface* or the *Responsive Wall*. Pia Ednie-Brown suggests that '[t]he affective power of these works is tied to the degree to which they lift us out of habitual processes of perception into a process of perceiving our habitual processes of perception through engagement with another' (Ednie-Brown, 2005, forthcoming).In the case of the interactive architectures I am describing, this affective attunement occurs between the passer-by and the ethereal "other" that is able to be perceived as existing through the motions of the surface. The inflection that is enacted by both these pieces of responsive architecture is not quite the same as the inflection which is encountered in the Rococo mirrors of the Amelianborg. These mirrors produce a straight forward modulation or warping that always acts the same way and so can be predicted. In order for the sense of liveness or presence to occur in these interactive architectures the surface has to become an unfaithful mirror, just different enough to hover between being a perfect reflection and an unpredictable agency which exists entirely separately to the self. Both of the works I have discussed do not directly mirror the actions of the body. They are inflected by it, transforming the movements of the body and modulating this movement back into the movement of the surface. This is more like a transduction: a transfer of characteristics from one thing to another. The shiver of empathy we feel is the coming to the surface of the affective relation that is embedded in the act of recognition of the self-made-strange in another: in architecture. This is architecture that, in a very profound sense, gets under our skin.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Inger Mewburn graduated from architecture at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1996 and is polishing the footnotes of her masters degree in architecture in the Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory at RMIT. Her design research practice has focused on the emerging field of responsive architectures and matters of the surface. Recent papers include 'A feeling of the Rococo' (SAHANZ, Melbourne, 2004) and 'Resisting matter: creating an armature forfuturedigitalpractice'(Futureground, Melbourne 2004).

NOTES

[1] Promotional DVD produced for the Spatial Information Architecture Laboratory, Royal Melbourne Institute of technology, 2005: currently unavailable for public viewing
[2] In general conversation at a SIAL colloquium which took place on the 26th March 2005
[3] Synaesthesia is a medical condition where one sense modality can be experienced through another. The most common form of synaesthesia is seeing numbers as consistently having a particular colour. For further information refer to the work of Vilynur Ramachandran, particularly 'The Emerging Mind' (2004).
[4] Dr Nigel Stewart is a computer scientist who specialises in Open GL programming
[5] Some good images and a description of this local icon's recent transformation can be found at: http://www.arup.com/australasia/project.cfm?pageid=1427
[6] For further information on this exhibition and its unusual structure and material work refer to the work of Pia Ednie-Brown, senior lecturer at RMIT. Specific information can be found on line at http://www.onomatopoeia.com.au
[7] These comments were gathered in research carried out during the course of the exhibition: 'Skins of Intimate Distance' held at Experimedia, State Library of Victoria, 2003.
[8] The Amelianborg Pavillion was designed by Francois Cuvillies in 1739. It is located in the Nyphenburg Gardens in Munich, Germany.
[9] Something similar can be experienced in a changing room with more than one mirror which are placed at angles to each other in order to allow you to see your behind.
[10] Freud describes the child's compulsion to repeat as having a 'demonic character'. Parents who have read the same bedtime story to a toddler many (many) times will attest to this compulsion; but not necessarily the demonic character of it.
[11] Ellen Dissanayake describes these implications at depth in her book *Homo Aestheticus: where art comes from and why* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995).

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WONDERLAND – A MANIFESTO FOR 21ST CENTURY IMMERSIVE WORKS

MELINDA RACKHAM

Virtual Reality is a sensual space, a spectacular arena that can corporeally transport the immersant beyond everyday space and time. [1] Ripe with mixed metaphors, its pleasure resides in a temporal zone, somewhere between hard and soft consciousness, between the material and the spiritual, in the interwoven threads of body and mind. Yet these epicurean, non-addictive, G-rated, wonderlands have been getting bad press lately.
In their introduction to *Mesh 17: New Media Art in Australia and Asia,* Russell Smith and Sarah Tutton suggest that we are disenchanted with the hype of immersive media and VR technologies (http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh17/index.htm). This justification for the uptake of Video Art implies that we have lost both our ability to engage with our society's technology, and more sadly, with the joy of giving ourselves over to simultaneous childish wonder and adult fancy. I would speculate that this recent overexposure of linear video arts speaks more of conservatism and commodification in the new media art market - of the ease of having a saleable edition for collectors, rather than the demise of VR.
But to be fair, immersive media is a risky business both from the point of view of the viewer and the artist/investor/producer. These works are demanding - they do not neatly sit on a shelf to

MANIFESTO FOR 21ST CENTURY IMMERSIVE WORKS
1. SIMPLE, STRONG, SUBTLE.
2. SEDUCTION OVERCOMES CONTROL.
3. PLAY IS PLEASURE.
4. CONTEMPLATE DON'T MANIPULATE.
5. ABSTRACTION AMPLIFIES MINIMALISM.
6. FEEL NOW, THINK LATER.
7. NOTHINGNESS ENHANCES EMPTINESS.

be turned on at your desire, they don't pause or rewind, and they insist the viewer be willing to engage, to play, to respond in a physical situation. In terms of financial investment, the often amorphous, expansive, and experimental works may also have extended development time, large budgets and no saleable end product.
While there have been some extraordinary works produced, others have been appallingly empty. But whether you love them or hate them, they ask hard questions and have an impact unlike any other form of practice. How can you not be moved after 15 minutes of meditative breathing in the intimate and intense immersion in Char Davies' *Osmose*? Does placing ones hand on the console of Jeffrey Shaw's *Web of Life* generate a sense of deep global connection? What do you talk about after communing with the larger than life spectacle of Stellarc's severed polygonal *Prosthetic Head*?
So perhaps we have arrived at a productive juncture, a time to reconsider what Virtual Realities can offer us. As a networked city dweller who is continually engaged in high speed multi-tasking, more and more I find that I want immersive worlds which provide a haven from the hyper-stimulation of my daily life. It seems a critical mass has been reached as we collectively long for a change of pace to eagerly embrace slowness and subtlety. What the art world needs now is a manifesto for immersive technologies in the 21st century, a guide to creating landscapes of altered consciousness in computer-generated immersive environments.
Although our human species is highly complex, we are relatively simple creatures when it comes to stimulus and response. As any phone-sex worker knows we don't need very much at all to get us going. Suggestion and illusion can be far more powerful than physical reality. We like to fill in the gaps with our own imagination. The same applies in relation to art. Many three dimensional virtual reality works fail to recognise this and overwork at producing an *optical* virtual realism, rather than endeavoring to trigger *sensation*. In fact, the most effective immersive space I have ever experienced consisted of nothingness. It had no object, no imagery, no text and no discernable auditory narrative.
This immersive sound/space work, *<db>* , was created by multi-form artists *dumb type's* music and sound director Ryoji Ikeda, and installed within an anechoic (echo free) chamber at the NTT InterCommunication Centre [ICC] in Tokyo in 2002. The viewer is placed in the completely light free chamber and exposed to densely composed sine waves and white noise. There is an emergency stop button under your hand in case the blackness and sound become too intensely frightening or physically painful. Just when you think you can take no more, the piercing, grating noise abruptly stops and a non-speaking attendant ceremoniously leads you into an adjoining room. This new space is the antithesis of the anechoic chamber. Here you are confronted by an infinity of images of yourself reflected by mirrors on every surface, in sound proofed silence, bathed in intense white light.

The alternation of the sensory on/off switch, from black intensity to white intensity produced a floating sensation in me. I literally felt a lightness of being unlike anything I have experienced without chemical enhancement or deep and sustained meditation before. Time suspended. It was a delightfully long and crystal clear few minutes. Perhaps it was something akin to the religious ecstasy reported by those having white light near death experiences. That light and dark, sound and no sound could be so profoundly consciousness expanding, such a full experience, inspired me to seek out other works which make intelligent use of minimalism.

Operating with similar levels of simplicity is *Whiteplane2*, a collaboration in sound and light by UK artists Alex Bradley and Charles Poulet, which recently premiered at the BALTIC (http://www.whiteplane2.org). Earlier versions of the work were researched and developed partially in Australia during residencies at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and the Performance Space in Sydney with sound artists Gail Priest and Bruce Mowson. Instead of the black and white immersion of *<db>*, *Whiteplane2* creates a coloured light

Whiteplane2 (2005) Alex Bradley and Charles Poulet (UK)

Scorched Happiness (2004) Adam Nash, Mami Yamanaka and John McCormick (Australia)

space, an 'in-between', which the artists poetically describe as an impossible geography inhabited by beauty and disorientation.

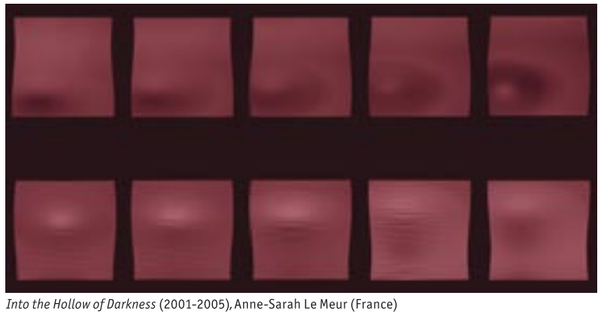
The viewer is physically located – sandwiched - between two shifting planes of light while their senses are temporarily realigned by way of the frequency, volume and movement of the work's audio horizon. Physically the installation is an 8 x 5 metre Perspex platform and ceiling – giant light boxes filled with LED's that cycle through flowing colour sequences. Hearing becomes critical as the light, synchronised with the sound, flashes, disappears and almost liquefies the gallery space. It is the audience who become the interactive components in this work as its minimal and contemplative execution encourages a loss of self consciousness. They relax, lie down on the platform, and yield to the seductive power of a visceral sonic light bath.

Immersive contemplative spaces can also reside outside physical manifestation in the form of navigable abstract three dimensional VRML internet worlds. As completely computer generated territories, they have unique qualities which can only be experienced by putting aside our default preconceptions as colonisers of cyberspace. In works such as *Scorched Happiness* (2004), the viewer becomes an abstract, non-humanoid avatar in order to explore a virtual emotionalgeography(http://yamanakanash.net/scorched_happiness/). A collaboration between Melbourne based Adam Nash, Mami Yamanaka and John McCormick, it is a beautifully confronting meditation which envelopes its participants in foreignness.

There isn't much for the viewer to do. They merely steer their floating shifting animated shape around the monochromatic geometric landscape inspired by Julia Kristeva's *Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner* (1991). The avatars become huge, layered, temporally chimerical audiovisual events which fill up the space and then recede as they react to each other's manifestations. This highly poetic work is almost impossible to describe subjectively. One must be inside it to truly feel the emptiness of virtual space.

The newness these works embody seems to be about feeling rather than thinking. We are sophisticated enough to knowingly enjoy fleeting sensation, to be centred in our body and to relate to other intensities from there. Anne-Sarah Le Meur's three dimensional real time installation *Into the Hollow Of Darkness* subtly encourages corporeal engagement (http://aslemeur.free.fr). A silent work, co-produced between 2001–2005 with Art3000/LeCube and Interface-Z in France, it utilises simple imagery and synthetic light to spectacular affect. Abstract, minimal, sensual images are constituted by the spatial play of two lights - one black and the other colored - which combine and then part in a slowly choreographed dance upon an animated surface.

Into the Hollow of Darkness' computer generated images are suggestive of an unknown creatures body apertures. They could be irises, nostrils, nipples, anuses, or folds of skin on something alien. In this way, the work shares something with Patricia Piccinini's *The Breathing Room* (1999) - a non-responsive screen-based installation that looks at the idea of panic within contemporary society through the creation of an immersive emotive space. While Piccinini's unidentifiable, yet highly vulnerable, creature conveys a sense of urgency and intimacy through the sound of breath and a physically vibrating floor, Le Meur creates affective immersion - a cybernetic feedback system which responds to the viewer's movements via an unobtrusive head-mounted device.



Into the Hollow of Darkness (2001-2005), Anne-Sarah Le Meur (France)

The *phenomena,* as Le Meur affectionately calls it, is projected on the periphery of the viewer's visual field, and unlike most art installations, the software generated abstract representations move away from the viewer as they move towards it. One gradually learns that it is passivity, almost motionlessness that influences the *phenomena's* colors and movements, holds or pauses the forms, or *tames* them. The outcome of this subtle interaction gives the impression that the forms are alive, returning the viewer's gaze. Hence slowness creates intimacy and sensual pleasure.

All of these works mark a return to the delightful openness of abstraction, producing a powerful yet strange intimacy with ephemerality. Nothing tangible is represented – everything rests upon the simple seductive power of light and sound, and the reciprocity of the play between the viewer and the work. They are pure refreshment, delightfully pleasurable interludes in a world of chaotic banality. They meet the criteria of my manifesto for 21st century immersive works and leave me feeling as though I have savoured the sweet taste of wonderland.

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Sydney-based artist, writer and curator Dr Melinda Rackham investigates the aesthetic, technological and psychological aspects of distributed identity, locality, and sexuality; as well as trans-species relations and avatar life in 3d multi-user and game environments. Her writing appears in many arenas and her award winning web and video works are widely internationally shown. She produces -*empyre*- online media forum.

NOTES

[1] Immersant is a term coined by Char Davies to describe those immersed in virtual reality worlds.

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CHANGING THE COMMONPLACE TO THE VISION SPLENDID: THE POETRY OF THEATRICAL TRANSFORMATIONS

ANITA CALLAWAY

Mr Gordon and Mr Brunton's beautiful transformation scenery has become a topic in everyday conversation, as well it might, for nothing half so poetic has been seen in pantomime before. (Table Talk, 10 January, 1890:14)

This 'beautiful transformation' was the story of *Cupid and Psyche*, devised by George Gordon and John Brunton in 'ten fairy-like and poetical scenes' for the Christmas pantomime *Cinderella; or, Gold and Silver and the Little Glass Slipper* (Theatre Royal, Melbourne, 1889; and Theatre Royal, Sydney, 1890). (*Table Talk* (26 December 1889:16) Although this transformation was the most popular element in the pantomime performance, it was not strictly part of it: it was an independent interlude, sandwiched between the fairy tale and the harlequinade, and having no relevance to the burlesqued narrative of the former or to the latter's slapstick nonsense. As the critic James Neild described the transformation scene in *The House That Jack Built* (Theatre Royal, Melbourne, 1869), it 'seemed so exactly a spectacle by itself. It might have been exhibited without reference to any pantomime. It had no necessary connexion with pantomimes at all'. (*Australasian,* 1 January 1870: 18)

In eighteenth-century English pantomime, the transformation had been merely a mechanical device—a puff of smoke, say, or a clap of thunder—that masked the changeover of the storybook characters to those of the harlequinade. During the nineteenth century, however, the simple "transformation" developed into a complicated and drawn-out "transformation scene" that emphasised process rather than purpose. The process involved the intricate play of light upon painted scrims, so that successive scenes materialised slowly through the depth of the stage. The end-result was no longer a comical harlequinade but an idealised image, whether an enchanted refuge from modernity (for example, *A Glimpse of Fairyland*); the classical allusions of grand history painting (*The Dream of Endymion*); or the promise of a glorious future (*Australia's March of Triumph*).[1] Despite the array of whiz-bang effects used in transformation scenes—opening bowers, tinsel showers, trap doors, painted gauze, coloured fires, and girls on wires—the actual changes themselves never relied upon shock and surprise. Instead, the scenes unfolded, slowly and inexorably, with each scene frozen for a few minutes before dissolving into the next:

THE PROCESS INVOLVED THE INTRICATE PLAY OF LIGHT UPON PAINTED SCRIMS, SO THAT SUCCESSIVE SCENES MATERIALISED SLOWLY THROUGH THE DEPTH OF THE STAGE.

All will recall in some elaborate transformation scene how quietly and gradually it evolved. First the 'gauzes' lift slowly one behind the other—perhaps the most pleasing of all scenic effects—giving glimpses of 'the Realms of Bliss', seen beyond in a tantalising fashion. Then is revealed a kind of half-glorified country, clouds and banks, evidently concealing much…Now some of the banks begin to part slowly, showing realms of light, with a few divine beings—fairies—rising slowly here and there. More breaks beyond and fairies rising, with a pyramid of these ladies beginning to mount slowly in the centre. Thus it goes on, …[until] finally, perhaps, at the back of all, the most glorious paradise of all will open, revealing the pure empyrean itself, and some fair spirit aloft in a cloud among the stars, the apex of all. (Percy, 1881: 89-90)

The snail's pace of the transformation (which often took twenty minutes to unfold), the flying divinities in pink tights, and the 'pure empyrean' that resembled Coleridge's laudanum vision far more closely than a happy-ever-after fairy-tale resolution, confirm the transformation scene as adult entertainment. Children would have been bored stiff.

Theatre critics (particularly those who, like Neild, alternated as art critics) reviewed transformations as exhibitions of stage pictures, acknowledging their imaginative and aesthetic merit, rather than any dramatic or realistic quality. Scene painters (many of whom were also easel painters) considered the annual pantomime their only opportunity to prove to the theatre audience that they were scenic artists, rather than just splodgers. Many transformations exposed their creator's high-art aspirations, not only in the sheer beauty of the finished scenes, but in the gravity of the subject chosen for insertion within a frivolous pantomime (for example, *The Arrival of the Flying Squadron* transformation in *Love's Silver Dream*), and in the quotation of familiar art works (Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* and Guido Reni's *Aurora*) presented *en tableau*. [2]

The painted veils that lifted so provocatively during the course of the transformation were prepared in the same way as the illuminated transparencies that were used as night-time decorations from the eighteenth century. Watercolour pigments were carefully applied to gauze that had been treated with clear sizing so that the colour would remain on the surface and not be absorbed into the fabric, thereby allowing the passage of light through the painted cloth (Callaway, 2000: 4-8) Just as transparency paintings shone brilliantly in darkened streets, so the transformation scrims shone out on the darkened stage. As high-art practitioners were at this time preoccupied with the naturalistic rendition of light, it is surprising that so few of them adopted transparency painting other than for decorative or theatrical purposes. Instead, they continued to use opaque pigments on solid canvas or panels, restricting themselves to producing reflected—rather than transmitted—light, and to producing impenetrable colour rather than atmosphere. In the natural world, as Dickens remarked, one 'look[s] through, rather than at, the deep blue sky' (1896:90); whereas, as Ruskin remarked, in the world of 'the old landscape painters…you may indeed go a long way before you come to the sky, but you will strike hard against it at last.' (Ruskin, 1857: 205) Those few painters who tried transparency painting in their artistic practice were dismissed as tricksters.9 Yet conventional artists could create only the illusion of light, while the designers of transformation scenes painted with light itself.

The penetrability, the transparency, of the transformation scenery allowed the audience easier access to the stage than standard scene painting. Whether a journey to fairyland or to the lap of the gods, the transformation took the audience to another world - an Otherworld - and transcended both time and space in its progress from the prosaic to the poetic. Its cultural significance lay in its apparent confirmation of Horace's dictum, *ut pictura poesis*, despite the prevailing opinion (following Lessing's *Laokoön,* 1766) that poetry and painting were not equivalent: poetry is temporal and kinetic; painting is spatial and static. Viewers of so-called literary paintings, whether Hogarth's eighteenth-century comic-strips or Victorian narrative paintings weighed down with detail and moralistic symbolism, found themselves, like Ruskin, 'strik[ing] hard against' the dense colour, and shut out of the picture rather than drawn into the world within. When Brunton's transformation for *Robinson Crusoe* (Theatre Royal, Melbourne, 1886) was described as 'a poem in colour and form', it was more than a compliment to the artist. (*Table Talk,* 1887: 12) It was recognition that the supposedly lesser art of theatrical scene painting had resolved the *ut pictura poesis* conundrum.

IN THE NATURAL WORLD, AS DICKENS REMARKED, ONE 'LOOK[S] THROUGH, RATHER THAN AT, THE DEEP BLUE SKY'

It is not surprising that transformations are not to be found in the sad travesties that pass for pantomimes today. Who would stage a transformation scene in a shopping mall? In this cinematic age, the wonder of theatrical transformations has well and truly passed us by. Even back in 1930, the director of the Chicago Opera's production of *Parsifal* dropped the opera's transformation scene, claiming that 'to cinema-bred patrons… Herr Wagner's elaborate device to indicate motion would have appeared quite childish' (*Time*, 1931). It is surprising, however, that transformations receive so little scholarly attention. It is a case, perhaps, of poetry striking back, reclaiming exclusive rights to the liberal arts appellation that transformations had temporarily won for painting.

The hegemony of the literary text in contemporary theatre studies has deemed scenic spectacle a tasteless aberration, and the transformation (being the most spectacular of theatrical effects) the most vulgar of all. Perhaps extravagant scenery does interfere with the integrity of dramatic dialogue. But pantomime—that is, in the form peculiar to the English-speaking world—was as much a visual spectacle as it was a literary one. The transformation was rarely (if ever) created by the author; rather, it was the last-minute invention of the scene painter, following the theatre manager's advice. Pantomime author Garnet Walch wryly commented that there were 'three notable individuals' involved in producing a pantomime, their order of importance being the 'MANAGER' (in bold caps), the 'Scenic Artist' (in mixed upper and lower case), and the 'author' (in lower case entirely) (Walch, 1875: 1). Because transformations were completed close to the eleventh hour, because they had no spoken dialogue, and because of their detachment from the author's plot, they were rarely described in the scripts or in the published pantomime books that were printed well before opening night, apart from the general instruction to 'insert transformation here'. Rarely, then, are they afforded the same scholarly attention as the rest of the pantomime.

Since it is generally accepted that transformations were peculiar only to Britain and to those few colonies (Australia in particular) that matched her pantomime excesses, they are overlooked in theatrical histories. Yet transformations were once so popular that they were appropriated into other forms of nineteenth-century theatre, including operas and extravaganzas. Richard Wagner—as much stage director as composer—demanded transformations in the Bayreuth productions of his operas. J.R. Planché complained in hindsight that the fairy extravaganzas he wrote for the London Olympic had been overwhelmed by the excesses of

the scene painter William Beverley ('year after year…I was positively painted out') although, at the time, they were especially admired for Beverley's lavish transformations in this non-pantomime context (Planché, 1978: 338). The most remarkable American example of the transformation scene was the one in Laura Keene's New York production of *The Seven Sisters* extravaganza. This transformation, *The Birth of the Butterfly in the Bower of Ferns* (painted by James M. Roberts), was described as the 'most magnificent specimen of scenic art ever presented to the American public'and the audience demanded a replay of it at almost every performance (*New York Times*, 1860: 7). The fern fronds that opened in the soft breezes, the gradual appearance of a fairy lake with the fairies floating upon it, a giant water lily that slowly opened to reveal a fairy child nestling within, and the final apotheosis of the Seven Sisters, were all part of 'a scene of fairy-land so dazzlingly beautiful that we are at a loss for words to describe it. We can only say that it is the most complete triumph of scenic art we have ever witnessed, and we doubt whether it has been excelled in any theatre in the world' (*Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1860: 35*). *The Seven Sisters* season lasted from 26 November 1860 to 10 August 1861, the 'longest unbroken run known up to that time in New York' (Odell, 1927-1949, Vol. 7: 310).

The significance of theatrical transformations was not ignored in nineteenth-century America: George Fox tried to follow up Keene's success straight away with a similar transformation, *The Birth of the Peacock in the Queen Bee's Bower* [4] and Hiram Fuller, on returning to America after thirteen years' absence, adopted "transformation scenes" as his metaphor for the amazing cultural changes he found in his home country (Fuller, 1875). Their historical significance, however, is not so obvious today. Much has been made of the supposed connection between nineteenth-century moving panoramas and twentieth-century film. Both panoramas and film rely upon the mechanical unwinding of spools, both exhibit images on a monumental scale—but these superficial similarities are less substantial than they are circumstantial. Moving panoramas were two-dimensional pictures, whose pigments were as flat as the canvas itself, and whose creaky unwinding across the stage proscenium could only suggest the passage of time and space. Transformation scenes, however, were three-dimensional, using the full depth of the stage. Their transparency and their scenic dissolves allowed the audience to make imaginative leaps in time and space, and to find themselves translated from the commonplace to the vision splendid. Only the cinema could surpass the wonder of this illusion.

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Anita Callaway is a cultural historian whose special interest is the enduring legacy of ephemeral art and performance in peripheral societies. She is the author of *Visual Ephemera: Theatrical Art in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (UNSW Press, 2000), and past editor (1996-1999) of the *Australian Journal of Art*. From 1998 to 2003, she held post-doctoral fellowships awarded by the Centre for Cross-Cultural Research (ANU), the Australian Research Council, and the Getty Institute. Most recently (2003-2004), she was a Kluge Fellow at the Library of Congress, Washington. She is currently an Honorary Associate in Art History and Theory at the University of Sydney.

NOTES

[1] *A Glimpse of Fairyland* transformation, by John Brunton, for *Sinbad the Sailor; or, Tinbad the Tailor, and the Wicked Ogre, and the Good Fairy Submarina*, Theatre Royal, Melbourne, Christmas 1888; *The Dream of Endymion* transformation, by John Hennings, for *Hey-Diddle-Diddle, the Cat and the Fiddle, the Cow Jumped over the Moon; or, Harlequin Sing a Song of Sixpence, a Pocket Full of Rye, and Four and Twenty Blackbirds Baked in a Pie*, at Theatre Royal, Melbourne, Christmas 1876; *Australia's March of Triumph* transformation, by Phil Goatcher, for *Cinderella and the Little Glass Slipper*, Lyceum Theatre, Sydney, 1894.

[2] *The Arrival of the Flying Squadron* transformation by W.J. Wilson and Alexander Habbe, for *Love's Silver Dream; or, The King, the Goddess and the Fays of Fairyland; or, Harlequin Pygmalion and the Golden Demon of the Yawning Chasm*, Adelphi Theatre, Sydney, Christmas 1869. Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* appeared as the penultimate scene of the *Theseus and Ariadne* transformation by Hennings, Harry Grist and John Little, for *The Babes in the Wood*, Theatre Royal, Melbourne, Christmas, 1879; and Guido Reni's *Aurora* as part of *The Triumph of Aurora* transformation by Hennings, for *Harlequin Humpy Dumpy; or, The Magic Eagle and the Golden Bough*, Theatre Royal, Melbourne, Christmas 1859.

[3] For example, see Charles Lamb and Richard Redgrave's comments on John Martin's paintings: Yampolsky, Mikhail. 'Transparency Painting: From Myth to Theater', in Alla Efimova and Lev Manovich (eds.) *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 127-151.

[4] *The Seven Sisters*, with its *Birth of the Butterfly* transformation, opened at Laura Keene's Varieties on 26 November 1860. Fox's *Harlequin Jack, The Giant Killer*, with its *Birth of the Peacock* transformation, opened at the New Bowery Theatre in February 1861.

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THE DARK RIDE: THE ATTRACTION OF EARLY IMMERSIVE ENVIRONMENTS AND THEIR IMPORTANCE IN CONTEMPORARY NEW MEDIA INSTALLATIONS

JOEL ZIKA AND VINCE DZIEKAN

Cities were transformed at the beginning of the twentieth century. New architectural projects and rapid urban expansion led to the emergence of the modern metropolis. Anthony Vidler signals that these changes:

removed the distance that once separated the center and the periphery, a distance confirmed by the sight of the horizon – the view of nature beyond the walls – from inside the city to outside, and that was reassuring to the dweller enclosed "in the peace of the fortress" as the elemental forces of nature were held back from contact but revealed to view. (Vidler, 2000: 86)

In *Warped Space*, he describes how the shifting perspectives and disorientation associated with this new brand of technologized urban landscape lead to a pervading sense of estrangement: 'the estrangement of the inhabitant of a city too rapidly changing and enlarging to comprehend in traditional terms; the estrangement of classes from each other, of individual from individual, of individual from self, of workers from work'. (Vidler, 2000: 65) Estrangement, as an apt description of the underpinning subjective experience of new, distinctively modern forms of space and visual culture, becomes a key to understanding the aesthetic influences and associated behaviour of its viewing subject.

As city dwelling people became increasingly alienated from their local environs, they sought alternative destinations in a variety of forms of escape that involved physical as well as imaginary sorts of 'transport'. With the increasingly rapid proliferation of new technologies came a number of opportunities to do just that through dynamic and deeply engaging forms of popular entertainment. Amuse-ment arcades, and cinemas offering 'immersive destinations', became increasingly obligatory components of any 'downtown' precinct. They also became thoroughly embedded within the commercial and social infrastructure of communications and transportation of the city.

The expansion of existing rail networks, metro systems and electric trolley cars supported the public's transportation (to and from stations or terminal destinations and the journeys between such 'stops'), whether commuting to work or facilitating their leisure and holiday travel. One intriguing extension of such public transportation networks is the 'trolley park', an established amusement park at the end of the line that served as an escape from the city. The park itself was most commonly found in a remote, isolated space, often in a glen, that controlled the ways in and out through limited navigational options. This idea of a secret utopian town hidden in the woods found its way into popular culture and the Western psyche. The journey to the 'end of the line' became a mythological journey into the unknown.

Le Cachot Dark Ride Wildwood, New Jersey

Nosferatu (1919) F.W Murnau

In the 1920's, the 'Dark Ride' was added to the repertoire of many of the trolley parks. Adapting the simple electric trolley technology of the time, these rides created a certain seamlessness, or overall narrative continuity with the visitor's rail journey beyond the gates of the trolley park. These first iterations were based on modifying dodgem cars to run on an electrified track. The path of the ride was carefully mapped out in order to maximize a limited amount of track while still creating the impression of a vast, meandering environment. They also were known as 'Pretzel' rides. [1]

Dark Rides were a strange variation of the popular 'Tunnel of Love' rides, transforming the peacefully secluded and intimate themes of the latter into frightfilled multi-sensory adventures. William F. Mangels, who revolutionized the American amusement industry of the era, observed:

Greatly popular at some resorts are the attractions known as Dark Rides. In these, passenger-carrying vehicles, which may be boats, cars, or small trains, pass through dark tunnels or closed-in passages at a very slow speed. Along the way, surprise scenes such as mechanical ghosts, flirting devils, and similar devices pop up to scare or amuse the slowly passing riders. (http://darkride.com)

Mangels is a figure intimately linked with the history and mythology of Coney Island in New York. He built roller coasters, such as the 'Rough Rider', invented the 'Whip' and carousels. He revolutionized the mechanical engineering involved, building motors that enabled the trains to speed up around long curves and inclines thus increasing both the sense of speed and exhilaration for the

rider. He was also responsible for adding thematics to the ride experience. In one example, the attendants wore military-styled uniforms in order to evoke the Spanish-American War.

The first Dark Ride proper was built by Leon Cassidy at *Sunset Lake* in Bridgeton, New York in 1928. After running his own movie house in the 1910's, Cassidy, and business partner Marvin Rempfer, bought the run-down *Tumbling Dam Amusement Park,* which later became *Sunset Lake*. They turned a disused bowling alley into a sideshow alley and set about re-creating the attractions. In 1929, a Dark Ride was installed under the pier at *Ramagosa's Sportland* in Wildwood, New Jersey. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of these early rides was their appropriation of pre-existing structures, playing on the cultural mythology of the abandoned and derelict buildings and their association with fright-filled experiences.

Dark Rides, such as the *Le Cachot Dark Ride* [2] and *Witches Forest* [3] at Wildwood, New Jersey, were highly dependent on iconographic themes. In many cases they used simple triggering mechanisms designed to produce a maximum effect of surprise using limited visual props. Common features that came to define a Dark Ride attraction were as follows:

-an enclosed structure that created a darkened or dimply lit enclosure;

DARK RIDES WERE A STRANGE VARIATION OF THE POPULAR 'TUNNEL OF LOVE' RIDES, TRANSFORMING THE PEACEFULLY SECLUDED AND INTIMATE THEMES OF THE LATTER INTO FRIGHT-FILLED MULTI-SENSORY ADVENTURES.

-the use of lighting in the form of triggered spotlighting or back light effects;

-a powered ride system based on a passenger vehicle attached to a track that followed a meandering, seemingly random path;

-a reliance on scenography to create the ride experience, which included forms of spatial trickery and animatronic activation of simple figures, scenery and props; and

-sound effects, which could range from simple triggered sounds, such as horns and buzzes, through to voice-over narration and even complex, full musical scores.

The popular appeal of the Dark Ride was immediate and enthusiasm for it quickly spread. Cassidy and Rempfer established a company to manufacture, franchise and market the resulting rides. A standard Pretzel ride was comprised of 5 cars and 350 feet of track. This basic infrastructure would translate into a ride of about 90 seconds in duration and sold in 1929 for a purchase price of $1200. It spawned a rival competitor: the 'Laff in the Dark' ride designed by the Traver Engineering Company. Such rides quickly became ubiquitous features of amusement parks across Pennsylvania, New York and the eastern seaboard of the USA. In 1930, a ride was installed at the Canadian National Exhibition in Ontario. For this particular ride, a large carnival tent with a second inner tent of black canvas was erected to ensure the necessary, controllable darkness. By the 1930's, Pretzel rides were being shipped around the world, taking with them their distinctive visual style and user experience.

The Dark Ride offers one distinctive example of how technology and entertainment became more closely interlinked in the early 20th century. The ability to create dynamic immersive experiences with technology brought innovative new types of narrative spaces with which audiences could engage. The emergence of cinema is one such 'image space'. Illustrative of the impact of technological exploration and the film arts of this formative period is F.W Murnau's classic film *Nosferatu* of 1919. Murnau created a distinctive aesthetic in this film which can be described as 'gothic space': the framed image reduced to an almost pure iconography with limited depth of field and bleak and simple sets. The apparitions on screen assume a dream-like tangibility through sustained close-ups, a distinctive feature of Murnau's filmmaking. This technique, exemplified in classic scenes featuring lead actor Max Schreck looming up towards the screen, interjecting into the physical space of the viewer like a scary mechanized monster from a ghost train, affects an obliteration of the boundaries that separate the real from the unreal.

Following the lead of *Nosferatu*, German cinema continued to break amazing new ground with special effects. Expressionist filmmakers and production designers explored a fusion of screen aesthetics and mechanics: the 'cineplastics' of the new medium. Murnau and his cameraman Fritz Arno Wagner applied a wide variety of techniques and ingenious 'tricks', such as treating strips of negatives before shooting, in what was referred to as a 'one-turn-one-picture' manner. The Film Society of London in 1928 described the resulting cinematic sensation as 'combining the ridiculous and the horrid' (Krackauer, 1947/1974: 79). Much of this preceding production took place at Germany's UFA Pictures, and included Murnau's last film *Faust* before Marnau emigrated to Hollywood in 1926. At its peak, it was also responsible for realizing Fritz Lang's vision (based on his first impressions of a nocturnal New York City) for *Metropolis* (1927). These two films represented the zenith of the German expressionist movement and solidified its particular influence on the spatial readings of film. In the 1930s the Dark Ride would come to symbolise the growth in the popular interest in gothic iconography in America, preceding and influencing the popular fascination and appeal for films of the genre such as Todd Browning's *Dracula* (1931) and James Whale's *Frankenstein* (1931).

The Dark Ride, both thematically and technically, exhibited parallels with the cinematic movements of the time through a shared spatial aesthetic. While the Dark Ride and Gothic film are both expressionistic art forms that rely on the intermingling of key formal techniques to construct their themes and concepts, the way that the viewer is expected to interact within this construction is vastly different.

Writing in the midst of this era, in which cinema made significant advances in camera technology, special effects as well as the language of filmic montage, Erwin Panofsky articulates the type of imaginative 'transportation' associated with the viewing experience of film:

In a movie theatre… the spectator has a fixed seat, but only physically…

Aesthetically, he is in permanent motion, as his eye identifies itself with the lens of the camera which permanently shifts in distance and direction. And the space presented to the spectator is as moveable as the spectator is himself. Not only do solid bodies move in space, but space itself moves, changing, turning, dissolving and recrystalizing.

(Krackauer, 1947/1974: 6)

Panofsky's comments highlight the relationship of the viewer to screen discourse: the cinema-goer is a 'spectator', one who follows and identifies with the lens of the camera, not a 'participant'. Conversely, within the Dark Ride, the viewer's position in the overall narrativity of the phantasmagorical environment is unstable: at one moment this might involve observing a scene or situation take place; at other times it involves becoming a participatory subject who is directly confronted, whose circulation through the space brings them 'into' the midst of the action. The devices that provoke these feelings are admittedly simplistic but the effect is strong and visceral. Dramatically lit dioramas, recognized by the counter pointing of localised illumination with enveloping darkness, typifies a production technique that is closely associated with the visual style of the Gothic film. In the Dark Ride this play of visibility is used to create self-contained thematic environments framed by darkness. [4] When sequentially arranged, they interject and produce disruptive transitions between individual settings, offering a succession of set pieces that involve different characters and divergent scenarios. The participant's journey through these themes and spaces acts to link these episodes into a composite narrative experience. This moving experience offers a sequential 'time code' that propels the viewer through the narrative represented in the space; aware of immanent action yet uncertain of what will be waiting around the next corner. The role of the participant is constantly changing and this tension or estrangement becomes the Dark Ride's unique feature.

THE PARTICIPANT'S ESTRANGED ENGAGEMENT WITH THE DARK RIDE CAN BE SEEN TO BE EMERGING IN NEWER FORMS OF SCREEN BASED MEDIA ARTS.

The participant's estranged engagement with the Dark Ride can be seen to be emerging in newer forms of screen based media arts. One contemporary work that exemplifies this is Gary Hill's projected media installation *Tall Ships* (1992). As with the many screen based new media exhibits, the work is screened in almost complete darkness with few signals to guide the audience around the gallery space. Instead the projections that make up the work are themselves the exclusive sources of light in the space, much like the glowing facades of fairground attractions, intermittently interrupting the enveloping, cavernous darkness. Having unknowingly journeyed down a dark corridor the 'visitor' finds themselves in a room of apparitions, mutely approaching and withdrawing again, swallowed by the expanses of darkness. The narrative seems familiar but ultimately ambiguous. The estrangement of the lost souls themselves and the viewer, trying to find resolution in this nether-world, gives the piece its haunting resonance. Hill creates connections with a myriad of iconic symbolism, subtly intertwining these visuals with the immediately sensual and experiential. The work is not (in contrast to much new media work) an interface for a predetermined user interaction but instead offers a deeply resonant, participatory event, your own situation made to feel as strange as that of the ghost-like figures that surround you, trying in vain to speak to the viewer. Hill's *Tall Ships* also resonates with the trace of its antecedents, gothic cinema and the Dark Ride, in particular through its synthesis of darkened enclosure, lighting effects and immersive viewing experience.

In its particular time and place, the trolley park successfully lured people out of the city to escape and explore alternative, imaginary destinations that could be found at a safe remove, somewhere 'else'. The trolley park offered a series of

phantasmagorical amusements and simulated, poly-sensory events that overwhelmed the visitor with dizzying, disorientating affect. Today, the direction of the gravitational pull towards escapism draws us deep into the dark heart of the postmodern mediascape. As cities spread out and disperse around the edges, and the neon-lit movie palaces and sideshow arcades of a bygone era transform into suburban megaplexes, vicarious adventures and other-worldly experiences have found their way back from the dark fringes on the edge of town into the very cultural centre of today's cities. With respect to present destinations of media exploration, we have witnessed the development of a range of new venues for an engaged, entertaining examination of our cultural environment. New media spaces, such as the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne and the Black Box at the Arts Centre act not as neutral domains but as extensions of the city (our contemporary trolley parks), where we can comment and examine the overlapping discourses of mediated experiences that fill our everyday lives. Unlike conventional galleries or museums, entering such hybrid, media-saturated spaces, where there is no single 'screen', navigational path or viewing position, the viewer is forced to engage, explore and interact making new media arts venues the sites for modern phantasmagoria.

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NOTES

[1] Anecdotally, this particular name was attributed because a rider was heard to exclaim that he'd felt like he'd bent into a pretzel by the twisting path of the ride (ref. 'Send 'Em Out Laffing' by Bill Luca found at http://www.laffinthe dark.com).

[2] The *Le Cachot Dark Ride* was in operation until 1986 at *Kennywood Park*, West Mifflin, Pennsylvania. It featured imagery from renowned theme park artist Bill Tracey.

[3] *Hunt's Pier* in Wildwood, New Jersey, started in 1935 by William C. Hunt, was the home to many custom dark rides.

[4] Joel Zika's work deals directly with the scenography of early gothic film, adapting it to new environments and conditions. His show *Terrible Presence* (2004) breaks the spectator-based relationship with film by offering instead a new distorted view of the gothic cinematic landscape.

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FURTHER READING

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Nosferatu (1919) F.W Murnau

SPECTRES FROM THE ARCHIVE

MARTYN JOLLY

Reproduced with permission from the forthcoming anthology Le Mois de la Photographie, edited by Martha Langford, published by McGill-Queens University Press.

The dead have been making themselves visible to the living for millennia. In Purgatory, Dante asked Virgil how it was that he was able to see the souls of the dead with whom he was speaking, while their bodies had been left behind in the grave. Virgil beckoned a spirit, who replied that, just as the colours of reflected rays filled rain-filled air, so the unresurrected soul virtually impressed its form upon the air. [1] Similarly, the ghost of Hamlet's father was as invulnerable to blows from a weapon as the air. It was a mere image, which faded at cock-crow. But, for the last several centuries, these diaphanous, insubstantial condensations of light and air have been acquiring a technological, rather than a natural, phenomenology. And now contemporary artists are deploying those spectres as a means to directly address the present from the past.

In the years following the French Revolution, Étienne-Gaspard Robertson terrified crowds with the first phantasmagoria show, which he staged in a convent that had been abandoned by its nuns during the Terror. He made his magic-lantern projections of paintings of gory figures such as *The Bleeding Nun* appear to be phantasmic entities by blacking out their glass backgrounds and projecting them onto stretched gauzes, waxed screens, and billows of smoke. By placing the magic lantern on wheels, which was dollied backwards by an operator, he gave these luminous, translucent apparitions the power, suddenly, to loom out over the audience. At an 1825 London phantasmagoria show, the impact on the audience of this effect was electric. According to an eyewitness, the hysterical screams of a few ladies in the first seats of the pit induced a cry of "lights" from their immediate friends. When the operator made the phantom, *The Red Woman of Berlin*, appear to dash forward again, the "confusion was instantly at a height which was alarming to the stoutest; the indiscriminate rush to the doors was prevented only by the deplorable state of most of the ladies; the stage was scaled by an adventurous few, the Red Woman's sanctuary violated, the unlucky operator's cavern of death profaned, and some of his machinery overturned, before light restored order and something like an harmonious understanding with the cause of alarm" (Warner, 2001: 75). [2]

Illustration in Etienne-Gaspard Robertson, *Mémoires récréatifs, scientifiques et anecdotiques*, 1830–34, Stanford Library.

In the eighteenth century the host of supernatural beings, such as ghosts, devils, and angels, that had long inhabited the outside world alongside humans were finally internalized under the illumination of Reason as mere inner-projections of consciousness – fantasies of the mind or pathologies of the brain. During this period, in Terry Castle's phrase, "ghosts and spectres retain their ambiguous grip on the human imagination; they simply migrate into the space of the mind." (Castle, 1995: 135)

But, as she goes on to explain, technologies such as the phantasmagoria allowed these images of consciousness to project themselves outside the mind once more, into the space of shared human experience. They were destined to return from the brain to respectralize visual culture.

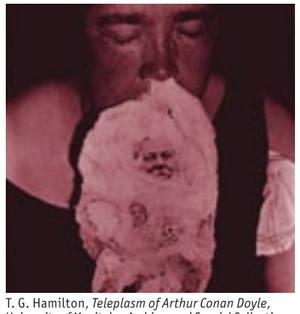
The eighteenth century also changed the way in which death was experienced. No longer an ever-present communal experience, the effect of someone's death became focused onto a few individuals – the family – just as the various processes of death and mourning became privatized and quarantined within the institutions of the home, the hospital, and the necropolis (Ariés, 1981: cited ibid.). One response to this change was the rise in the nineteenth century of an extraordinary cult of the dead – Spiritualism – which gripped the popular imagination well into the twentieth century.

Spiritualism was the belief that the dead lived and that they could communicate. It was a quintessentially modernist phenomenon, and Spiritualists, as well as the spirits themselves, used all emerging technologies to demonstrate the truth of survival. [3]

The early years of Spiritualist communication were conducted under the metaphoric reign of the telegraph. In 1848 the world's first modern Spiritualist medium, a young girl called Kate Fox, achieved worldwide fame by developing a simplified Morse code of raps to communicate with the spirits who haunted her small house in upstate New York.

Twenty years later, portraits of spirits began to appear on the carte-de-visite plates of the world's first medium photographer, William Mumler. Spirit photographs were a personal phantasmagoria. Just as Robertson's phantoms were lantern slides projected onto screens, spirit photographs were actually prepared images double-exposed onto the negative. But the spirit photographer's clients sat for their portrait filled with the belief that they might once more see the countenance of a loved one; they concentrated on the loved one's memory during the period of the exposure; and they often joined the photographer in the alchemical cave of the darkroom to witness their own face appear on the negative, to be shortly joined by another face welling up from the emulsion – a spirit whom they usually recognized as a loved one returning to them from the oblivion of death. For these clients, the spirit photograph was not just a spectacle; it was an almost physical experience of the truth of spirit return.

Public interest in spirit photography reached its highest pitch in the period just after the First World War, when the unprecedented death toll of the war, combined with the effect of an influenza pandemic, caused a public craze for Spiritualism. [4] On Armistice Day in 1922 the London spirit photographer Mrs Ada Deane stood above the crowd at Whitehall and opened her lens for the entire duration of the Two Minutes Silence. When the plate was developed it showed a "river of faces," an "aerial procession of men," who appeared to float dimly above the crowd (Jolly, 2001).



T. G. Hamilton, *Teleplasm of Arthur Conan Doyle*, University of Manitoba, Archives and Special Collections

Tony Oursler, *The Influence Machine*, 2000 oursler.net

When the ardent Spiritualist convert Sir Arthur Conan Doyle lectured to a packed house at Carnegie Hall the following year, he flashed this image up on the lantern-slide screen. There was a moment of silence, then gasps rose and spread over the audience, and the voices and sobs of women could be heard. A woman in the audience screamed out through the darkness, "Don't you see them? Don't you see their faces?" before falling into a trance (Jones, 1989: 193). The next day the *New York Times* described the image on the screen:

Over the heads of the crowd in the picture floated countless heads of men with strained grim expressions. Some were faint, some were blurs, some were marked out distinctly on the plate so that they might have been recognised by those who knew them. There was nothing else, just these heads, without even necks or shoulders, and all that could be seen distinctly were the fixed, stern, look of men who might have been killed in battle. (Doyle, 1923: np)

The Spiritualist understanding of photography was underwritten by a keen and highly imaginative conception of two substances: ether and ectoplasm. Since Morse's first telegraphing of the words "What hath God wrought?" in 1844, and Kate Fox's first telegraphing to the spirits four years later, the air had steadily thickened as it was filled by more and more of the electromagnetic spectrum: from the electrical ionization of residual gas in a cathode-ray tube (discovered by Sir William Crookes, who also photographed the full body materialization of a spirit Katie King by electric light), to x-rays (developed in part by Sir Oliver Lodge, who communicated with his dead son, Raymond, for many years after he fell in the First World War), to radio waves, to television transmission. From the late nineteenth century until the period when Einstein's theories made it redundant, most physicists agreed that some intangible interstitial substance, which they called ether, must be necessary as the medium to carry and support X-rays, radio waves, and perhaps even telepathic waves, from the point of transmission to point of reception. Since sounds, messages, and images could be sent through thin air and solid objects, why not portraits from the other side? [5]

If ether allowed Spiritualist beliefs to be made manifest through electrical science, ectoplasm allowed them to be made manifest through the body. For about thirty years after the turn of the century, various mediums, most of them women, extruded this mysterious, mucoid, placental substance from their bodily orifices while groaning, as though they were giving birth. Ectoplasm continued the long association between Spiritualist receptivity and the feminine – mediums were supposedly passive and unintellectual, but sensitive and attuned at a more elemental level.

Sometimes this all-purpose, proto-plasmic, interdimensional stuff seemed to be able to grow itself into the embryonic forms of spiritual beings, while at other times it acted as a membranous emulsion that took their two-dimensional photographic imprint. For instance, on 1 May 1932 a psychic investigator from Winnipeg, Dr T.G. Hamilton, photographed a teleplasmic image of the spirit of Doyle (who had "crossed over" the year before) impressed into the ectoplasm that came from the mouth and nostrils of a medium.

Just as spirit photographs were, in fact, various forms of double exposure, teleplasms were small photographs and muslin swallowed by the medium and then regurgitated in the darkness – to be caught, briefly, by the investigator's flash during the intense psychodrama of the séance. Nonetheless, for the Spiritualists, they confirmed an associative chain that poetically and technically extended all the way from ectoplasm to photographic emulsion – creamy, hyper sensitive to light, and bathed in chemicals. [6]

While the Spiritualists were placing photography at the centre of their cult of the dead, modernity's cultural theorists were placing death at the centre of their response to photography. They compared photography to embalming, resurrection, and spectralization. For them, the horrible, uncanny image of the corpse, with its mute intimation of our own mortality, haunted every photograph. To Siegfried Kracauer, writing in the 1920s, a photograph was good at preserving the image of the external castoff remnants of people, such as their clothes, but could not capture their real being. The photograph "dissolves into the sum of its details, like a corpse, yet stands tall as if full of life" (Kracauer, 1995: 55). The blind production and consumption of thousands upon thousands of these photographs was the emergent mass media's attempt to substitute itself for the acceptance of death, which was implicit in personal, organic memory:

What the photographs by their sheer accumulation attempt to banish is the recollection of death, which is part and parcel of every memory image. In the illustrated magazines the world has become a photographable present, and the photographed present has been entirely eternalised. (Kracauer, 1995: 59) [7]

To a subsequent critic, André Bazin, our embrace of the photograph was also a pathetic attempt to beat death. The sepia phantoms in old family albums were:

no longer traditional family portraits, but rather the disturbing presence of lives halted at a set moment in their duration ... by the power of an impassive mechanical process: for photography does not create eternity, as art does, it embalms time, rescuing it simply from its proper corruption. (Bazin, 1967: 242)

In Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, his almost necrophilic meditation on photography, written while in the grim grip of grief for his mother, the photograph's indexicality, the fact that it was a direct imprint from the real, made it a phenomenological tautology, where both sign and referent "are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures" (Barthes, 1982: 5-6). In posing for a portrait photograph, he says, "I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death ... I am truly becoming a spectre" (Barthes, 1982: 14). Later he reduces the essence of the portrait photograph down even further. It is not only an exact process of optical transcription but an exquisitely attenuated chemical transfer, an effluvial emanation of another body – "an ectoplasm of 'what-had-been': neither image nor reality, a new being, really" (Barthes, 1982: 87).

WHILE THE SPIRITUALISTS WERE PLACING PHOTOGRAPHY AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR CULT OF THE DEAD, MODERNITY'S CULTURAL THEORISTS WERE PLACING DEATH AT THE CENTRE OF THEIR RESPONSE TO PHOTOGRAPHY.

Although also wildly extrapolating upon the intimate connection between photography and death, the Spiritualist use of photography ran counter to this conception of the photograph as irrevocably about pastness, about the instantaneous historicization and memorialization of time. Spirit photographs cheerfully included multiple times and multiple time vectors. Spirit photographs were collected and used by Spiritualists very much as the millions of other personal snapshots were kept in albums and cradled in hands. But for them these photographs did not represent the exquisite attenuation of the 'that has been' of a moment from the past, disappearing further down the time tunnel as it was gazed at in the present, or the frozen image's inevitable prediction of our own mortality. Rather, they were material witnesses to the possibility of endless emergences, returns, and simultaneities.

The images were performative. They worked best when their sitters saw them well up from the depths of the emulsion in the medium's developing tray, or suddenly flash on the screen in a lantern-slide lecture. Their power lay not in their reportage of a pro-filmic real elsewhere in time and space, but in their audience's affective response to them in the present time and place. They solicited a tacit

suspension of disbelief from their audience, at the same time as they brazenly inveigled a tacit belief in special effects. Spirit photographs used the currency of the audience's thirst for belief to trade up on the special effects they borrowed from cinema and stage magic – which had also descended from the phantasmagoria. They shamelessly exploited the wounded psychology of their audience to confirm their truth, not by their mute indexical reference to the real, but through the audience's own indexical enactment of their traumatic affect. Their truth was not an anterior truth, but a manifest truth that was indexed by members of the audience as they cried out at the shock of recognition for their departed loved ones.

In mainstream thought about photography, the two signal characteristics that defined photography and photography alone, physical indexicality and temporal ambiguity, were, in their turn, produced by two technical operations: the lens projecting an image of an anterior scene into the camera, and the blade of the shutter slicing that cone of light into instants. But the Spiritualist theory of photography discounted that technical assemblage, along with the "decisive moments" it produced. It shifted the locus of photography back to the stretched sensitive membrane of the photographic emulsion, and it dilated the frozen instant of the snapshot over the full duration of the séance.

SPIRIT PHOTOGRAPHS WERE COLLECTED AND USED BY SPIRITUALISTS VERY MUCH AS THE MILLIONS OF OTHER PERSONAL SNAPSHOTS WERE KEPT IN ALBUMS AND CRADLED IN HANDS.

Many contemporary artists are rediscovering the richly imaginative world the Spiritualists created for themselves. Others are strategically deploying the same technical effects once surreptitiously used by spirit photographers. These contemporary invocations are no longer directly underpinned by Spiritualist faith, but they reinhabit and reinvent the metaphysical, performative, and iconographic legacy of the Spiritualists. For these artists, as much as for the Spiritualists themselves, images, bodies, beliefs, and memories swirl around and collide in intoxicating obsession. And technologies of image storage, retrieval, transmission, and reproduction are simultaneously the imaginative tropes, and the technical means, for communicating with the beyond. For the Spiritualists, the beyond was a parallel "other side" to our mundane existence. For some contemporary artists, it is quite simply the past. [8]

The New York–based artist Zoë Beloff, for example, folds famous episodes from the history of Spiritualism back into her use of new interactive technologies. Examples are the interactive CD-Rom, *Beyond* (1997); the stereoscopic film based on the extraordinary "auto-mythology" of the nineteenth-century medium Madame D'Esperance, *Shadowland or Light from the Other Side* (2000); and the installation of stereoscopic projections based on the first séances of Spiritualism's most famous ectoplasmic medium, *Ideoplastic Materializations of Eva C.* (2004). Some of Beloff's works resurrect dead-end technologies and apparatuses, such as a 1950s stereoscopic home-movie camera, to link contemporary notions of virtuality directly to nineteenth-century stage illusions, such as "Pepper's Ghost," where a live performer behind a sheet of glass interacted with a virtual phantasm reflected in it. She deploys the occult to reintroduce desire, wonder, fear, and belief into what most media histories would have us think was just the bland march of ever-increasing technological sophistication. Like many of us, and like all the people to first see a photograph or hear a sound recording, Beloff is still fascinated by the fact that the dead live on, re-embodied in technology. She remains interested in conjuring them up and interfacing between past and present like a Spiritualist medium. [9]

For his installation *The Influence Machine* (2000), the New York video artist Tony Oursler projected giant ghost heads of the pioneer "mediums" of the ether, such as Robertson, John Logie Baird, and Kate Fox, onto trees and billows of smoke in the heart of the world's two biggest media districts, London's Soho Square and New York's Madison Square Park. These disembodied heads uttered disjointed phrases of dislocation and fragmentation, while, elsewhere, a fist banged out raps, and ghostly texts ticker-taped up tree trunks. In his *Timestream*, an extended timeline of the development of "mimetic technologies," Oursler drew an occult trajectory through the more conventional history of media "development," and he identified that the dead no longer reside on an inaccessible "other side" but survive in media repositories. To him, "television archives store millions of images of the dead, which wait to be broadcast … to the living … at this point, the dead come back to life to have an influence … on the living. Television is, then, truly the spirit world of our age. It preserves images of the dead which then continue to haunt us" (Warner, 2001: 72)

The mostfamous spectre of the nineteenth century was the spectre of Communism, which, in the very first phrase of the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx declared to be haunting Europe. But this, unlike almost every other spectre, was not a grim revenant returning from the past but a bright harbinger of the future, when capitalism would inevitably collapse under its internal contradictions, ushering in the golden age of Communism. But now Communism is dead and buried, and when its spectre is raised it is not to haunt us, but to be a parable affirming the supposed "naturalness" of capitalism. [10]

This circular irony formed the background to Stan Douglas's installation *Suspiria* from Documenta 11 of 2003. The spectral temper of the imagery was achieved by overlapping a video signal with the oversaturated Technicolor palette of the 1977 cult horror film *Suspiria*. The piece deconstructed Grimm's 250 fairy tales into a database of narrative elements, often centring on characters vainly seeking shortcuts to wealth and happiness by extracting payments and debts. These fragments were videoed using actors wearing clothes and make-up in the primary colours. The chromatic channel of the video signal was separated and randomly superimposed, like an early model colour TV with ghosting reception, over a switching series of live surveillance video-feeds from a stony subterranean labyrinth. These fleeting evanescent apparitions endlessly chased each other round and round the blank corridors. (Douglas, 2002: 557)

In addition to the phantasmagoric apparatuses of projection and superimposition, with their long histories in mainstream entertainment as well as the occult, artists such as Douglas or Oursler have begun to deploy another newly occulted apparatus – the database. For instance, *Life after Wartime*, presented at the Sydney Opera House in 2003, was an interactive performance of an archive of crime-scene photographs that had been assembled by Sydney's police force in the decades following the Second World War. Kate Richards and Ross Gibson sat at laptops and midi keyboards and brought up strings of images which, combined with evocative haikus, were projected onto two large screens. Beneath the screens, The Necks, a jazz trio well known for its ominous movie music, improvised a live soundtrack of brooding ambience. Although not directly picturing spectres, the texts and images generated open-ended non-specific narratives around a set of semi-fictionalized characters and locations in the "port city" of Sydney. These characters became invisible presences occupying the creepy emptiness of the crime scenes. The element of automation, in the way the story engine generated the loose narratives, preserved the integrity, the artifactuality, of the original archive. Ross Gibson wrote:

THE ANTHROPOLOGICAL PHOTOGRAPHS USED BY URBAN INDIGENOUS PHOTOGRAPHERS ARE NOT MONUMENTS, AS THE STATUES OR PHOTOGRAPHS OF WHITE PIONEERS MIGHT ASPIRE TO BE, BECAUSE THEY DO NOT COMMEMORATE A HISTORICAL CLOSURE ON THE PAST.

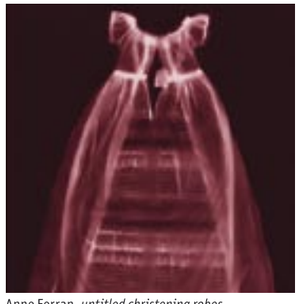
Whenever I work with historical fragments, I try to develop an aesthetic response appropriate to the form and mood of the source material. This is one way to know what the evidence is trying to tell the future. I must not impose some pre-determined genre on these fragments. I need to remember that the evidence was created by people and systems of reality independent of myself. The archive holds knowledge in excess of my own predispositions. This is why I was attracted to the material in the first instance – because it appeared peculiar, had secrets to divulge and promised to take me somewhere past my own limitations. Stepping off from this intuition, I have to trust that the archive has occulted in it a logic, a coherent pattern which can be ghosted up from its disparate details so that I can gain a new, systematic understanding of the culture that has left behind such spooky detritus. In this respect I am looking to be a medium for the archive. I want to "séance up" the spirit of the evidence. (Gibson, 1999: 30)

In seeking to be a voodoo spiritualist "medium" for the archive, the work was not trying to quote from it, or mine it for retro tidbits ripe for appropriation, so much as to make contact with it as an autonomous netherworld of images. This sense of the autonomy of other times preserved in the archive also informs the work of the Sydney photographer Anne Ferran. In 1997 she made a "metaphorical x-ray" of a nineteenth-century historic house. She carefully removed items of the colonial family's clothing from its drawers and cupboards and, in a darkened room, laid them gently onto photographic paper before exposing it to light. In the photograms the luminous baby dresses and night-gowns floated ethereally against numinous blackness. To Ferran, the photogram process made them look "three-dimensional, life-like, as if it has breathed air into them in the shape of a body … With no context to secure these images, it's left up to an audience to deal with visual effects that seem to have arisen of their own accord, that are visually striking but in an odd, hermetic way." (Ferran, 2000: 167–70)

In contrast to this diaphanous ineffability, Rafael Goldchain's *Familial Ground* (2001) was an autobiographical installation in which the artist physically en-

tered the archive of the family album, seeking to know and apprehend the dead. He re-enacted family photographs of his ancestors, building on his initial genetic resemblance to them by using theatrical make-up, costuming, and digital alteration, weaving the replicated codes of portraiture through their shared DNA. He saw these performances, along with the uncannily doubled portraits they produced, as acts of mourning, remembrance, inheritance, and legacy for his Eastern European Jewish heritage, which had been sundered by the Holocaust. The portraits supplemented public acts of Holocaust mourning with a private genealogical communion with the spectres of his ancestors who still inhabited his family's albums. The dead became a foundation for his identity, which he could pass on to his son. They took on his visage as they emerged into visibility, reminding him of the unavoidable and necessary work of inheritance. [11]

The Canadian First Nations artist Carl Beam also builds his contemporary identity on the basis of a special connection he feels to old photographs. He uses liquid photo-emulsion, photocopy transfer, and collage to layer together historic photographs, such as romanticized portraits of Sitting Bull, and personal photographs, such as family snaps, into ghostly palimpsests. The collages directly call on spectres from the past to



Anne Ferran, *untitled christening robes*, 2001 from Flock

Leah King-Smith, *'Untitled'*, from Patterns of Connection 1991

authorize his personal, bricolaged, spiritual symbology. They allow him to time travel and to rebuild a foundation for his identity out of fragments from the past.

In 1980, Australia's most eminent art historian, Bernard Smith, gave a series of lectures under the title "The Spectre of Truganini." In the nineteenth century, Truganini had become a much-photographed colonial celebrity as the "last" of the "full-blood" Tasmanian Aborigines. Smith's argument was that, despite white Australia's attempt to blot out and forget the history of its own brutal displacement of Australia's indigenous population, the repressed would continue to return and haunt contemporary Australia until proper amends were made (Smith, 1980). [12]

As indigenous activism grew in intensity and sophistication during the 1980s and 1990s, anthropological portraits, such as those of Truganini, began to be conceived of not only as the theoretical paradigm for colonial attempts at genocide but also as acts of violence in themselves, technically akin to, and instrumentally part of, that very process of attempted genocide. They began to be used by young indigenous artists to "occult up" their ancestors. Their reuse attempted to capture a feeling of active dialogue with the past, a two-way corridor through time, or a sense of New Age channelling.

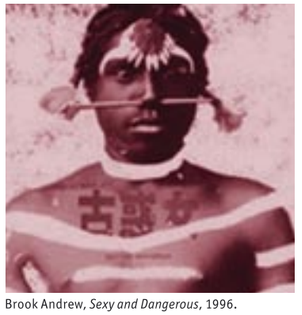
The anthropological photographs used by urban indigenous photographers are not monuments, as the statues or photographs of white pioneers might aspire to be, because they do not commemorate a historical closure on the past. In a way they are anti-monuments, images of unquiet ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves. In a Barthesian-inspired meditation on nineteenth-century anthropological photographs, the indigenous photographer Brenda L. Croft, who uses Photoshop to float imprecatory words of loss within images of her ancestors, retroactively invested the agency of political resistance in the portraits. "Images like these have haunted me since I was a small child ... [and] were instrumental in guiding me to use the tools of photography in my work ... The haunted faces of our ancestors challenge and remind us to commemorate them and acknowledge their existence, to help lay them, finally, to rest" (Croft, 1997: 9, 14)

However, rather than laying their ancestors to rest, some indigenous artists have photographically raised them from the dead to enrol them in various campaigns of resistance. One of the first Australian indigenous photographers to receive international attention was Leah King-Smith. Her 1992 exhibition "Patterns of Connection" travelled throughout Australia as well as internationally. For her large, deeply coloured photo compositions, anthropological photographs were copied and liberated from the archives of the State Library of Victoria and superimposed as spectral presences on top of hand-coloured landscapes. This process allowed Aboriginal people to flow back into their land, into a virtual space reclaimed for them by the photographer. In the words of the exhibition's catalogue: "From the flaring of velvety colours and forms, translucent ghosts appear within a numinous world" (Phipps, 1992: np)

Writers at the time commented on the way her photographs seemed to remobilize their subjects. The original portraits "contained" their subjects as objects, which could be held in the hand, collected, stored, and viewed at will. Their placement of the figure well back from the picture plane within the fabricated environment of a photographer's studio created a visual gulf between viewer and object. But King-Smith reversed that order. Her large, colour-saturated images "impressed" the viewer: "The figures are brought right to the picture plane, seemingly extending beyond the frame and checking our gaze with theirs" (Williamson, 1996: 46)

King-Smith comes closest to holding spiritualist beliefs of her own. She concluded her artist's statement by asking that "people activate their inner sight to view Aboriginal people" King-Smith, 1992). Her work animistically gave the museum photographs she reused a spiritualist function. Some of her fellow indigenous artists thought the work too generalist. It lacked specific knowledge of the stories of the people whose photographs were reused, and it didn't have explicit permission from the traditional owners of the land they were made to haunt. But the critic Anne Marsh described that as a "strategic essentialism." "There is little doubt, in my mind, that Leah King-Smith is a kind of New Age evangelist and many serious critics will dismiss her work on these grounds," she wrote. "... But I am interested in why the images are so popular and how they tap into a kind of cultural imaginary [in order] to conjure the ineffable ... Leah King-Smith's figures resonate with a constructed aura: [they are] given an enhanced ethereal quality through the use of mirrors and projections. The 'mirror with a memory' comes alive as these ancestral ghosts ... seem to drift through the landscape as a seamless version of nineteenth century spirit photography" (Marsh, 1999:117).

While not buying into such direct visual spirituality, other indigenous artists have also attempted to use the power of the old photograph to make the contemporary viewer the subject of a defiant,



Brook Andrew, *Sexy and Dangerous*, 1996.

Darren Siwes, *Region Narration*, 2004

politically updated gaze returned from the past. In a series of works from the late 1990s, Brook Andrew invested his nineteenth-century subjects, copied from various state archives, with a libidinous body image inscribed within the terms of contemporary queer masculinity and emblazoned them with defiant Barbara Krugeresque slogans such as *Sexy and Dangerous* (1996), *I Split Your Gaze* (1997), and *Ngajuu Ngaay Nginduugirr* [I See You] (1998).

Andrew exploits the auratic power of the original Aboriginal subjects simply to re-project the historically objectifying gaze straight back to the present, to be immediately reinscribed in a contemporary politico-sexual discourse. However, other strategic reoccupations of the archive show more respect for the dead and seek only to still the frenetic shuttle of appropriative gazes between us and them. In Fiona Foley's re-enactments of the colonial photographs of her Badtjala ancestors, *Native Blood* (1994), the gaze is stopped dead in its tracks by Foley's own obdurate, physical body. To the post-colonial theorist Olu Oguibe: "In Foley's photographs the Other makes herself available, exposes herself, invites our gaze if only to re-enact the original gaze, the original violence perpetrated on her. She does not disrupt this gaze nor does she return it. She recognises that it is impossible to return the invasive gaze ... Instead Foley forces the gaze to blink, exposes it to itself" (Oguibe, 1995-6: 58–9).

But the ghosts of murdered and displaced Aborigines aren't the only spectres to haunt Australia. White Australia also has a strong thread of spectral imagery running through its public memory for the ANZAC digger soldiers who fell and were buried in their thousands in foreign graves during all of the twentieth century's major wars. Following the First World War, an official cult of the memory developed around the absent bodies of the dead, involving painting, photography, elaborate annual dawn rituals, and a statue erected in every town.

Like indigenous ghosts, Anzac ghosts also solicit the fickle memory of a too self-absorbed, too quickly forgetful later generation. Since 1999 the photographer Darren Siwes, of indigenous and Dutch heritage, has performed a

series of spectral photographs in Australia and the United Kingdom. By ghosting himself standing implacably in front of various buildings, he refers to an indigenous haunting, certainly; but because he is ghosted standing to attention while wearing a generic suit, he also evokes the feeling of being surveilled by a generalized, accusatory masculinity – exactly the same feeling that a memorial ANZAC statue gives.

Siwes's photographs are mannered, stiff, and visually dull, but they have proved to be extraordinarily popular with curators in Australia and internationally. One reason for his widespread success may be that the spectre he creates is entirely generic – a truculent black man in a suit – and therefore open to any number of guilt-driven associations from the viewer. Similarly, many of the other indigenous artists who have used photographs to haunt the present have produced works that are visually stilted or overwrought. But they, too, have been widely successful, not because of their inherent visual qualities but because of the powerful ethical and political question that the idea of a spectre is able to supplicate, or exhort, from viewers who themselves are caught up in a fraught relationship between the present and the past, current government policy and historical dispossession. That question is straightforward: What claims do victims from past generations have on present generations to redeem them? [13]

AS PHOTOGRAPHIC ARCHIVES GROW IN SIZE, ACCESSIBILITY, AND MALLEABILITY, THEY WILL INCREASINGLY BECOME OUR PSYCHIC UNDERWORLD FROM WHICH SPECTRES OF THE PAST ARE CONJURED.

As photographic archives grow in size, accessibility, and malleability, they will increasingly become our psychic underworld from which spectres of the past are conjured. Like Dante's purgatory, they will order virtual images of the dead in layers and levels, waiting to interrogate the living or be interrogated by them. Through photography, the dead can be invoked to perform as revenants. They will be increasingly used to warn, cajole, inveigle, polemicize, and seduce. But, as always, it is we, the living, who will do the work of interpretation or perform the act of response. Like the viewers of Robertson's phantasmagoria, we think we know that these spectres are mere illusions, the products of mechanical tricks and optical effects. But we also know that the images we are seeing were once people who actually lived, and that the technologies through which they are appearing to us now will uncannily project our own substance through time and space in the future, when we ourselves are dead. This knowledge gives photographic spectres more than just rhetorical effect. They can pierce through historical quotation with a sudden temporal and physical presence. Yet, at the same time, they remain nothing more than the provisional technical animation of flat, docile images. In the end, they are as invulnerable to our attempts to hold onto them as the air.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Martyn Jolly is an artist and a writer. As an artist he reconsiders, re-contextualises and re-frames details from photographs found either in archives or in the mass media. He has recently completed a PhD at Sydney University. The thesis, titled *Fake Photographs: Making Truths in Photography*, dealt with issues of the 'true' and the 'fake' in early twentieth century reportage and propaganda photography and their relationship to recent technological changes in the image; spirit photography in the early twentieth century and its relationship to recent discussions of photography and memory; and contemporary Australian Aboriginal photography and its incorporation of the historical photographic artefact. He has published articles on these topics in The *History of Photography* journal, and given papers at conferences at UK and Australian universities as well as the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Australia, and the Centre for Contemporary Photography.

NOTES

[1] *Purgatory*, 25, 11, 94–101, cited in Warner, "'Ourself Behind Ourself — concealed"…'. For a discussion of Dante's Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory in relation to cyberspace, see M. Wertheim, The *Pearly Gates of Cyberspace: A History of Space from Dante to the Internet*, (Sydney: Doubleday, 1999), 44–75.

[2] For more on the phantasmagoria, see T. Castle, 'Phantasmagoria and the Metaphorics of Modern Reverie', in *The Female Thermometer: Eighteenth-Century Culture and the Invention of the Uncanny*, ed. by (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

[3] For Spiritualism and photography, see M. Jolly, *Faces of the Living Dead: The Belief in Spirit Photography*, (London: British Library, 2001), and T. Gunning, 'Phantom Images and Modern Manifestations: Spirit Photography, Magic Theatre, Trick Films, and Photography's Uncanny', in *Fugitive Images: From Photography to Video*, ed. by P. Petro (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995) and T. Gunning, 'Haunting Images: Ghosts, Photography and the Modern Body', in *The Disembodied Spirit*, ed. by A. Ferris (Brunswick, Maine: Bowdoin College, 2003)

[4] For postwar memory and Spiritualism, see J. Winter, *Sites of memory, sites of mourning: The Great War in European cultural history*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[5] For more on the electromagnetic occult, see R. Luckhurst, *The invention of telepathy, 1870-1901*, (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and J. Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000). Artists who have been inspired by the electro-acoustic occult include Susan Hiller, Scanner (Robin Rimbaud), Mike Kelley, Joyce Hinterding, David Haines, Chris Kubick, and Anne Walsh.

[6] For more on ectoplasm, see K. Schoonover, 'Ectoplasm, Evanescence, and Photography', *Art Journal*, 62, (Fall), 3and M. Warner, 'Ethereal Body: The Quest for Ectoplasm', *Cabinet*, Fall 2003 - Winter 2004 (2003).

[7] For a discussion of Walter Benjamin's thought on death in relation to photography, see E. Cadava, *Words of Light: Theses on the Photography of History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 7–13.

[8] For a recent exhibition exploring this connection, see A. Ferris, 'The Disembodied Spirit', in *The Disembodied Spirit*, ed. by A. Ferris (Brunswick, Maine: Bowdoin College, 2003).

[9] See www.zoebeloff.com, and *Whitney Biennial 2002*, ed. by L. R. Rinder, (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 2002).

[10] For Marx's spectralization, see J. Derrida, *Specters of Marx : the state of the debt, the work of mourning, and the New international*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), and F. Jameson, 'Marx's Purloined Letter', *New Left Review*, 209, January/February.

[11] See www.rafaelgoldchain.com.

[12] For subsequent work on Australia's indigenous haunting, see K. Gelder and J. M.Jacobs, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Melbourne University Press, 1998), and P. Read, *Haunted Earth*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2003).

[13] "The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that precedes us, we have been endowed with a *weak* Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim. That claim cannot be settled cheaply." W. Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by H. Arendt (Glasgow: Fontana/Glasgow, 1973), 256. For another extensive response to this epigram in the context a photographic archive from the Holocaust, see U. Baer, 'Revision, Animation, Rescue', in *Spectral Evidence : The Photography of Trauma*, ed. by (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002).

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Produced with the assistance of Film Victoria's Digital Media Fund – the Digital Media Fund is funded by Multimedia Victoria as part of the Victorian Government's Connecting Victoria policy, which aims to bring the benefits of technology to all Victorians.

This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Front cover:
Into the Hollow of Darkness (detail) (2001-2005)
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