

Viatopias

Exploring the experience of urban travel space

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Abstract

The title of this research is constructed from: 'via' - route and τόπος - a place. Viatopias are urban spaces of continual travel or flux that incorporate multiple forms of perception and inscriptions of meaning.

My aim has been to define and describe the increasingly important fluid perceptual spaces that have developed between static nineteenth century destinations. Viatopias such as passageways, underground tunnels, train tracks, and the North Circular escape a sense of destination, operating as ever-changing experiences or events. The practice has sought to produce digital representations of these urban travel spaces that exist in constant flux, to communicate the experience of Viatopias.

The research explores themes such as: *The North Circular as a Deleuzian Route* exploring driving as performance; *Plica, Replica, Explica* an unfolding of experience through digital media; *The Making of Baroque Videos*, using Baroque architectures of viewing; *Mobilizing Perception* treating human vision as an artifact; *Mirrors For Un-Recognition* disassembling nineteenth century controlled vision; *Sound as an Urban Compass* considering urban audio experience; *Narrative Practice in New Media Space* analysing contemporary approaches in digital media; and *Convergent Languages, Digital Poiesis* investigating the dislocation of representation in different digital languages. These conceptual frameworks developed in symbiosis with the practice.

The visual practice presents a collection of digital videos that extend and complicate these concepts through experimental visual and audio techniques such as layering, repetition, anamorphic distortion, and mirroring to produce visual immersion and the fracturing of space. The concluding digital works incorporate video with audio and text resulting in integrated visual statements that attempt to stretch the viewer's perception, in the process offering a glimpse of a new experience within urban space.

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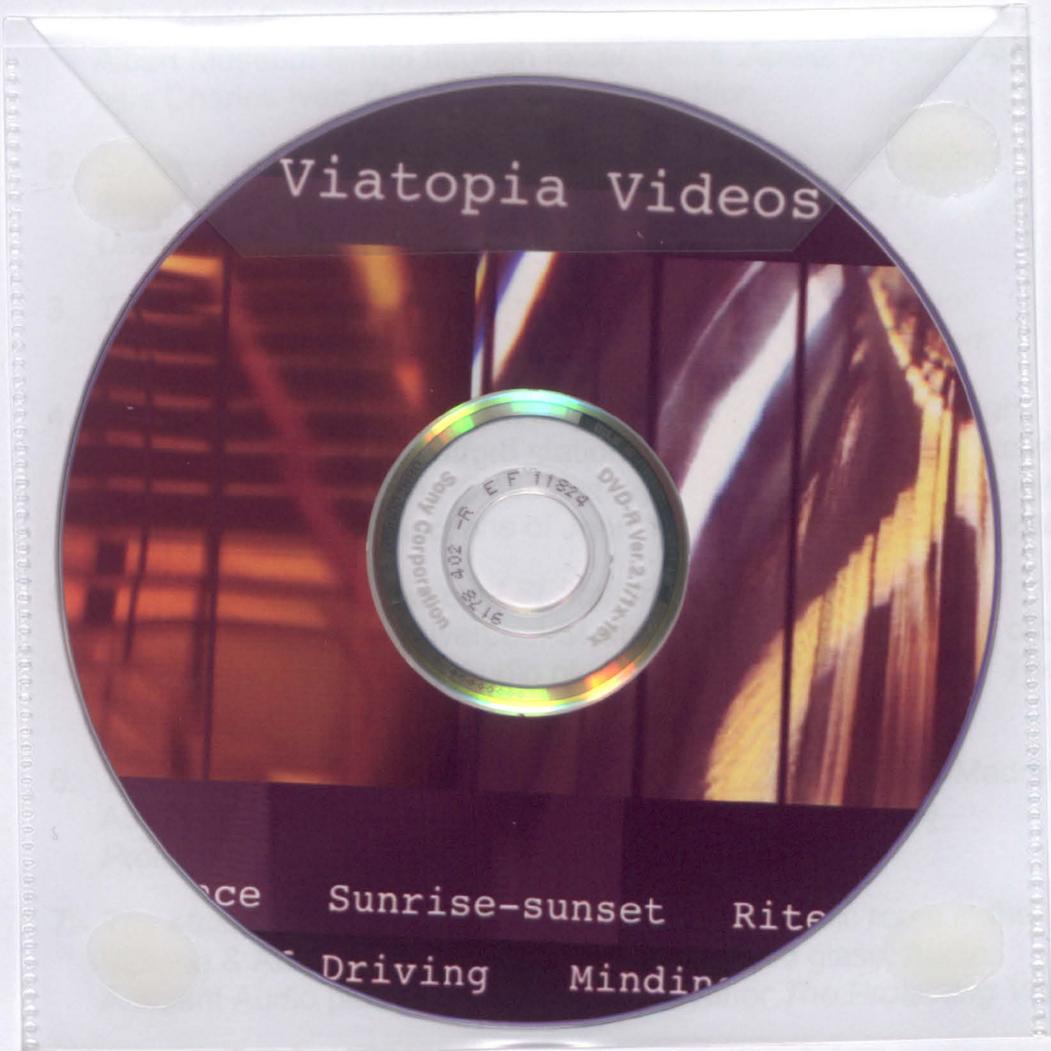
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DVD**

Screening Notes

Viatopia Videos DVD

Viatopia Videos

The Flow of Space:



Sunrise ~ Sunset

1. Escalator view from the up escalator at Leicester Square filmed through a lens. Audio: Ambient Audio plus Pump, Glass & Ray. Sharad Offering.
2. The art gallery, filmed through a lens. Audio: Ambient Audio plus Pump, Glass & Ray. Sharad Offering.

Screening Notes

Viatopia Videos

The Flow of Space:

1. *The Music Room*: Norwich House music room in the Victoria & Albert Museum filmed through folded glass. Audio: Ambient Audio plus Charles Ives *The Unanswered Question*.
2. *St Pancreas Station*: Reflection of St Pancreas Station ceiling filmed through lens. Ambient Audio plus Charles Ives *The Unanswered Question*.
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4. *Blind Glass*: View of platform filmed with mobile phone through lens as train leaves Stratford station. Elements of Gertrude Stein's poem *Carafe as a Blind Glass* text layered on top of image. Audio: Ambient Audio plus sections of John Tavener *The Protecting Veil*.
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Section 1 Introduction

Introduction

My research proposal developed from a series of digital photographic works exhibited in the Watershed Gallery in Bristol that collated gas and water outlets on public buildings in San Francisco and Paris, under the title *Building Gender*. My interest in this area subsequently widened to include other street furniture such as manhole covers that punctured the street space and offered other physical and conceptual spaces. While photographing these elements I became interested in the perceptual experience of moving through layered public spaces, and wondered what this experience was, and if it was possible to express this visually. I became aware of a discursive gap that seemed to lie between shifting concepts of social structure: heterotopias and nomadism as presented by theorists such as Michel Foucault and Giles Deleuze; accounts of visual perception by Jonathan Crary and Martin Jay; theories of urban geography formulated by Edward Soja, Edward Casey and Michel de Certeau; and new media theories associated with Marshall McLuhan, and Lev Manovich. These accounts hint at new experiences of urban travel space, yet they have been largely overlooked in visual digital practice and theory. This research attempts to explore and address this gap.

Studying sculpture at BA and MA level allowed me to develop an awareness of physicality and space, which I have brought to digital media such as photography and video. This together with a personal history of immigration and travel has enabled me to connect a number of conceptual frameworks dealing with perceptions of space and travel in a way that perhaps would not have been possible with a linear specialist approach.

In my investigation of contemporary art practice in digital media in section four (*Narrative Practice in New Media Space*) I consider artists who explore contemporary experience of space in a cinematic way; spatial approaches to cinema; representations of rural space in the city; digital

interventions in reality; and embedded spatial performance of the city through filmic networked gaming. I examine artists such as Carsten Holler, who seems to reverse the process by re-framing digital sensibilities in physical interactive pieces, giving the experience of travel. Lev Manovich's work offers a more spatial database approach to cinema, while projects like *Glenlandia* by Susan Collins trace digital shifts in the rural landscape in city gallery space through her travelling pixels. Kate Southworth's practice of digital *derivé* plays with the fiction inherent in systems behind public and digital space; while Stanza who transforms Data from environmental monitoring re-maps sociability in city space. More recently urban intervention groups such as Blast Theory have used the spatial environments of the city for interactive Wi-Fi games that reference cinematic viewing. However the most pertinent research came from theorists such as Deleuze's writing in *The Fold*, Walter Benjamin's writings on the city and De Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* who offer the opportunity to visually reconstruct the practice of commuting.

A major motivation for the research was my particular interest in pushing the language of digital video away from more common formats, which record performance or narrative, into a more visually experimental language. I wanted to see if it was possible to articulate and 're-view' key theoretical formulations of space. My use of these concepts from philosophy and social sciences to optics and new media theory has expanded and developed my digital practice, enabling me to extend the language from early pieces such as *Side Stripe* and *No Stopping* that focused on digital replication and colour malfunction, to work that re-used lenses and mirrors to disassemble the moving image as evident in *Road to Madrid* and *The A12*. This development in the practice led to research into Gertrude Stein's deconstruction of descriptive language, and the American L.A.N.G.U.A.G.E poets like Lyn Hejinian. These sources have led to my introduction of text into pieces such as *JN.NB.BN, a blind glass* and writing the chapter on *Convergent Languages – Digital Poiesis* (p111).

The project has evolved as a close symbiosis between theory and practical visual research. It has become an experience aptly similar to learning to walk: taking a step with my practice foot which then directed my theory footprint, which in turn informed the next practice step. Learning to research in this way has reminded me of early experiences of learning to negotiate space. My conceptual framework has evolved from a direct experience of travelling through and filming spaces and reading whilst travelling. Particular theories and issues have been added or discounted in terms of the balance or momentum they brought to the project's progression.

There have been paths that were initially explored such as Slavoj Žižek's writing on Lacanian psychoanalysis which offered internal psychological re-structuring; or in the case of the *derivé* technique of the Situationists the re-creation of newness through performative chance; latterly I considered a contemporary resurgent interest in the sublime, but these theories did not practically contribute to visualising the haptic experience of travel, the primary focus in the practice, and the research was subsequently refocused. Other avenues such as the audio theory of Douglas Kahn and Walter Ong, did contribute greatly to the development of the practical work, enabling me to use audio to ground the swirling anamorphic visuals of work like *JN,NB.BN*. At times when the practice seemed too invested in a particular technique the conceptual development offered a different view of the problem and stimulated further experiments. The concepts and practice that have remained are the elements that extend the research in the most productive ways.

Each chapter in the Thesis relates to a specific issue in the digital media practice and offers a particular perspective on the central theme of Viatopias. The section and chapter order is based on a facet structure, which, for me, resembles buildings bordering a public space. Each chapter relates to its neighbours but is at a similar distance from the core issues and is discrete in its own form, potentially allowing chapters from the main body of the text to be visited in any order.

I had been particularly keen from the start that my practice should not simply illustrate concepts, but should drive and challenge my ideas, assumptions and the borders of established disciplines, for example: the experimental use of lenses has led me to consider optics and the complex nature of perception.

The long duration of a part-time PhD has meant that some concepts and particularly some elements of the digital practice have been in danger of moving from interestingly experimental to commonplace. The research has had to continually re-focus and extend its reach to ensure that it was covering fresh territory. This is a particular issue when working with rapidly developing technology.

My choice of the digital medium as the arena for practical research was based on the very fluid electronic nature of the pixel that lends it its chameleon character. It is the ideal 'ambiguous sign' - 'Ideality par excellence.'¹ In the digital environment there is also an increasing convergence between words, imagery and sound.² This reduces the gap between approaches to practice and theory, making discourse possible with images, sound, video and text within the same environment. This convergence however incorporates a productive difference, which I have found particularly stimulating in this project, and offers an enlarged arena that encourages a creative use of theory as a vehicle; a nomadic and haptic approach that directly engages with the practice as a form of digital interlacing.

My use of the Baroque as a point of departure for exploring urban travel spaces through digital video was inspired by the architecture of viewing the Baroque style offered such as the multi media construction of space; the emphasis on movement and the optical illusions that open the viewer

¹ Deleuze G *The Fold* 1993 London. Athlone Press p15

² Digital convergence brings together the separate worlds of audio, video, data and voice communication services... and offers a whole new way of life' according to the European Commission: Reding V, 2006 *Digital Convergence: A Whole New Way of Life* – speech at the Digital Lifestyles Exhibition Brussels 30th May accessed 9.2.09 http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/reding/docs/speeches/dle_20060530.pdf.

up to a different experience of the familiar. The practice methodology developed to incorporate theories on perception and optics, using approaches such as Cezanne's discovery that concentrated viewing led to perceptual disintegration and the breakdown of intelligible form. This challenge to visual consistency is considered in the section: *The Mobilising of Perception*.

There have been a number of directions the digital practice could have taken, particularly in the area of rapidly developing technical hardware such as producing work to be specifically blue-toothed between handheld devices such as iPods and mobile phones. With the introduction of Web 0.2 and the explosion in interactivity, the work could have opened up by inviting You Tube users to contribute to an online global Viatopia. Developers of GPS software and mobile technology such as *Walkingtools* that write 'apps for walking artists'³ are starting to invite artists to create geo-specific work that can be accessed at different Wi-Fi points across the city. Although this is at a slight tangent to the main aim of the research, it could offer a productive way of disseminating work in the future.

My experience of travelling through and filming these spaces has formed the bedrock of this research, navigating using theory as a mapmaking process. The physical experience of commuting every day from Ealing to Romford by car on the North Circular or reading on the train has enabled me to consider the research aim of exploring appropriate spatial languages from within a germane space, redraw conceptual frameworks and perform my research whilst in the Viatopias of everyday urban life.

³ <http://www.walkingtools.net> accessed 14.7.09

Section 2 Methodology and Materials

The North Circular (A406) As A Deleuzian Route

The North Circular is by its very positioning an ambiguous road, its beginning and end mysteriously transforming at some point into its opposite partner the South Circular. This may reveal something of the binary nature of town planners, who have clearly abandoned the spatial qualities of the four points of the compass, opting instead for the top / bottom opposites of North and South as if London were a flat piece of paper that could be folded neatly in half. The result of this is the strange experience of falling round the sides of London even before navigating the complexities of the route itself.

A study on behalf of the new Greater London Authority (GLA) itself describes the route in uncharacteristically hazy circular terms such as radial routes:

In its role as a major orbital route, the NCR combines a number of important functions ... Not only does it provide a direct route for longer distance through road traffic moving across north London, it also caters for local orbital journeys and enables those making radial journeys (towards/away from London) to switch between radial routes.⁴

The route's vague geography relies on a strange compass relationship to the rest of London's roads, lending the North Circular a Deleuzian sense of fluid and 'virtual' positioning. In rejecting the numerical beginning of motorways (Junction 1, etc...) it side-steps identification at a static mathematical point and to use Deleuze's description in *The Fold*, 'It is not exactly a point but a place, a position, a site, a 'linear focus,' a line emanating from lines.'⁵

⁴ G:\GLABE.pol\website\Mar 2005\northcirc.doc p1 accessed 2.5.08

⁵ Deleuze G, 1993 *The Fold* London, Athlone Press p19

One could develop this analogy further by viewing the North Circular as an 'active spontaneous line' as described by the artist Paul Klee⁶ where its route, marked on a map is articulated by action, or as mathematician Gottfried Leibniz states, describing the inherent movement contained in any apparently straight line: 'There can never be a straight line without curves intermingled'⁷ This is certainly true of a rush hour drive round the North Circular where even proceeding along a straight dual carriageway requires drivers to perform the minute curves of constant lane changing in order to make any progress at all.

The North Circular acts as a 'virtual road' in the sense that it is made up of a number of smaller local roads assigned this performative role. Presumably should the need arise due to building development, new roads could be elected to 'be the North Circular', fulfilling the same task of guiding a flow of constant traffic around an agreed sense of perimeter. This enables the 'A 406' – clearly marked on the surface of the road, to escape a static sense of 'objectness', transforming it into more of a Deleuzian 'objectile' (related to projectile) ... 'no longer defined by an essential form, but reach(ing) a pure functionality...where the object assumes a place in a continuum by variation ...- it becomes an event.'⁸ It is almost as if the North Circular is a migratory path selected by mass experience through a variety of needs bringing into place a continuum that is named belatedly by planners.

The 'event' or physical experience of travelling round the North Circular in a car can perhaps offer Deleuze's 'point of view' through the windscreen as a way of perceiving the ever moving, transforming 'objectile' of the A 406 route. A static single viewpoint or even series of 'as they are happening' viewpoints does not equip the driver to anticipate, react and navigate the spatial flow of both traffic and route. Rather a driver who treats the immediate view and necessary positional adjustments on the road in direct relation to the movement and flow of the journey as a whole

⁶ Klee P, 1953 *Pedagogical Sketchbook* London Faber & Faber p16

⁷ Leibniz G W, *Theodicy* sec. 346

⁸ Deleuze G, 1993 *The Fold* London, Athlone Press p19

would probably be more successful. Deleuze offers some excellent driving advice:

What can be apprehended from one point of view is therefore neither a determined street nor a relation that might be determined with other streets, which are constants, but the variety of all possible connections between the course of a given street and that of another.⁹

London drivers become very adept, I suspect, at constantly holding in mind the variety of all possible connections, should they suddenly need to abandon a chosen route, a Deleuzian skill heightened by frequent traffic jams. What is seen through the windscreen therefore is: 'what remains in the point of view'¹⁰ at any moment in the flow of traffic. In this way a glance, photograph or video still of any particular part of the road is constructed from the total surrounding area and as the product of this, holds within it the sense of movement or potential of the whole journey. It is perhaps telling that the GLA report identifies the fast throughway nature of the route which offers little reason to stop:

The bulk of trips (75%) are made by car/taxi and, with few large trip attractors, origins and destinations are widely spread. The primary role of the NCR as a fast throughway means that it is little used by public transport.¹¹

In many ways the North Circular 'envelopes' the contours of the north of London, holding within it the folds of junctions, slip roads and underpasses, stretching out across a multiplicity of areas and access roads, causing planners to develop series of traffic lights to accommodate its integral flow and movement. Perhaps it acts as the container for the 'soul' of London and as such is inseparable from the roads it folds into itself. Maybe junctions act as 'points of opportunity', each junction containing within it the potential of travelling the whole of London yet each 'expressing more clearly a small region of the world, a "subdivision", a

⁹ *ibid* p 24

¹⁰ *ibid* p 19

¹¹ ¹¹ G:\GLABE.pol\website\Mar 2005\northcirc.doc p1 accessed 2.5.08

borough of the city, a finite sequence.¹² It is at these multi-layered crossing points that an infinite number of drivers intersect across an infinite series of different routes, the individual route sequence in every driver, overlapping the destination potential at every traffic lights or roundabout. Deleuze, discussing individuality, suggests that there is an infinity of souls and an infinity of points of view – or in this context ‘journeys’ and what defines difference is the serial nature or the particular order of junctions in the route of the journey: ‘Each (driver) grasps or includes it in a different order and from the standpoint of a different borough.’¹³ This therefore gives each individual their particular windscreen ‘point of view’ in their unique series or journey.

The continual envelopment and extension through dynamic interaction is replicated in the internal landscape of the driver: ‘a state of One that envelops a multiplicity, this multiplicity developing the One.’ This driver is what occupies ‘the point of view’ and has the function of ‘enveloping and developing’ so every fold or layer of the journey; every sideways spatial adjustment or loop through an underpass is folded into the driver’s experience becoming part of him or her. This may explain the common ‘driving amnesia’ experienced when repeatedly taking the same route. Often drivers will comment on no memory of having driven to work except for the last few seconds of arriving. The external landscape having been so folded into the internal one (in the manner of colouring into pastry) that it has become an integral part of the structure of seeing and reacting.

In the same way that the route is folded into the driver, the driver is the articulation of the North Circular – bringing it into being by performing the event of the journey. The driver and the route forming a double loop, as route becomes event and driver becomes an embodied route, a möbius strip.

To conclude, by joining the final thought to the first one and completing the circle, the ambiguity of having no clear beginning or end underlines

¹² Deleuze G, 1993 *The Fold* London, Athlone Press p25.

¹³ *ibid* p25

this infinity of possibilities: 'The entire world (North Circular) is the infinite curve that touches at an infinity of points, an infinity of curves ... and the entire world (North Circular) is enclosed in the soul (that navigates it).'¹⁴ In travelling this unfolding road, what has opened up is a multi-layered labyrinth of possibilities, coinciding and gliding over one another in flows of never to be repeated momentary connections that constructs the driver as he or she make their journey.

¹⁴ *ibid* p24

Plica - Replica – Explication

In his exploration of Leibniz and the Baroque, Gilles Deleuze uses *The Fold* not only as the overarching title for his book, but as a theoretical tool to analyse his subject matter, a method of working. Folding, unfolding and refolding becomes embedded not just as a series of metaphors, but in the stylistic form of his written work. As Tom Conley in his *Translators Foreword* notes:

'Deleuze's sentences tend to be short, (and) simple ... they break open and recombine, inviting the reader to isolate given clauses and reconnect them to produce mobile affects where verbal groups jump into or recur in other clauses.'¹⁵

In this way Deleuze gives a clear example of the potential of such a dynamic approach to folding, when used in a linear form such as written text. How much more can be explored then, when this theoretical process is applied to the dynamic and spatial nature of video. The folding of the medium, the folding of a perception of space, and the narrative folding of the journey are all possible approaches. As a metaphor and in practice, the act of folding always reveals something of the material that is folded.

Taking his example, I aim to fold Deleuze's chapter on *Folds in the Soul* together with analysis of my video work on the North Circular, in such a way that the resulting 'unfolding' or explication sets up a working methodology for my video practice.

Perhaps we can start by taking a pixel for a run, to corrupt Paul Klee's saying¹⁶. This small element – the pixel - operates in all visual digital work

¹⁵ Deleuze G, 1993 *The Fold* London, Athlone Press p xviii

¹⁶ The original well known saying that drawing is: 'Taking a line for a walk' appears in Klee P 'Pedagogical Sketchbook' P 16 trans Sibyl Moholy-Nagy 1953 London. Faber & Faber.

as a basic element, or electronic mark. It is this very fluid electronic nature of the pixel that lends it its chameleon character and therefore makes it such an apt choice for this project. It is the ideal 'ambiguous sign' - 'Ideality par excellence'¹⁷ due to its 'Virtual' nature. It owns no inherent physical or visual properties, but rather is identified by a series of electronic codes that bear no relation to its visual character. It is 'weightless'. Before being used, it is stored as potential, identified as memory capacity – operating (as Paul Klee states of the point or dot in drawing) as 'a site of cosmogenesis ... a non dimensional point ... between dimensions'¹⁸ it is an event that is awaiting an event. A pixel is waiting to take its colour from received information or indeed by copying the pixel next door. So beginning at this point, the pixel, we start at the point of 'the pure Event of the line or the point'¹⁹ – the performative potential of the pixel particularly when used in video. We start at the 'Point Fold' where a dot 'shifting its position forward'²⁰ becomes a line, or a pixel running becomes a video.

What Deleuze describes as 'inflexion' is a process of multiple performative internal folding that produces transformation. In making the videos 'Side Stripes' and 'Blurred Side' the process of inflection in relation to pixels could be said to occur at three levels, parallel to Deleuze's proposed three virtual transformations: 'Vectorial', 'Projective' and 'Infinite Variation'. Each pixel operates at a vectorial level, articulating the movement and animating digital information. So each pixel becomes a turning point or point of transformation for the next point. This articulation is more pronounced due to the deliberately slow capture speed of the video camera, causing a juddering movement where some frames are lost, which reveals more clearly the process of shifting from one set of pixels to another. This causes the viewer to become aware of tangential

¹⁷ Deleuze G 1993 *The Fold* London Athlone Press p15

¹⁸ Attributed here by Deleuze as from 'Theorie de l'art modern' However it does appear in Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook* p.18

¹⁹ Deleuze G 1993 *The Fold* London Athlone Press p15

²⁰ Klee P, 1953 *Pedagogical Sketchbook* translated Sibyl Moholy-Nagy Faber & Faber London.

p16

information progressing before them in a way that breaks up or interrupts the illusion of a flowing image. This technique is an important tool in disrupting an orthodox reading of the video as a flowing narrative description of another magical reality – video as a window. Instead it works to break up the represented image, reducing it into information bundles whose jarring tangential relationships raise the viewer's awareness of the medium being used.



Side Stripe 2002

Blurred Side 2002

Side Stripe 2002

The increased awareness of the medium also takes the digital pixels into the Deleuzian realm of the 'Projective'. As the shutter speed is slowed whilst attempting to film the road passing at different speeds, the ability of the pixels to record sufficient information to present an 'accurate' or realistic image breaks down causing a range of morphologies: stuttering / stretching / blurring and extreme colour fluctuations. For Deleuze, 'every contour is blurred to give definition to the formal powers of the raw material, which rise to the surface and are put forward as so many detours and supplementary folds.'²¹ When the resulting effects are replicated and folded back on top of themselves, the range of morphologies increase. These transformations again push the image towards a raw digital texture; by stretching the medium beyond its capacity and thereby exposing it's nature. The resulting distortion and break up of recognisable imagery also conveys more accurately the experiential and performative nature of repetitive 'folded' journeys round the North Circular, or perhaps the multiple foldings of many commuter journeys each day.

²¹ Deleuze G 1993 *The Fold* London Athlone Press p17

As the pixels are cloned and repeated, they layer up at varying intervals to form almost a gradient of imagery; a sedimentation of visual elements from the recorded journey. As a result of this process there also develops a possible 'infinite variation'²² of positions for any image or bundle of pixel texture. The translucent layers of video fold back and overlap in an infinite variety of ways, revealing to the viewer a multiplicity of possible visual combinations. In doing this, the image again breaks away from the traditional 'time line' of film, and the linearity of narrative. As a visual 'line of film' is folded or looped back on itself 'the line effectively folds into a spiral.'²³ What then becomes primary in the viewing experience is not necessarily the representational image or order of events, but the movement, fluctuation or spiralling of images repeated in a variety of orders. 'Inflection itself becomes vortical and at the same time its variation opens onto fluctuation, it becomes fluctuation.'²⁴ The performative folding produces a sense of action or force at work in the video: 'force itself is an act, an act of the fold ... the fold is power.'²⁵ The more the video is folded back onto its self the more the sense of fluctuation or force gains visual priority over the image. If this is continued, and this 'performativeness' is multiplied then the methodology or process being used overpowers the image being communicated, the methodology becomes the image.

This builds to produce 'a new object we can call objectile... where fluctuation of the form replaces the permanence of a law; where the object assumes a place in a continuum by variation.'²⁶ 'Object' has become dynamic, on the move, continually changing and fluctuating. It is objectile as related to projectile. This almost calls for a similar new phrase, such as 'Digitile' to describe the related digital video work: a term that reflects the performative use of the medium that brings its formal qualities to the surface, rather than digital video's more usual self-effacing

²² ibid p16

²³ ibid p17

²⁴ ibid p17

²⁵ ibid p18

²⁶ ibid p19

transparency subordinated to the role of documentation. The objectile or video here 'is manneristic, not essentializing: it becomes an event'²⁷ but not an event like watching a film whose performance is linked to 'real time'.

Deleuze describes this new status of the object as a 'temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form.'²⁸ The folding, layering and fluctuation in the North Circular video leaves behind a static sense of time and place as a range of different travelling events, capture and editing speeds are used and then overlapped. The viewer is presented with a variety of different experiences of the same place, simultaneously.

The videos shift into a dynamic 'objectile', also transforms the viewer through viewing, from being 'sub'ject (that is being under the authority or truth of a static and clearly defined object) to 'superject' – to use Alfred Whitehead's²⁹ term. The term 'superject in this context connotes the 'emerging quality of ... the subject'³⁰ this emerging-ness of the viewer is produced by viewing the work. The subject or viewer moves into a dynamic relationship with the work. As a sub-ject they move from a position of holding the object in their attention in a passive static way, to a role of 'super-ject' – as someone in a continually changing dynamic relationship to the object (in this case the video work.)

This can be understood as a dynamic viewing of a continuous object: 'because every point of view is a point of view on variation.'³¹ The subject or the viewer therefore experiences 'point of view' in flux for example when approaching a video in a gallery, walking towards it. The visual qualities of the folded video work act to disorientate the viewer from a mono temporal understanding, pushing them to experience any

²⁷ ibid p19

²⁸ ibid p19

²⁹ Alfred North Whitehead (b.1861 - d.1947), a British mathematician, logician and philosopher: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/whitehead/>

³⁰ Rotenstreich N, *The Superject and Moral Responsibility* JSTOR article: <http://www.jstor.org/pss/20123566> accessed 26.07.09

³¹ Deleuze G 1993 *The Fold* London Athlone Press p20

particular moment as ‘a point of view on variation,’ – not just the view that the video camera captured, but also the perceptual route of the of the person watching the work, who has travelled to see it. Bringing any number of ‘points of view’ to intersect at the same time. A viewer’s experience of the video becomes the total of these combining views i.e.: ‘what remains in the point of view’³² at any time.

This continual folding, repetition and refolding of a 3-minute piece of video, which layers up multiple versions of the same image, effectively stretches the ‘event’ until it takes 20 minutes in real time. The effect has something in common with Deleuze’s adaption of the term ‘extension’: ‘Leibniz can define extension (extensio) as “continuous repetition” of the situs or position – that is, of point of view.’ This video piece would appear to operate in the same way, by stretching perception through replication and fluctuation, ‘the status of the object, which now exists only through its metamorphosis’³³ These morphemes are evident in the video work in a variety of ways from simple visual distortions like blurring, stuttering, colour fluctuations, replication and pixel interpolation, to the anamorphoses of the route name itself appearing at the end of the video *Redbridge O* like Holbein’s skull in *The Ambassadors*. This like all the other distortions acts as a contrast and perhaps critique of expected forms of video, within the broader context of fine art video.



Redbridge O Stills

³² ibid p19

³³ ibid p21

So we are what we see / what we are / what we see. The video as an event is folded in to our experience and we make the event by being there. The individual experience of the journey in the video is folded into each viewer as they view the work. Folding and stretching of the video extends both the time and visual complexity of the piece, the folding of the event of the video into the viewer's experience stretches their understanding, offering a possibility of change.

Deleuze's use of 'the fold' offers a strategy for re-viewing and re-presenting the experience of driving round Redbridge roundabout. A stretching of imagery in an amorphic way, a stretching of the work's duration, and the stretching of the audio all appear to unfold from the peeling apart of a fold between the road and the car bonnet. The video 'explicates' a haptic sense of journey from this fold. The more folding is included in the video, the more the viewer's perception is stretched.

On The Making Of Baroque Videos

The series of video works under the title 'Viatopias' offer a fluid multidimensional, multi-temporal sense of contemporary urban travel space. 'The Baroque' has developed as a many faceted creative and conceptual arena for this research – entered sideways through Deleuze and the Fold. Discovered like an exotic chapel through the side door of a densely camouflaged exterior of folded fake foliage, or perhaps through the openings of one of Cristina Iglesias's panelled sculptures.³⁴



The Door Jero'nimos' Cloister, Prado Museum,



Habitaciones Vegetales (Vegetable Rooms)

The explosion of science in the seventeenth century was significantly optically based, from Galileo Galilei's³⁵ improvements on the refracting telescope that identified the moon as a sphere, Johannes Kepler's³⁶ mathematical analysis of light to Rene Descartes³⁷ invention of the Cartesian coordinate system (which was critical in the development of

³⁴ See images at the Elba Benitez Gallery:

<http://serurbano.wordpress.com/2009/08/14/cristina-iglesias/> accessed 26.08.09

³⁵ Galileo Galilei (1564–1642) played a key role in the history of science and philosophy he is a, if not the, central figure of the scientific revolution of the 17th century.

³⁶ Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was one of the most important scientist in the field of astronomy. <http://www.johanneskepler.com/>

³⁷ René Descartes (1596 –1650) a French philosopher, mathematician, physicist, and writer often referred to as the father of modern philosophy.

Cartography) spatial understanding was constantly being rewritten. The Baroque era consequently delighted in playing with visual and spatial perception, from trompe l'oeil chapel ceilings such as Andrea Pozzo's *The Glory of S. Ignazio*, in the Church of S. Ignazio, Rome that appeared



Andrea Pozzo *The Glory of S. Ignazio* 1694



Louis XIV's *Galerie des Glaces* 1672

to continue the building into the heavens, to Louis XIV's *Galerie des Glaces* in the Palace of Versailles where the ornamental gardens were reflected inside amongst the courtiers, there was a deliberate confusion of space.

Architecture and art 'contrived to destabilise rational vision and estrange the senses.'³⁸ This was largely due to the drive of the Catholic Church against the rising tide of scientific rationalism in the Counter Reformation that threatened their authority. Their emphasis on the unknowable wonder of the divine present in the world, aligned visual excess with spirituality almost to the point of instability.

Baroque³⁹ techniques offer the image-maker a surprising number of structural links with Postmodernism. Although originating in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century, the Baroque style offers a surprisingly familiar architecture of viewing. Christine Buci-Glucksmann in *Baroque Reason* comprehensively explores this relationship⁴⁰. Both the Baroque

³⁸ *ibid* p25

³⁹ The Baroque is an artistic style prevalent from the late 16th century to the early 18th century.

⁴⁰ See comprehensive introduction by Bryan S Turner in Buci-Glucksmann 1994 C. *Baroque Reason* Sage Publishers London p8

and Postmodernism present a form of 'hyper-reality', and use a visual currency highly dependent on a culture of visual play. Postmodernism's preference for such techniques as montage, pastiche, allegory, irony and parody, closely shadow baroque themes such as the multiple element, spatial & temporal distortion, the labyrinth, artifice, and the ruin. Perhaps this parallel springs from both eras dealing with the discovery and exploration of sudden new worlds of knowledge. The Baroque in a more physical sense learning to navigate to the New World, whilst contemporary society deals with becoming Internet explorers, with all the fears of unknown travel that this entails.

Baroque uber-reality, made up of artificial surfaces and dizzying spatial effects was counterbalanced by the haunting melancholia of the 'Trauerspiel' - the sorrow play, a consistent thread of visceral grief underlying all baroque work - a major theme in Walter Benjamin's work, particularly in his analysis of German Baroque tragic drama, which he linked to medieval Christian plays with their emphasis on the mortification of the flesh and public displays of grief rather than any link to Greek tragedies, which place tragic feelings within a rational Aristotelian paradigm. Baroque drama instead offered a heightened sense of almost tactile mortality in the face of such over flowering sensuality. This 'theatre-isation of existence'⁴¹ to use Turner's apt phrase, achieves in art that which occurs naturally in theatre, offering an alternative view of chronology, a multilayered 'now-time':

The historian who takes this as his point of departure stops telling the sequence of events like the beads of a rosary. Instead, he grasps the constellation which his own era has formed with a definite earlier one. Thus he establishes a *conception of the present* as 'now-time' which is shot through with chips of messianic time.⁴²

⁴¹ See comprehensive introduction by Bryan S Turner in Buci-Glucksmann 1994 C. *Baroque Reason* Sage Publishers London p22

⁴² Benjamin W, *Theses on the Philosophy of History* p263 as quoted by Buci-Glucksmann C in *Baroque Reason* p 67

This brings into play issues of ambivalence and difference providing what Buci-Glucksmann calls the 'Reason of the Other', a strategy that allows us when using a Baroque methodology, to see the modern world from within: '*El mundo por de dentro*'⁴³. William Boddy provides an interesting link in his discussion of 'Technological Convergence as Trauma', citing the nationally dislocating effects of domestic digital recording of television programmes.

This new form of time-shifting is merely one sign of the ways in which digital technology, at least in the eyes of many current industry leaders and pundits, is eroding the experience of simultaneity and liveness that has been traditionally seen both as part of television's essential nature and central to its relation to the nation.⁴⁴

Grief for the feared loss of an old identity (whether national or individual) has become a common but inseparable shadow to the growth of digital communications.

Barbara Borngässer notes that the term 'Baroque' originated as a French description for a category of pearl. 'Irregular, strange, peculiar...' ⁴⁵ and it continues to carry with it even now a sense of rich irregular beauty that is almost mesmerising. And this is indeed a central aim in Baroque art: 'Baroque is consistently remarkable for the value it places on subjective response, aiming to stir the spectators emotions'⁴⁶ This is achieved by using a wide range of perceptual devices. To begin with, the distinctions between genres such as painting, architecture and sculpture are blurred in Baroque buildings. As Robert Harbison observes in his excellent study of the Baroque: 'Most elaborate interiors of the period aim at phantasmagoric merging of architecture, painting and sculpture, deliberately confusing the borders between them, the goal a single overpowering effect.'⁴⁷ Built columns merge into sculpted stone clouds,

⁴³ Buci-Glucksmann's own introduction p39

⁴⁴ <http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/papers/boddy.html> accessed 12.10.09

⁴⁵ Borngässer B, Toman R 1998 *Baroque* Konemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH Colone

⁴⁶ Harbison R, 2000 'Reflections on Baroque' pviii Reaktion Books London.

⁴⁷ *ibid* p1

which merge into painted columns, which float in a painted sky between the arches of a domed ceiling. Movement is another key element.

Harbison comments that: 'Baroque is set apart from what precedes it by an interest in movement above all.'⁴⁸ This is perhaps one of the most disturbing features for the contemporary viewer: billowing garments strain against wild stone waves against a frenetically detailed and patterned background. There is nowhere to rest the eye, or to regain one's balance. No space or time to step back and get a Renaissance sense of perspective, before the next sensory wave engulfs you as the viewer.

Another key element can be described as 'the unconcluded moment.'⁴⁹ Harbison describes Baroque's 'enthusiasm for dynamic suspension or interrupted movement which represents energy as yet unspent.' This keeps a sense of potential movement in the scenes portrayed, they are approaching a point of high drama – saints and sinners are 'in the process of...' This is story telling at its most dynamic. An approach further developed in the operatic works of Monteverdi to incorporate the idea of 'return' – 'recurrence' in larger sections or 'repetition' in smaller ones – continual re-emphasis building to a crescendo. Monteverdi's 'reiterations' can be described as 'still looking for meaning... retain(ing) surprising life ... because they remain unresolved.'⁵⁰

Every struggle is happening in the present. If this isn't dizzying enough, further disrupting techniques include: 'The Baroque partiality for bird's eye perspective which makes a plan look like a view'⁵¹ this combined with the worm's eye view is very difficult to assimilate – one minute you are floating over a dramatic earthly struggle, then in the same instant you have plummeted with the heavens opening up above you revealing layers of angels ascending into the ether above. This produces such a distortion of space that the viewer is constantly destabilised and denied a static viewpoint. Baroque's architectural delight in the ovoid, a flattening of the

⁴⁸ ibid p1

⁴⁹ ibid p9

⁵⁰ ibid p10

⁵¹ ibid p10

ideal sphere of the Renaissance, may seem a perverse distortion but while it is possible to comprehend a central circular space at one go, Baroque ovals require a series of viewpoints. The speed of the curves in ovoid space suggest a haptic reading, it is not enough to simply look at this complexity one is drawn to engage, to enter into the experience. Add to this frequent 'sideways presentation of works (that act) as a powerful relaxant of focus and of feelings of duty or urgency, allowing us to luxuriate in the space, sybarites rather than devotees'⁵² and the viewer should by now be afloat in a sea of sensation.

The link between the Viatopia video pieces and the architecture and opera of seventeenth century Italy is not present in the medium. The connexion occurs, at a more profound level: that of methodology as medium. Digital video, offers the opportunity to reassess the process as language. Originating as a series of electronic signs digital video offers a tabula rasa: there is no innate linearity, no strips of film, or in fact bias towards progression in any direction. The pixel operates in all visual digital work as a basic element, or electronic mark. It is this fluid electronic nature of the pixel that lends it a transparent and adaptable character. This allows the medium to instantly adopt the image that is directed at it, an ultimate fluid transparency that one moment is stone like the next as fluid as water. The size of the image produced by these pixels is defined only by the size of the liquid crystal screen display or the power of the video projector. This freedom within the media enables a range of approaches to become significant devices in the production of video. With modern projectors, moving images can be painted larger than life onto walls or floors of buildings in the daylight; transported on a small laptop; stored on a disk; or viewed via the web. How envious would Bernini have been, to have access to a material so fluid, so emotive, so adaptable and so eager to mimic?

The early video pieces such as *Side Stripe* which act as a form of anti chamber to a Baroque hall, carry within them some Baroque elements.

⁵² ibid p11

They offer a lateral view, and as Harbison notes of Maulbertsch's painting of a saint: 'Something which can only be apprehended sideways works in a peculiar way.'⁵³ The viewer is operating in a world between Japanese and Renaissance perspective. In a video that flows sideways all reference to a vertical rolling 'film' is denied. No vista is offered no route is laid out. What is being presented is a partial view of the world. There is no defining or overarching view, rather points on a continuum, as Deleuze would say. The video is at the point of action all the time. In the video *Side Stripe*, despite the camera's honest recording of the changing nature of the painted white line on the road, the resulting image is not one of clear representation. Instead the emphasis is on continual movement of the surface, the folding over and layering of the same journey at different times, which combines to produce a sensation of texture causing the material to become 'almost hysterical'⁵⁴, a clear Baroque trait. It is interesting that in Harbison's discussion of Bernini's 'The ecstasy of St Teresa' he should refer to this Deleuzian term adding that the resulting 'energy is almost a disorganising force'⁵⁵.



Side Stripe stills 2002

The bird's eye view taken by the camera also combines to leave the viewer with the sensation of floating in an indeterminate space somewhere above the image. This, though, does not translate into a feeling of privilege as there are no clear boundaries or horizon and if the video was projected on the ground, then it is the 'terra firma' that is

⁵³ Ibid p33

⁵⁴ ibid p24

⁵⁵ ibid p24

passing at multiple speeds below. In addition to this there is a perpetual incompleteness embedded into the structure of the piece, despite (to use Harbison's description of Filippo Juvarra's *Hunting Lodge at Stupinigi*) 'replicating itself like a runaway molecule'⁵⁶.

The audio, which is the ambient sound of the car, the road and other traffic on the road, has been treated in a parallel way to the film – playing at 30% of the real speed and layered with the imagery. The software used to edit this video was one of the most basic which, when stretching the digital information to fit the new longer slower length, did not compensate by filling in the gaps. This resulted in the digital sound being presented in short syncopated parcels. The overall affect is again a distancing from everyday external reality, as the sound is no longer recognisable. More intimate and internal connections might be made, instead with heartbeats or a heavy percussion underpinning music. Perhaps a connection can be made here with the function of the Baroque staircase, which Harbison describes as: 'at least as much an instrument of delay as progress ... making it more dynamic by stretching out the moment of transition between inside and outside.'⁵⁷ Sound has always been a powerful link between the internal emotive and external corporeal presence, and here the stretched heartbeat of the road delays the viewer in the space between.

Another Baroque musical structure present in the piece is temporal disorientation. As the video is folded back on itself the viewer is offered the possibility of being 'present' at different parts of the journey at the same time for example, Monteverdi uses a similar technique in *The Return of Ulysses* where a layering of voices present their realities simultaneously in recurrent or looped form, creating a temporal texture that actually dislocates the receiver from the present. The video similarly causes the viewer to suspend connections to the present and float in a spatial and temporal limbo.

⁵⁶ *ibid* p14

⁵⁷ *ibid* p17

Another early video, which acts perhaps as another side chamber to the later more clearly Baroque work is *Wet Bonnet*. This video, although running on a more conventional vertical format was filmed horizontally, and is so distorted by the continual flow of water across a windscreen that it is difficult to identify the direction of the car's movement. This piece, far more than *Side Stripe*, delivers a rich engulfing emotional charge. The colours are intense liquid reds and yellows on a moving dark background, and sense of disorientation is increased by the video running at 30% slower than actual speed so that the images glide in a dreamlike way across the screen. Again, although the video was shot through a car windscreen on a wet dark morning, no recognisable image remains, in fact there is little to enable a stable purchase on the visual image to orientate the viewer, no narrative and no horizon line to identify what is up and what is down and no beginning and no end.



Wet Bonnet Stills

The sound, which has also been slowed down, has become unrecognisable – more like liquid fire (converging the senses) than the water it is. My intent is that the piece works powerfully as a whole experience in true Baroque style, seducing the viewer with texture, colour, sound and the sensation of the sliding image. The viewer is left in a territory between close up and distance; drifting between a focused and dissolving image.

Two further video pieces: *Side Wheels* and *Sunny Side* probably sit at a recess to Baroque-ness, and show a developing technique. Both are again presented as a lateral view, with all the action moving back and forth across the screen between left and right so that the film appears to

run sideways. In *Side Wheels* the image appears as tarmac in the top half of the screen with a reflection of it (in the side of a vehicle) in the bottom half – although this is not immediately discernable. Action starts with a pair of upside down car wheels moving in a distorted way to the right, across the lower half of the screen. The viewer is further disoriented by the flat surface of the road then moving to the left, at which point the screen appears to catch up with the wheels, which then remain relatively stationary on the screen whilst continuing to turn. This continues backwards and forwards across the screen, adopting colour changes as the scene moves through and out of a tunnel. The introduction of the image of tarmac and wheels, however disembodied, adds a significant figurative element to the previous largely abstract video work. These disconnected images seem to operate as ‘floating signifiers’⁵⁸, a phrase Michael Tarentino uses to describe Cristina Iglesias’ use of elements like vegetation in her sculpture, suggesting they ‘illustrate not one, but multiple possibilities’: the journey; the mode of travelling; the surface of the terrain; the route travelled; someone else’s journey within your own and the viewer’s journey through the piece.



Side Wheels stills

The image of the wheels are folded back into a reflected space, that appears to be travelling, but prevents a renaissance reading, that of understanding based on ‘a notion of truth based on reflection’⁵⁹ as

⁵⁸ Tarentino M, 2002 *Christina Iglesias: Between the Natural and the Artificial* in *Christina Iglesias* ed Iwona Blazwick Whitechapel, London.

⁵⁹ Newman M, 2002 *Imprint and the Rhizome Artificial* in ‘Christina Iglesias’ ed Iwona Blazwick Whitechapel, London. p138

Michael Newman discusses in his article 'Imprint and the Rhizome' where he critiques Iglesias's Baroque use of space. *Side Wheels*' spatial construction acts to 'derealize'⁶⁰ this space in which reflections of wheels, road, and journey are shown. The viewer is left with a haptic experience that has become unlinked from traditional readings of film, journey, or place brought about through an entirely different form of reflection.

The video piece *Redbridge O* sits along a different axis of Baroque experience. The imagery is more representational, and reassures the viewer with a hint of narrative, but with increasing representation comes increasing awareness of distortion. Half the screen is a plan view of moving tarmac and half is the reflection of the roundabout architecture in the curved red bonnet of the vehicle travelling the route. This has been inverted during editing so the reflection appears uppermost, with the tarmac in the lower half of the screen. Both images appear to fold into each other in a curved line in the middle of the screen like two rollers of a mangle drawing in the viewer and threatening to trap them in the process. But the relationship of the two folding halves is dislocated, the lower half showing only road texture while the reflection in the upper half reveals a distorted vista, the distorted phantasmal image taking precedence over the lower unmediated documentary image. These peeling layers, set up an exchange between simulacrum and originator, the halves operating as a resemblance not based on the idea of *the thing to be copied*, but the experience of a loss of mastery of space. The road surface and a different distorted image are continually feeding into the central line of the screen, the viewer is left floating on a spatial lake, adrift on the lip of an asymmetrical visual waterfall.

⁶⁰ Ibid p147



Redbridge O stills

This continual act of 'un-becoming' as the road surfaces slide into each other is in dynamic tension with the upper half of the screen, a phantom world, intermittently betrayed by telltale specs of dust on the car bonnet.

Filippo Raguzzini's plan for the 'Piazza Sant' Ignazio' in Rome is an example of Baroque delight in false vistas and their mock invitation to travel. Harbison describes how 'Individual structures in Raguzzini's scheme are pieces in an urban puzzle which lock into an adjacent pieces, violating all ideas of edge or distinct beginning and end. If you try out the routes you find the orderly display a sham.'⁶¹



360 Panorama of the Piazza Sant' Ignazio in Rome

This perverse approach to travelling is picked up and extended in *Redbridge O* where the circular journey, now distorted to a Baroque oval, is not a road that leads anywhere. Pauses at the various junctions and traffic lights, highlight the other traffic progressing in a distorted way

⁶¹ Harbison R, 2000 *Reflections on Baroque* Reaktion Books London. p 61

⁶² See interactive panorama <http://www.360cities.net/image/piazza-sant-ignazio> accessed 27.07.09

across the screen. The incomprehensible signs (except for the Dyslexic traveller), which are in reverse in the reflection, emphasise a more haptic fairground like experience. The whole effect is perhaps reminiscent of Fisher Von Erlach's proposal for a summer palace at Schönbrunn outside Vienna, which according to Harbison: "could swallow much of one's life in the twin processes of arriving and leaving."⁶³

Having considered the Baroque visual strategies, it is perhaps appropriate to finish with a short consideration of the gaze itself and the combination of ways of looking that are used in the videos mentioned above. Most prominent is a 'distracted gaze'; a form of looking that feels its way across an image or view without focusing consciously on rationalisation, experiences becoming 'soluble by apperception'⁶⁴. Walter Benjamin's use of the term 'distraction' as a form of viewing for appropriating experience, is discussed by Anthony Vidler in his article *Blind Alleys*, and is clearly linked to a haptic use of the senses: 'habit and use determine the optical reception of buildings.'⁶⁵ This is in contrast to the more familiar Renaissance model where a single distanced viewpoint, linked perspective to the divine and civic order. The viewer might start looking at the videos with a 'look and learn' rationalism, but soon finds understanding deflected with each new optical ploy. Critical distance has gone through a dual collapse: the unfamiliar route that had become familiar has become unrecognisable again. As Benjamin famously states in *One-Way Street*: 'As soon as we begin to find our bearings, the landscape vanishes at a stroke like the façade of a house as we enter it.'⁶⁶ However he goes on to assert that 'Once we begin to find our way about, that earliest picture can never be restored.'⁶⁷ This perhaps is the Baroque question: does the perceptual shift offered by this visual

⁶³ Harbison R, 2000 *Reflections on Baroque* Reaktion Books London. p 73

⁶⁴ Benjamin W, 1999 *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* xv in *Illuminations* Plimlico edition p233

⁶⁵ Vidler A, 2002 *Blind Alleys* Christina Iglesias' ed Iwona Blazwick Whitechapel, London. p174

⁶⁶ Benjamin W, 1979 *One Way Street* Verso London p78

⁶⁷ *ibid* p78

⁶⁷ *ibid* p78

methodology change our understanding of the space? What is the experience offered by this methodology?

The abstracted images of the early videos such as *Side Stripe* do not hold the contemporary viewer for long, as they are more accustomed to narrative action. Presenting these videos as a projected installation favours the strolling viewer who is by nature more mobile and ready to depart than the static cinema audience. The failure of installations and sculptural environments is as Nina Danino notes in relation to video work in *Documenta 11*: 'The freedom from conventional cinematic codes was vital and energetic and yet the work, in its unwillingness to declare limits, also absolves the spectator of the need to 'stay' beyond the hypnosis induced by duration and particularly by the stasis of some of the images.'⁶⁸ Danino draws a distinction between *Documenta 11* and experimental video work that emerged in the 1980's which she described as 'the expression of a difficult subjectivity produced or constructed by film as object and as experience... and a certain introspection which is involved with trying to find a way to 'speak'.⁶⁹ The latter Viatopia videos such as *Redbridge O* relate to this second approach as they start to test more explicitly the boundaries of language rather than the commitment of the viewer.

The Baroque strategies for manipulating space provide an architecture of perception that is particularly well suited to destabilising familiar viewing routines. They offer a tool, useful in exploring the perceptual construction and perception of space.

⁶⁸ Danino N, 2003 *The Intense Subject in The Undercut Reader – critical writings on artist's film and video* Wallflower Press London. p 8

⁶⁹ *ibid* p9

Section 3 Perception

The Mobilizing Of Perception

'Human vision is itself an artifact'⁷⁰

M.W Wartofsky

Baroque celebrated what Buci-Glucksmann refers to as 'the madness of vision'⁷¹ or in Martin Jay's terms an: 'overloading of the visual apparatus with a surplus of images in a plurality of special planes. As a result it dazzles and distorts rather than presents a clear and tranquil perspective on the truth of the external world.'⁷² One of the ways the visual implications of these ideas were tested in this research was through a deliberately perverse use of optical equipment.

The lenses used in the Viatopia videos are direct products of the panoptic institutions and technologies of the nineteenth century, which also produced heterotopias such as prisons, hospitals and laboratories. The lenses are the physical results of a controlled monocular sealed ontology. They promise an authoritative view of 'reality' that allows no alternatives. When used correctly these lenses present a singular reality that has become so powerful and so universally accepted that they themselves have become invisible. This is even to the extent that a glimpse of their edges - which may allude to their limited scope or the existence of other paradigms, becomes disturbing. Scratches or cracks make the viewer aware of their viewing strategies and even the lens's frailties, and diminish the value of viewing to the point of not just worthless but unacceptable.

⁷⁰ Wartofsky M.W. 1972 *Pictures, Representations and the Understanding in Logic and Art: Essays in Honour of Nelson Goodman*, ed R. Rudner and I Scheffler Indianapolis

⁷¹ Buci-Glucksmann C 1986 *La folie du voir: De l'esthetique Baroque* Paris

⁷² Jay M 1994 *Downcast Eyes* University of California Press London p47

There is no permission to look over the wall of these visual heterotopias, one can move from one lens to the next but the view in between is not to be seen. In taking these lenses and concentrating on their edges and malfunctions I am attempting to catch a glimpse of the space between these technologies of vision: the 'Viatopias' of perception.

The original rationale for the production of this optical equipment was the construction of a single and universal 'correct' vision, as highlighted by Jonathan Crary. Crary identifies and connects the beginnings of optical normalisation or control at the start of the nineteenth century with the rise of a social obsession with and reliance on numbers and measurement: 'Measurement takes on a primary role in a broad range of the physical sciences between 1800 and 1850.'⁷³ Ian Hacking in *Representing and Intervening* reinforces this where he comments on a growing social desire to chart and quantify: 'After 1800 or so there is an avalanche of numbers'⁷⁴. This harnessing of mathematics and physics to order or control the human body and its interaction with the surrounding world is picked up by Foucault in his study *Discipline and Punish*, where he highlights these increasingly individual forms of control, introduced under the guise of the new sciences of physiology, and psychology describing them as a 'technology of individuals'⁷⁵. As Crary notes of Foucault's study: 'The management of subjects depended above all on the accumulation of knowledge about them'⁷⁶. Such is the strength of this nineteenth century 'normalisation' that it has become all pervasive and largely invisible.

The 'misuse' of this equipment is a conscious act, detaching the device from its correct and normalising use. This effect of dislocating devices from their place in empirical science works on several levels: firstly there is no longer a connection to accepted universal measurements or rules. This has the effect of disorienting the viewer as the lenses clearly

⁷³ *ibid* p17

⁷⁴ Hacking I 1983 *Representing And Intervening* Cambridge p 234-235

⁷⁵ Foucault M 1979 *Discipline and Punish* Pantheon New York p 224

⁷⁶ Crary J, 1992 *Techniques of the Observer* October Books MIT press London UK p15

reference the existence of such rules but then immediately negate them. They draw attention to the action or need of the viewer to 'make it right' visually, to apply the rules successfully. The misuse of the lens particularly in pieces like *To the corner shop* gives the viewer the sensation of straining to separate the magnifying action of the lens from the upside down reflections moving across the surface of it. This sense of straining is produced by the compelling desire to make the familiar rules around perception and lenses work. The viewer struggles to organise the visual information, which obviously relates to a mundane suburban street in a city, in a recognisable way that makes sense.



To The Corner Shop still



Redbridge O still



Road to Madrid still

This apperceptive reaction although 'learnt' is a deeply embedded and reflexive response to the visual problem presented. In videos like *Redbridge O* where the curved bonnet of the car takes the place of a lens in reflecting a distorted image, the compulsion to correct is so strong that despite the images of the roundabout emerging as a flipped mirror image that floats and undulates across the dents and curves of the car bonnet, it is still perceived as a more 'real' set of information than the directly filmed grainy flat texture of the tarmac that is continually disappearing beneath it. What one becomes aware of when watching these videos is the struggle to 'manage' these viewing experiences as if one is reaching around for tools equipped to do the job, that used to work but don't quite fit any more.

This leads to the second issue, that the images are not organised into a socially recognisable set of signs that are part of the current system of visual exchange. The historically increasing intellectual suspicion of

visuality charted by Jay, has led to a perceptual poverty to the degree that nothing further seems to have developed to replace the outmoded visual tools from the nineteenth century. Despite all Benjamin's discussion of the 'distracted gaze' or Debord's highlighting of the 'society of the spectacle'; despite the development of video games, virtual reality, and the increased visual nature of the internet, a contemporary visuality equipped to deal with the contemporary complexity of urban travel, seems to be waiting to be defined.

Thirdly where 'normal' filming appears within the same frame in the Viatopia videos there is the simultaneous contrast of several modes of viewing and spatial organisation. The perceptual multitasking required by the videos is fundamental to the negotiation of contemporary urban space. Travelling on a bus in London you are now confronted with: the visual space of the bus, the video screen on the bus, the multimedia message or video phone call sent to your phone on the bus and the view of the passing street identifying where you want to get off. In the same way videos such as *Road to Madrid* invite you to follow multiple facets of the image - those nearest to you at the bottom of the image are segments of the road moving away from you, those above are mirrored segments of the road also folding into a vanishing point, whilst the segments at the side are sections of passing scenery moving towards you. The interior sections within the black rings of the magnifying glass that was used to film through, are upside down as happens when the magnifying glass is held too far from the lens. This mix of multi-spatial information suspends the viewer in the place of forever processing down the road, a Viatopia.

The nineteenth century drive to analyse the eye was based on a desire to understand and control the human. As Crary notes: 'The rapid accumulation of knowledge about the workings of a fully embodied observer disclosed possible ways that vision was open to procedures of normalisation, of quantification, of discipline.'⁷⁷ However this effort to understand the observer's workings, encountered problems, rather than

⁷⁷ Crary J, 2001 *Suspensions of Perception* October Books MIT press London UK p12

offering clearer vision which enabled more information to be gathered, and greater understanding being gained, by studying the eye it was found that vision did not function that way.

The paradox Crary points to was that 'looking at any one thing did *not* lead to a fuller and more inclusive grasp of its presence, its rich immediacy. Rather it led to perceptual disintegration and loss, its breakdown as intelligible form ...'⁷⁸ for Crary Cezanne's paintings epitomised this paradox. Cezanne's innovation: the depiction of multiple perceptions of space on the painting surface challenged the controlling drive of observational science towards 'universal truths' and perceptual constancy. In 1878 the French scientist Emile Javel established that vision occurs in short fast jumps, which he termed "saccadic" movements. This was a major development in understanding how an individual's visual field was formed: ' Not through an instantaneous intake of an image but through a complex aggregate of processes of eye movement that provisionally built up the appearance of a stable image.'⁷⁹ The world which was taken as stable and its consistency available for close rational scrutiny was destabilised into the relative ability of the individual viewer to 'construct' a stable meaning from continual movement.

In contrast to the nineteenth century techniques that were designed to control the viewer's attention, the Viatopia videos demand not the management or focusing of vision, but the disassembling of attention, they call for a split or multi-attention approach to perception. They function more on a level of 'multitasking' - demanding focusing on several areas of the moving image at once with equal concentration. The result is a 'multi awareness' that is based on spatial simultaneity rather than linear narrative. The viewer's perception is therefore far more active in 'constructing' the work. The visual journey through the work is experienced or built through an organic Deleuzian 'rhizomatic'⁸⁰ look, that connects multiple elements navigating across the image searching for

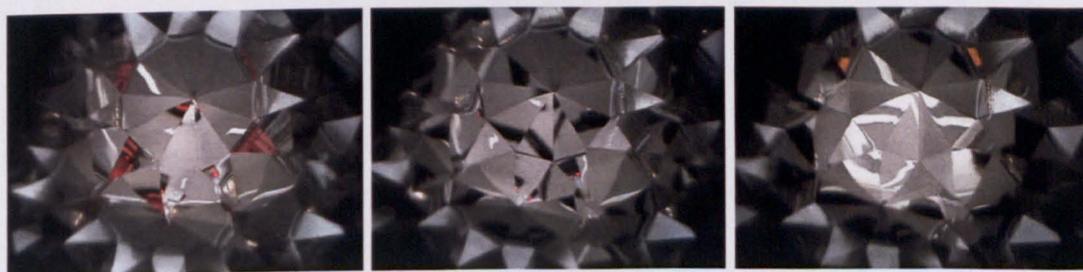
⁷⁸ *ibid* p288

⁷⁹ *ibid* p290

⁸⁰ Deleuze & Guattari 1988 *A Thousand Plateaus* Continuum London p7

recognisable links and features, as you would use a map⁸¹. Deleuze and Guattari discuss in *A Thousand Plateaus* the importance of a map-like relationship to gaining knowledge: 'What distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real.'⁸² The Viatopia videos offer this heightened sense of active engagement with the real through their portrayal of space and their consumption.

The video *Amsterdam by Coach* uses a kaleidoscope to re-present the real space of the road. Crary describes the kaleidoscope as 'a machine of the disintegration of a unitary subjectivity and for the scattering of desire into new shifting and labile arrangements, by fragmenting any point of iconicity and disrupting stasis.'⁸³ The moving faceted image has within it one shard of directly seen road hidden amongst many moving, glittering pieces which reflect and reverse views of the space. Identifying which is the original segment becomes irrelevant. The kaleidoscope, transformed 'each observer into simultaneously the magician and the deceived.'⁸⁴



Amsterdam by Coach stills

By using optical equipment in this way, I have tried to step outside of established forms of viewing, to a place that could be described as polyocularity where the viewer is not constructing a singular: 'other' but a 'crowd' a personality disorder of vision. This is a multiphrenic adaptability

⁸¹ Deleuze & Guattari 1988 *A Thousand Plateaus* Continuum London p7

⁸² Ibid p 13

⁸³ Crary J, 1992 *Techniques of the Observer* October Books MIT press London UK p113-114

⁸⁴ Crary J, 1992 *Techniques of the Observer* October Books MIT press London UK p133

that is defined as: 'Having multiple identities pieced together from the multiplicity of mediated messages in our environments.'⁸⁵ This of course does not mean viewing is easy, as this threatens the viewer's sense of 'singular' identity with a polyvalent form of perception. This development in the video work offers significant alternative strategies for reading travel space, and is much closer to the phenomenological focus of this research project.

⁸⁵ <http://www.definition-of.com/multiphrenic> accessed 27.07.09

Mirrors For Un-Recognition

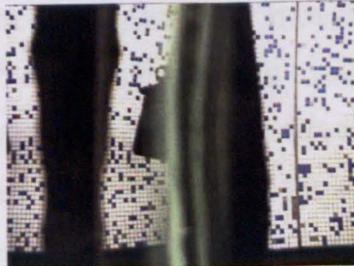
*We are now so accustomed to encountering our image at every turn in mirrors, photographs and on videotape that it is difficult to measure the extraordinary impact on human sensibilities brought about by the possibility of seeing oneself head to toe in a mirror, not to mention the upheaval in perceptual space*⁸⁶

Sabine Melchior-Bonnet

The capacity for mirrors and lenses to disturb and reconfigure vision has been the rationale for their experimental use in the *Viatopias* videos. The mirrors and lenses used in *Road to Madrid* onwards are constructed in such a way that they allow the viewer to 'un-discover' public space. This is particularly true of the walking, tube and train videos that record mundane commuter journeys through the centre of London. This work aims to take apart and 'un-know' familiar and often travelled routes. Videos such as *Road to Madrid*, *Green Park* and *Folding Windows* employ mirrors and lenses to re-configure visual travel space. The resulting 'de-recognition' in these videos sets up a challenge to the viewer's occupation of space, their movement forcing a visual nomadism.



Road to Madrid still 2003



Green Park still 2005



Folding Windows still 2005

⁸⁶ Melchior-Bonnet S, 1994, *The Mirror – A History*, Originally published in French *Histoire du Miroir* English Trans Jewett K H, 2002 Routledge UK. p2

In assessing the ambiguous role that mirrors have in relation to our vision and our perception of the world, it is important to examine what mirrors do. The fundamental action of the mirror separates an image from its physical tactile reality. As Stafford and Terpak comment in the exhibition publication for the *Devices of Wonder* Exhibition:

Mirrors belong to a long line of artificial devices for separating objects from their images and lifting images from their adhering surfaces. Skimming not only lightens things but makes them transportable and per-mutable.⁸⁷

This quality offered by reflective surfaces makes them ideal partners in a visual project focused on peeling away established visual practices and identify an experiential, moving multi-spatial perception of spaces, that act as conduits. As Sabine Melchior-Bonnet comments: 'the mirror offers an enigmatic and divergent way of knowing... an invisible "elsewhere" in the heart of the visible'⁸⁸ This is particularly appropriate to these travel spaces, as sites of always 'passing through' an elsewhere to traditional destinations. The splitting of the image from its form offers a double dislocation, a reflection of the space that is also dissociated from an identity of destination.

Despite Plato's condemnation of reflection as a deceptive and fleeting distortion of the real,⁸⁹ he suggests this split of image and form enables the mind of the viewer to contemplate image as analogy freeing it from mundane reality. This disassociation has the potential to point to 'cause rather than effect' in a similar way that the 'moving shadows drive the wise to leave the cave,'⁹⁰ a reflection points to something hidden and has the potential to activate symbolic levels of understanding. The mirrors used in these video pieces use reflection like a key that unlocks the recognised from the experienced, disassociating the mimetic from the

⁸⁷ Stafford B, & Terpak F, 2002 *Devices of Wonder* Volume accompanying Exhibition at the J Paul Getty Museum The Getty Research Publications, L.A.

⁸⁸ op cit p102

⁸⁹ Plato, *The Republic* X 596 in Melchior-Bonnet S, *The Mirror – A History*.

⁹⁰ Melchior-Bonnet S, 2002 *The Mirror – A History*, Originally published in French *Histoire du Miroir* 1994, English Trans Jewett K H, Routledge UK. p104

haptic. Digital video is strangely well equipped to work in the play between these two states through its inherent immateriality yet its ability to represent in a material way.

While the viewer may be able to acknowledge the experience in the video work, there is little recognisable image to jog their visual memory, few 'pre-installed' images to call up to enable a short cut to visual processing, no quick route to understanding. The mirror becomes a sharp knife inserted between the camera and the object, that fillets the skin of recognition from the form, requiring the viewer to reassemble the dispersed visual remains as if seeing it for the first time. In this new act of construction, there is an opportunity for the viewer to reconsider spatial relationships and form alternative understandings.

Socrates proposed the mirror as teacher in line with his guiding rule 'know thyself' an aphorism inscribed in the forecourt of the Temple of Apollo at Delphi⁹¹. In ancient Greece mirrors carried the association not of vanity but of contemplation for the purposes of self-knowledge and humility. Terms like 'to reflect upon' still carry the association of knowledge gained through visual contemplation with the underlying assumption that visual repetition can lead to internal understanding. The redoubled reflections in *Road to Madrid*, *Green Park* and *Folding Windows*, both question the viewer's assumed knowledge about a public space and challenge their visual ordering of a visual experience. The videos offer a 'you almost knew...' sensation as the viewer is left to assemble the scrambled but faintly familiar moving imagery. This multiplicity of image requires a deep perceptual introspection. In *Road to Madrid* the image fractures in many directions, some areas of the screen inverts the image and some maintain it in an upright position but reflects it laterally, requires the viewer to employ both visual multi-tasking to make sense of the moving imagery and abandon searching for narrative and embrace a holistic 'absorption' of the video.

⁹¹ http://www.culture.gr/h/2/eh251.jsp?obj_id=1318 accessed 13.10.09

The Latin term for mirror was *speculum* made from *spec(ere)* to look, behold + *ulum* an instrument. During the Middle Ages however *speculum* also came to mean the encyclopedic collection of knowledge to improve self-understanding. Here again there is the semantic link between visual reflection and contemplative thought, continuing today through phrases like 'to speculate' - to engage in conjectural or experimental thought. Interestingly, this has recently accumulated the additional sense of 'taking a risk'. Perhaps branching out with new visual methods to gain a deeper understanding is indeed risky. However the space to experiment is valuable and the complex visual space offered by the scattered images in 'Road to Madrid' do not offer any concrete perceptual solutions, rather the opportunity to speculate visually.

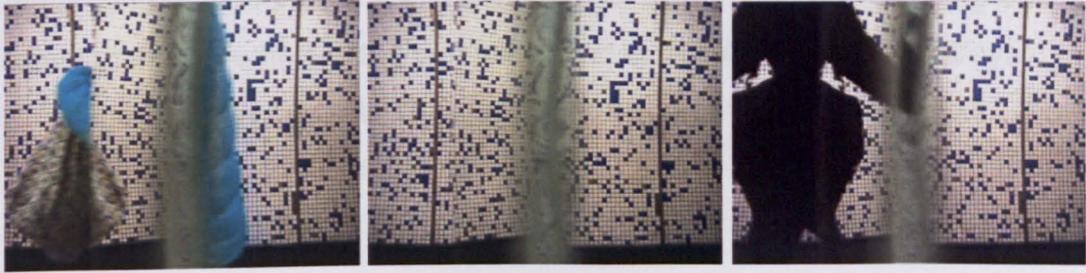
Melchior-Bonnet refers to a privileging of vision in the Middle Ages, identifying sight as the preferred way of acquiring knowledge. This had an obvious influence on the heightened power that was conferred on optical devices such as mirrors:

This marvellous object was also a disturbing one. Because it did not duplicate reality exactly – in the mirror the right hand becomes the left – the reflection poses questions about image and resemblance... just where does the image reside? At the same time both present and elsewhere, the perceived image has an unsettling ubiquity and depth, located at an uncertain distance.⁹²

In the video *Green Park* the mirrors double, re-double and swallow the space of the underground connecting passageway. The passing travellers appear to be folded in and out of the passage itself, approaching from one direction, then from both only to disappear momentarily and then to double again before a single image disappears at the opposite end from their arrival. Where do they go when they are not there? Does this 'elsewhere' space of the connecting passageway itself have an elsewhere? Their doubling appears to happen laterally in

⁹² *ibid* p 101

the same space not a parallel space, throwing into question which is the original image and which is the copy?



Green Park stills

Gilles Deleuze refers to this doubling circuit that forms a looped exchange in more mainstream cinema in *Cinema 2*:

'Oblique mirrors, concave and convex mirrors and Venetian mirrors are inseparable from a circuit, ... This circuit itself is an exchange: the mirror-image is virtual in relation to the actual character that the mirror catches, but it is actual in the mirror which now leaves the character with only a virtuality and pushes him back out-of-field. The exchange is all the more active when the circuit refers to a polygon with a growing number of sides: as in a face reflected on the facets of a ring, an actor seen in an infinity of twins. When virtual images proliferate like this, all together they absorb the entire actuality of the character, at the same time as the character is no more than one virtuality among others.'⁹³

This observation by Deleuze of the increased visual power of multiplied or faceted images is relevant to a number of the video pieces that have scattered or fractured images such as *Road to Madrid*, the Kaleidoscope piece *Amsterdam by Coach* or *blind glass*. The 'actors' in these cases are the travel routes themselves, but the 'original route' becomes virtual, one option among many, and indistinguishable from the infinity of 'virtualities' that surround it. These multiplied images are offered up as more than mimetic virtualities, they are given the weighting of 'alternative realities' through a democracy of image value across the screen. The facets in the videos *Road to Madrid* and *Amsterdam by Coach* lock together to form a

⁹³ Deleuze G, 2005 *Cinema 2* Continuum Impacts Publishers, UK Ch 4.

chain link fence of imagery, united in their deflection of direct representation. Somewhere in *Amsterdam by Coach* is a small segment that is not reflected, that is viewed directly. It is almost impossible to say which one this might be, and it is no longer important. The dizzying and spectacular unfurling of the wet grey road out of Amsterdam conveys more information about the spatial experience of travelling this route than a single direct image ever could.



Road to Madrid still



Amsterdam by Coach still



blind glass still

In her examination of the *Arnolfini Marriage Portrait* by Jan Van Eyck, Melchior-Bonnet describes the mirror that is at the centre of the painting as ‘not an instrument of imitation, but rather both microscope and telescope, calling forth another reality within the closed space of the work.’⁹⁴ So even within a static painting, itself a form of reflection of ‘reality’ the painted mirror acts as a spatial talisman alluding to the existence of ‘other’ spaces and offering other forms of vision.

In *Folding Windows* above there is a constant offering of four alternative visual spaces from within the space of the tube carriage, that continue to unfold throughout the video. The spaces are paired, similar yet opposite, with no clue given as to which space might be the original and which might be alternative reflections. This range of optical spaces, present the viewer, used to a visual hierarchy, with a dilemma of visual concentration. To follow or ‘believe’ two sections of the video would be to miss out on the remaining half, to step back, un-focus and allow all of the video to wash over one in a multi perspective approach is to let go of the ‘truth’ of

⁹⁴ ibid p 122

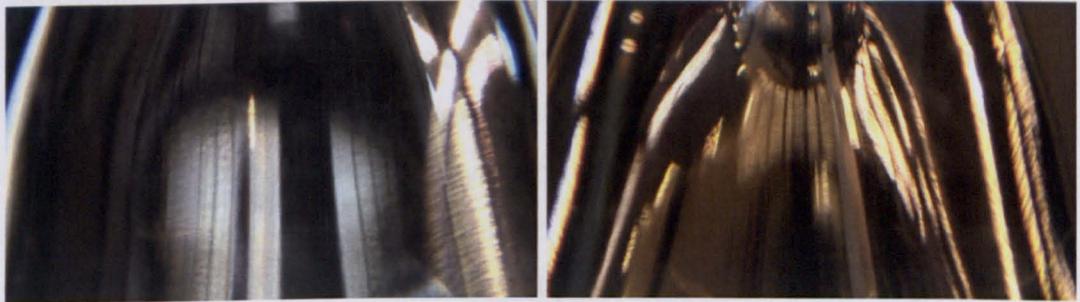
single viewpoint perspective. Viewers of the video have commented on the sensation of being caught between different *modus operandi*. The mundane subject matter and lack of narrative apparently highlight the viewer's sensation of perceptual dilemma. These four dominant reflective spaces are further overlaid by the series of reflections in the tube window itself, which refer to spaces behind the viewer's line of sight. This layering of anterior and posterior space, all moving in opposite directions, fold the viewer's perception into this 'marbling' of travel space.



Folding Windows stills 2005

Using a slightly different approach, there are a number of videos that explore gallery or museum space as places of both physical and conceptual travel. Videos such as *Tate Modern Turbine Hall*, *The Norwich House Music Room* and the *PM Gallery* use combined techniques of anamorphic distortion and reflection layered on top of each other. Their anamorphic treatments of space both hide and reveal, preventing an obvious and immediate recognition by denying realistic representation and revealing other spatial options. They are not stimulating *a priori* memory by offering recognition of the galleries from advertising and Web pages. In semiotic terms the deflection of recognition stops them acting as signifiers for well-known spaces. They appeal instead to an *a posteriori* form of knowing: knowledge gained through the experience of travelling through the gallery or museum spaces. The *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* gives a particularly haptic sensation of viewing the exhibition space, the anamorphic visuals denying a surface reading whilst at the same time the real time audio grounds the viewer in a clearly recognisable space with mundane

everyday sounds. The tension caused by the 'normality' of the sound in relation to the distorted images requires the viewer to work extra hard at balancing the perceptive experience with the auditory one as they try to make sense of the illusive visuals. The anamorphic disguise of one form of knowledge calls out for a perceptual enactment that takes the viewer to a different form of knowledge, one based in spatial experience and peripheral visual skills.



Tate Modern Turbine Hall stills 2006

Stafford & Terpak comment on this ability of mirrors to make the viewer work at the perceptual understanding.

As the source of puzzling and captivating anamorphoses, mirrors constitute a kind of optical magic. The mirror becomes not just duplicating but an enacting ocular device. The contradictions inlaid on its surface summon us to change our ways; its transformations impel us to turn around. Like a code breaker, curved mirrors assist the spectator in cracking a scrambled message.⁹⁵

An additional quality of the convex mirror is their questioning of stable perspective and therefore introducing complexity and mobility to perception. The video work becomes a perceptual prism where concepts and images reflect off each other, and layer planes of meanings in a network of metaphors and references. The *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* video appears to be both modern and ancient, filmed in High Definition digital video clearly a contemporary medium, in a newly refurbished

⁹⁵ Stafford B, & Terpak F, 2002 *Devices of Wonder* Volume accompanying Exhibition at the J Paul Getty Museum, The Getty Research Publications, L.A. p30

modern gallery space, the optical association however appear to belong to a different age. The lack of Renaissance perspective throws the viewer into a different historical era whilst still seeing contemporary imagery. The video resonates with the atmosphere of Baroque cathedrals, Galileo's experiments, futuristic science fiction films, and virtual gaming environments. The aim is for the viewer to feel strangely sensorially handicapped, in some unidentifiably way, yet overly spatially aware in another. This leads to a strange temporal blending of space and references. The *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* aims to bring strangeness to the domestic and the familiar by telescoping visual history reversing the anamorphic effects of the seventeenth century proliferation of mirrored fun houses. These were employed for entertainment with the aim to 'domesticate strangeness through an ideal panoptic vision.'⁹⁶ *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* references multiple visual histories through it's destabilising of rational vision and a confusion of space setting the architecture of the Tate Modern into a dialogue with buildings from a completely different era. As Angela Ndaljianis observes:

'Baroque style involves a synthesis of styles or past techniques to transcend or perfect those techniques, additionally, stylistic coherence in the baroque is the result of the reorganisation of past signs and stylisations into new combinations so that a dialogue emerges between the past and the present.'⁹⁷

For Baudelaire the kaleidoscope, invented by Sir David Brewster in 1815 reflected the modern condition itself. His aim as a 'lover of life' was to become 'a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness'⁹⁸ Baudelaire saw the kaleidoscope as 'a machine for the disintegration of a unitary subjectivity and for the scattering of desire into new shifting and labile arrangements, by fragmenting any point of

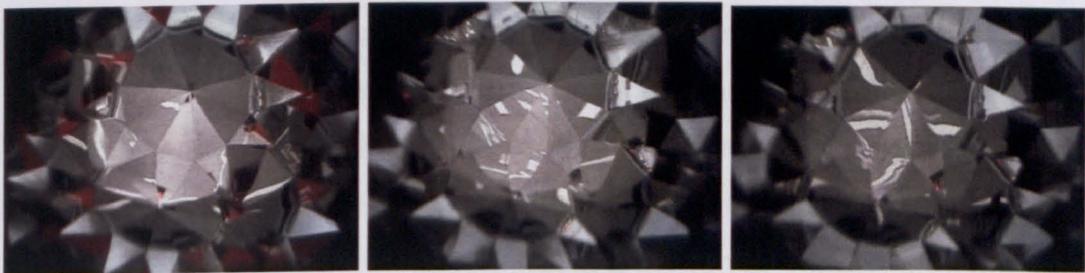
⁹⁶ibid p225

⁹⁷ Ndaljianis A, 2004 *Neo Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* MIT Press USA p73

⁹⁸ Baudelaire C, 1964 *The Painter of Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne, Phaidon Press p9-10

iconicity and disrupting stasis.⁹⁹ It represented desire at it's most visually dynamic and perhaps operated as a perceptual forerunner of the proposed contemporary visual approach proposed in this research.

However suspicion of the kaleidoscope's 'illusory skills' overpowered what perceptual alternatives it had to offer, as Crary observes the kaleidoscope transforms: 'each observer into simultaneously the magician and the deceived.'¹⁰⁰ A magician, because it creates the possibility of other forms of spatial awareness, deceived, not unless static single viewpoint perspective is the only perceptual truth allowed.



Amsterdam by Coach Stills 2004

As a device for re-ordering the road space in *Amsterdam by coach*, the kaleidoscope proved to be so effective in its visual disruption that during filming it was difficult to ascertain what was being filmed, even a gravitational sense of 'which way was up' was lost. The final video could in fact be played with any side as 'up'. This is perhaps pushing spatial ambiguity to its limits, but it does however demonstrate that a video piece can still function visually in this highly spatially re-constructed way. The device certainly 'fragments any point of iconicity' in the accepted sense of a single static recognisable image, however perhaps it is the journey that in a dynamic way becomes the 'icon' of the video.

Christine Ross in discussing the ontology of video in an article in *Mirror Machine – Video and Identity* posits the language of video as solely

⁹⁹ Crary J, 1992 *Techniques of the Observer* October Books MIT press London UK p113-114

¹⁰⁰ *ibid* p133

surface: 'What does one say about an image that presents itself as nothing more than the effect of reflection...?'¹⁰¹ Her reading of video, sites this form of representation as a 'process of slippage and dislocation.'¹⁰²

A video image (which could only be) of the surface is one which invites the gaze to slip; the visible surface of video hampers perceptual access. Not only does this work against depth but depth itself is absorbed.¹⁰³

She presents this as a separation of 'the interior from the exterior' that denies integration and enacted perception by the viewer. She suggests the video 'feigns mimesis... the surface throws off the spectator in order to constitute itself as subject; it aborts the subject.'¹⁰⁴ This denial of the viewer's engagement may operate in the realm of recognisable imagery (daytime TV perhaps unfairly comes to mind) that holds the power to simultaneously seduce and repel, leading the viewer to be excluded and frustrated by this superficiality 'skimming without dipping below the surface'. A form of representation that is a screen of images consumed passively and ultimately unsatisfying. However the subversion of recognition in the Viatopia videos contests the mimetic sleight of hand inherent in the media, and reintroduces the engagement of the viewer. This combined with the videos' gritty mundane reality of everyday ambient sounds, thoroughly contextualises the swirling images in a recognisable reality. The visual can no longer remain a chaotic surface decoration; the subject becomes implicated by the act of reconstruction.

¹⁰¹ Ross C, 1995 *The Lamented Moments – Desired Objects of Video Art* article in *Mirror Machine – Video and Identity*, ed Marchessault J, YYZ Books Canada. p129

¹⁰² *ibid* p130

¹⁰³ Ross C, 1995 *The Lamented Moments – Desired Objects of Video Art* article in *Mirror Machine – Video and Identity*, ed Marchessault J, YYZ Books Canada. p131

¹⁰⁴ *ibid* p 132



blind glass stills

The video *blind glass* is an example of an apparently surface and decorative approach to the media. The stills above show the reflections layered on top of each other through the use of faceted glass. When the video is played however the moving images start to glide across each layer at different angles reflecting different elements of the same space. The movement of the train is lateral, and continues in one direction but the faceted lenses pick up and reflect movement from several directions. The resulting visual space presents a spatial complexity that the viewer has to manage.

The spatial experience is similar to those achieved by 'structure from motion', computer visualisation techniques¹⁰⁵. The lights revolving over the surface of the lens and the landscape flowing beneath it give an increased sense of volume. The visual power of kinetic depth or 'structure from motion' where movement of 3D objects dramatically enhance the perception of tangible space, is only just coming back into play through the development of computer gaming and virtual web based worlds such as 'Second Life'. In these virtual environments the conjuring up of alternative spatial territories brings back the sense of wonder that a visit to Baroque churches in the seventeenth century must have engendered. These virtual reality techniques draw on the earlier stereoscopic approach to perception that excelled in a hypnotic enfolding of the viewer. The immersive presentation of the space draws the spectator in making them strangely intimate with the scene. This of course was used to

¹⁰⁵ Humans perceive a lot of information about the three-dimensional structure in their environment by moving through it. When observers move and the objects around them move, information is obtained from images sensed over time. Linda G. Shapiro, George C. Stockman 2001. *Computer Vision*. Prentice Hall. ISBN 0-13-030796-3.

dubious pornographic effect when the 'stereoscope' was popularised, though presumably was not the reason it was invented by Charles Wheatstone in 1838. As Cray comments in *Techniques of the Observer*:

The stereoscope as a means of representation was inherently *obscene*, in the most literal sense. It shattered the scenic relationship between viewer and object and there developed perhaps an understanding link between the stereoscope and pornography fuelled by the growing need to take possession of objects or images from close hand experience... Thus the desired effect of the stereoscope was not simply likeness, but immediate, apparent tangibility... no other form of representation in the 19th century had so conflated the real with the optical.¹⁰⁶

It is perhaps too easy to align stereoscopic vision with today's multimedia virtual worlds, although there is an interesting parallel with the rapid expansion of pornography into every corner of the Internet but it is clear that there is a long lineage of cultural experimentation in the visual depiction of space and our struggle to understand our environment.

Walter Benjamin wished for a '*historiographic telescope* capable of seeing through the phantasmagoric fog – a haptic–optic instrument for bringing the tangible, tactile concreteness of things closer to view'¹⁰⁷ The Viatopia videos attempt to answer this haptic / optic need through their presentation of a phenomenological tactility. Bringing things into view through an immanence that is constructed between the viewer and the experience of the work. This is a continual process when viewing the Viatopia videos, which operates in a Deleuzeian '*field of immanence of desire*' - a desire that is a process of re-producing meaning not from a mirrored recognition, but from the experience of travelling and viewing these videos.

¹⁰⁶ Hartley R, and Zisserman A 2003. *Multiple View Geometry in Computer Vision*. Cambridge University Press ibid p124

¹⁰⁷ Mertins D, 1999 *Walter Benjamin – Using Architecture as an Optical Instrument* article in *The Optic of Walter Benjamin* ed Coles A, Black Dog Publishing UK.

To take a phenomenological¹⁰⁸ approach to the role of vision in the environment it is important to consider how we experience it without any preconceptions. Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests 'in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it.'¹⁰⁹ It is this difficult task of 'un-knowing' the familiar that is so difficult to achieve in the visual realm. Merleau-Ponty identifies recognition, which acts as a short cut to pre-established knowledge as a key element in our construction of daily assumptions:

The presupposed basis of any thought, they are taken for granted, and go unnoticed, and because in order to arouse them and bring them to view, we have to suspend for a moment our recognition of them.¹¹⁰

The act of peeling away recognition from familiar travel spaces through filming 'reveals the world as strange and paradoxical.'¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ 'Phenomenology is the study of "phenomena": appearances of things, or things as they appear in our experience, or the ways we experience things, thus the meanings things have in our experience.' Definition: Smith, David Woodruff, "Phenomenology", The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (Summer 2009 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/phenomenology/>>. Accessed 27.07.09

¹⁰⁹ Merleau-Ponty M, 1962 *Phenomenology of perception* Routledge pxv

¹¹⁰ Merleau-Ponty M, 1962 *Phenomenology of perception* Routledge pxv

¹¹¹ *ibid* pxv

Sound as an Urban Compass

'Sound situates man (us) in the middle of actuality and simultaneity, whereas vision situates man (us) in front of things and in sequentiality.'¹¹²

Walter Ong

'The trouble is that noises are never just sounds, and the sounds they mask are never just sounds: they are ideas of noise.'¹¹³

Douglas Kahn

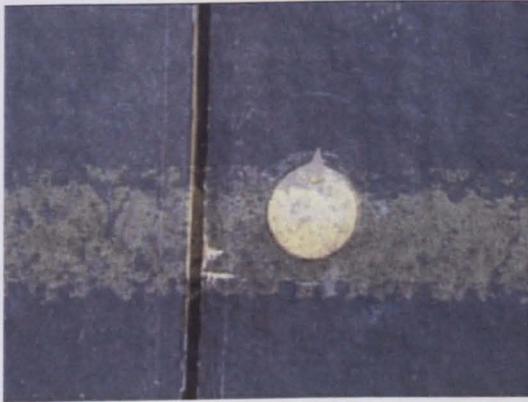
This chapter considers the role of sound in the experience of contemporary urban travel, and throughout I will insert other voices, and ideas drawn from audio theory as a strategy to open up conceptual spaces parallel to my work. I hope these will function in the same way as a radio debate or phone conversation on a journey. I would also like to use Walter Ong's quote that highlights the contrasting sensory functions of sound and vision as a sounding board to explore the relationship between the audio and the visual components in the Viatopia series of videos. Do they support and enhance each other or do they contradict and challenge each other within the viewing experience, or has perhaps their form of communication been transposed and reversed, is the video filmed in an immersive auditory way and the audio orientating the viewer physically in space, and what does this mean for the viewer?

I aim to finish by asking a number of questions: does the digitisation of sound mean that the 'convergence of all digital media under the digital

¹¹² Ong W J, 1981 *The Presence Of The Word: Some Prolegomena For Cultural And Religious History*. University of Minnesota Press, p128

¹¹³ Kahn D, 2001 *Noise, Water, Meat* MIT Press, USA p20

regime actually spells the end of media?'¹¹⁴ as Friedrich Kittler in 'Gramophone, Film, Typewriter,' suggests. In our increasingly immersive technological society will there come to be no clear distinction between the senses, or does media convergence offer more than the sum of the parts?



But You Know This already.. still 2001



To The Corner Shop still 2004

In the videos above two distinctly different approaches have been taken. *But you know this already...* traces the short walk from the 'no parking' line outside Chelsea college gate up to the door of the *Milbank 2* exhibition on the campus where the video was shown. The subject of this piece was multiple mundane journeys that are not remembered or enjoyed. The visual image and ambient audio had been layered over each other three times in five-second steps; the video was looped so that the end of the first journey overlapped the beginning of the third one.

The audio was unedited and tracks the walk to the door, each layer providing an echo of what either has been or what lies ahead, depending on which layer is your visual focus. The viewer at the exhibition would also have had their own experience of the walk in their recent memory. The suggestion of the work was that if you rushed to view this exhibition you would only be confronted by the journey you did not notice on the

¹¹⁴ Kittler F 1999 *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* trans Geoffrey Winthrop-Young & Michael Wutz Stanford University Press p1

way. If you had noticed the route, then the sensory experience of walking would have been reaffirmed in a new way.

The layering of the audio produced an interesting effect: instead of cancelling each other out, the repetition of the audio tracks seemed to emphasise or underline certain sounds in the environment such as the sound of a taxi pulling away or a distant horn. These elements initially worked as markers in the performance of the journey and then in their repeat seconds later an *aide memoire*, a sonic photo of what had passed.

To the Corner Shop filmed three years later treats the experience of the familiar walk to the corner shop very differently. Here an old lens from an overhead projector has been held in front of the camera lens, and the recorded moving imagery is a pre-layered mix of magnified raw tarmac and pavement over which floats a stretched reflection of the tops of the nearby buildings and the sky, upside down. This anamorphic reflection has a visual stutter, an unclear paler double that tracks it. Both reflections disappear momentarily when the route passes under the shadows of nearby trees, at these points the magnified pavement comes sharply into focus.

The audio is also structured differently: there is a single track of ambient sound, getting louder as the main road is approached, which is overlaid by a second track with a slightly muffled sound referencing iPod headphones giving an indistinct impression of recorded music. These tracks combine with the slightly jerky pacing of the visuals to give a disparate multisensory phenomenological experience of walking to the shops, rather than an ordered, recognisable hierarchical representation of the senses that organises and tames the perceptual multi-tasking involved in walking this route. There are at least five spaces operating in this video; the ambient audio space that slowly increases with the volume and texture of the approaching high street, which shifts the perception away from the second more personal sound of iPod space. Visually, the magnified coarse surface of the pavement emphasises the haptic space felt by your feet, which is overlaid by a doubled distant reflection of the

tops of the buildings and the clouds, a more distant street space. There is of course also the personal space of the viewer watching the videos.

The stereo nature of human hearing facilitates at a fundamental level our ability to position ourselves in a specific physical space. Hearing the sounds of our environment enables us to contextualise our place within the 'performing' world around us and navigate a safe route through it. Sound has an inherently spatial quality to it, and as the sea surrounds a fish, so we are immersed in the constant vibrations of our environment.

Jean-Paul Thibaud in *The Sonic Composition of the City* discusses 'Interphonic Knots' which happen when virtual and geographical space combine. They become 'the point of convergence between two sonic spaces of a different nature – that of the walking listener and that of the street.'¹¹⁵

Thibaud also comments on the relationship between radio reception and the urban environment. One of the reasons that the use of pre-recorded music has become so widespread in the urban environment is due to the physical presence of the large buildings screening reception. 'It is remarkable that walking listeners are capable of localising zones of radio wave disturbance so precisely. On their walking route, they identify radio territories in the city and acquire their own knowledge.'¹¹⁶ Listening to radio whilst walking through the city functions in a very different way to pre-recorded music, the radio listener is continually adjusting either their station or their geographic position in response to the built environment. Whereas the iPod user with self organised playlists is adjusting the perception of their environment to meet their needs.

Thibaud refers to areas where reception interference occurs as a 'Topophonic Knot': 'the interference point between media listening and architectural space'¹¹⁷ in these places sometimes no reception is

¹¹⁵ Thibaud JP, 2003 *The Sonic Composition of the City* article in *The Auditory Culture Reader* ed Bull M, Back L, Berg publishing Oxford UK p335

¹¹⁶ *ibid* p336

¹¹⁷ *ibid* p336

available, sometimes two stations at once. Often the stations are very localised in geography and specific in content with a particular age group or ethnic emphasis, and reveal a cultural architecture.

If we are denied the ability to hear we often experience the heightened need to touch close objects as an anchoring device, and an urgent need to look in all directions, to compensate for a lack of spatial information. Richard Minard describes our tendency to perceive space with our ears more than our eyes, and how we use this ability to orientate ourselves in space and enhance our visual understanding of our environment. He suggests that quite accurate impressions of architectural space and building materials can be identified through 'room reverberation time, resonance, sound-reflection characteristics and types of frequency absorption,'¹¹⁸

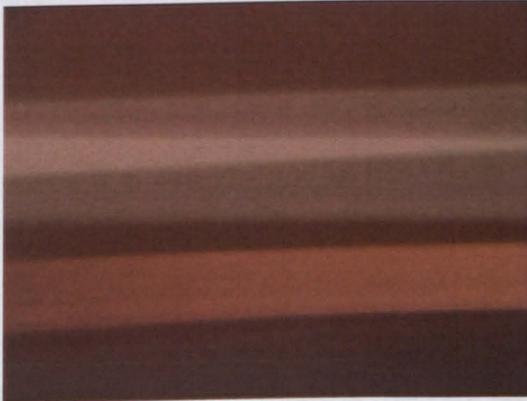
However despite the importance of sound in the perception of our built urban environment, auditory information is not high in the modern hierarchy of knowledge. Prior to the Enlightenment, God 'spoke' and the world was ... the bible was a substitute for sound. The 'word' of god was divine communication. However the role of sight, and vision from the Baroque onwards has assumed a monopolising position almost unquestioned. Derrick de Kerckhove identifies this significant shift through the myth of Narcissus and Echo, at the moment when Echo calls and Narcissus no longer hears her:

That for me is the mythical moment when the alphabet man loses connection with Nature, loses connection with the other senses. This is the kind of attitude that ushers in the Baroque period, where touch will be simulated by vision with *Trompe l'oeil* and so on, and the dominion of the eye over the other senses will be sealed and declared.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Minard R, *Sound Installation Art* paper for the Institute of Electronic Music Graz <http://iem.at/projekte/publications/bem/bem6/bem6> p14 accessed 11.1.08

¹¹⁹ De Kerckhove D, 2002 *Recovering Narcissus: Sound and Touch in the Digital World*, *Soundscape Journal* vol 3. No. 1, July p15

This rise in the cultural importance of looking has been covered comprehensively by Jonathan Crary and Martin Jay respectively in *Techniques of the Observer* and *Downcast Eyes*, particularly the Victorian drive to colonise both what the eye saw and the eye itself. The project to control the eye was an effort to control the efficient production of wealth as well as the social criminal. From the Catholic Church's use of the spectacular Baroque as a defence against the rationalism of the Enlightenment, via Bentham's all seeing Panopticon design for a prison, to the feminist deconstruction of the male gaze, vision has long been linked with power and control. It has misleadingly been called 'the most distancing of all the senses'¹²⁰ yet this does not take account of the subjective complexities of the visual sense.



Side Stripe still



No Stopping still

In the two videos *Side Stripe* and *No Stopping* the camera seems to caress the surface of the road, looking with an intensity that we do not normally use on such mundane routes such as the North Circular. The videos are a composite of three layers, three journeys summoning up multiple commutes, and memories of this route. Both videos have been slowed to 30% of their original speed to allow the tactile nature of the road surface to be taken in by the viewer. In the case of *Side Stripe* this was achieved in very simple video editing software, the lengthening of the video duration stretches the video, causing the audio to break up into little

¹²⁰ Bull M, Back L, 2003 *The Auditory Culture Reader* Berg Publishing Oxford UK p4

stutters of syncopated sound. This fragmented audio produced by the faltering digital signal works in parallel with the extreme colour fluctuations of the image as the digital camera struggles to adjust to the change from daylight to florescent with headlights and back to daylight. *Side Stripe* presents a visual and auditory experience that hovers on the edge of abstraction, by slightly transforming the original material.

No Stopping layers the experience of momentarily passing over a no stopping junction box three times. The image here is much more recognisable and the video has been slowed to 30% using more advanced software so that the ambient audio (U2 on the car radio plus surrounding traffic) has dropped in pitch but the tune remains audible, transformed but recognisable. The staggered audio also mirrors the visual folding in the image where the road markings are reflected in the side of the vehicle suggesting different generations of information. The audio spaces in the video are built up from the street sounds, the 'in car' sounds such as muffled talking, and the car radio. All of these sounds reflect 'not stopping' in the looped track. The digital stretching of both these pieces allows the visual image to be more easily read, whereas the change in sound shifts the work into a different perceptual space adjacent to reality. This highlights the crucial role audio plays in the perceptual construction of space.

The nineteenth century advances in audio technology made possible the releasing of a sound from its source through permanent recording and offered both independence between sound and image and the permanent capturing of sound.¹²¹ Ursula Franklin highlights the importance of this in her paper *Silence and the Notion of the Commons*. This established audio as an expressive form. Murray Schafer writing in *The Soundscape* a highly influential early text on audio theory introduced the term 'Soundscape' making a clear early link between sound and physical

¹²¹ Franklin U, 2000 *Silence and the Notion of the Commons* Soundscape Journal vol1 no.2 Winter. 'What modern technology has brought to sound is the possibility of doing two different things: to separate the sound from the source and to make the sound permanent' P 14.

space. However, he also called the separation of sound from its source *schizophonia*,¹²² This term schizophonia carries with it the negative associations that the Greek terms for 'split' schizo combined with phono (voice / sound) may not be natural or entirely good. This ambivalent relationship to contemporary mediated sound has grown almost as fast as modes of recording have proliferated. Olivier Balay, in his article on *Discrete Mapping of Urban Soundscapes* identifies an even more negative contemporary approach:

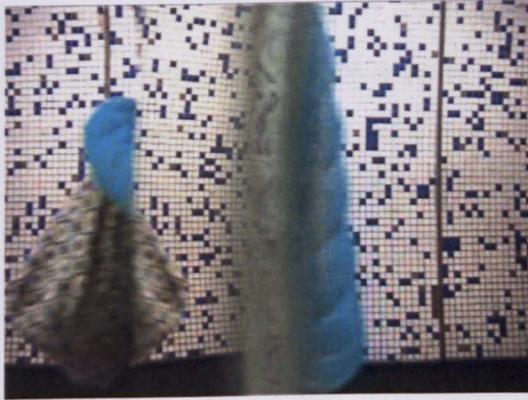
(In) the history of representation of urban soundscapes since the end of the 19th century – three points are of particular note: we have stopped describing sound and now only measure its quantity; instead of taking account of the perceptible effects of sound material we now study its acoustic impact; and we have stopped creating paths for the circulation of sound in space and started fitting sound insulation.¹²³

The view of sound as pollution, invasive, disruptive, unpleasant, aggressive, antisocial, 'not natural' - to be kept out, developed alongside a 1970's dislike of urbanism. De Certeau writing the *Practice of Everyday Life*¹²⁴ in the 70's, proposed that walking in the urban environment required strategies and tactics (re-sited military terms) to allow the contemporary urban Flâneur to cope with the real environment. The arrival of the mobile phone in public urban space illustrates this need as urban walkers multiple perceptions are today radically re-focused through multiple sound environments.

¹²² Murray Schafer R, 1994 *The Soundscape: Our Sonic Environment and the Tuning of the World* Destiny Books USA p54

¹²³ Balay O, 2004 *Discrete mapping of urban soundscapes* trans H Foster, *Soundscape Journal* vol 8 no.1 p13

¹²⁴ De Certeau 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life* University of California Press, London



Green Park still



Arriving at Goodmayes still

The Underground passages and train spaces in videos such as *Green Park* and *Arriving at Goodmayes* are fluid multi spaces. Travellers are in the process of travelling. In *Green Park*, the slowed and broken announcements operate as an audio equivalent of the fragmented tile pattern in the background that acts as a form of strangely pixelated visual noise. The travellers appear distracted by the many spatial options and are presented on the video as being only partially present, visually slipping in and out of reception.

In the train video *Arriving at Goodmayes* seated passengers are more physically static but inhabit several visual, virtual and auditory spaces as they are caught in reflections, surf from laptops as well as answer the phone. The visual complexity of the video image describes the multiple virtual / physical spaces. The audio here is not layered, it simply records the ambient sound at 70% of real time, synchronised with the image. This slowing of the audio shifts the viewer from reading it as a window on the everyday to consider there are more realities to contend with than surface visual / audio ones.

As Caroline Bassett observes in *How Many Movements?* 'Today the city streets are full of virtual doorways opening into other places.'¹²⁵ She draws the distinction between De Certeau's version of rail travel as an

¹²⁵ Bassett C, 2003 *How Many Movements?* article in *The Auditory Culture Reader* ed Bull M, Back L, Berg publishing Oxford UK p345

'incarceration vacation'¹²⁶ a sealed environment away from the pressures and responsibilities of everyday life, and today's mobile accompanied train journeys that have no dislocation from the outside world, 'Each world is shot through with the other.'¹²⁷ This reveals a significant move from the colonising view emphasised by one of the great Victorian heterotopias, the train, to global communication via mobile phone technology. The command of the eye, has given way to the demands of our ears, not disciplined by enclosure but controlled via communication to paraphrase Deleuze. Gone is the train as a symbol of mobility, this has been drowned out by 'a new symbol of a particular kind of contemporary freedom to move and act in multiple spaces, and a symbol of 'always on' accountability / surveillance.'¹²⁸ The mobile phone is the definitive object of mobility that enables multiple aural and spatial perceptions anywhere. A later video 'Phone View' presents this convergence as a washing machine of communication, which causes the bleeding of contrasting spaces.



Phone View stills 2007

Bassett describes mobile equipped travellers as inhabiting a form of 'interface' that exists almost between the high speed passing landscape on the outside, and the static interior of the train. We are today neither fully present in the train, or completely outside it but are folded in layers of different sensory experience. The call of the mobile however is very compelling, and has a tendency to overwrite the perceptual demands of

¹²⁶ De Certeau 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life* University of California Press, London p113

¹²⁷ Bassett C, 2003 *How Many Movements?* article in *The Auditory Culture Reader* ed Bull M, Back L, Berg publishing Oxford UK p345

¹²⁸ *ibid* p345

the local environment. As Bassett observes: 'Phone space is often prioritised over physical space.'¹²⁹ Why is this? Why is the auditory suddenly more powerful than the visual, after centuries of visual domination? Bassett suggests that what is exciting here is not the conversation itself but the experience the receiver / speaker has of 'going live'. This transforms the user into a 'highly mobilised subject', able to multitask, send high speed messages whilst negotiating a fluid environment themselves, able to be super-fluent in the culture of today. I would suggest there is also an element of 'publishing', the user being publicly observed in the act of communication, bring with it the allure of both '15 minutes of fame'¹³⁰ and the embarrassment of being 'on stage' often unprepared. This seductive attention in the midst of the crowded anonymous urban landscape is a powerful narcotic that seems to heighten a sense of self-identity and intensify the surrounding environment. I do not identify this as selfishness as Bassett does but rather an act of recreating self in the face of anonymity.

The Viatopia videos combat this spatial anonymity through a digital editing of the audio to suggest other realities in other spaces. These are mediated spaces operating between raw reality and portable 'muzak'¹³¹ allowing the listener to inhabit the travel space in a fluid but aware way. They offer a space to recreate themselves. The combination of physical space and the imagined spaces summoned via a mobile phone can combine to produce new perceptive space. Lefebvre in *The Production of Space* sees space as a social product 'indistinguishable from mental space on the one hand, and physical space on the other'¹³² this new layered multi sensory social space is a contemporary cultural product, the

¹²⁹ ibid p349

¹³⁰ Warhol A, 1968 *Retrospective Exhibition Moderna Museet Stockholm*. Exhibition catalogue: 'In the future everybody will be world famous for fifteen minutes.'

¹³¹ Also known as elevator music, this style of music was deliberately bland, so as not to intrude on foreground tasks, and adhered to precise limitations in tempo and dynamics. Originally produced by Muzak Holdings best known for their distribution of music to retail stores and other companies.

¹³² Lefebvre H, 1991 *The Production of Space* Oxford Publications UK. P27

work of a collective imagination that is currently re-constructing individual identity and social communication.



Road to Madrid still



Redbridge O still

Both *Redbridge O* and *Road to Madrid* develop the use of audio, the ambient sound has been edited parallel to the visual elements, but also music has been added in an edited form. *Road to Madrid* features the musical composition *Triana Te Corona* by Isaac Gomez & Jorge Agulia, an Easter processional piece that uses dramatic trumpets and drums, replacing in this case the ambient sound of the coach and traffic. The opening part of this piece has been layered three times starting at three second intervals, giving a rolling sense of continuous procession that becomes fragmented as the musical phrases start to lose their linear structure and relate more as sets of echoes. These reflect the groups of prism images that are continuously unfolding from the centre of the screen without appearing to proceed anywhere. The power of the externally constructed audio and the lack of 'real sounds' again add an otherworldly experience to the journey, suggesting a detached, ritualistic and repetitive 'state of continual procession' without ever arriving.

The *Redbridge O* video incorporates in the audio, Handel's *Zadok the Priest* slowed to 30% of its original speed layered over the sound of the engine and traffic (also playing at 30%). This gives the video a dream like quality as the car floats endlessly round the roundabout going nowhere, to the building orchestration of the music that is distorted enough to carry a Baroque sense of heightened emotion but has become unrecognisable from its original source. The heightened atmosphere of the music

combined with the grainy roar of the engine, complements the red saturated landscape at the top of the screen and the gritty tarmac unfolding at the bottom. This piece also builds a sensation of continual travelling without arriving, but here the building tension from the adjusted audio warps our perception of space as we negotiate through it in a trapped mesmerised way.

Michael Bull in *Soundscapes of the Car*¹³³ describes the vehicle as a metaphor for western values representing individualism, personal ownership and a romanticised notion of travel that signifies individual freedom. This is not the technology of mass travel, regimented timetables, and set destinations that was the pride of Victorian train travel. It is the technological equivalent of the horse, the individual explorer driving with skill and speed into dangerous and hostile territory in an unassailable personal bubble. However this popular cultural myth fails to take into account the reality of urban commuting where 'SWOT' - sheer weight of traffic locks cars into increasingly slower and more packed roads. What started as cultural vehicle of freedom, transforms in *Redbridge O* to a disorienting and claustrophobic trap offering no way off the circular journey round the roundabout, no progression and no destination, a modern day carousel.

Wolfgang Sachs states in *For the Love of the Automobile – Looking Back into the History of our Desires*, that the status of the car has been highly influential in contemporary culture: 'Far from being a mere means of transport, automobiles crystallise life plans and world images, needs and hopes, which in turn stamp the technological contrivance with a cultural meaning'¹³⁴ The potential of having these ambitious dreams fulfilled by the car, seems to highlight the frustration and despair involved in the real experience of driving round London. In response to this increasing sense of powerlessness when trapped in traffic on the roads drivers have

¹³³ Bull M, 2003 *Soundscapes of the Car* article in *The Auditory Culture Reader* Bull M, Back L, Berg publishing Oxford UK p358

¹³⁴ Sachs W, 1992 *For the Love of the Automobile – Looking Back into the History of our Desires*. University of California Press, Berkley, CA. p92

resorted to controlling the sonic environment within the car. The car as a sound environment is explored by Ola Stockfeld in *Cars, Buildings, Soundscapes*:

'The car is one of the most powerful listening environments today, as one of the few places you can listen to what ever you like, as loud as you like, without being concerned about disturbing others, and even singing at the top of your voice – the car is the most ubiquitous concert hall and 'bathroom' of our time'¹³⁵

The car has the potential when used in this way to not only act as a viewing machine to explore and transport us physically and visually but also to transport us aurally to different places, simultaneously as we journey. Our immersion and involvement (when we sing along) must be the closest modern parallel to the Baroque Mass. As Bull suggests: 'Automobile habitation, with its privatised sound world, represents a form of 'compensatory metaphysics' in which time is transformed and experience heightened.'¹³⁶ This auditory Baroque space inside the car offers a powerful escapist and transformational possibility, replacing the dream of physical escape that used to be associated with independent travel. Bull discusses the way cars appear to act as sanctuaries¹³⁷ in the journeying environment, and offer us the opportunity to centre ourselves in the abrasive urban spaces we move through. Richard Sennett in *Flesh and Stone* discusses this contemporary attempt to order and make space in our inner world, in the face of a rapidly changing and demanding exterior environment.

¹³⁵ Stockfeld O, 1994 *Cars, Buildings, Soundscapes* in *Soundscapes, Essays on Voom and Moo* Jarviluoma H, Tampere University Press USA p33

¹³⁶ Bull M, 2003 *Soundscapes of the Car* article in *The Auditory Culture Reader* ed Bull M, Back L, Berg publishing Oxford UK p371

¹³⁷ *ibid* p371



The Music Room Still

The Music Room and *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* offer a different approach to sound as they deal with the subject of suggested or remembered sound and Cagian concepts of silence. *The Music Room* is filmed through a distorting lens in the V&A's reconstructed music room from Norwich House. The room is from the Baroque era and although not grand in scale, is suffused with an atmosphere of Baroque music. As the camera spins slowly around the room, the visual distortions evoke the sense of a distracted awareness of the room whilst dancing. The sound on the video is the ambient quietness of a museum with the occasional slow footstep of a visitor walking reverentially around. This sense of hush only serves to highlight the viewer's awareness of music that had filled the room in past times. These audio 'ghosts of music' become one of the strongest elements of the piece despite not being present, and enable the visual element of the video to form a supporting role to a non-existent sound track.

This perhaps works in an opposite way to Erik Satie's *Musique d'ameublement* (furnishing music) written as 'not-to-be-listened-to-music'¹³⁸ that acted as audio wallpaper that enhanced ones visual perception of the surrounding space or architecture. In a section called *The Impossible Inaudible* Douglass Kahn aligns Satie's music with the pervasive piped *musak* that flooded American public spaces. Aldous

¹³⁸ Kahn D, 2001 *Noise Water Meat – a history of sound in the arts* MIT Press, USA. p180

Huxley in *The Perennial Philosophy* condemns this *musak* and the growing culture of continuous background radio, which he said was:

Nothing but a conduit through which prefabricated din can flow into our homes... filling it with a babble of distraction or sentimental music, continually repeated doses of drama that bring no catharsis, but merely create a craving for daily or even hourly emotional enemas.¹³⁹

It was in this context that John Cage produced his first piece dealing with silence: *Silent Prayer*, which he sent to Musak Co. with the proposal that they inserted it into their programme of piped music. However as Kahn points out this would have been merely an intermission in the company's programme and would do nothing to change the public perception of music or silence. It was through his later more famous piece: *4'33"* that Cage achieved both these objectives. The staging of *4'33"* was in the specialist art environment of a concert hall, where clear expectations regarding the anticipation of the performance of music were assumed. The fact that a formally dressed pianist came on stage, opened the piano and sat there for 4 minutes 33 seconds without making a sound relied on these set of social expectations to achieve the audience experiencing an unexpectedly heightened sense of the ambient sounds around them. Cage used this strategy to re-educate people's hearing and to incorporate all sounds into the field of music.



Tate Modern Turbine Hall still

¹³⁹ Huxley A, 1990 *The Perennial Philosophy* Reissue edition July Perennial pub. p249

The *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* video uses the quiet ambience of the empty Turbine Hall and the distorted visuals to summon up an anticipation and memory of distant crowds and noisy viewing elsewhere in the building. There is a feeling of space that has recently held crowds and exciting spectatorship. The process of filming through a spherical lens pushes the visuals almost to the point of abstraction, but not quite. The audio seems to ground the viewer by its very 'ordinary' spatiality, the quiet echoing footsteps in the cavernous space, combining with the visuals to allude to other spaces other states and other times in history.

Kurt Blaukopf in *Space in Electronic Music* supports the theory that the accentuation of musical registers may influence our perception of space, and suggests there exists an apparent relationship between the influence of sound on spatial perception:

The application of reverberation to bass frequencies gives the impression of 'obscure' space, while the augmentation of reverberation in the upper frequency range produces the impression of 'clear' space. Clarity and obscurity also existed in live conventional music: Besseler, Schering, Dart and other musicologists pointed out the 'clear' character of music played in baroque churches (where wooden interiors favored an increased reverberation in high frequencies), as opposed to the 'obscure' character of music played in Gothic cathedrals (characterized by a longer reverberation time in bass frequencies).¹⁴⁰

Within the *Viatopia* video work there has developed a dialogue between the spatial orienting of the audio and the immersive strategy of the visuals. This is a notable reversal of the accepted relationship between audio and visual where the visuals usually orientate the viewer and the audio immerses the listener in a different world. The *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* folds the viewer in a swirl of visuals while the audio appears to

¹⁴⁰ Blaukopf K, 1971 *L'Espace en Musique Electronique* in *La Revue Musicale*, No. 269, p. 162. Translation: R. Minard

orientate the viewer physically in a particular space, while additionally opens up the possibility of other histories within the present.

This has only become possible through the use of digital media, which offers the opportunity to translate and transpose sensory information. With the digital signal acting as an interface, sound can become image and image sound. Further than this, their functions at an experiential level can be adapted and exchanged. Lawrence Rinder in his introductory essay for the Whitney Museum *Bitstreams* Exhibition Catalogue offers a positive reading of digital new media's potential: 'Digital technology is also being used to create complex, layered approaches to narrative that explore new ways of capturing the experiences of time, place, and identity.'¹⁴¹ This exhibition was the first show by the gallery of digital audio art in 2001 (and a subject not repeated until a permanent installation entitled 'Follow Through' in 2006). However *Bitstreams* met with mixed reviews as the critics and public struggled to come to terms with 'reading' and valuing a new media aimed at different senses than were traditionally used in galleries.

Mark Hansen writing in a revised edition of *New Philosophy for a New Media* in 2006 argues that media convergence through digitality actually increases the centrality of the body as a framer of information and that this new 'embodied' status of the frame corresponds directly to the digital revolution:

A digitized image is not a fixed representation of reality, but is defined by its complete flexibility and accessibility. It is not just that the interactivity of new media that turns viewers into users; the image itself has become the body's process of perceiving it: as media lose their material specificity, the body takes on a more prominent function as a selective processor in the creation of images.¹⁴²

However not all are in favour of this new found flexibility. Friedrich Kittler in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, suggests: 'this convergence of all

¹⁴¹ Rinder L, 2001 *Art in the Digital Age* introduction essay to Bitstreams Exhibition Catalogue Whitney Museum p2

¹⁴² Hanson M 2004 *New Philosophy for a New Media* MIT USA p22

digital media under the digital regime actually spells the end of media. Media effectively become different interfaces to the ubiquitous flow of information.' He voices concerns about the erosion of difference in these media and implies that this will lead to superficiality: 'the general digitisation of channels and information erases the difference among individual media. Sound and image, voice and text are reduced to surface effects, known to consumers as interface.'¹⁴³ Kittler's fear does not allow for further developments within the various fields of digital media.

Digital capabilities have changed not only the modes and sites of production, but also the qualities within the work. The sources for audio art works, for example, have exponentially increased, as almost any kind of non-aural information, such as light or visual images, can be translated into binary code and then transformed into sound. In addition, now widely available software allows artists to break down existing sounds into smaller parts and reconstruct them in ways that drastically alter their original properties. As Debra Singer writes in her essay for the *Bitstreams* catalogue: 'often such newly generated sounds are unrecognizable, having no physical corollary in the real world. Artists thus move beyond merely composing with sounds to composing the sounds themselves.'¹⁴⁴ And this of course does not stop with sounds; in the digital environment, the menu for the senses is constantly being re-written.

To return to the questions at the beginning of the chapter: do video support and audio enhance, or contradict and challenge each other? The answer is perhaps that both are evident. In the *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* the transposing of spatiality from sound to visuals; and the grounding role of recognition moving from visual to sound; both challenges and enhances the viewers experience. The use of digital editing of ambient and pre-recorded audio opens up the possibility of other realities in other spaces. These mediated spaces in the videos allow the viewer / listener

¹⁴³ Kittler F, 1999 *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* translated Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz Stanford University Press p 1-2

¹⁴⁴ Singer D, 2001 *Bending/breaking/building: the resonance of digital technologies in experimental sound* essay in *Bitstreams* Exhibition Catalogue Whitney Museum p1

to reconstruct the travel space in a different way, and perhaps in the process becoming more aware of a phenomenological freshness to their perception of it.

Section 4 Narrative and Language

Narrative Practice in New Media Space

'The thin film of 'writing' (or filming) becomes a movement of strata, a play of spaces. This mutation makes the text habitable, like a rented apartment. It transforms another person's property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient'¹⁴⁵

De Certeau

'Narrative, understood as an extensive arc ... can make sense of these experiences through a form of assembly that is not retrospective but in process, not necessarily linear but rather expansive, and that is certainly open and indeed *generative*.'¹⁴⁶

Caroline Bassett

Writing in 1936 Walter Benjamin expressed concerns about the demise of the storyteller in modern society. He identified a slow demise in myths, tales, folk law, and parables, all of which he felt, offered an understanding of our common experience of reality. It was his belief that: 'If the art of storytelling has become rare, the dissemination of information has had a decisive share in this state of affairs.'¹⁴⁷ This perceived tidal wave of what has come to be known as the 'information age' has brought with it a challenge to existing structures of communication such as narrative, with a flood of multi-media opportunities. It is not surprising that Benjamin saw only the destructive power of the 'bit torrent' that seemed to sweep all that was recognisable in linear narrative away. However a new flow of information and communication has spread at speed in all directions across the flattened plane of the web with high-speed Internet, and with it

¹⁴⁵ De Certeau, 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life* University of California Press p xxi
my brackets

¹⁴⁶ Bassett C, 2007 *The Arc and the Machine* Manchester University Press p3

¹⁴⁷ Benjamin W, 1999 *Illuminations* Pimlico edition UK p89

has brought fresh multidirectional and spatial opportunities for both the communication and narration of life.

Questions then start to surface: How and to what use are these opportunities being put? How has new media changed our structural perception of the world around us? How has experience of every day life become the material for narrative in films, books, TV series, and online games? Has this in turn fed back into the language of new media? What does it mean to make a film today that is a product of time spent surfing on the internet; texting friends on a mobile phone while commuting to work; emailing documents to different countries, buying a book from Canada rather than a local bookshop and watching segments of programmes recorded previously on SKY+? What does it mean to be 'in the present'? Where *is* the present when you are listening to voice mail whilst walking to the shop? And more crucially for visual communication today: what does this all *look* like.

Michel de Certeau's approach was to identify underlying patterns of power and behaviour, and propose tactics for subverting the power structures inherent in everyday life.

The individual can not escape the controlling frameworks of contemporary society and can henceforth only try to outwit them ... to rediscover, within an electronicised and computerised megalopolis, the "art" of the hunter and rural folk of earlier days.¹⁴⁸

De Certeau's modus operandi was based in the reclamation and reconfiguration of urban myth and public space for the individual, whether it was restoration of identity or physical survival. He identified walking as an act of expression: 'walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language'¹⁴⁹ a very physical form of enacting narrative. His 'rhetoric of walking' uses preferences, memory, associations, and personal history as the grammar of spatial narrative. He described these continually

¹⁴⁸ De Certeau, 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life* University of California Press p xxiv

¹⁴⁹ *ibid* p97

changing personal routes through the urban environment as 'embroideries'. These physical trajectories were constructed through the mundane public spaces in a way that personalised the controlling language of architecture.



Side Stripe still



Redbridge O still

This reading need not be restricted to walking alone. Viatopia videos such as: *Side Stripe* and *Redbridge O* lend themselves particularly well to this analogy, as seated within the metal 'needle' of the car the camera dips into underpasses, surfacing for stretches to then produce intensively worked patterns at roundabouts. There is an appealing irony to embroidering with a car. It suggests the subverting of such a macho icon of power and control as the car, with the idiosyncratic tracings of a personal narrative across increasingly controlled urban space. The analogy also links the videos to the process of revealing through construction, the joining together and articulation of disparate pieces through experience, whether through sewing, driving or indeed filming.

This understanding through a physical practice relates to de Certeau's: 'way of thinking invested in a way of acting, an art of combination that cannot be dissociated from an art of using'¹⁵⁰ This applies not just to the methodology used in the production of the individual elements of video, but also to the viewers experience which requires a cumulative construction of meaning through the fragmented visuality and multiple

¹⁵⁰ *ibid* p xv

forms of perception. Due to the lack of clear linear narrative in the videos, the viewer also has to work to build an experiential understanding through the physical viewing of the videos. The range of perceptive treatments in the discrete clips, only really start to 'read' as a language after a number have been viewed and the experience has been 'assembled' in the viewer.

These videos frequently used De Certeau's 'tactics' as an approach, filming 'on the fly' with simple equipment. This approach to filming has not employed production strategies to set up pre-organised shots, controlled lighting or sound. The capturing of reality on the move, records space, as it happens, never returning to re-take the same thing, as the time and place has always changed. They have never been 'proper' (proper filming in this case) which de Certeau identifies 'is a victory of space over time' whereas 'a tactic depends on time – always on the watch for opportunities that must be 'seized on the wing.'¹⁵¹

This returns us to the methodologies of the visual hunter/gatherer now using time based media, unpremeditated but always ready to capture temporary connections of space, light, sound, people and movement. The Viatopia videos are not planned in the language of documentaries, or controlled to set a mood in a particular story. They are the 'by product' of the process of having experienced that travel space at that time. This is the visual grammar of the traveller, the immigrant and the disempowered, rather than the established visual language of businesses and landowners. This process of filming reflects the enactment of space through walking/driving/taking the tube etc. The making of the videos is a parallel and integral part of making the journey, which becomes an articulation on three levels, as the viewer 'constructs while watching' the different visual elements. Viewers have commented that they did not know which parts of the image to look at in *Folding Windows* or *Rd to Madrid*, describing the viewing

¹⁵¹ ibid p xix



Folding Windows still



Rd to Madrid still

experience as a form of 'visual scrabbling around'¹⁵² to try and make sense of the moving images. This seems to point to an ad hoc patchwork form of perception that assembles meaning as it goes in order to function, initiated by a visual language that requires a phenomenological approach to perception that discards all socially constructed assumptions.

Another element that the *Viatopia* videos highlight and reclaim is the valuing of a personal journeying experience in anonymous travel spaces. In some cases the slowing down of the videos to 30% of their original speed enables viewers to absorb the detail and sound of the environment. The focus of this work draws attention to spaces that are rarely looked at because they are not destinations, spaces that are resented as a 'waste of time' when commuting. The video work builds through viewing, to reclaim a narrative for these spaces. If, as de Certeau suggests: 'Travel is a substitute for the legends that used to open up space to something different'¹⁵³ then perhaps the *Viatopia* videos attempt to offer a different visual narrative to the controlled urban spaces and traditional filmic history that has accumulated around recognised destinations. This different visual language is not a recognisable story of an anti-hero or a documentary of urban development, but is situated on the edges of recognition, a peripheral visual language that sidesteps existing spatial and narrative forms.

¹⁵² Comment by Fran Ross at *Viatopia* exhibition at *La Viande* 2006

¹⁵³ De Certeau, 1984 *The Practice of Everyday Life* University of California Press p106

The loss of shared stories and legends in contemporary culture, like the loss of the deep dark forests and other places of the unknown that fostered these myths, has led to a privatising of stories in the personal space of families and intimate neighbourhoods. It is here that the familiar is re-embroidered with history, myth and given value. This fragmentation of urban space into known areas: 'my manor' breaks up a sense of the city as a whole, and disrupts a coherent reading of a capital like London. The resulting majority of urban space, a patchwork of the unfamiliar, becomes a 'suspended symbolic order.'¹⁵⁴ The city spaces become threatening and alienating, as there is no familiarising link with an untraveled area. The 'no man's land' or 'urban jungle' of these travel spaces are often regarded as dangerous and threatening as there has been no 'domestication' of the space by socially accepted stories, leaving them open for the itinerant individual to write their own personal history, potentially through vandalism or violence.

Any stories linked to urban travel spaces seem invariably to be negative and deal with the language of fear, threat and violence. For the urban visual hunter/gatherer however these spaces become rich with potential visual narrative yet to be assembled through use. The Viatopia videos reflect a more positive approach to fragmented journeying. Their linking together attempts to thread a creative and dynamic spatial story and narrative in the spaces filmed. The lenses and mirrors used in the filming have the effect of dislocating immediate recognition and obvious narrative to avoid familiar fears and prejudices being automatically activated when viewing the pieces. Videos such as *Crossing the road to the V&A* and *St Pancras* use perceptual qualities that make the familiar unfamiliar again, opening up the spaces within the film to re-coding within a new visual order, a chance to re-view it and know it afresh.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid p106



Crossing the road to the V&A still



St Pancras Diaspora still

Victor Burgin in *The Remembered Film* discusses the role of memory in relationship to films, and how these fragmentary memories are used to re-construct experience of spaces around us. He uses Chris Marker's expression: 'objects jouant', 'actor objects'¹⁵⁵ to describe how short sections of film, lodged in our memory and separated from the original narrative, come to perform a new role in real life contexts. The viewer becomes in this way the editor / director of a lived film that is spliced with fragments from other commandeered narratives. In this sense when we 'go to' see films and 'go to' see places of interest we embody the collapse of director, cinema, and viewer into ourselves. This re-telling of our lives through our multi-media memory offers a parallel meaning to the chaos of our daily experience, an opportunity to re-make sense of it. Burgin describes the Chris Marker film *La Jetee* as a vehicle producing a number of narratives in different forms: 'The plurality of narratives that *La Jetee* generates are dreamed. A dream is the redistribution of the signifying elements of everyday existence under the impact of desire. It represents another throw of the dice.'¹⁵⁶ We are all auteurs in the new media environment. The Viatopia videos act as dreams of spaces, formed through the desire of repetition, waiting to be recycled, re-dreamed.

Edward Dimendberg, in the *Wide Angle Journal* discusses silent films by Dziga Vertov, Rene Clair, Dmitri Kirsanoff, and Walter Ruttmann relating them to accounts of urban modernity by cultural critics such as Georg Simmel, Walter Benjamin, and Siegfried Kracauer:

¹⁵⁵ Marker C, 1950 'Orphee' *Esprit*, 18 November p695

¹⁵⁶ Burgin V, 2006 *The Remembered Film* re-print Reaktion Books p108

Whether we think of Clair's *Paris qui dort* (1925), Vertov's *Man With a Movie Camera* (1929), or analogues from the contemporaneous visual arts such as paintings by Fernand Leger and Robert Delaunay, the collages of Paul Citroen, or photographs by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, these metropolitan representations from the period 1910 to 1930 appear indisputably as dynamic hymns to the industrial progress and productive forces which compose the machine rhythms of urban civilization... they are also the product of their creators' search for new formal languages to represent the fresh realities of the modern city,¹⁵⁷

On the other hand Benjamin in his seminal piece *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* identifies an early fragmentation in the very process of filming compared to traditional forms of expression such as painting:

Magician and surgeon compare to painter and cameraman. The painter maintains his work at a natural distance from reality; the cameraman penetrates deeply into its web. There is a tremendous difference between the pictures they obtain. That of the painter is a total one, that of the cameraman consists of multiple fragments, which are assembled under a new law.¹⁵⁸

Benjamin aligns this inherent fragmentary quality of film, constructed out of thousand of separate frames, with our dislocated experience of modern life. But what does this mean for digital media? Laura Mulvey in a lecture for the *Argos Video Blog* discusses the new control of media that digitality offers, and suggests a link between new media and the history of cinema through what she identifies as an 'aesthetic of delay'

The concept of 'cinema in transit' derives metaphorically from the idea of a journey, transportation, the crossing of space as well as time. Just as a journey might be stopped so into this liminal space an aesthetic of delay might be able to emerge... freeze frame / image pause – this

¹⁵⁷ Dimendberg E, 1997 *From Berlin to Bunker Hill: Urban Space, Late Modernity, and Film Noir* in journal *Wide Angle* - Volume 19, Number 4, October, pp. 62-93

¹⁵⁸ Benjamin W, 1999 *Illuminations* Pimlico edition UK p227

process of delay brings stillness to visibility but also effects and disrupts the linear tradition of narrative.¹⁵⁹

This presents cinema history as a linear narrative, as Mulvey, clearly nostalgic for the past qualities of film attempts to see positive opportunities for the development of new media. The element she selects to champion however, the freeze frame, appears to be looking back over its shoulder to the language of photography, and specifically to Barthes' sense of death through the photographic image, as Mulvey's book *Death 24 x a Second* reinforces. This attempt to construct a moving image genealogy that ties photograph to film frame to digital freeze frame, denies the fluid mutability of new media. Her observations rest on visual similarities that have perhaps arisen from filmmakers who have moved into the territories of new media taking their visual language with them, rather than an understanding of the digital environment.

Lev Manovich takes a slightly different approach to identifying the meta-language and narrative possibilities in new media. He singles out the loop as the defining motif of the medium: 'can the loop be a new narrative form appropriate for the computer age? It is relevant to recall that the loop gave birth not only to cinema but also to computer programming.'¹⁶⁰ Again a linear history is signposted, by linking an early but underused cinematic effect with digital potential, offering another route out of Benjamin's problem of disappearing contemporary narrative. In *What Is Digital Cinema*, Manovich describes a heritage of the digital loop constructed from early cinematic forms:

All nineteenth century pro-cinematic devices, up to Edison's Kinetoscope, were based on short loops. As "the seventh art" began to mature, it banished the loop to the low-art realms of the instructional film, the pornographic peep show and the animated cartoon. In contrast, narrative cinema has avoided repetitions; as modern Western fictional forms in general, it put forward a notion

¹⁵⁹ Mulvey M, 2007 lecture for Argos blog '[Cinema in transit](http://argos.xio.be/blog/?cat=8)' Thursday, December 6th, <http://argos.xio.be/blog/?cat=8> accessed 5.8.08

¹⁶⁰ Manovich L, *WHAT IS DIGITAL CINEMA? Cinema, the Art of the Index* <http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html#fn0> accessed 4.8.08 p11

of human existence as a linear progression through numerous unique events.¹⁶¹

Is this loop motif a fork in the path of moving visual media, to be returned to and re-invigorated by the endless replicating potential of digital media today? Was cinematic linear narrative a 'phase' in a longer trajectory of assemblage, freeze frame and loops? or is the perhaps aptly named 'new media' a genuinely different medium from film, despite having been press-ganged into mimicking the qualities of 35mm film as it does in contemporary cinema.

Marshal McLuhan's prophetic book in the sixties *The Medium is the Massage* sought to rethink the cultural implications of the emerging new media. McLuhan did not attempt to tie the digital nature of computers to the heritage of cinema, but made pre-literary links instead that introduced a non-linear spatiality: 'Electric circuitry is recreating in us the multi-dimensional space orientation of the "primitive."' ¹⁶² The structure of his book itself prefigures today's sound bite culture by presenting a mix of contentious statements and ambiguous imagery. There is no clear narrative; rather a theoretical position emerges from many small facets of information layering ideas in the reader. As he observed: 'older societies thrived on purely literary plots. They demanded story lines. Today's ... on the contrary has no story line – no sequence. It is usually a compressed overlay of stories.'¹⁶³ McLuhan's book presaged with uncanny accuracy the contemporary interactive multi screen news content with short *YouTube* length videos, and constant *RSS* feeds of information tailored to the individual.

These emerging interactive cultures have sprung from increasingly complex information databases. Lev Manovitch in *Database as a Symbolic Form* proposed his resolution of the crisis in narrative by identifying the database as the replacement to narrative itself:

¹⁶¹ *ibid* p11

¹⁶² McLuhan M, 1967 *The medium is the MESSAGE* Gingko Press inc USA p56

¹⁶³ *ibid* p92

After the novel, and subsequently cinema privileged narrative as the key form of cultural expression of the modern age, the computer age introduces its correlate - database. Many new media objects do not tell stories; they don't have beginning or end; in fact, they don't have any development, thematically, formally or otherwise which would organize their elements into a sequence. Instead, they are collections of individual items, where every item has the same significance as any other.¹⁶⁴

This democratizing of media offers access at any point to media consumption as there is no scene setting introduction or grand finale to a story. There is a faceted cloud of media that builds a sense or meaning through individual experience of the elements, with each experience reflecting an individual choice. This makes shared cultural experience difficult to communicate as it becomes increasingly disparate and individual. Gone are the days of discussing TV programmes with friends and colleagues the next day at work. The multiple choice, personalised recording schedule and access at different times now offered through SKY+ and BBC iPlayer results in little overlap of passive consumer experience.

Instead what appears to be replacing this are more interactive forms of communication. Multi-media conversations are becoming increasingly popular as a cultural phenomenon. The current form of cultural conversation, takes place *through* images or video, for instance: responding to a video with a new video. This has become a standard feature of the YouTube interface. Derek Lomas first identified the phenomenon of 'conversation through media' in 2006 through comments on MySpace pages. The most interesting case so far is a five minute theoretical video *Web 2.0 ... The Machine is Us/ing Us* posted on YouTube by anthropologist and digital ethnographer Michael Wesch on January 31, 2007.¹⁶⁵ Recent statistics show that this video has been

¹⁶⁴ Manovich L, Database as a Symbolic Form quoted in: <http://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2007/10/05/lev-manovich-on-user-generated-content-video-vortex/> accessed 5.8.08

¹⁶⁵ < <http://youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE>>, accessed 12.08.08.

watched 6,234,218 times. It has also generated 7,170 text responses and 24 video responses that range from short 30-second comments to long equally theoretical videos.¹⁶⁶ In Wesch's further video: *An Anthropological Introduction to YouTube* presented to the Library of Congress, June 23rd 2008,¹⁶⁷ this phenomenon is traced through videos such as *Charlie bit my finger* and *Numa Numa* who both spawned huge numbers of re-enactments and 'homage' videos that have become embedded in a global internet cultural history.

Michael Wesch coins the phrase 'context collapse' in relation to these multi media conversations. 25 minutes into the *An anthropological introduction to YouTube* video Wesch has a section titled: 'The webcam: Everybody is watching where nobody is ("context collapse")¹⁶⁸' where he discusses the tension between the narrative of individual identity and the anonymous global space of the web. 'Context collapse' refers to the phenomenon of posting videos on the web without knowing what context they will be viewed in or how they will be copied and re-used. These new web based approaches to media consumption and appropriation raises issues of authorship, copy write, identity, and of course introduces new approaches such as a collective global narrative.

Anne Helmond on the *Masters of Media* website discusses Manovitch's use of video in *Little Movies*. She seeks to re-claim a traditional sense of narrative by suggesting that narrative has not gone away, it has just shrunk perhaps like the technology relaying it. She proposes: 'These individual items could be considered to be ... almost intensified little narratives.'¹⁶⁹ Manovich's on-going project *Little Movies* is a digital response to narrative cinema, which replaces its traditional sequential mode with a spatial one. Manovich identifies a contradiction between

¹⁶⁶ Manovich L, 2008 [The practice of Everyday \(Media\) Life: Tactics as Strategies](#) accessed 12.08.08

¹⁶⁷ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TPAO-IZ4_hU&feature=user accessed 12.08.08

¹⁶⁸ A phrase used by Dr. Michael Wesch Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology and Digital Ethnography Kansas State University
<http://mediatedcultures.net/youtube.htm> accessed 5.8.08

¹⁶⁹ Helmond A, on Lev Manovich <http://mastersofmedia.hum.uva.nl/2007/10/05/lev-manovich-on-user-generated-content-video-vortex/> accessed 5.8.08

cinema, which replaced all other modes of narration with a sequential narrative, and other historical art forms, particularly painting.

A sequential narrative turned out to be particularly incompatible with spatialized narrative which played a prominent role in European visual culture for centuries. From Giotto's fresco cycle at Capella degli Scrovegni in Padua to Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans*, artists presented a multitude of separate events (which sometimes were even separated by time) within a single composition.¹⁷⁰

In contrast to cinema's linear narrative, all the 'shots' in these paintings were accessible to a viewer at once. Manovich proposes 'spatial montage' as an alternative mode of presentation. In his *Little Movies* piece, he presents a grid of film clips that simultaneously run along side each other, stopping and starting in an apparently random order that set up spatial references and narrative links across the screen. The clips are brief excerpts from early silent cinema, more in the spirit of experimentation than the established genre of '80s Hollywood.

Cinema has elaborated complex techniques of montage between different images replacing each other in time; but the possibility of what can be called "spatial montage" between simultaneously co-existing images was not explored. In *Little Movies* I begin to explore this direction in order to open up again the tradition of spatialized narrative suppressed by cinema.¹⁷¹

Manovich then moved on to develop what he referred to as: 'Softcinema', database as the new narrative. In 2005 Manovich put theory into practice, and released *Soft Cinema: Navigating the Database* DVD, a three-year collaborative effort with new media artist Andreas Kratky.

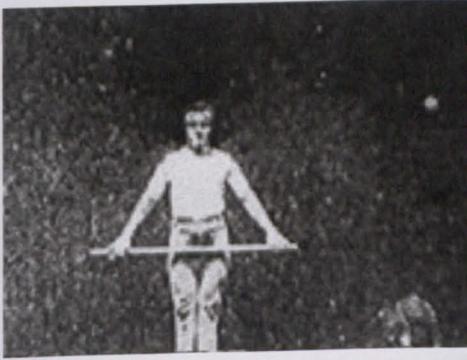
The viewers are presented with an infinite series of narrative films constructed on the fly by the custom

¹⁷⁰ Manovich L, *WHAT IS DIGITAL CINEMA? Cinema, the Art of the Index* <http://www.manovich.net/TEXT/digital-cinema.html> - fn0 accessed 4.8.08 p13

¹⁷¹ *ibid* p14

¹⁷¹ Manovich L, http://www.manovich.net/cinema_future/toc.htm accessed 18.08.08.

software. Using the systems of rules defined by the author, the software decides what appears on the screen, where, and in which sequence; it also chooses music tracks.¹⁷²



Lev Manovich *Little Movies* still



Lev Manovich *Softcinema* screenshot

The drawback with this digital approach to narrative is that the viewer has to make decisions and physically construct the work. This demands that the viewer selects, filters from the many options, crafts the piece and takes responsibility for the outcome, traditionally the role of the filmmaker or artist. *Softcinema* is in fact asking the viewer to do exactly what they have to do everyday in reality: select from the increasing tidal wave of information to 'construct' a life. This may explain a general resistance and conceptual fatigue in relation to forms of visual art relying on a database, and their failure to capture the excitement of both the viewing public and contemporary artists. *Softcinema* would appear to be the logical digital extension of fragmenting narrative, combining new media interactive theory with an infinitely variable medium, but by placing increasing demands on the viewer in terms of composition, whilst limiting the material they can use, *Softcinema* appears to encourage but ultimately stifles viewer interaction. This is perhaps underlined by the growing trend in video responses through 'homage videos', which feed back into cultural history and subtly shift its semiotic value.

As a result contemporary art practice seems to have developed in a number of other directions. Carsten Holler appears to reverse this

process by re-framing our contemporary digital sensibility in physically interactive pieces that give the experience of travel. Holler modifies visual experience through physical interaction. His large slide installations at the Tate Modern created an urban travel film within the viewer, the narrative constructed by the traveler's movement through the space. The heightened sense of drama and unusual panned visual angles experienced when descending the slides, produce a filmic engagement with the architecture. In an interview with Doug Aitkin, Holler stated: 'It's about losing certainty, about not knowing any more or knowing too much to handle and then the real film starts the inner film.'¹⁷³ This looping back of the cinematic experience onto engagement with real space points to a new arena of practice where the boundaries of action in real and digital space overlap and collapse.

Susan Trangmar explores the urban park space of St Ann's Well Gardens as a performative arena and narrative space in *A Play in Time*, a commissioned digital video piece. David Alan Mellor in *An Incidental Arcadia* refers to an English tradition of creating these discrete performances spaces: '*rus in urbe* – the countryside embedded in the town.'¹⁷⁴ These park spaces are also opportunities for transformation in a way similar to the Viatopia spaces in their provision of an alternative space, a place to dream. Mellor identifies Trangmar's work as being 'about reveries that are generated *rus in urbe*.'¹⁷⁵ This Victorian pleasure space operates however more as a heterotopia of leisure with its own codes of conduct, in a separate world of otherness. The visitor is made more aware how their self acts on a static manicured stage that references a tamed nature. The work, through beautiful composition and careful observation, reveals many layers of subtle control: between human ordering of nature; nature ordering human activity; human

¹⁷³ Holler C, 2006 *Broken Screen* ed Doug Aitkin, Distributed Art Publishers USA p171

¹⁷⁴ Mellor D, 2008 *An Incidental Arcadia* an article in *A Play In Time* a book accompanying commissioned work by Susan Trangmar published by Photoworks Brighton UK paragraph 1

¹⁷⁵ *ibid* paragraph 2

monitoring human; human controlling dogs etc... as Claire MacDonald in the same publication comments:

The park is a space whose conventions we have inherited from a different moment of urban aesthetics. The Victorian park – like the Victorian department store, or like Walter Benjamin’s Parisian arcades – was a place in which to perform the distinction between work and leisure¹⁷⁶

In Trangmar’s work park space becomes a stage with historical links to early cinema where humans and nature perform a consciously choreographed ‘at leisure’ in public. The performed ideal of leisure becomes reflected in the two-screen presentation of the work. The mirroring reveals a slippage as the image may be similar but retelling a slightly different time, or answering fading sunlight with streetlight, setting up a tension between the idyllic and the real space.



Susan Collins *Underglow* still 2006



Glenlandia still 2007



harewood still 2008

Susan Collins also explores changes in urban and rural space; *Underglow* an installation of illuminated drains transformed Queen Street in east London. This work animated inaccessible spaces though moving light in a cinematic way that again offered a space for a personal narrative to be imagined. This was inaccessible space however and narrative experience needed to be projected rather than immersive in the Viatopia sense. Art consultant Modus Operandi observed that the work:

¹⁷⁶ MacDonald C, 2008 *A Dance to the Music of Time* an article in *A Play In Time* a book accompanying commissioned work by Susan Trangmar published by Photoworks Brighton UK paragraph 4

Focused on the hidden world beneath our feet, illuminating the network of drains and gullies which service the streets. Light glows and leaks through the grilles, gradually shifting through a spectrum of intense colours, giving the impression that these vents breathe and pulse with alien life. Light is used to draw our imaginations into an underground world below street level, following the disappearing path of the city's waste.¹⁷⁷

In more recent pieces such as *Glenlandia* and *Harewood* it is the pixels that travel, as through a web cam connection. Images of an idyllic English rural landscape are slowly updated pixel by pixel in an urban gallery space or an inner city laptop. Richard Colson discussing *Glenlandia* in *The Fundamentals of Digital Art* reflects on Aboriginal nomadic relationships to public space compared to early colonial attempts to capture space through static imagery and ownership, and suggests that 'by interpreting gesture in response to location, technology opens up a new type of colloquy with our surroundings.'¹⁷⁸ Digital mutability of public space, whether rural or urban is evident in Collins work, although it is held at a distance, as emphasised by the travelling and transforming pixels. The changes inherent in the surroundings are happening at a remove from the viewer's physical experience, it is not emersion that is being offered but dislocation. A view of what is happening 'where you are not'.

Kate Southworth is iRes¹⁷⁹ Cluster Leader and co-member of *Glorious Ninth*¹⁸⁰ with Patrick Simons. She reframes in her work a Situationist sense of *derivé* that is to: 'to seek out reasons for movement other than those for which an environment was designed'¹⁸¹ exploring ways of subverting the production of digital work within physical and networked space. In *Fuorange* she defines a 'Matrixial space within which encounters between "subject and object, among subjects and partial-

¹⁷⁷ <http://www.susan-collins.net> accessed 7.08.09

¹⁷⁸ Colson R, 2007 *The Fundamentals of Digital Art* AVA publishers UK

¹⁷⁹ iRes - Research in Network Art, University College Falmouth

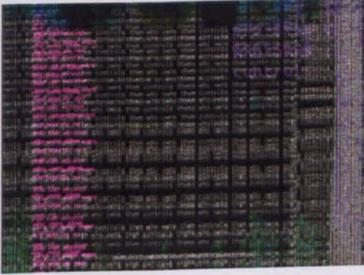
http://www.ires.org.uk/team/kate_southworth.php

¹⁸⁰ <http://www.gloriousninth.net> accessed 7.08.09

¹⁸¹ Plant, Sadie 1992 *The Most Radical Gesture: The Situationist International In A Postmodern Age*, London: Routledge p59

subjects, between me and the stranger” could occur and re-occur.’¹⁸² This is presented as a feminine creative space of encounter in public environments like beaches. These counter strategies of the *derivé* appear similar to some of the urban spatial strategies employed in the Viatopia videos, however the Viatopia work focuses on perceptual immersion within routine journeys such as daily commuting rather than traveling in a radically non-structured or chance way through the familiar.

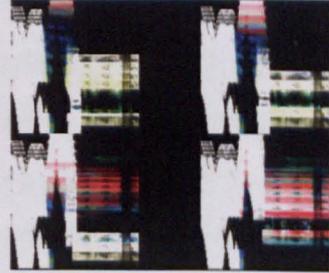
INSTALLATIONS AND ARTWORKS



Who Owns Them Controls 2001
Kate Southworth
Patrick Simons
(glorious ninth)



Fuorange 2004
Kate Southworth,
Christina McPhee
Patrick Simons



Flaming 2004
Kate Southworth,
Patrick Simons
(glorious ninth)

Southworth who introduced the Tate Modern *Disrupting Narratives* symposium 2007, describes her approach to restructuring narrative as:

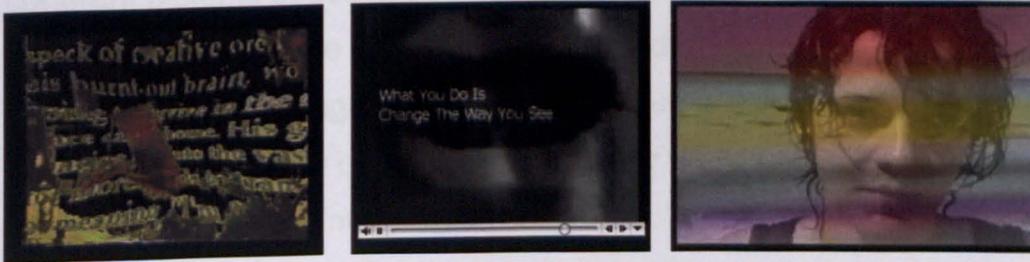
Experiments into co-poietic relationships between code and ritual (that) find form as aural-visual works, installations, performative presentations and texts, and expose their ongoing aesthetic and political attempts to evade systems of control.¹⁸³

Which presents perhaps a Situationist’s distrust of the accepted expectations of narrative, and challenges this through process as well as language. The Viatopia videos attempt to operate at the other end of the narrative spectrum, dealing with the phenomenology of unmediated perception, spectacular in their visual language but having stepped outside the currency and control of Guy Debord’s ‘spectacle’.

¹⁸² Southworth K, 2004 *Articulating A Matrixial Space* Interactive Art & Design Research Cluster Sensorial Knowledge Conference Draft Paper.

¹⁸³ http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/webcasts/disrupting_narratives/default.jsp

Another artist who works with digital communication to challenge visual culture is Mark Amerika who explores hypertext in *Grammatalogy*; digital audio poems in *Phon-e-me* and the use of subtitles and mobile phone filming in *Immobilité*. His work blends several digital approaches to language in each piece. The web page for the feature length mobile phone film *Immobilite* describes the process of the film: '*Immobilité* mashes up the language of "foreign films" with landscape painting and literary metafiction.'¹⁸⁴ Amerika attempts to undercut cinematic expectation by using unscripted, improvised methods of acting and low quality mobile phone images shot in an amateur style referencing what he describes as: 'the evolving forms of video distributed in social media environments such as YouTube.'¹⁸⁵ His stated aim by interfacing this 'low-tech version of video making with more sophisticated forms of European art-house movies,' is to ask and answer the question 'What is the future of cinema?'¹⁸⁶



Mark Amerika *Grammertron* 1997. *Society of the Spectacle* 2004. *Immobilite* 2009 screen shots

An exhibition entitled *Fluid Architectures* at the Netherlands Media Art Institute, Amsterdam in July 2009 presented what essayist Florian Rötzer refers to as a "digital urbanism" whose salient features are "dispersal, decentralisation, valorisation of interiority, globalisation, individuality and mobility"¹⁸⁷ the gallery describes these factors as shaping 'a networked society and a 'space of flows', which generate 'new dimensions for imagination and action no longer concurrent with the old geographies and

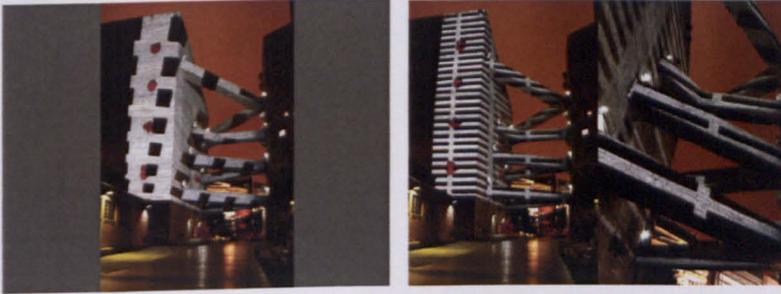
¹⁸⁴ <http://www.immobilite.com/film/> accessed 4.08.08

¹⁸⁵ *ibid* accessed 4.08.08

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid* accessed 4.08.08

¹⁸⁷ http://www.nimk.nl/en/index_agenda.php?cat=e&id=306 accessed 12.08.09

topographies.¹⁸⁸ In the exhibition are a number of artists such as Mader Stublic Wiermann who use titles like: *folded space and twists and turns* to reflect a Deleuzian conceptual approach, but whose work:



Mader Stublic Wiermann *Folded space and twists and turns* screen shots¹⁸⁹

does not develop beyond projecting moving patterns onto public buildings in a way that visually plays with their form and stability. The space itself remains unchanged for the viewer. Wiermann suggests that because the video 'creates a new layer on the building which is floating over the surface and "fractured" at the edges, the video is "folded" and 'the coherent pictorial space is questioned'.¹⁹⁰ This pictorialness would appear to refer to a flat picture plane which is indeed challenged by the shifting boundaries of the image in an Escher – esque graphic illusion, however it does not necessarily operate for the viewer as 'folded space' that is 'broken open' and 'reinterpreted'.

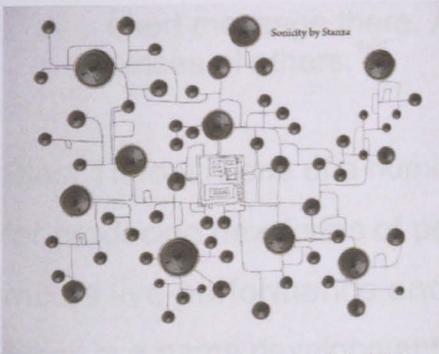
Stanza, a UK based artist, however works in a number of audio and visual forms that 'explore new ways of thinking about interaction within public space and how this affects the socialization of space'¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Ibid accessed 12.08.09

¹⁸⁹ <http://www.webblick.de/> accessed 17 .08.09

¹⁹⁰ <http://www.webblick.de/> accessed 17 .08.09

¹⁹¹ <http://www.stanza.co.uk/sonicity/index.html> accessed 17 .08.09



The gallery: the building is experienced as sound, a live data space. The lights, temperature, noise, humidity and position is recorded using a live sensor to make sound and presented as an installation of hundreds of speakers. The network is experienced as a city of sound. In effect the environmental data is turned into music and experienced as a real time event.

Stanza *Sonicity* – an audio city profile

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Stanza *Sensity* - a visual city profile

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Stanza takes and importantly transforms 'Data from security tracking, traffic, and environmental monitoring ... interpreted as a medium to make artworks.'¹⁹⁴ In this work he reconstructs and explores the shifting relationship between the digital information environment and the urban physical one to re-map sociability in city space. As he states: 'These investigations have created new ways of comparing, conceptualizing and then visualizing complex concepts related to the relationship of emergent data and real space in the built environment.'¹⁹⁵

This strategy for producing visual work that extends digital communication through mobile technology into the environment is being successfully pursued by groups such as Blast Theory. In 2007 they produced a piece of work titled *Rider Spoke* which connected a haptic knowledge of urban space through cycling, wireless networking, live gaming and personal reflective recording. Their web site describes this as:

A work for cyclists combining theatre with game play and state of the art technology. The project continues Blast Theory's enquiry into performance in the age of personal communication...the piece invites the audience to cycle through the streets of the city, equipped with a handheld computer. They search for a hiding place and record a

¹⁹² *ibid* accessed 17 .08.09

¹⁹³ <http://www.stanza.co.uk/sensity/index.html> accessed 17 .08.09

¹⁹⁴ <http://www.stanza.co.uk/about/index.html> accessed 17 .08.09

¹⁹⁵ *ibid* accessed 17 .08.09

short message there. And then they search for the hiding places of others.¹⁹⁶

Blast Theory is one of a number of groups that has a growing reputation for producing new forms of performed narrative and interactive art that mixes live performance and digital broadcasting. Another group, 'It's Alive' is a game development studio, based in Sweden that focuses on 'pervasive games' such as 'Botfighters' played on mobile phones. A description from the *we-make-money-not-art.com* web site claims that: 'the games are played on multiple devices, involve the player 24 hours a day, everywhere, generating experiences that merge with the real world - redefining reality.'¹⁹⁷

In both cases the interacting viewer again constructs the narrative, but here they are given the creative tools of communication to use for themselves. Adriana de Souza e Silva, in an article for *Trace Archive: Are cell phones new media?* outlines the significant shift in user experience that real time mobile networking in urban space has brought, and in particular the new forms of narrative that are enabled through this new hybrid space.

Multiuser environments in cyberspace have frequently been regarded as utopian spaces in which users could project their imagination. When communities are shaped in a hybrid space, mobile phones become new media tools for creating novel and unpredictable imaginary spaces, re-narrating cities. ... the emergence of nomadic interfaces represents a chance for such imaginary spaces to be enacted and constructed in physical space.¹⁹⁸

She suggests that this virtuality 'is an essential element for promoting sociability in urban spaces, and to re-conceptualizing physical space.' and one of the key tools for promoting identification with urban space is a re-conceptualizing through narrative. This new media narrative uses time

¹⁹⁶ http://www.blasttheory.co.uk/bt/work_rider_spoke.html accessed 13.11.08

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.we-make-money-not-art.com/archives/2004/04/its-alive-a-mix.php> accessed 15.11.08

¹⁹⁸ <http://tracearchive.ntu.ac.uk:80/Opinion/index.cfm?article=121> accessed 15.11.08

in the manner that Deleuze discusses in *The Fold* as 'a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form.'¹⁹⁹ Pierre Huyghe an artist who also deals with time in this way through his filmic installations states:

I believe in a non-linear way of editing fragments, but not so much in the postmodern idea of collage. We are not talking about process, but about jump cuts and vibrating time. The notion of time has crashed in to this immediacy, the now. We act in this fold of the present, an exponential present.²⁰⁰

This multi present tense reflects new understandings of now and the way that it is shifting and re-narrating place.

The Viatopia videos connect the space between digital virtual-ness and real tactile life, that is; what you experience both when surfing and away from the computer screen. They offer what Bassett refers to as: 'The optic of narrative,'²⁰¹ perhaps of a new narrative. Their portability and potential to be downloaded from different sites across London could embed them back into the urban context they came from. Current developments in Augmented Reality software now mean that it is possible through Geo-positioning to view the Viatopia videos where they were filmed, embedded and streamed by an iPhone App. building visual narrative in that space.

So how *has* new media changed our structural perception of the world around us? Has this fed back into the language of New Media? What does today's 'present' look like?

Gunther Kress in his study of *Literacy in the new media age* questions the influence of new media on contemporary communication: 'Is the world represented through words in sequence – to simplify massively – really different to the world represented through depictions of elements related

¹⁹⁹ Deleuze G 1993 *The Fold* Athlone Press. London. p 19

²⁰⁰ Huyghe P, 2006 in *Broken Screen* ed Doug Aitkin, Distributed Art Publishers USA p174

²⁰¹ Bassett C, 2007 *The Arc and the Machine* Manchester University Press p3

in spatial configurations?'²⁰² His study focuses more specifically on shifting trends in written language, however Kress does identify that:

The screen and its logic more and more now provide the logic for the page also... the communicational landscape is dominated by the logic of the organization of the visual modes.²⁰³

This shift in the organizational structure of communication where written language and literacy 'now have to be seen as partial bearers of meaning only'²⁰⁴ means that meaning comes to be 'spread across several modes', which are becoming increasingly specialized due to the ubiquitousness of the digital environment; leading Kress to predict that 'new principles of reading will be at work'²⁰⁵

Today we re-narrate our lives through the active editing of the tidal wave of information that daily washes over us from all directions, an engagement that necessitates a spatial mode of perception. A contemporary sense of 'presence' springs from our ability to handle, structure and communicate experience this way.

As Carsten Nicolai aka 'alva noto' says: 'It's about editing perception.'²⁰⁶

²⁰² Kress G, 2003 *Literacy in the new media age* Routledge p2

²⁰³ Kress G, 2003 *Literacy in the new media age* Routledge p10

²⁰⁴ *ibid* p35

²⁰⁵ *ibid* p35

²⁰⁶ Nicolai C, 2006 in *Broken Screen* Ed Doug Aitkin, Distributed Art Publishers USA p216

Convergent Languages – Digital Poiesis

'Where once one sought a vocabulary for ideas, now one seeks ideas for vocabularies'²⁰⁷

Lyn Hejinian

'One can argue that the *mise-en-scene* of the early twentieth-century cosmopolitan city demanded a new kind of text, because it demanded a new way of being in the world.'²⁰⁸

James McDougall

'Fundamentally, construction is at the heart of writing'²⁰⁹

Charles Bernstein

The experiences of contemporary urban travellers are multi-sensory ones assembled from different modes of transport, pre-recorded audio, mobile phone calls, urban signage and Wi-Fi hot spots, as much as from the physical geography of the street. The 'language' of urban travelling requires the traveller to make an active composition of space and experience, to construct a personal travel tale from the often undefined lacunas that make up public space. The challenge of negotiating the un-narrated space of public thoroughfares often makes urban space 'hard work' and it is therefore frequently modified, simplified and re-constructed by commuter's strategies such as wearing headphones; reading books on the tube or routines of behaviour such as always standing at particular points on platforms.

²⁰⁷ Hejinian L, 1984 *If Written is Writing* in *The L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E Book* ed Bruce Andrews & Charles Bernstein Southern Illinois University Press. p29

²⁰⁸ McDougall, James, 2005 *Pound's Poetry as IMAGE TEXT* in *ImageText: Interdisciplinary Comics Studies*. 2.1 Dept of English, University of Florida. http://www.english.ufl.edu/imagetext/archives/v2_1/mcdougall/ accessed 17.1.09 p4

²⁰⁹ Bernstein C, 1968 *Contents Dream Essays 1975-1984* Sun & Moon USA p49

This act of composing-by-travelling is reflected in the relationship between the event of travelling in the Viatopia videos and the image / audio / text they use. The attention to language construction within the videos parallels the process of journeying itself, the media questions on varying levels the language of its own genre, history or mode of construction.

'Digital convergence brings together the separate worlds of audio, video, data and voice communication services... and offers a whole new way of life'²¹⁰ according to the European Commission. This 'digital convergence' of contemporary forms of communication encourages a re-assessment of language by acting as a cohesive environment. This enables video, audio and the written text of Viatopia Videos to be considered and critiqued within the same framework, and allows for example, forms of visual analysis to be usefully applied to linguistic structure. Computers or the digital environment 'remediate' other media, to use Lev Manovich's term from his *Softbook*,²¹¹ an endlessly update-able publication on Software studies situated on the Web. This remediation enables a fluid form, much like the *Softbook* itself, and Manovich suggests offers 'many different views of the same information'.²¹² However contrary to this, is the danger of the digital landscape that it may translate different information into similar homogenous views. Perhaps it does both, bringing different terrain into a panorama that allows different vistas, a sub theme that has developed within this research extending the exploration of digital discourse.

The development of written text within the Viatopia videos resulted from a continuation of the titles of the individual videos into the body of the work, an extension of the text of the road markings visible in some of the videos. The presence of text also underscores obliquely a concern with

²¹⁰ Reding V, *Digital convergence: a whole new way of life* – speech at the Digital Lifestyles Exhibition Brussels 30th May 2006 accessed 9.2.09
http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/reding/docs/speeches/dle_20060530.pdf.

²¹¹ Manovich L, 2008 *Software Takes Command* 20.11.08 version
www.softwarestudies.com/softbook p35

²¹² *ibid* p45

the structure of all the languages in the work. The fluid and unstable nature of the visual image, audio and text in the work push the viewer to search for stepping stones of meaning in what ever medium rises to the surface as 'moments of clarity' in the surrounding flow of media, and as is the case in a fast flowing river, it is momentum and engagement that carries meaning-as-the-traveller through.

Richard Lanham describes the textual surface as becoming 'permanently bistable' to denote the constant shift in focus needed when viewing digital text that is neither static in construction, nor its ability to hold meaning:

We are always looking first AT (the text) and then THROUGH it, and this oscillation creates a different implied sense of decorum, both stylistic and behavioural. Look THROUGH a text and you are in a familiar world... where facts are facts ... look AT A TEXT however and we have deconstructed the Newtonian world into Pirandello's where identity and truth are unstable shifting sands that are constantly mutable.²¹³

This continual adjusting of perception that slips between form and content; between social certainty and a personally constructed relativity, mirrors the strategies employed in the visual construction of the Viatopia videos. The slippage between in and out of focus or recognisable and abstracted forms becomes a metaphor for understanding and searching; for knowing with certainty and being lost. Visual searching equates metaphorically to physical journeying. This continual shifting of perception in the video work, places the unknown and 'to be experienced' alongside, with equal value to the certain and familiar in a similar way to the Cubists presentation of the space between objects with the same intensity as the objects themselves. The urban travel spaces themselves represent a 'negative space' in the busy list of destinations for the city commuter, and the videos focus on these lacunas, which Alice Notley refers to in her

²¹³ Lanham R.A. "The Electronic Word" *New Literary History* p5

poetry as: 'spaces between official places'²¹⁴ which are gaps rich in potential folded meanings.

The embedding of the text in time based media that employs techniques such as 'delay' and 'timing' pushes the text to vibrate on the edge between written text – as we read it, and the time based spoken word – as it is delivered and experienced. The drip feed of text throughout some of the Viatopia videos set up environments of delayed meaning, where the meeting of these expectations are continually deferred. This deferral of expectation connects to the deferral of meaning that is central to Lyn Hejinian's approach to writing, in her essay *Barbarism in The Language of Inquiry* Hejinian discusses the ability and 'perhaps the obligation' of poetry to speak in the language of borders.

The border is not an edge along the fringe of society but rather their very middle – their between; it names the condition of doubt and encounter which being foreign to a situation (which may be life itself) provokes – a condition which is simultaneously an impasse and a passage, limbo and transit zone... a meeting place and realm of confusion. Like a dream landscape, the border landscape is unstable and perpetually incomplete. It is a landscape of discontinuities, incongruities, displacement, dispossession. The border is occupied by ever shifting images, involving objects and events constantly in need of redefinition and even literal renaming, and viewed against a constantly changing background.²¹⁵

These borders or spaces are places where meaning 'is in process', where the very act of language whether text, audio or image is in flux through a strategy of putting it 'out of play.'²¹⁶ Perhaps linking to the phenomenological reduction developed by Merleau-Ponty, who formulates this as a suspended recognition.²¹⁷

²¹⁴ Stefans B, 2006, *Before Starting Over* Salt Publishing UK p39 – a review of *Disobedience* - poems by Alice Notley

²¹⁵ Hejinian L, 2000 *The Language of Inquiry* University of California Press p327

²¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty M, 1962 *Phenomenology of Perception* Routledge pxiv

²¹⁷ *ibid* pxv

These Viatopias, places of always travelling, require a grammar or syntax that attempts to articulate their condition. The meaning negotiated at the unstable intersections of different media. Barbara Freeman whose writing links ideas of the 'feminine sublime' to theories of *'feminine écriture'*²¹⁸ suggests that there are inevitable instabilities in a discourse, which focuses on excess and on boundary experiences:

'The ecstasy of the sublime, and experience of the boundary, is that of such an unstable subject, whose borders are no longer clear, and who is always negotiating the way in which one is always already 'beside oneself...'²¹⁹

The experience of the fluid and unstable Viatopia spaces offer the opportunity to be 'beside' the ordered self of normal perception, to step outside everyday travel experience and become caught up in the 'other' – 'transported' in flux and fragments of understanding.

Brian Stefans identifies meaning for Hejinian as both 'fluid and contingent... the mind comes to experience it when a certain friction is created with the "other" of meaning.'²²⁰ This suggests a dynamic; a vibration caused by the friction of languages within the video work that is movement itself. Hejinian says she is not describing a 'marginal language but an agent (and provocateur) of palpability and a medium of proliferating connections.'²²¹

Hejinian discusses the importance of Gertrude Stein in her notable essay *Two Stein Talks*, and discusses the relationship of language to perception in Steins work: 'Stein animated in practice, the vital, even vivacious, relationship of language forms and structure to perception and consciousness.'²²² And it is this active and almost live reconstruction of perception on the page as Stein's poetry is read that links it to the

²¹⁸ As developed by Hélène Cixous

²¹⁹ Freeman B C, 1995 *The Feminine Sublime: Gender and Excess in Women's Fiction*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press p26

²²⁰ Stefans B, 2006, *Before Starting Over* Salt Publishing UK p29

²²¹ Hejinian L, 2000 *The Language of Inquiry* University of California Press p328

²²² *ibid* p92

Viatopia videos. It is an engagement with the very fabric of the medium in an attempt to understand meaning and rebuild it. Hejinian describes Stein's focus: 'for Stein it was not truth but understanding that was of value – a shift of emphasis, from perceived to perceiving, and thus to writing, in which acts of observation, as complex perception, take place.'²²³

The video *a blind glass*, whose title is a fragment of the title from the poem 'A Carafe, that is a Blind Glass' from Stein's collection *Tender Buttons*²²⁴ reflects the fragmentary and incompleteness inherent in a depiction of anything. The visual language of the video works in parallel with the text rather than attempting to illustrate it, operating as 'a kind and a cousin' and a 'system to pointing' in the way it builds an experience of a journey from perceptual elements constructing as it accumulates into an event of meaning, but one that is 'not unordered in not resembling'.



blind glass Stills

Marjory Perloff notes that TS Elliot and Stein did agree on some issues, particularly: 'composition is not a question of what but how...'²²⁵ this focus on the structure and operation of language took as one of its key strategies avoidance of the representational process, the recognizable. In video this operates as a recognizable image, in text Stein identified this in the process of naming, the use of nouns which as Hejinian notes 'tends to obscure experience, by replacing what we experience with a pre-established concept, a "simulacrum" of it.'²²⁶ *a blind glass* sidesteps or

²²³ ibid p93

²²⁴ Stein G, 1914 *Tender Buttons* unabridged edition (1997) Dover publications p3

²²⁵ Perloff M, 2002 *21st Century Modernism – the "new" poetics* Blackwell p47

²²⁶ Hejinian L, 2000 *The Language of Inquiry* University of California Press p93

possibly dances around the issue of naming by offering only partially recognizable elements that shift in the moving image contrasted by the recognizable elements of the audio. The video points, but is careful not to engage in easy recognition, avoiding the transparent process of naming where the signifier gets conflated with the signified, causing the media to become invisible and therefore the perception of the viewer passive.

Perloff observes that 'Flaubert seems to have given Stein the license to stress *composition* rather than *representation*, the play of signifiers rather than the pointing relation of signifier to signified.'²²⁷ When reading *Tender Buttons* it is difficult to get any sense of what is being signified, as the reader is held at the level of the signifier, entranced by the skilled play of language that reveals its own structure. Perloff suggests that the hallmark of Steins work 'is its extreme artifice'²²⁸ in the original meaning of art plus *facere* (to make) inferring an art that shows the skill of its construction. Richard Lanham suggests a style of writing that uses 'radical artifice rather than native transparency'²²⁹ He takes Perloff's term that calls for a deliberate engagement with the language and construction of a particular media, rather than the more modern sense of a highly mannered style. As Perloff states:

'Artifice in this sense, is less a matter of ingenuity and manner, of elaboration and elegant subterfuge, than of the recognition that a poem or painting or performance text is a *made thing* – contrived, constructed, chosen – and that its reading is also a construction on the part of the audience.'²³⁰

The Viatopia videos highlight the composition of the moving visual image and the construction of the audio. The viewer struggles to look through the opacity of the image, created by distorted lenses and mirrors, to see the recognisable and familiar on the other side. Through the 'artifice' of the fragmentation the viewer is focused away from the reading of video

²²⁷ Perloff M, 2002 *21st Century Modernism – the "new" poetics* Blackwell p54

²²⁸ Ibid p62

²²⁹ Lanham R.A. 1994 *The Electronic Word* University of Chicago Press p5

²³⁰ Perloff M, 1994 *Radical Artifice* University of Chicago Press USA p28

as window on the real world through telling a story, towards an awareness of the process of looking and hearing, of constructing sense.

Modernism was deeply suspicious of artifice particularly: 'that the word will no longer adhere to the object haunts the poetics of Modernism.'²³¹

The Baroque and all its forms of production were heavily disparaged during the modern era due to its subversive use of language. Instead Modernism's emphasis was on the 'honesty to materials' as if there was no space between the signifier and the signified. The irony is that the supposed 'honesty' in modernism actually masked the strategies of making, the hand of the artist and the act of *poiesis* (making). This of course was equally unpopular with the general public who still placed a high value in skill. The apparent invisibility of this skill in iconic sculptures like Carl Andre's 'Bricks' outraged the public.

Contemporary artists and writers returning to mine unexplored avenues in early modernism, have focused once again on the structure and function of language as a means of translating the world and our relationships in it. This resurgence of interest in how the signifier is constructed foregrounds the act of *poiesis*. More specifically it highlights the function of *poiesis* as translation, of making visible.

Martin Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology* links *techné* to *poiesis* and refers to the activity of making as a 'bringing-forth'²³², using this phrase in its widest sense. Heidegger's use of the term seems to pivot more on a threshold experience, but none the less deals with the language or narration of making. Heidegger contrasts a modern approach to technology that makes by extracting and depleting, to *poiesis* that he sees as a process, bringing out inherent properties, potential or structure. He identifies modern technology as a 'challenging forth' and *poiesis* as 'revealing' using the example of a windmill that reveals the presence of

²³¹ *ibid* p31

²³² Heidegger M, 1977 *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. William Lovitt, Harper & Row publishers New York p 294-295

the wind through its language of movement, but does not extract and consume the energy in the way coal burning power stations do.

This 'language of making' was clearly in evidence in the *Altermodern* exhibition curated by Nicholas Bourriaud at the TATE Britain. One strategy for 'bringing forth' making to the surface of the object is to 'narrate' its making. Nicholas Bourriaud in the title essay for the exhibition catalogue discusses the curatorial theme of the 'archipelago', a constellation or cluster as 'an example of the relationship between the one and the many'. In Bourriaud's essay the only mode of production for the contemporary artist is the language that traces relationships during production, this is for him the production of language. He quotes *Dispersion* an essay by Sean Price who appears to be arguing against the production of 'real' material goods:

With more and more media readily available through this unruly archive, the task becomes one of packaging, producing, reframing, and distributing; a mode of production analogous not to the creation of material goods, but to the production of social contexts, using existing material. Anything on the Internet is a fragment, provisional, pointing elsewhere. Nothing is finished.²³³

This is back to the framing of contemporary art practice as a 'system of pointing' to slightly bend Stein's phrase. However Price seems to offer a severely reduced and negative reading of the possibilities for contemporary art practice. He closes his essay with the final statement: 'Production, after all, is the excretory phase in a process of appropriation'²³⁴

Bourriaud appears more optimistic in his defining of parameters for contemporary practice: 'the artist, turns *homo viator*, turns nomad. They transform ideas and signs, transport them from one point to another. All modernity is vehicular, exchanged-based and translative in its essence.'

²³³ Price S, 2003 *Dispersion* for the catalogue of the Ljubljana Biennial of Graphic Art, curated by Christophe Cherix Printed as a book by Green Naftali. Published on Web as PDF: www.distributedhistory.com/Dispersion2008.pdf accessed 23.2.09. P13

²³⁴ *ibid* P19

In his discussion of cinema however Bourriaud suggests that the medium's development was parallel with its contemporary the Locomotive, and that its physical form compromised it, forming 'narrative rails organising the passage of images'.²³⁵ The digital environment does seem to offer an alternative plateau structure to this, a multi-temporal plateau. Bourriaud discusses contemporary practice in terms of being an 'aesthetic of heterochrony' and particularly 'delay', identifying its heritage based in Duchamp's 'delay in glass'- *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors*. This form of 'delay' brings together the pre-recorded, with 'the immediate (or 'live')' together with the anticipated, 'with the aim of revealing our present in which temporalities and levels of reality are intertwined.'²³⁶

Maria Walsh in an article discussing Sutapa Biswas' film *Birdsong* (2004) identifies a Deleuzian 'double side of delay', caused by the complex relations of signs within the videos language:

For Deleuze images are fully real rather than referring to a supposedly real world outside of them or to a transcendent meaning beyond them as they would in a representational economy. Images are simply one type of sign in a continuum with other signs, other existents ... which generate intensities that exceed our systems of representation.²³⁷

As Walsh comments Deleuze always see these signs as being in a state of 'constant flux', morphing between actual and more virtual realms of existence. In fact she seems to take this further and sees the signs as 'generative' of further experience. Lyn Hejinian in her introduction to *Language of Inquiry* states that 'Poetry, therefore, takes as its premise that language is a medium for experiencing experience,'²³⁸ a deferral

²³⁵ Bourriaud N, 2009 *Altermodern the Tate Triennial* Tate publishing UK p21

²³⁶ *ibid* p21

²³⁷ Walsh M, 2008 *The Double Side of Delay* in *Refractory a Journal of Entertainment Media* Published Dec 26th <http://blogs.arts.unimelb.edu.au/refractory/2008/12/26/the-double-side-of-delay-sutapa-biswas%E2%80%99-film-installation-birdsong-and-gilles-deleuzes-actualvirtual-couplet-%E2%80%93-maria-walsh/> accessed 27.2.09

²³⁸ Hejinian L, 2000 *The Language of Inquiry* University of California Press p3

from the surface reflection of obvious meaning leading to language being 'experienced' by the reader as they enter into the act of construction through its use.

This form of travelling through the experience of language is at the heart of the Viatopia videos. They are constructed in an experimental language of experience rather than the nostalgia of recognition. They offer the experience of making language, as a metaphor and structure for 'bringing forth' meaning in experience.

Section 5 Conclusion

Conclusion - A Plan View

This research has sought to establish *Viatopia* as a working concept to communicate new experiences in urban travel and a productive arena for digital practice. The act of identifying these new Viatopic spaces demanded a 're-viewing' of them using a combination of media and concepts that were appropriate to a proposed new spatial practice. This was done initially by combining the theories of Deleuze and the Baroque with digital video practice, folding and layering the media to reveal colour and malfunction. This can be seen in some of the early pieces such as *Side Stripe*, where the digital medium struggled to adjust to changes from daylight to fluorescent lighting when driving through tunnels at speed. This work used ideas of folding and replication to analyse and articulate a commuter's experience of travel space (see *Plica - Replica - Explica* p25).

During the early stages of research, experiments with the technical boundaries of digital video proved unproductive partly because of the inherent instability of this approach to the medium (digital media often refuses to work when there are faults) but primarily because it highlighted an overtly painterly treatment of pixels that led the work down a modernist trajectory, drawing attention to the flat surface plane of the monitor and a 'truth to materials' methodology, rather than employing a Baroque *trompe l'oeil* transformation that played with visual language and subverted visual space.

Having explored some visual approaches that were not appropriate to my aims, or the subject matter, the challenge then became how to extend the methodology so that the visual practice developed in new ways. Through the digital video I explored a Baroque anamorphic approach and experimented with alternatives to standard perspectival representation as seen in *Redbridge O* a breakthrough piece of work, filmed off the bonnet

of my slightly dented MG Midget producing a swimming anamorphic spatial version of reality in intense red, contrasted against a plan view of the gritty grey road beneath. This work opened up the possibility of more than one perceptual and conceptual space within the same video. A number of works followed, that explored the car as mirror of the road environment for example: *No Stopping*, *Wet Bonnet* and *Side Wheels* all folded the body of the car into the travel space of the road through reflection. However having explored this methodology through the practice, the visual limitations started to become evident and there was clearly a need to develop the research further.

I produced some speculative filming that experimented with fragments of mirror and developed work like: *Folding Windows* and *Green Park* that explored the Underground and Tube Train space. This new work articulated and reviewed key theories of perception and optics, extending the conceptual framework and brought in the use of lenses to produce pieces like *Road to Madrid*, which combined the use of a magnifying glass and a faceted lens. The misuse of these lenses, the product of the nineteenth century's quest to order and control vision, was a tactic employed to unravel these established modes of visual perception. These multiplied images offered up more than mimetic virtualities, and gave glimpses of 'alternative realities' through a democracy of image value across the screen. This strategy proved very productive in the visual practice, and led to a substantial body of work that explored a developing theme of visual immersion and attention management. Further research on the changing historical significance of visual understanding threw up comparisons with auditory understanding, which led me to reassess the audio elements of the practice work.

The research was broadened to include audio theory and an interesting reversal was identified in the work: in *Tate Modern Turbine Hall* the audio acts to spatially anchor the viewer whilst the visuals operate in the traditionally aural role of immersion. I presented a paper on this subject

(Travel as a Digital Landscape) at the MeCCSA²³⁹ post graduate conference at the University Of Sussex 2008, which identified the opportunity that digital media offers to swap functions in perceptive experience (traditionally vision placing us in front of things, sound giving spatial awareness). Further development in the practice led to the audio element of the work being transformed or worked using a similar process to the visual editing, so that the audio became fractured, mirrored, reversed, warped in a parallel way consistent with the rest of the practice. An early example of this is *Road to Madrid* where Easter processional music by Isaac Gomez & Jorge Agulia is layered four times repeated slightly out of step as an audio reflection of the visual facets in the piece, revealing the same thing but at a slightly different time. This audio editing developed further in pieces like *St Pancreas Diaspora* where the ambient sound of the station was augmented by a re-edited, repeated and reversed sample of Messian's *Le Merle Noir* (Black bird) which acted as a transient travel motif.

The study of audio theory further extended the conceptual framework of this research project, and the spoken word was introduced in pieces like *Crossing the road to the V&A* where describing the memory of a repetitive travel experience was explored. Six different narrations of the memory of crossing the road at a particular junction are layered together to accompany faceted visuals, produced by toy optical glasses bought at the V&A shop. This piece of work highlighted the subtle differences in each repeat journey and threw to the fore issues of perception and slippage in descriptive aural language. This concern with the construction of a language represented a spiral return, on a different plane, to a significant theme present in the research from the beginning, how to take apart a language and use the elements to communicate a different understanding and in the process extend the digital language.

The research was further developed through considering the descriptive language of writers such as Gertrude Stein whose active and almost live

²³⁹ The Media, Communication and Cultural Studies Association.

reconstruction of perception on the page connects to the haptic perception of the Viatopia videos. This facet of the research theme mirrored what Lyn Hejinian identifies as Stein's focus: 'for Stein it was not truth but understanding that was of value – a shift of emphasis, from perceived to perceiving, and thus to writing, in which acts of observation, as complex perception, take place.'²⁴⁰ Stein's de / re-construction of representation in her *Tender Buttons* poetry inspired the introduction of text in pieces such as: *JN.NB.BN.Tate* (Jane Norris remembers Burnt Norton at the Tate) where selected lines that I could remember from TS Elliot's poem *Burnt Norton* were overlaid on the *Tate Modern Turbine* video, in effect sampling Elliot's thoughts on simultaneous and disconnected time to bring another layer of perceptual travel to the piece. The addition of text to some of the video pieces offered other facets of thought and provided an additional conceptual space within the work. Margery Perloff's observation: 'the fear that the word will no longer adhere to the object haunts the poetics of Modernism'²⁴¹ reveals what traditionally has been at stake when wrestling with the relation of image, sound or word to meaning. With the convergence of all these forms of expression in the digital environment came the sharing of questions and issues. As Perloff aptly warns from Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (5.62) 'The limits of my language ... mean the limits of my world'.

The boundaries of this research have been established through a phenomenological approach, which has continually returned the research to an unmediated physical experience of space in an attempt to ensure the practice did not simply illustrate theories. The relationship between practice and theory has been formed by moving through and filming travel spaces. The physical experience of commuting every day from Ealing to Romford by car on the North Circular or by reading on public transport has enabled me to test my research questions, develop conceptual frameworks and engage in the practice through a direct relationship to an every day experience of urban travel.

²⁴⁰ Hejinian L, 2000 *The Language of Inquiry* University of California Press p93

²⁴¹ Perloff M, (1994) *Radical Artifice* University of Chicago Press USA p31

The methodology used in this research and adopted in the digital practice, have been assessed against and critiqued by both historically established practices in different specialist fields. From Andrea Pozzo's *The Glory of S. Ignazio* Baroque work to the L.A.N.G.U.A.G.E. group's writing to the audio work of John Cage, but also to digital contemporaries such as Lev Manovich, Michael Wesch, Mark America, Susan Collins and Tom Corby as covered in the sections: *Mirrors And Lenses For Un-Recognition*, *The Practice of New Media Space* and *Sound as an Urban Compass*. This has produced another layer of 'convergence' as the borders of traditional disciplines have been challenged, and a range of theoretical fields have been incorporated into the Viatopia research arena.

This research set out to explore if it was possible to communicate through digital media a proposed shift in our perception of contemporary urban travel space. Was it possible (without diversifying into designing different cameras or other three dimensional scanning equipment) to use existing digital equipment to communicate in a different or new way? Without throwing out the optics of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, could visual and audio communication reflect societies changing relationship to urban space? If so what would this look like and how might we be able to read or understand these products of new spatial habits? Would people, be able to resonate with the work?

The body of work produced throughout this research has employed a range of visual / audio strategies to disturb viewing, hearing, and to challenge perceptual consistency, leading to proposed solutions that walk along various edges of recognition, comprehension and attention management, as possible answers to the questions. The presented visual language is not a recognisable story of an anti-hero or a documentary of urban development, but is a peripheral visual language that sidesteps existing spatial and narrative forms. Some videos are fairly simple and accessible, some more complex and challenging. Mid-way through the

research a range of the work was exhibited in a solo show: 'Viatopia Videos – folded journeys'²⁴² in order to see the digital work in a physical space away from the visually limiting environment of a laptop, and to obtain in-depth feedback from supervisors as well as colleagues who commute with me and know the spaces described, together with members of the general public who are fellow travellers through London's transport systems and urban spaces. The feedback was very constructive, with a number of comments highlighting the underlying theme of attention management in visual perception²⁴³ and the contrasting role of the audio to the visual elements. In the light of this feedback I worked on developing the audio aspect of the work to further push the attention management experience of the viewer and to explore the seeming reversal of relationship between the audio and visual. This in turn led to other potential solutions through an exploration of text and the spoken word in an increasingly convergent digital environment.

The later compound work (on Viatopia Videos DVD) such as *The Flow of Space* and *Sunrise – Sunset* blend together a number of fractured travel journeys in a way that reflects the short episodic experience of commuting space such as changing tube lines or transferring from bus to train. The combination of formats used in the work, whilst acting as a historical trace of the journey of digital media development in mobile phones and from standard to High Definition digital video, also acts as a metaphor for different levels of attention. The shift in *The Flow of Space* from HD widescreen to low resolution mobile capture, presented in a reduced window on the screen suggests a focusing or perceptual editing either by the viewer or as part of the journey process as when trains suddenly enter a tunnel and the visual world shrinks to the carriage space. The shift in media quality / format, speak in turn, for changing qualities of travel experience and offer different emotional registers to the viewer.

²⁴² La Viande Gallery, *Viatopia Videos* 27th April – 4th May 2006

²⁴³ See footnote 9 in 'The Practice of New Media Space' for a quote from Fran Ross.

The editing language used in *The Flow of Space* and *The Practice of Driving* etc often employs a slow fade in and out of black for transition between the fragments of travel film (while the audio continues) as a way of emphasising the act of looking. The dream like pausing operates as a slowed down blink that accentuates the gap before the next visual onslaught and seems to embed the work in the viewer at a deeper perceptual level. The black transitions also work to converge a You Tube fragmentation with a cinematic form of presentation: segments presented in a large immersive projection.

The combining of short video pieces into longer 10-minute films has raised issues of presentation. Would the collection of short video work be better presented in a travel space as a multi screen installation or should the work all be combined into one long cinematic film? I feel the solution is appropriately somewhere in a space between the two. The longer works are most successful as a large format projection that uses cinematic scale to fill the viewers visual field, whilst the flexibility of the form allows the shorter elements (see *Viatopia Additional Material DVD*) to be also uncoupled and presented as discrete works possibly on the Internet, Bluetoothed onto mobiles etc. it is I believe important to retain a fluidity in the possible forms of presentation given the subject and nature of the material and the rapidly developing convergence of real and digital worlds.

Future innovative thinking and practice most likely to extend to this project lie in the overlap between software application development, and shifts in public spatial practice. Recent developments in virtual experience in the area of Augmented Reality²⁴⁴ now offer the possibility of layering digital text or image over a real time view of a public space when looked at through a mobile phone. The virtual placement of the digital video work and site-specific digital art and web content and will be an interesting and important area to research in the future as it will take the creative visual work off laptops, out of galleries and onto the streets themselves. The

²⁴⁴ <http://augmentation.wordpress.com> - accessed 21.07.09

seductiveness of 'travel' on the Internet will also be fruitfully explored and looks set to challenge the current peculiar unrepresentable nature of cyberspace.

3D Spatial Design development is currently exploring 3D architectural printing and will soon be able to 'print' buildings commercially and presumably then streets using primarily organic shapes which will transform public space.²⁴⁵ This would offer a more physical basis for considering the significance of the rapidly evolving digital arena and our physical relationship to it. Certainly in contemporary research the boundaries between disciplines are dissolving, traditionally distant subjects are converging and research methodologies will become increasingly able to 'hot-desk' between seemingly unconnected fields.

The Viatopia videos celebrate some of the most mundane aspects of urban travel, such as crossing a road or driving round the North Circular. They transform these experiences into almost operatic multimedia events that reference the Baroque but also offer a conceptual and perceptual alternative to today's unrelenting rationalism of the work routine that designates the journey between work and home 'dead time'. They reveal a present in which 'temporalities and levels of reality are intertwined.'²⁴⁶ The videos offer the viewer ways to be 'transported' through the process of travel; so they can let go of the certainty that destinations give us with their pre-set relationships and expectations. Travellers can consider the option of collecting memories of journeys rather than the places they went to. Viewers are encouraged through the videos to consider the language of their travel; that repetition of a route might enrich rather than deplete the quality of their experience; that they are constructing personal events where the route, their reading matter, audio on their iPods, and memories of other journeys converge. Multi-tasking and information management are the convergent languages of society today, and look set to be the survival skills of the future.

²⁴⁵ <http://www.fastcompany.com/blog/kit-eaton/technomix/rapid-prototyping-gets-serious-fabricates-entire-building> accessed 21.08.09

²⁴⁶ Bourriaud N, 2009 *Altermodern the Tate Triennial* Tate publishing UK p21

During this research I have discovered how to engage with theory as a performative process of mapmaking. This approach has revealed 'multiple entryways'²⁴⁷ concepts have combined with the practice of filming, inhabiting and growing the work, fuelling desire for development in unexpected ways. The Viatopia videos are not careful 'tracings' of ideas, in a traditional academic sense, but are digital weeds that have grown in a gap – 'an experimentation in contact with the real'²⁴⁸ born from a nomadic practice of commuting.

²⁴⁷ Deleuze G & Guattari F 1987 *A Thousand Plateaus*, (trans. B. Massumi) University of Minnesota Press Minneapolis p14

²⁴⁸ *ibid* p13

Glossary

Anamorphic	Having, or producing different optical imaging effects along mutually perpendicular radii
Augmented Reality	A field of computer research which deals with the combination of real-world and computer-generated data (virtual reality), where computer graphic objects / text are overlaid onto real space in real time.
Baroque	Originally a style of architecture and art deriving from Italy in the early 17th century and followed in Europe and the New World for a century and a half. It is characterized by free and sculptural use of the classical orders and ornament, by forms in elevation and plan suggesting movement, and by dramatic effect in which architecture, painting, sculpture, and the decorative arts often worked to extravagant effects. Used and interoperated by contemporary theorists such as Deleuze & Guattari.
Convergent media	Digital convergence brings together the separate worlds of audio, video, data and voice communication services.
Database	A collection of data arranged for ease and speed of search and retrieval usually on a computer.
<i>Derivé</i>	The exploration of a built environment without preconceptions, through the passive

movement through space. It can be translated as *drift*.

Explica

L explicā - to unfold, or set forth, to explain.

Haptic

Physical perception, the process of recognizing objects through touch

Heterotopias

Separate spaces like institutions where individuals were placed, outside of everyday life (hospitals, asylums, prisons, rest homes, schools.)

New media

A term meant to encompass the emergence of digital computerised, or networked information and communication technologies in the later part of the 20th century.

Nomadism

A state of being continually on the move. A way of life in which a community has no permanent settlement but moves from place to place, usually seasonally and within a defined territory. Nomadism does not imply aimless wandering, but suggests organized travel to ensure maximum use of available natural resources.

Optics

Relating to the eye or vision.

Plica

From L plicāre to fold,

Poiesis

Gk -poiēsis - to make or bring forth.

The North Circular

The A406 or the North Circular Road is a trunk road which spans North London, UK ,

Viatopia

'via' - route and tóp(os) - a place. This term identifies: urban spaces of continual travel or flux that carry in them multiple forms of perception and inscriptions of meaning.

Web 2.0

The second generation of web development and web design that facilitates information sharing, interoperability, user-centred design and collaboration on the World Wide Web.

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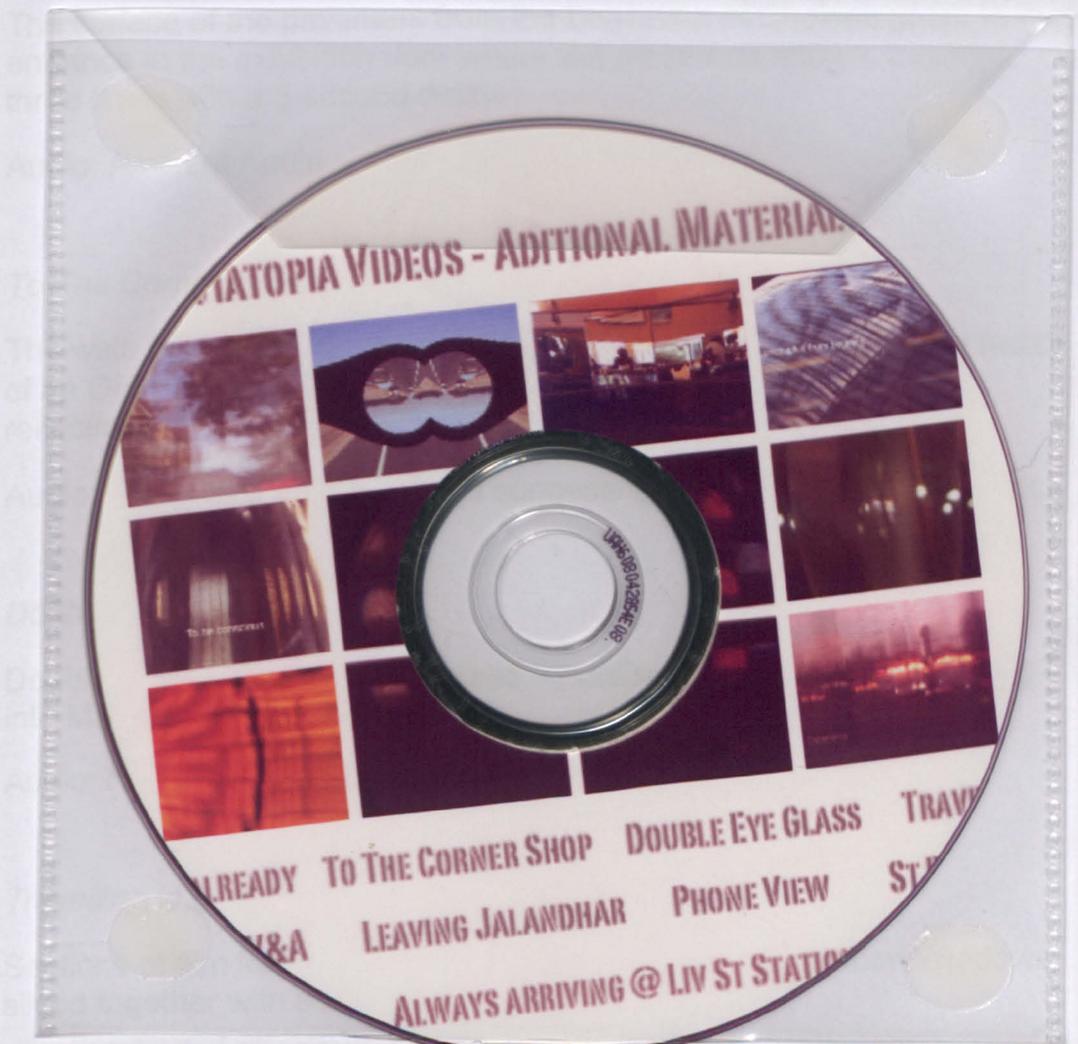
Appendix

Screening Notes

Viatoxia Videos – Additional Material DVD

Viatoxia Videos – Additional Material

But You Know This Already



Audio: Ambient Audio plus six different interpretations of the journey. Always playing in each ear.

Crossing the Road to the V&A

The walk across the road from L. crossing to the V&A shop through a lay-kid bought from the shop there.

Audio: Ambient Audio plus six different interpretations of the journey. Always playing in each ear.

Screening Notes

Viatopia Videos – Additional Material

But You Know This Already...

The surface of the pavement from the beginning of Chelsea gates to the entrance to the exhibition door where the piece was shown. Layered three times with a 3-second delay.

Audio: Ambient Audio

To The Corner Shop

The walk from my front door to the corner shop filmed through the head of an OHP, which picked up the magnified pavement surface and reflections of the street space.

Audio: Ambient Audio plus audio suggesting generic MP3 player music.

Double Eye Glass

Doubled image of magnifying glass recording a stretch of road leading into Madrid.

Audio: No audio

Travelling in a Café

Sections of film from Reina Sophia café in Madrid and Folded Windows sliced together with sections of text

Audio: Ambient Audio plus sections of Steve Reich *Electric Counterpoint* 1,2 & 3 sliced to correspond to three spaces.

Crossing the Road to the V&A

The walk across the pedestrian crossing to the V&A filmed through a toy lens bought from the shop there.

Audio: Ambient Audio plus six different narrations of the journey, three playing in each ear.

Leaving Jalandhar

Car lights filmed at night through a scratched OHP lens and faceted lens.

Audio: Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan & Michael Brook *Lament* plus phrases read from *Learning Punjabi*

Phone View

View of platform filmed with mobile phone through lens as train leaves Ilford station. My text layered on top of image.

Audio: Ambient Audio

St Pancreas Diaspora

Reflection of St Pancreas Station ceiling filmed through lens.

Audio: Ambient Audio, plus sections from Messiaen *La Merle Noir* (the Blackbird) re edited.

JN.NB.BN. Tate

The Tate Modern Turbine Hall filmed through a lens, with extracts of TS Elliot *Burnt UMBER* that I could remember in the space superimposed as text on the image.

Audio: Ambient Audio

Escalators

View from the up escalator at Leicester Square filmed through a lens, with my text superimposed on the image.

Audio: Ambient Audio

Always Arriving @ Liverpool St Station

View through carriage window of arriving at Liverpool St Station filmed with two split oval mirrors, with my text superimposed on the image.

Audio: Ambient Audio

On The Bus With Fatalyn

View through bus window on twilight journey from work to Romford station filmed through a lens, with 23 lines from Lyn Hejinian *The Fatalist* superimposed as text on the image.

Audio: Ambient Audio

