

Catherine Sibley

MA Fine Art

Project Realization

Critical Evaluation Paper

Unit 3.1

August 2012

Dedicated to Chris Marker: 29 July 1921 – 29 July 2012

self-augmented actual/virtual

augmented

adjective

1. having been made greater in size or value: *augmented pensions for those retiring at 65*

2. *Music* denoting or containing an interval which is one semitone greater than the corresponding major or perfect interval: *augmented fourths*

(<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/augmented?q=augmented>. Accessed 19 August 2012)

augmented reality

Noun [mass noun]

A technology that superimposes a computer-generated image on a user's view of the real world, thus providing composite view.

(<http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/augmented+reality>. Accessed 19 August 2012)

At the conclusion to this course of study I am presenting two pieces of work which have grown symbiotically through my research and experiments but that have come to function independently.

Counterfeit number 3 is a sculptural video installation named in reference to the fallibility of human recollection and the composite nature of explicit and autobiographical memory. With the sculptural element as both a vehicle for projection and screen, while also disrupting the form and content, it is inclusive in an effort to divide the physical space into distinct locations. The projected narrative takes the form of a misaligned series of short scenes, depicting spaces of contemporary transit and somehow hoping, with the familiarity of the content, to engage the collective memory of my intended audience, to evoke a collective schemata (1.). The division of space, indeed *how* the space is divided, is intended to reflect notions of Cartesian dualism. His notion of the body as machine is reiterated by the constructs' mechanical and utilitarian form, the nature of the projected image reflecting the non-physical, non-material mental life he proposed.

Another aspect of this duality is it's being simultaneously a screen and filter for the Newtonian or linear time represented by the projection of time codes, the imposition of clock time but rendered meaningless and muddled.

Also engaging with ideas of the index, the central aspect of the second work, *'Beautiful Friend'*, is that of the medium. At a time of flux, the final bars of the swansong, some might say the manner in which you inscribe the moving image to posterity has, at the dawn of the new century, changed almost beyond recognition (in its process, anyway). Having lost the analogue television signal in the inevitable shift to digital, *'Beautiful Friend'* is almost rude in its crass depiction/assertion of this, being three stripped down cathode ray tubes relocated into the glass tanks of the 'museum'. The obsolete technology also acts as a metaphor for mortality, doubly so with its screening of 16mm film footage. Time gets squashed as the rate of change speeds up and the new nature of the index is here.



Above: A still captured from - <http://www.westminster.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/2012/end-piece>

'Ambika P3 is delighted to present a major solo exhibition by David Hall, the influential pioneer of video art, featuring a monumental new commission '1001 TV Sets (End Piece)' 1972-2012...

This timely exhibition vividly heralds the end of analogue TV in the UK as London finally switches to digital on 18 April 2012...

'1001 TV Sets (End Piece)' features 1,001 cathode ray tube TV sets, of all ages and conditions, which will fill the massive Ambika P3 subterranean space. The TVs will be tuned to different analogue stations playing randomly in a cacophony of electronic signals, gradually reducing between April 4 and April 18, as the final analogue signals are broadcast from London's Crystal Palace. When transmission is turned off, the multiple sets will emit only terminal audio hiss and a visual sea of white noise.'

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/2012/end-piece>. Accessed 20/07/12

In my role as a graphic designer the conclusion of work is clearly defined but, functioning in the gallery context, I have had to re-think the role of the audience or spectator and my relationship with them. Re-positioning the importance of the viewer, as a kind of vindication and 'completion' of the work in different way. My research has been both informed by, and benefited from, the two public exhibitions in which it has been made manifest during this course of study. Indeed, the opportunity to test work and ideas in a public gallery has both affirmed and informed my research and work to date.

In the first instance the imminent prospect of a public show, with all its immediacy, crystallised the notion of expressing and communicating the ideas I'd been reading and cogitating, galvanising me into a healthy mode of production and experimentation, with some physical aspects of the creations I was imagining, while exploring the relationship between theory and practice and my shifting position to it.

With this bringing into life a full, physical manifestation. I was attempting to create a liminal space into which the viewer was drawn and in which it might be hard to keep track of time, hoping to somehow adjust the nature of their experience of it.

Repetition, the looping of the filmic elements of the piece became central to the project. To disregard the notion of a linear narrative so that in the liminal environment the notion of time might be removed from the

experience or altered by it in some way. Responding to Bergsonian notions of duration, which, in the *Deleuze Dictionary*, Adrian Parr tells us:

‘According to Deleuze, one can only comprehend the notion of duration by using Bergson's method of philosophical intuition (intuition philosophique), a deliberate reflective awareness or willed self-consciousness. Intuition reveals consciousness (or more generally, mental life) to be essentially temporal. [...] Mental life is, then, a kind of flowing experience, and duration is the immediate awareness of this flow.’ (Parr, 2011: 81).

And following the Deleuzian understanding of repetition, that ‘repetition is more a matter of coexistence than succession, which is to say, repetition is virtual more than it is actual. [...] repetition is a creative activity of transformation. When Deleuze speaks of the ‘new’ that repetition invokes, he is likewise pointing to creativity, whereby habit and convention are both destabilized.’ (Parr, 2011: 226).

The looping of an unspecific narrative, a journey, functions as metaphor of temporal experience and our linear perception of time. I am seeking to disrupt this experience.

With this collection of short black and white scenes I am also referencing the physiology of vision, intending to include only an element of colour in the final piece and referring to the fact that we have only a very few colour receptors in our eyes. According to Graham Lawton, in his 2011 article for

New Scientist ‘...you can only capture a tiny percentage of the visual field with full colour and detail at any one time. [...] most of the rest is captured in fuzzy monochrome.’ (Lawton, 2011 p.36).

Going on to describe the saccades that ‘...happen about three times a second and last up to two hundred milliseconds. With each fixation your visual system grabs a bite of high resolution detail which it somehow weaves together to create an illusion of completeness.’
(Lbid)

In addition to the physiology and neurology of sight, the work is concerned with perception and the composite nature of memory and therefore the plastic and pliable nature of the notion of self and self-image. I’m interested in the ways in which recollections are coloured and distorted by the passage of time, the fragmentary nature of experience, most of it being just our best guess. According to Lawton ‘Exactly how your brain weaves such fragmentary information into the smooth technicolour movie that we experience as reality remains a mystery. One leading idea is that it makes a prediction and then uses the foveal “spotlight” to verify it. [...] Essentially we experience the brains best guess about what is happening now.’
(Lawton, 2011 p.37)

When I started construction of what turned out to be ‘*Screen Dream*’, the first concrete version of my proposed research, it seemed to be all about the light-boxes, a space in which to examine, in a passive way. Adding

the projected image turned that passive, even contemplative act, into an animated one but one which also encouraged observation and examination with a new dynamic and creating new dynamic content. (Fig. 1 + 2).

In *Screen Dream* the boxes were significant not only structurally, but also theoretically, conceptually and metaphorically. There was something archival, museum-like and institutional about them: boxing up; collecting; implying scientific distance; looking through lenses; using screens; magnifying and distorting. The production by the static boxes and containers of filters and lenses, distorting and refracting the image, produced new material from the projection.



Fig 1. *'Screen Dream: November 2011. Gallery shot.*

Showing detail of glass box construction (left) and detail of the re-augmented projection.

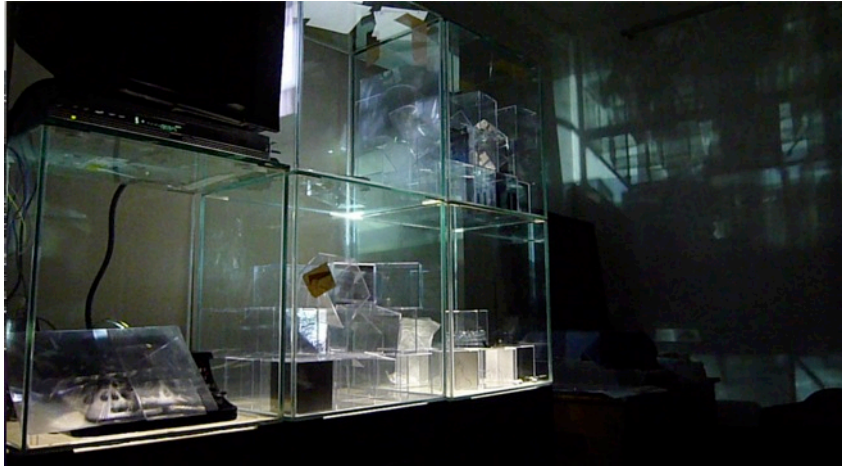


Fig 2: 'Screen Dream'.
In production, studio
shot.



Far left: Detail from
'Screen Dream'.
In production, studio
shot.



Left: 'Screen Dream'.
In production, studio
shot.

In the opening paragraph of my project proposal I ask 'What's 'real', what's 'imagined', what does it matter?' and begin by referring to the confusion of memory and imagination called confabulation, something I experienced during my rehabilitation from a traumatic brain injury but which would seem to be an aspect of all human memory. I went on to propose that the 'canvas', on which I intended to explore aspects of recollection and memory retrieval, would be composed of spaces of travel ,non—spaces; a psychological space unto itself, a time in which the 'white noise of every day existence subsides, the volume turned down if only for a while.'. The lone traveller, repeatedly traversing the circuitous routes of contemporary life, afforded, on occasion, a rare moment to themselves, despite the inevitable noise, crowd or delay.

From the beginning, and throughout, the desire to convey a feeling of institutionalisation has been central. Machinery, with visible wires initially, becomes almost a piece of institutional furniture, a display case, perhaps, in one of Auge's non-spaces, an institution of some kind, the clinical super white hyper modernity of sterile spaces, with light boxes for the scrutiny of orthopedic x-rays, CT scans and then back to machinery. The sculptural elements of my work, then and now, are ultimately presented as a vehicle for an indistinct narrative, maybe even just the suggestion of a narrative, eternal, timeless, universal. To be experienced in, around and through the imposed structure in which it exists.

Although initially envisaged as a physical interruption to the flow of human traffic through an imagined space, seen only as a floor plan, the role of choreographer was better attempted by the subsequent manifestation of my thinking, in the next show at the Pie Factory, later on in the course.

With '*Screen Dream*' I was initially hoping to choreograph the flow of human traffic around the space but was thwarted by the confines of a large group show. With the next, smaller show at the Pie Factory, I was afforded more opportunity to choreograph the experience of the work, although this time, not as the interruption I had envisaged for '*Screen Dream*'.

This next show in Margate was a much smaller affair, involving only five artists. We called the show, appropriately for all, 'Cognition'. For it I was looking to create a space within a space, rather than an interruption in the flow I was now considering dualism and the relationship between the internal and the external. I wanted the experience to be somehow disconcerting, simultaneously comfortable yet somehow confusing and used audio to add to this affect in the imaginatively titled '*Experiment 2*'. Using five or more portable MP3 players, all loaded with a selection of audio samples and pieces, some containing spoken word and with all players set to random. Destabilising the experience with multiple loops producing randomised and unpredictable combinations. The audio was emanating from various headphone speakers, hidden within the cavities of the doors and hung within them.



Above: gallery shots of installation '*Experiment 2*'

At this point I would like to mention three pieces of work but I feel have made a direct and obvious contribution to my thinking and practice and to this piece in particular. Firstly the rabbit warren of rooms and corridors created by Mike Nelson at the Tate in 2000 for his installation '*The Coral Reef*'.



'... a claustrophobic construction of rooms and narrow corridors, each with a hint of life but decaying in front of your eyes. The sprawling work was first shown in 2001 at Matt's Gallery in London, and is now part of Tate's collection. In this interview the artist explains the ideas and ideologies behind the work, and tells us why he wants the spectator to feel 'lost in a world of lost people.'

<http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/video/mike-nelson-coral-reef> . Accessed 30/07/12

Later, in 2009, Miroslaw Balka's 'How It Is' was heralded by Mark Brown, arts correspondent for the Guardian, with the headline 'Tate Modern puts void in Turbine Hall' referring to the container like steel structure placed there by the artist. 'The Warsaw-born artist has created a piece that the gallery fully expects will unnerve and unsettle visitors. The structure is enormous – 30 metres long, 10m wide and 13m high – and once inside it, visitors will walk into complete blackness...'

Mark Brown, arts correspondent
guardian.co.uk, Monday 12 October 2009

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/oct/12/tate-modern-turbine-hall-balka>

(Accessed on 18/08/12)

Thirdly I would like to remind you of one of Susan Hiller's sound based works, by which I was deeply affected at the Tate Britain show in the summer of 2011. The installation for 'Witness' consists of 'Approx. 400 speakers, 10 audio track, each of 50 to 60 recordings; wires, lights. Installed size approx. 1800 x 900' (Gallager 2011:100) and comprising of a "forest"... Made of flat round speakers, like microphones radios, each hanging at the end of its speaker wire... Every speaker transmits voice

telling the story, the voices speak great range of languages; eventually, one realises that they are all relating stories close encounters with UFOs...' (Lbid). Sound, hidden, waiting to be encountered.

Also from '*Cognition*', I now realize, came '*Beautiful Friend*', the satellite piece now in the near orbit of the installation, having flown the nest after said exhibition, testing of ideas.

Both of the final works incorporate multiple screens, a comment on the proliferation of screens in everyday contemporary life, among other things.

Until gaining access to the gallery space I am occupying, I was unsure about what the conclusion of my research would be and how it might look, while being quite sure of the phenomenology I am attempting to create, how I want it to feel. With no single, finished piece of work in my mind at this stage, rather I was cogitating several, or possibly too many, alternatives. Thankfully access to the space clarified my position in relation to moving the project forward and brought it into sharper focus. Through reflection and experimentation, the strategies and elements most relevant became clear and rendered some superfluous.

'The value of an idea is proved by its power to organize the subject matter. Goethe' (O'Doherty :87)

With the installation of the final piece still incomplete at the handing in of this paper. Any critique must be one of an almost completed work while talking about it as though finished. Luckily, the installation exists and is not far from its end.

All of the filmic elements already exist but I can't guess the success or otherwise of certain things I still intend to try in the edit. Indeed they may end up 'on the cutting room floor'.

The remaining 'tweaks', will hopefully add to the completed work but are not, I suspect, fundamental to the overall affect.

I have created an immersive environment, inviting the viewer to move around in the space whilst encouraging lengthy moments of stillness and reflection.

While commenting on the plural nature of human existence I am asking the viewer to come further into the space, to seek what is obscured.

Encouraging a dialogue within, between and around the created spaces by creating the desire to navigate them.

Aiming to achieve the impact and dis-orientation of Susan Hiller's Punch and Judy piece, 'An Entertainment', in which she choreographs the experience with the contingent sound and visuals, making the viewer turn 100 degrees to follow the action, never quite sure what is coming next.

The past two years have been earnestly spent engaging in the development of practice and the research methodologies that has led to this point and these pieces of work. I conclude this paper and course of study in agreement with Descartes, who makes the assertion in ‘The Description of the Human Body’ that ‘there is nothing one can more profitably occupy oneself with the most trying to know oneself.’

(<http://www.philosophy.leeds.ac.uk/GMR/hmp/texts/modern/descartes/body/body.html>) (Accessed 20/07/12)

Notes

1. in his book ‘Memory A Very Short Introduction’, Jonathan K. Foster under the title ‘The effects of previous knowledge’ discusses ‘Schemas - what we already know’ and the work of Bartlett in the 1930s and ‘-what Bartlett termed an ‘effort after meaning’.

Bartlett proposed that we possess *schemata* (or *schemas*), which he described as active organisations of past experiences. These schemas help us make sense unfamiliar situations, guiding our expectations providing a framework within which new information is processed.’

(Foster, 2009: 68)

Bibliography

Books

Foster, Jonathan K (2009) *'Memory (A Very Short Introduction)'* Oxford: Oxford University Press

Gallagher, Anne (2011) *'Susan Hiller-exhibition catalogue'*. Tate publishing, London.

O'Doherty, Brian (1999) *'Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space'*
Los Angeles and London: University of California Press

Journals

Lawton, Graham **'The Grand Delusion'** in *New Scientist*, 14 May 2011 pp35-41

Other

DESCARTES: THE DESCRIPTION OF THE HUMAN BODY Translation © George
MacDonald Ross

<http://www.philosophy.leeds.ac.uk/GMR/hmp/texts/modern/descartes/body/body.html>

(Accessed 20/07/12)