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The Memory Effect
Anachronism, Time and Motion

Charles Green

INTRODUCTION

1 This article draws on research for a jointly written, forthcoming book on memory method in contemporary art, co-authored with Lyndell Brown.

2 The work's full details are: *The Return of Ulysses* (*Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*), premiere 1998, William Kentridge, director, Handspring Puppet Company (Cape Town), puppets, music, Ricercar Consort, director, Philippe Pierlot opera by Claudio Monteverdi (1640). Kentridge's Handspring collaborations included *Woyzeck on the Highveld* (1992), *Faustus in Africa!* (1994), *Ubu and the Truth Commission* (1998), *The Chimp Project* (2000) and *Confessions of Zeno* (2002–2003).

3 See Rosalind Krauss's important essay, '"The Rock": William Kentridge's Drawings for Projection', *October*, no 92, spring 2000, pp 3–35; Jessica Dubow and Ruth Rosengarten, 'History as the Main Complaint: William Kentridge and the Making of Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Art History*, 27:4, September 2004,

The background to this article is an ethical landscape defined by the shift from the postmodern to the contemporary. Contemporary artists are working in ground-breaking ways with images and information, navigating new sources and spaces, and old places and legal regimes.[1] Digital technologies that enable archive-based art practices are now directly affecting contemporary art, reinforcing a key trajectory in art from the 1960s on. At the same time, the collection, recollection and display of images by artists and art historians is often in conflict both with the law and with cross-cultural ethics. The re-use and re-casting of cultural materials has been central to art. This article examines three structuring principles of memory in key artworks, art theories and films.

Over time since the 1960s, audience tolerance for disrupted narration has increased in proportion to the penetration of new media's database and digital effect paradigms into cinematic representation: contemporary concepts of neo-baroque cinema and the idea of the Cinema Effect have been formulated in response to this. Trying to 'understand' broken narratives – the world of a database aesthetic – through narration, effectively insisting on naive cinematic realism's world of character motivation, has always seemed excessively wilful. This article explores the workings of time and motion in the films of William Kentridge and Doug Aitken, presaged in the much earlier *Atlas* of art historian Aby Warburg, on the understanding that artists, film directors and art historians have all demanded the activity of memorisation and negotiated the travails of 'understanding' produced by the effect of memory itself, by the atlas's effect of navigational competence, and by the time and motion effects of frozen movement and stop–start flickering. The result of these memory effects is a cinematic experience of suspension within a quasi-documentary film genre that is specific to panoramic, environmental video installation, the identifications within which are very different from that of classic narrative cinema. They, in turn, illuminate the anachronistic, pseudo-cinematic methodology of the

Doug Aitken, *Interiors*, 2002, still from DVD 3 projection video installation with sound, four sequences, 6 minutes 55 seconds duration, dimensions variable. Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York

pp 671–90. Neither author mentions Warburg, though Krauss draws crucially upon Walter Benjamin; her choice of artist as subject in this essay might seem initially perplexing (Kentridge's messy, passionate figurative, expressionist idiom intertwined with politics; his decades-long connection with alternative theatre) but follows the trajectory established in her essay on Irish artist James Coleman and her meditations in two essays on reinvented (and cinematic) media; see Rosalind Krauss, '…And Then Turn Away? An Essay on James Coleman', *October*, no 81, summer 1997; Rosalind Krauss,

Atlas, a methodology that fascinates many contemporary artists, as the last three Documentas have illustrated.

ANACHRONISM

Behind opera singers, musicians and a cast of skeletal, adult-sized puppets manipulated by sombre, professorial-looking puppeteers, audiences see a video projection of charcoal-drawn animations interspersed with medical and scientific footage. No simple adaptation, South African artist William Kentridge's multimedia version (2002) of Monteverdi's 1640 opera, *The Return of Ulysses* (*Il ritorno d'Ulisse in Patria*), though a concert production, subsumes the early opera's different elements inside the architecture of video installation.[2] *The Return of Ulysses* exemplifies the continuity of figuration in art and the dramatic and synthetic ambition of contemporary video installation.

At the intersection of cinema and visual art, this art form has dominated major surveys of contemporary art since the early 1990s, but largely awaits detailed art historical research. Influential commentators

such as Rosalind Krauss place Kentridge as an exemplary innovator, demonstrating the evolving form's possibilities.[3] But Krauss's dependence on anachronism by itself is not enough.

And, equally, if organised recollections of art such as Aby Warburg's anachronistic *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–1929) are to have any wider significance beyond personal taste or curiosity (and we shall come to that work in the second part of this article), it must be established that the memory described by organised recollections of art is capable of collective rather than personal affect, and it must be shown that what Gilles Deleuze identified as the memory function of film can be located in art.[4] What does this mean? In the wider social sphere, as Kwame Anthony Appiah has noted, shared memory is supported by institutions such as schools, universities, histories – all involved actively in telling and retelling a story – as opposed to having common memories of an episode that is experienced individually.[5]

Such a Memory Effect is easily located within visual art. But as far as helpful precedents go, this presents a problem because the intersection of memory and the imagining subject is relatively under-researched in art theory and art history, especially compared with the proliferation of material on the subject in literary studies and, more recently, in cinema studies. Worse, memory method is normally associated with literature that provokes the empathic identifications associated with Marcel Proust's almost too-familiar, involuntary memory trigger, the little madeleine cake dipped in lime blossom tea. But as memory theorists from antiquity onwards have recognised, the mind remembers images better than words and, given this, they also understood that images cannot be reduced to words. In order to think about the way that artists and art theorists present memory as a cultural preoccupation, as an artistic and art theoretical problem (and as a source of potentially productive disciplinary destabilisation), primary rather than secondary texts – works of art rather than literature about works of art – are for the most part the unreliable sources of knowledge about the subject.

Different forms of archival exploration and, after that, exploratory, aestheticising and exploitative archivism, have become established methodologies in contemporary art, and archival forms are particularly associated both with works of art lazily labelled neo-conceptual, or with the supposed recovery of identity through cultural retrieval. Many exhibitions of contemporary art have assumed memory could be set to work as an anchor against forgetting, attributing to improbably different artists the same unlikely generic effort 'to suspend the twilight of memory'.[6] Allan Sekula's pivotal 1986 essay on the archive and contemporary art, 'The Body and the Archive', stands near the beginning of contemporary art's more rigorous reengagement with the archival, as do his extraordinarily vast photographic projects.[7] In her exemplary and well-known book, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, Miwon Kwon took curator Mary Jane Jacobs's gargantuan site-specific curatorial project 'Sculpture Chicago' (1993) to task for its sentimental presumption that memory, place and cultural authenticity are linked, for its underlying assumption that to create a memorial (to memorialise) is the same as to remember.[8] Too often, archive-based contemporary art, including works by highly political artist collectives, has been incoherent by comparison with explanatory essays. Wherever artists have assumed

'Reinventing the Medium', *Critical Inquiry*, no 25, winter 1999.

4 See Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: the movement-image* (1983), trans Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: the time-image* (1985), trans Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1989. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and signs: the complete text* (1964), trans Richard Howard, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2000. For an explanation of the concept of world memory, see *Cinema 2*, p 119.

5 Kwame Anthony Appiah, 'You must remember this', *New York Review of Books*, 50:4, 13 March 2003, pp 35–7

6 Neal Benezra and Olga M Viso, *Distemper: Dissonant Themes in the Art of the 1990s*, exhibition catalogue, Smithsonian Museum, Washington DC, 1996, p 12

7 Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', *October*, no 39, winter 1986, pp 3–64

8 See Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2002. The conception that memory and authenticity are linked is based on the range of assumptions regarding site specificity that Kwon analyses in her chapter on 'Sculpture Chicago'.

Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, p 18, 1927–1929, black and white photograph, page dimensions variable. Courtesy Warburg Institute, London

Aby Warburg, *Mnemosyne Atlas*, p 19, 1927–1929, black and white photograph, page dimensions variable. Courtesy Warburg Institute, London

9 See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993; a famous article by French film director Claude Lanzmann attacking Hollywood film director Stephen Spielberg's popular *Schindler's List* was published in *Le Monde* on 3 March 1994 and later reprinted in English in *The Guardian Weekly* on 3 April 1994. For Lanzmann, see Claude Lanzmann, *Shoah, an oral history of the Holocaust: the complete text of the film*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1985; Claude Lanzmann, director, *Shoah*, 35mm, film, 570 minutes running time (1986). Also see Michèle C Cone, *French modernisms: perspectives on art before, during, and after Vichy*, Cambridge University Press, New York, 2001.

10 See Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, trans Sophie Hawkes, Zone Books, New York, 2004; see also Georges Didi-Huberman, 'Foreword: Knowledge-Movement', in Philippe-Alain Michaud, *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion*, pp 7–19, 337–42; Georges Didi-Huberman, *L'image survivante: histoire de l'art et temps des fantômes selon Aby Warburg*, Editions de Minuit, Paris, 2002; two chapters from Didi-Huberman's book were reprinted as Georges Didi-Huberman, 'The Surviving Image: Aby Warburg and Tylorian Anthropology', Vivian Sky Rehberg, trans, *Oxford Art Journal*, 25:1, 2002, pp 59–70. Didi-Huberman explores Warburg in relation to nineteenth-century British ethnologist Edward B Tylor's ethnographic methods, distinguishing between analogical pseudo-morphisms that conflated mythifications with survivals, which were both

that the status of art endows the archive with a voice, then the result has been enfeebled, oblique and boring.

A Memory Effect must be understood, therefore, at a crucial but late moment, against the backdrop of a longstanding, understandable and extensively theorised distrust of the image, and in particular of the image in relation to memory. This distrust has been voiced both through the deeply influential anti-visual strand of philosophy and critical theory and in demolitions of the claims of visual memory in relation to sentimental and over-familiar representations of evil and the Holocaust. The latter takes the form of essays and films like those of Claude Lanzmann, attacking the explanatory superficiality offered by director Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and similar films. Jean-Luc Godard, in the second half of his late work, *Eloge de l'amour* (*In Praise of Love*, 2001), mounts a similar attack on Spielbergian memory.[9] Because of this, it is particularly important to differentiate between increasingly discredited claims for images and memory, and on the other hand an emerging language of memory that has appeared largely from film theory, from trauma studies and, finally, from understanding Warburg. Cinema curator Philippe-Alain Michaud's brilliant book *Aby Warburg and the Image in Motion* (2004) shows that Warburg saw individual images (artistic or not) as film-stills in a virtual cinema of culture.[10]

Back to Kentridge. Though his charcoal drawings of apartheid, torture and hospital rooms are celebrated in themselves, in this work they are the ground – the rear-projection – against which the puppet-actors, separated from their dramatic voices, gesture slowly or strike poses in front of the projected animations, which sometimes feature surprisingly sharp perspectival recessions. Kentridge's puppets, manipulated by his long-time collaborators, the Cape Town-based Handspring Puppet Company, inhabit several worlds at once: Homer's Ithaca, mid-twentieth-century Johannesburg, and the contemporary hospital ward where Ulysses, having time-travelled to the present, is now dying. In turn, despite their awkward movements, restricted gestures and stylised artificiality, the wooden puppets are mysteriously and in this case uncannily inhabited by other Ulysses (not least Jean-Luc Godard's) and also by the characters from Kentridge's other animated films. William Kentridge has referred to the complete and obvious artificiality of puppets. As he says, try to be alienated from identification as we may, their characters always inhabit the puppets.[11] And more than simple character hindered by artificiality animates them. Kentridge's description of the double vision induced by his puppets' frozen gestures, held against his ambiguous, hand-drawn, projected backdrops, serves as their demystification and as an astute description of a term invented by iconologist Aby Warburg in the first decades of the twentieth century, the dynamogram:

> It is difficult to pin down whether we read the manipulation and puppet's agency at the same time or oscillate between them – and then become aware of this oscillation in ourselves. Self-consciously aware of ourselves as spectators only partly in control of how we see.[12]

Kentridge's words bring into focus the ambiguous position of a viewer sliding between three roles: assessing the artist's constructed world, being held by the affective power of the gesture itself, and reflexively

witnessing oneself watching. Kentridge's figures – whether puppets or in charcoal drawings – are like transparent screens themselves, which is to say that both Kentridge and Warburg saw the figure as a transparent template giving way onto other images and figures. The double vision induced by frozen, intense gestures held against projected backdrops serves as an accurate reintroduction to Warburg's two linked ideas of the pathos formula or effect, and the 'dynamogram', the arrangement of figures into an intense hieroglyphic formation that gives rise, in a sign language, to pathos. Not that Kentridge's figures are literally transparent and Warburg's theory of dynamograms a cookie-cutter list of great themes. But whether moving through frenetic, collapsing African cities or walking down endless hospital corridors – for Kentridge's innovations cannot be understood in isolation from his politics and his background as a white person working in highly politicised, cross-racial, experimental theatre during the 1980s in which gestures were *pathetic* – his silhouetted Ulysses is a film still in the sequence linking different Ulysses. Kentridge's puppets are a perfect embodiment of Warburg's hieratic idea of the way that gestures appear in figure composition, just as flickering animation is the perfect embodiment of Warburg's imaginary animation of Renaissance figures' moving drapery. The puppets simultaneously personify distance (as once did monochrome grisaille) and the pathos of awkward, hand-carved gestures and poses. Warburg's *Atlas*'s assemblages have the same status as well: an individual photograph is a stilled interval along a film sequence. From the perspective of a dynamogram, the status of an individual work of art is not far from an animation cell anyway. Kentridge's anachronistic, monochrome, pre-cinematic method of redrawing each individual animation cell in a repeatedly reworked, full-scale drawing – photographing, erasing, advancing a pose in small intervals so that a gesture or a piece of disintegrating machinery shifts centimetre by centimetre – illuminates Warburg's use of the page in *Atlas*. Theirs is the perspective of mental filing cards flickering past the imagining viewer. Flickering repetition conjures up the illusion of movement in a simulacrum of the succession of film-frames through a projector and figures moving in ceremonial motion. The methods are anachronistic. The purpose of all this transformation is not to trace taxonomy so much as to animate. Kentridge shows us the power of Warburg's *Atlas* brought to life and set in motion. And Warburg's *Atlas* shows an odd collaboration between Warburg and his artists: together to actualise art history as an ordered collection of animation cells.

Well over sixty panels comprise Aby Warburg's last work of art history, *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–1929). For the most typical panels, the early twentieth-century inventor of iconology arranged a collection of photographs of Old Master etchings and paintings on a large canvas so that the viewer would be cued to try to identify the copies and adaptations from artist to artist. They were then photographed using large-format glass negatives and contact-printed in order to comprise separate pages of *Atlas*. By collecting images and arranging the resulting archive into a system, Warburg was trying to show the specific but ineffable Memory Effect underlying the temporal and spatial breadth of European art history.

The uneasy tension between the two – the temporal and spatial breadth – that we sense as the project's indeterminate utility and its

Warburg's and Tylor's great interests.

11 William Kentridge, conversation with the author, Sydney, 16 November 2000

12 William Kentridge, 'An unwilling suspension of disbelief: the puppets of Adrian Kohler', in Melbourne International Arts Festival, *The Return of Ulysses*, programme notes, Melbourne International Arts Festival, Melbourne, 2004, p 10

intriguing anachronism was in part due to the relation between the specificity and ineffability of recollection. Across the *Atlas*'s panels, Warburg traced morphological affinities and specific recurring gestural motifs by juxtaposing chains of small photographs. His categorisations according to allegories – Melancholy or Medea or the Death of Orpheus – were governed, he postulated, by sublimations surviving from image to image in frozen, intensely felt gestures. Explanations of these oscillate between attributing to them something of the syntactical nature of a legible sign language or something more of the nature of a wreckage. Warburg assumed – wreckage or signing – that the collective mind is connected by the sublimated image's affect.

This is completely different from many iconographers' conservative assumption that *Atlas* showed how and where artistic and stylistic influence was transmitted. Kurt Forster has correctly pointed out that Warburg was inventing the discipline of cultural studies, giving it a domain far beyond the conventional art history of his time.[13] Warburg was also attempting to develop a psychological history and language of affect, encoded and transmitted in visual images. He called the pathetic effect by a name, the pathos formula. Particular gestures or signs triggered or excited this effect. He gave these signs, abstracted from the gestures of figures or figure-groups frozen at an instant of maximum intensity and excitement (as opposed to moments of ethos or contemplation), a name: the dynamogram. He was implying a hidden language of images, like invisible writing. If some lines and shapes produced the affect of pathos and others not, if the affect was not produced by semiotic context, then the effect was tied to mysteries rather than to the effect of the uncanny. Warburg's *Atlas* was a taxonomy of abstract signs.

The contemporary temptation is to recuperate Warburg's *Atlas* through apocalyptic theories of montage. This is the path traced by Benjamin Buchloh's often reprinted article on *Atlas*. Buchloh's argument about Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* unfolds along an ingenious and compelling trajectory. Aby Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* (1927–1929) was a precursor to German painter Gerhard Richter's famous collection of photographs, *Atlas*, and its underlying modernist dynamic and tension could be retroactively projected backwards onto Warburg to create an ideologically charged genealogy for the contemporary archival turn.[14]

I disagree strongly. Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, and his implicit understanding of memory as an archive of preserved impressions, should be read through the pre-Gutenberg techniques for remembering described by Frances Yates. In premodern memory visualisation schemes statues were mentally placed in imaginary architectural niches so they formed part of a procession of iconic forms stretching from niche to niche in order to trigger the exact recollection of sequences of text. This suggests that *Mnemosyne Atlas* occupies a position of profound mental continuity in the historiography of images. A statue stands in for a block of text.

Buchloh's modernist comparisons, on the other hand, signpost and privilege the *Atlas*'s modernist discontinuity and disruption, and, inadvertently, its lateral, affective disorder. In the same way, the *Atlas*'s anachronistic preoccupation with mnemonic remembrance (a pre-Gutenberg technology) rather than archival storage (the standard post-Gutenberg

13 K W Forster, 'Aby Warburg: His Study of Ritual and Art on Two Continents', *October*, no 77, summer 1996, pp 5–24; K W Forster, 'Introduction', in Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity*, Getty Publications, Los Angeles, 1999, pp 1–75

14 B H D Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's Atlas: The Anomic Archive', *October*, no 88, spring 1999, pp 117–45

method of memory storage) occurred at the same time as Warburg crossed the boundary between art historian and art maker in his elaborations of extreme formal control and manipulated semantic impoverishment. Through this dual aesthetic activity, the heroic inevitability of the project's failure and the inadequacy of Buchloh's reading can be comprehended, both as preposterous readings in the sense posited by Mieke Bal.[15]

So, does *Mnemosyne Atlas* really fit within this modernist trajectory of crisis? Buchloh's central thesis, with which I would profoundly disagree, is that Warburg's work can be taken as a pointer, as a limit-case, in the complex and fraught evolution of the new paradigm of montage. His second point is that *Mnemosyne Atlas*'s technique of mnemonic forms was a method for writing a decentred history. This is wishful thinking, for Warburg's model of memory registration and mnemonics faced away from modernity and, further, demonstrated the decay of the conditions for a successful modern visual mnemonics. Throwing away the *Atlas*'s mnemonic art historical utility and its utopian appropriation forces a turn to *Atlas* as indexical – as the result of a process that was sedimentary and entropic, rather than metonymic and modernist. *Mnemosyne Atlas* was not a method for writing art history, but a method for re-making art histories into something else altogether, into something more akin to art practice.

Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas* was to a large degree founded on the optimistic formal belief in the overriding indexicality or veracity – the transparency – of the photograph, but this belief became, quite simply, hard to sustain towards the end of the twentieth century. How had *Atlas* managed this tension? The process of re-photography and reproduction, quite oddly, made Warburg's panels convincing due to the suppression of the disparate original authors' handiworks. At the same time, photography rendered his sources – Warburg's selected paintings and sculptures – retroactively ghostly and suddenly transparent. He combined, through a relatively seamless but already both technologically and conceptually anachronistic montage method (for multiple negative printing on one photograph was already possible), different modes of representation. He merged these onto a single panel and, second, translated and unified the result through the apparently intrinsic properties of photographic transparency gained by the subordination of collaged sources underneath a single, shiny photographic paper surface.

So although Warburg's conception of cultural memory transmitted through the affective traces of ancient pagan trauma in a kind of time travel was, first, a textual mode of seeing, it was also, second, a way of virtual seeing in which we were asked to examine works of art as if they were strata, snapshots and excerpts from something bigger. The question is: what larger entity were these strata or snapshots indexical of? This is a crucial question. Warburg was attempting something more complicated than an abbreviated description of the canonical artistic archive. His theory of pathos formula – of the effect of movement encoded in a dynamogram – was a theory of formulae or effects that triggered memory, but were not memory itself.

But at the same time, it is clear that not all images wish to be included in *Atlas*. Copyright and moral rights restrictions surround the circulation of particular images by indigenous and First Nations artists. If

15 That Buchloh's neo-Marxism is an uncomfortable fit with Bal's semiotics is irrelevant here. In a nuanced examination of the modernist context, Buchloh (like Didi-Huberman and Forster before) links *Mnemosyne Atlas* to the early 1920s Soviet debates about photographic images and montage led by Rodchenko and Brik, to Walter Benjamin's 'Small History of Photography' (1931) and finally to Siegfried Kracauer's deeply pessimistic, cryptic essay, 'Photography' (1927). See Walter Benjamin, 'A Small History of Photography' (1931), in *One Way Street*, trans Edmund Jephcott, New Left Books, London, 1979, pp 240–57; see Siegfried Kracauer, 'Photography' (1927), in *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays*, ed and trans Thomas H Levin, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1995, pp 47–63. Buchloh aligned Richter's *Atlas* with Kracauer's pessimistic analysis, in direct contrast to Roland Barthes's efforts to reinvest bodily memory and phenomenological authenticity within the photograph of his mother in *Camera Lucida*; see Buchloh, 'Gerhard Richter's *Atlas*: The Anomic Archive', p 141.

particular images have special status, given the role of images in indigenous culture as emblems of literal ownership to culture and land, then it is important to be fully aware of the controversies surrounding European art history's (and White Australia's) unauthorised and authorised uses of indigenous images.[16]

Warburg's legacy may be a key to understanding contemporary art as a transdisciplinary field, but its limited comprehension of cross-cultural ethical constraint, as Claire Farago has convincingly shown, also illuminates the globalisation that art and art history must now negotiate, whether willingly or not.[17] Warburg's vision of the survival of the classical tradition is commensurable with contemporary art. But his vision, Farago argued, was oblivious to its own imperial politics, masking his deep dissatisfaction with the present and his inability to see Western art history's evolutionary perspective as always culturally contained. Unconstrained himself by the corporate- and consumer-driven copyright laws that now seek to regulate contemporary culture, and equally unaware of or uninterested in the fierce disagreements about the protection of Hopi culture swirling around him during his visit to the American South West, Warburg provides a magisterial but now somewhat utopian (as well as illegal and ethically deficient) example of a collective archive of representations that migrates across media boundaries, but one in which there is an increasing tension between artistic practice and the law. The latter presumes that its authority (and protections of both intellectual and moral property) will be reproduced easily within the fluid realm of art, so that paradigms of certifiable and easily recognisable expressivity are privileged at the expense of models of reception – of listening, reading and transformation – that have always been at least as basic to artistic practice and theory. Warburg's methods presage archive-oriented conceptualist art and postmodern appropriation's image scavenging, but also demonstrate the endangered status of both. His *Mnemosyne Atlas* was an unobserved landmark, and its catastrophic failure is deeply instructive for both an ethical art history and an art history that wishes to incorporate a wider cultural field.

TIME AND MOTION

The second part of this article will explore the workings of time and motion through the concept of a cinematic experience of suspension within a quasi-documentary film genre that is specific to panoramic, environmental video installation, the identifications within which are very different from that of classic narrative cinema.

Over time from the 1960s, audience tolerance for disrupted narration has increased in proportion to the penetration of new media's database and digital effect paradigms into cinematic representation; the concept of neo-baroque cinema and the idea of the Cinema Effect have been formulated in response to this.[18] Trying to 'understand' broken narratives – the world of Lev Manovich's database aesthetic – through character motivation, residually insisting on naive cinematic realism, has always seemed excessively wilful. Los Angeles video artist Doug Aitken comments thus: 'Nonlinear structures allow one to explore time – opening it up, pulling

16 Read the chapter by Vivien Johnson, 'Five Stories', in her exemplary *Michael Jagamara Nelson*, Craftsman House, Roseville, Austin, 1997, pp 61–77; see the long discussion of protocols involved in responsible academic acknowledgement of indigenous copyright in Sylvia Kleinert and Margo Neale, *The Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and Culture*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2000.

17 Claire Farago, 'Re(f)using Art: Aby Warburg and the Ethics of Scholarship', in *Transforming Images: New Mexican Santos In-Between Worlds*, eds Claire Farago and Donna Pierce, Penn State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2006, pp 259–73, 308–13

18 See Angela Ndalianis, *Neo-Baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2003; Sean Cubitt, *The Cinema Effect*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, 2004.

it back, and revealing the inner workings of a single moment.'[19] The article now explores these workings.

The French actress heroine and the Japanese architect hero of Alain Resnais's *Hiroshima mon amour* (1959) spend a large part of the movie experiencing different levels of the past as if they were no longer connected to them. Resnais's French actress (played by Emmanuelle Riva who reappeared in Krzysztof Kieslowski's *Three Colors: Blue* (1993) at the end of her career, three decades later, as an old woman sick with dementia and bereft of memories, the exact and deliberate, I am sure, opposite pathology of her earlier role), adrift in Hiroshima for a film shoot, is beset by flashbacks, but her memories remain of ambiguous provenance and status.

In the opening scenes of *Hiroshima mon amour*, Resnais provides a model of consciousness and recollection in the process of a recitation of facts about Hiroshima as the camera moves restlessly around. Hiroshima is constituted as an archive composed of collectively remembered and reviewed facts, exhibits, photographs and figures, following the camera along its famous, long tracking shots, most memorably in the Hiroshima Museum and on the two lovers' endless walks, during which they lose and find each other. Resnais's Japanese man and French woman become iconic presences by virtue of their disconnection from their environment (in the face of their obdurate self-absorption, as transparent as a rear-projection screen), their inexplicable motivations and stasis. The protagonists are silhouetted in semi-frozen gestures against spectralised nocturnal environments, and propel themselves out of bars into space in continual perambulation. They convert themselves into exponents of Aby Warburg's notorious pathos formula, projections over an apparently neutral object, the dark city.

Doug Aitken is deeply familiar with 1960s and 1970s art cinema and with Resnais's film, along with those decades' experimentation with proto-data-base related, non-linear narrative structures. Aitken makes environmental, multi-screen video projections of great scale and elegance, split-narrative videos in which his young characters' perambulations blur in portrayals of shifting time related to previous mainstream cinema. The plots of these fragmented, electrifying works are usually elliptical, slickly edited journeys through ghostly urban landscapes or strange wilderness regions. The most compelling aspect of his productions is not non-linearity per se (though the term is, as is evident in his book, *Broken Screen*, of great concern to him as it is to new media theorists) so much as the means by which his generically portrayed figures are inhabited by art and cinema history.

Next, we shall take up the way in which a broken continuity across the decades, based on duration, distance, phased appearance, disappearance and perambulation, is manifest in Aitken's videos *Electric Earth* (1999) and *Interiors* (2002), which both also draw on the model of travel-documentary film. Let us start with the latter form. The semi-transparent, scrim-framed environments show the influence of multi-screen world exposition technology, and of Cinerama docu-feature films, which were the 1960s progenitors of the contemporary IMAX genre both in terms of technology and also in terms of their hybridity of genre and narrative. This narrative structure does not move beyond the simplest plots nor is there any substantial character development. Aitken's figures are types.

19 Doug Aitken, quoted in S Anton, 'Doug Aitken talks about *Electric Earth*', *Artforum*, 38:9, May 2000, p 161

In *Electric Earth*, nothing much happens except that a young black man (Giggy Johnson) alone in a hotel room gets up from his bed and walks through the utterly deserted streets of Los Angeles at night, where it looks as if the world has ended. Plot is, for the most part, very difficult to pin down under a welter of detail – so much so that the pivotal aspect is the surface of the matrix that unfolded. Interviewed about *Electric Earth*, Aitken noted:

> I wanted to see if I could create an organic structure – like a strand of DNA, where every bit of information, every chromosome, is critical – through accumulations of small events and actions.[20]

He is saying that a matrix of elements is marked by repeated gestures – watermarks underneath the semiotic code.

How does one understand this William Gibson-like idea? Writer Frances Richard has stated with great sensitivity that contemporary painter Matthew Ritchie's works are 'multidimensional or exploded facets of a single (impossible) master image, a unified field that needs no distinctions between seen objects and conceptually unbounded

20 Ibid. The artist also refers to *Electric Earth* as an 'expansion narrative'.

Doug Aitken, *Electric Earth*, 1999, still from 8 laserdisc projection with sound, dimensions variable. Courtesy 303 Gallery, New York

themes'.[21] Aitken's work can be understood in the same way. There is no punch-line, his wandering city-dweller does not arrive anywhere. The narrative structure does not move beyond the simplest plots, nor is there any character development.

It is important to remember the disjunctions between science, technology and ecology from the late 1960s on, and to understand the degree to which this period now fascinates artists such as Aitken, or Los Angles artist Sam Durant's ironic models of Smithson's works, or Tacita Dean's saturated film-strip documentation of 1960s architecture and entropic disintegration, including of Smithson's *Spiral Jetty*.[22] Nor should younger artists' familiarity with the cinema and art of this period be underestimated. At that time, critic Jack Burnham wrote many articles, including 'Real Time Systems' for *Artforum* magazine, in which he compared the role of the artist to that of a software designer.[23] Burnham also referred to 'list structures', which we would link to the *Atlas*'s enumeration of dynamograms in *Atlas*:

> Pioneered between 1962 and 1965 in the writings of Donald Judd, it resembles what a computer programmer would call an entity's 'list structure', or all the enumerated properties needed to physically rebuild an object… A web of sensorial descriptions is spun around the central images of a plot. The point is not to internalise scrutiny in the Freudian sense, but to infer the essence of a situation through detailed examination of surface effects.[24]

At the start of *Electric Earth*, Aitken's young man is a doppelganger, inhabited by a host of wanderers in art and film before him. So we must remember that Aitken is an art-house cinephile. His connections to art-house are deliberate. Again recall Alain Resnais's un-named French actress (Emanuelle Riva) wandering around Hiroshima during the space of a night, alone or trailed by her Japanese lover, for most of *Hiroshima mon amour*, having announced that she loves cities that never sleep and where things are always open.

It might be argued that such representation of created memory results in works that simply share a memory style, resembling each other rather than producing any insight into memory. Catharsis is not the object. The addictive object is recollection. The point is to have something to remember each other by in order to overcome forgetting. Shared traumatic memories in this case are alternately a painful attempt to fix in memory – to make sense of – this brief affair, an anterior effort to construct memory for two through intense sensory, here sexual, identification. The flashbacks in *Hiroshima mon amour* are experienced primarily and initially as profoundly mysterious disruptions, as a shock, as a trigger, on account of their short duration and, quite definitely, their uncanny inconsistency with the preceding and succeeding shots. Only upon re-viewing the film could they be interpreted as flashbacks of momentary duration. Their power has little to do with the gradual integration of the flashbacks into a chronological pre-history of the woman's life, just as comprehension definitely assisted neither of the lovers whom Resnais portrayed.

Aitken's young man and Resnais's woman are surrounded by graphic signs – they are *submerged* in neon, billboards, street-signs – and by night, in their constant movement and statuesque repose, the two *look*

21 Frances Richard, 'Matthew Ritchie', *Artforum*, 41:5, January 2003, p 136

22 This impact, rather than the relationship between the archive and art, is the proper subject of Hal Foster's useful essay, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, no 110, autumn 2004, pp 3–22.

23 Jack Burnham, 'Real time systems', *Artforum*, 8:1, September 1969, pp 49–55, 55

24 Jack Burnham, 'Systems aesthetics', *Artforum*, 7:1, September 1968, pp 30–5, 32

like signs. With their startling physiques and hyperactive jumpy move-ments or stillness, they *acknowledge* that they are driven or possessed. Aitken's Giggy Johnson declares exactly this at the start of *Electric Earth* and, as an expert dancer in real life, he moves with the perfect coordina-tion of a jangling marionette puppet and motions as if signing in a precise language. His precursor is Resnais's walking Frenchwoman possessed by the memory of her dead German lover (talking to him throughout the film; it takes a while to realise this) and by her provincial home, the small city of Nevers. Just as Giggy Johnson looks backwards to Emmanuelle Riva, so she herself is inhabited by a succession of isolated flâneurs from both cinema and art, not least the wandering heroine-murderer of Louis Malle's slightly earlier first feature, *Ascenseur pour l'Echafaud* (1957) and Agnès Varda's slightly later first feature, *Cléo de 5 à 7* (1961). Half the actresses in Paris seem to have been pounding the nocturnal purgatory of Parisian streets. More important still, both Johnson and Riva are *graphic* presences, like Muybridge's time-delay subjects. This insistent, graphic presence attracts and traps, according to the formula of pathos.

In 2004, Aitken co-curated an exhibition, 'Hard Light', at PS1 Contemporary Art Center (New York), in which he juxtaposed the work just mentioned, and Chris Marker's *La jetée*, with his own large video installation, *Interiors* (2002), a minimalist sculpture made of fine silk scrim stretched over a steel frame, over which four separate stories unfolded in very different locations around the globe, woven together by sound and rhythm. *Interiors* juxtaposes disconnected scenes shot in an eerie white helicopter factory, an American ghetto, the streets of Tokyo and a downtown American city, following several anonymous people on their peregrinations. Low-key and pensive in mood compared with *Electric Earth*, *Interiors* expands the isolated frontal objectivity of that film's documentary form into a much more subjective and enveloping environ-mental experience that is also strategically stuttered, looped and frag-mented.

Interiors and the other works in Aitken's co-curated exhibition had been linked by the trope of sharp, clearly defined 'hard light' images. This bright, shiny light promotes, Aitken argued, fragmented, broken, ambient narratives and, by implication, devalued coherence, unity and narrative seamlessness.[25] Hard light comes with sharp edges, and there-fore also with the interstices we have already emphasised. Hard light implies the entropic devolution of story into archive, into database frag-mentation, and thence into a very different model of cinematic organisa-tion. This aspect of broken narrative cannot be emphasised too much. If Aitken's films are metaphoric and metonymic networks of images mimicking the fragmented but meaningful operation of unconscious memory, Aitken himself was so concerned to emphasise precisely this hyperactive non-linearity that he interviewed other artists and film direc-tors on the subject, publishing the resulting collage of voices as an article in *Artforum*, 'Broken Screen', and then a book, *Broken Screen*.[26]

Broken image networks produce the illusion that the workings of unconscious memory govern the world. This does not mean that the surrealist visual unconscious actually governs the world but that uncon-scious memory collects pathos; the ancient genealogy of gestures animates his figures, whether a father and his tiny child, or a hyperactive

25 'Exhibition press release: Hard Light', Klaus Biesenbach and Doug Aitken (curators), PS1 Contemporary Art Center, New York, 2004, p 1

26 Doug Aitken, 'Broken Screen: A Project by Doug Aitken', introduction by *Artforum* editor Tim Griffin, *Artforum*, 43:3, November 2004, pp 194–201; artist Ugo Rondinone is quoted as follows: 'For 20 years we haven't had a language for art because language has not developed as much as the visual.' Aitken includes his own comment: 'Nonlinear structures allow one to explore time – opening it up, pulling it back, and revealing the inner workings of a single moment.'

young man roaming the perimeter of LA, or a young man tap-dancing in a deserted factory. To rephrase this: gestures are watermarked by their predecessors. A single image derives from virtual recollection of a panorama of artworks, but is not identical with the *Atlas* of gesture archetypes.

So, a work of art is like a still, ceremonial image. In ceremonial images, people do not blink, nor do they have an autonomous existence; they are recalled as formulae rather than people. This accounts for the shock and surprise of the moment late in Chris Marker's great early work, *La jetée* (1962), when the woman that the hero had fallen in love with during his time-travel blinks. Up to this moment, the film is all stills and slow dissolves, like an animation. *La jetée* had been created from still photographs and this choice clearly was no accident, by which I mean that Marker composed his film from stills for a reason, not from economy or incompetence, nor even from minimalist austerity. We know that Aitken is a virtuoso film technician. We know that *La jetée* inhabits *Spiral Jetty* and, later, Aitken's *Interiors* (2002) in several ways.

The great modernist photographer Brassaï noted the dynamic importance and significance of repeated poses. He isolated this as an 'eminently photographic' quality, noting Proust's recurring descriptions of silhouetted images in his odd small book, *Proust in the power of photography*. Brassaï wrote, 'Proust's models pass by, appear in silhouette, projected in appropriate settings against judiciously chosen backgrounds'.[27] Brassaï emphasised the importance of considered gesture, and his own precisely composed photographs demonstrated this 'ceremonial image'.

All this suggests, of course, Aby Warburg's iconological account of the survival of specific gestures in art history, which is much more dramatic than the more familiar iconographic explanations familiar from his great followers, Ernst Gombrich and Erwin Panofsky, that style and images were transmitted through studio lineages and borrowings. Walter Benjamin also linked the auratic charge to distance, observing: 'The essentially distant is the inapproachable; inapproachability is in fact a primary quality of the ceremonial image.'[28] The cinematic equivalent of Benjamin's ceremonial images can be identified in late modernist films and installation videos: in distant, still tableaux of figures nested within an environment within which things move.

Electric Earth's cinematic experience is, in turn, dependent on a panoramic and environmental installation. So far, the role of narrative has been pretty much left aside, except to point out the irrelevance of cathartic resolution. In this, Aitken can be compared with his contemporary, the Finnish video artist, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, and her work, *The House* (2002). The first issue is literary. Mieke Bal, in her superb essay on Eija-Liisa Ahtila, which I will here draw upon, observes that when you see a toy car ride on a living room wall, a cow walk into an ordinary house, and a woman fly across treetops, it is easy to think of fairytales.[29] But fairytales harbour more than lightness, and the narrator and central character of *Electric Earth* is an adult man. For all this, it would be a mistake simply to pathologise the lone young man and to see *Electric Earth* as the exposition of the man's symptoms, because art is not therapy. Bal points out in the same way that it is much too easy to look at *The House* as an account of psychosis. Standing in between a video installation's screens

27 Brassaï, *Proust in the power of photography* (1997), trans Richard Howard, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2001, p 100

28 Walter Benjamin, 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, trans Harry Zohn, ed Hannah Arendt, Jonathan Cape, Glasgow, 1977, pp 157–202, 190

29 Mieke Bal, 'What if …? Exploring "unnaturality"', in *World rush_4 artists: Doug Aitken, Eija-Liisa Ahtila, Lee Bul, Sarah Sze*, ed Charles Green, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2003, pp 30–7. The next paragraph is in part a paraphrase of this section of Bal's argument.

places the viewer initially 'inside' a character's head. The hyper-linearity and sharp edges of *Electric Earth* have everything, like Ahtila's *The House*, to do with the progressive experience of video installation similar to that which Mieke Bal identifies, in which the literary aspect of classic cinema is diminished. Empathy for the character is the least important emotion in the face of a struggle to work out a point of view in a unified field of superficially incoherent surface incident. This is continually defeated for, like Ahtila's young woman and Resnais's Riva, Aitken's Giggy Johnson is suspended.

This suspension is dependent on a cinematic experience, which is specific to a panoramic, environmental installation and a quasi-documentary film genre, and which is very different from the identifications of classical narrative cinema. The peripheral vision associated with separate walls of semi-transparent screens result in the de-corporealisation, rather than embodiment, of the viewing subject. Writers often assume that the intensely affective sensations of embodiment associated with many contemporary video installations automatically confirm the most familiar mode of embodiment, that of inhabiting the body. This is lazy thinking, for there are other embodiment experiences that more appropriately describe the carefully choreographed, multimedia experiences of works like Aitken's *Electric Earth*. These include the experiences of spectralisation, autoscopy or de-corporealisation – of being turned into ghosts, of being invisible and flying, by autoscopy: 'The subject's ego is no longer centred in its own body, and the body feels as if it has been taken over or controlled by outside forces.'[30] Here, Elizabeth Grosz is describing a world inhabited by ghosts and spectralised subjects who can walk through walls, more or less as we also do when we move through the shimmering, semi-opaque, scrim-screened space of Aitken's *Electric Earth*. Further, ghosts and doubles can move through time irregularly, and fly. They dance, like Aitken's Giggy Johnson in *Electric Earth*. Hard light, shiny brilliance and intense kinetic motion navigate across the semi-transparent planes. This is not the same as eliminating individual difference, for flight, transparency and travel imply translation, not loss, and commensurability, not incompatibility. It is possible to read many things into *Electric Earth* – for example, that the artist has a strong but inchoate commitment to the social and cultural issues of our time, particularly to the tension between individual and social power – but there is definitely no need to pin these down. But is this (and Aitken's videos) a political formalism? First, it is necessary to define the formalism a little closer.

By now it should be clear that Aitken is deeply interested in the language of cinema, paying separate attention to three levels of cinematic frame that correspond in turn to the three types of cinema that have been so far distinguished. First, his images are pictorially composed in precise, semi-static tableaux. Second, figures and objects in these tableaux slowly move like ceremonial images (ceremonial in the precise sense identified by Walter Benjamin) rather than like unfolding narratives. Finally, the work is encountered at the narrative point – middle, end or beginning – at which the installation space is entered, for it contains three apparently linked episodes unfolding across three shimmering screens in a curtained, constructed space in relation to which viewers choreograph themselves during continuous looped screenings.

30 Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1994, p 43

Aitken describes his rhythmic editing and dynamic, staccato soundtrack in the following way:

> In some respects, it's a kind of exploration of chaos theory, where you have these people moving through situations that are very random, where they're bombarded by different things from their environment, and then the piece reaches a point where, suddenly, all the stories link up very tightly and very quickly and create this unified composition. And the piece becomes denser and tighter and accelerates more and more until a point where it just snaps.[31]

To extrapolate, the philosophical antecedent of *Electric Earth* and *Interiors*, via Godard and Smithson, is Proust, whose reinvention of the modernist novel (a form already then as anachronistic as Kentridge's animation method) resulted in art ruled by sequences of memory images and madeleines rather than by dance or freeways. As Barthes acutely observed, Proust's work was neither essay nor novel, but a third form:

> The structure of this work will be, strictly speaking, rhapsodic, ie (etymologically) sewn; moreover, this is a Proustian metaphor: the work is produced like a gown; the rhapsodic text implies an original art, like that of the couturière: pieces, fragments are subject to certain correspondences, arrangements, reappearances.[32]

Mieke Bal framed the same observation slightly differently: she explained that Proust's innovation was his montage and his cinematographic focus. She noted his serialisation, 'by means of a progressive adjustment of the same image, also functions syntagmatically in the production of consecutive images, each of which announces the next'.[33] Aitken's serialisation and repetition – the choppy, rhythmic editing of *Interiors* and the migration of characters from screen to screen – implied something quite different from the speed that this might have implied: progressive adjustments, continual disclosure, a flatness reminiscent of Godard's insistence on flat characters, and a disinterest in personal revelation in favour of an ethnography of types and gestures.

The integrity of all academic 'disciplines' in the humanities has been imperilled rather than empowered until now by interdisciplinarity – that is, until the digitised present in which the concept of the archive splinters into forms undistinguished by recent art theorists – for artists and filmmakers have been to a remarkable extent quarantined by the protocols and conventions of their respective industries and the particular demands of their media. At the same time, they work in very eclectic ways, boasting that they are disrespectful of boundaries and endorsing the popularised (Kantian) view that artists are uniquely responsive to inward disposition and feeling, and are indicators of cultural change. But, not surprisingly, there has been a long history of crossover between art and cinema, and the incidence has dramatically increased over the past fifteen years. Art and cinema long for the effects of sensation, immediacy and even bodily transcendence that each medium itself has not independently achieved. This article has shown the mutual plundering of visual treasures that this longing for a Memory Effect, an organisation of recollection, prompts.

31 Aitken, 'Doug Aitken talks about *Electric Earth*', op cit, p 161

32 Roland Barthes, 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans Richard Howard, Hill & Wang, New York, 1986, p 281. For a famous example of Proust's metaphor of stitching, see Marcel Proust, *Time Regained* (1927), trans Andreas Mayor, Chatto & Windus, London, 1970, p 454, where he writes: 'These "paperies", as Françoise called the pages of my writing, it was my habit to stick together with paste, and sometimes in this process they became torn. But Françoise then would be able to come to my help, by consolidating them just as she stitched patches onto the worn parts of her dresses or as, on the kitchen window, while waiting for the glazier as I was waiting for the printer, she used to paste a piece of newspaper where the glass had been broken.'

33 Mieke Bal, *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, CA, 1997, p 213