

Slivers of Crystal: Living in the Oscillation

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The Afterlife of Memory: *Memoria/Historia/Amnesia*

5 - 8 July 2006

Post Memory/Trauma:

In this presentation, I will be considering my video installation, *Hold* (2006), and other recent works where I have begun to develop a language of refilmed frames and moving Image spaces, in the light of Victor Burgin's idea of the 'remembered film'

"The film we saw is never the one that I remember.." (1)

- and will also touch on Deleuze's work on painting as 'pure presence':

"Painting directly attempts to release the presences beneath representation, beyond representation. The color system itself is a system of direct action on the nervous system... Painting gives us eyes all over: in the ear, in the stomach, in the lungs (the painting breathes...)." (2)

I am looking here at the 'affect' of the work I am constructing with video frames'; the connections between myself, as an artist looking into memory, and the spectator.

Considering the direct affect of painterly work In relation to memory, I am reminded both of Artaud's words:

"..contacts reduced to a thread which catches fire but never breaks." (3)

- and Edmund Wilson's conception of memory:

"..the brain is an enchanted loom where millions of flashing shuttles weave a dissolving pattern. the mind recreates reality from the abstractions of sense impressions.. runs imagined and remembered events back and forth through time" (4)

***Hold*; 2-screen video installation; 2006:**

Hold is a digital video installation which places still and moving images side by side, and uses refilmed tv stills, sampled sequences from film, and original footage which I have filmed as a kind of notebook, exploring personal journeys

into displaced remembrance: through remembered films, and sites of family memory.

My work in painting and video installation has for several years, been engaged with the freeze frame - the liminal moments in film language, which may have a heightened unsettling quality when isolated from causal or temporal flow, or when visually abstracted. Film languages, digital and otherwise have threaded through my practice including painting, and I have started to look at spaces between frames, with the blurring of frame spaces in digital imaging and editing; and to develop languages of re-filming to 'catch' these frames; exploring this as a space of the imaginary, offering a way of both looking into memory and constructing new images with the presence of painting.

Some questions I am interested in are:

How can various forms of re-filming moving images, and the languages of moving image technologies, including slow motion work in relation to time, subjectivity and memory, in making and viewing work?

What is the emotional affect of encountering moving image fragments side by side with painterly freeze frames?

What are the possibilities of the space between frames in digital video as an imaginative space for artist and spectator? Exploring the space between the frames of digital video as an imaginary space - alternately a space of reverie, clarity, rest, pain, rupture or rapture.. how can we begin to conceptualise such a space?

Some technical points about what a frame is.

'Persistence of vision' has been generally held to explain the illusory perception of movement created by the viewing of still pictures in rapid succession – each still being one frame – at anything between about 10 and 35 frames per second; so that the eye's retina, connecting with the perceptual processes of the brain, briefly retains an image. It has been suggested that this phenomenon is created by 'iconic memory'.

It is however, important to recognise that the brain and the eye do not work according to a camera type "frame rate" or (as with video) "scan rate". Rather, visual experiences are created from the outputs from motion detectors, detail detectors and pattern detectors in the brain/eye system. Other technical factors to take account of are flicker fusion threshold, flicker rate, and de-interlacing (video).

Generally speaking, the frames I am looking at in this work are virtual rather than actual, being the product of digital systems rather than physical celluloid, or even

analogue video interlacing.

However, in spite of these frames dematerialising, in thinking about the space between, I have been plagued by 'remembered films', in particular films of trains.. train tracks emerging from underneath a moving train - like film frames running through a projector, the language of cinematic construction.. tracks and tracking.. underlying rhythms in cinema from Lumiere onwards... through direct animation, painting vertically across the frame lines to create a lament of steel rails humming... through death in the *Red Shoes* .. and beyond .

Victor Burgin's describes the emergence of his ideas about 'remembered films' as appearing to him on train journeys.. . and the work that I will show here started with a train journey exploring memories..

On the 'real' tracks, the spatial divisions are called 'sleepers'... and, sleep is where we dream.. who has not been seduced along the tracks to sleep by the sound of a train in the distance..?

I would like to consider the space between frames as a space of memory, and the imaginary, a space to be used in making art

At the points, sparks fly - switchback like Artaud's thread on fire, suggesting dream space a space of making art on the edge.. from sleep to lucid dreams..



Hold; 2-screen video installation; 2006:

Burgin cites a poem by the filmmaker Chris Marker, and writes movingly of our capacity to dream in spite of damage:

"The wrists have in advance a hollow for the handcuffs.." (5)

This is important for me in undertaking this memory work, this art work which deals with the movement of shadows... I have a sense here of yet another misremembered film.. an Imaginary cinematic space between my father's fists tattooed.. love and death.. as I hunt through the night for home..

The work came from memory that wasn't going to let me be, memory that was uncomfortable in its absence.. My father was born in 1895, the year of the Lumiere train, and died in 1976, when was 16 following an illness where he suffered dementia, and had been mostly detached from reality for a number of years, his own memory during that time having been reshuffled. One of the first images I encountered in my family history search was a handwritten description of tattoos as distinguishing marks on my father's naval record from 1912. He was a sailor for 35 years. a sailor from a long line of sailors. So much of his life happened before I was born, that I eventually just wanted to know. I have more recently considered this work in relation to Marianne Hirsch's idea of idea of 'postmemory':

she suggests that :

"..the motor of the fictional imagination is fuelled in great part by the desire to know the world as it looked and felt before our birth.." (6)

I am also reminded of Bergson's idea of *durée*, and of memory never really being lost, only stored, so that yesterday's time and even yesterday's consciousness continue in current time. This is also relevant to making or looking at art where time operates in an entirely subjective fashion, expanding or contracting depending on how much attention is brought to a particular moment - Bergson says:

"When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement of the hand which corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure durationI merely count simultaneities Outside of me, in space, there is never more than a single position of the hand and the pendulum, for nothing is left of the past positions. Within myself a process of organization or interpenetration of conscious states is going on, which constitutes true duration. It is because I endure in this way that I picture to myself what I call the past oscillations of the pendulum at the same time as I perceive the present oscillation." (7)

This work started off being about the sea as a place of memory. The sea is inevitably a place where our concept of time and the divisions of time zones are called into question. Foucault talks of a ship being the 'other space' the *heteretopia par excellence*, and says:

"in countries without boats, dreams dry up..." (8)

“I was the particle at the beginning of its trajectory and the series of waves which flows back on it...” (9)

I went to find the tiny coastguard's cottages in Marazion and Mousehole in Cornwall where my father had grown up, one of 9 children, - I documented this journey on video and began to consider the idea of a video installation exploring still and moving images articulated in space - not faded memory, but something closer to time travel. I was to be fascinated by the leap in time covered in just one generation – my father was the same age as cinema and had grown up in a different world.

My father was the person looking after me as a small child, before school age, and he had spent his life at sea. I grew up by the sea in Scotland, and have been drawn to the element itself, the constant pull and motion, the sense of infinite space - connecting with the immensity within ourselves in daydreaming.

I see my younger self daydreaming at the edge of the sea, by the harbour, by the river, watching reflections and waiting to run, to sail, to reach a land of adventure where she can prove her soul by heroically overcoming obstacles... tales of the sea, seeing the deep, bringing it all back home. Sitting in under a table in a box, cardboard tube pressed to one eye in the hope of seeing dry land and safety, whilst the other is obscured by an old sunglass lens eyepatch. The curious eye of the “curious I” the strange outsider child dreaming dreams, making art... the travelling eye..

Barthes describes the ship as:

“...no longer a box, a habitat, an object that is owned; it becomes a travelling eye, which constantly begets departures, it comes close to the infinite.” (10)

In the mythology of seafaring, at journey's end, dry land is gained and the ship departs.

Building a language for this work was a long process, and in fact several pieces came from this increasingly intense journey, as working processes evolved.

My refilming work seems to have a particular quality in relation to memory - looking at a screen through a lens, almost like looking through someone else's eyes.. I am thinking here of 'the uncanny', of the idea of 'postmemory,' and also of the idea of memories of painful experiences being formed in such a way that it is part of the process not to be able to look directly or sometimes even remember directly. In her work on post memory, Hirsch points to Freud's analogy from *The Interpretation of Dreams*, suggesting that the refraction of rays between conscious and unconscious are like a telescope. He says:

"Everything that can be object of our internal perception is *virtual*, like the image in the telescope produced by the passage of light rays. But we are justified in

assuming the existence of the systems (which are not in any way psychological entities themselves and can never be accessible to our psychological perception) like the lenses of the telescope, which cast the image. And if we continue this comparison, we might compare the censorship between two systems to the refraction which takes place when a ray of light passes into a new medium." (11)

The imagery here is of course reminiscent of seafaring. Some of my working processes, such as looking through many frames to select, are like trying to sift through reflections of memories. Refilming - using another lens - serves to highlight 'brilliant', resonant, luminous images by acting like a kind of telescope. The resulting images then, can seem like peering through directly into memory.

During the work that became *Hold*, I was almost haunted by the memory of a film I had seen as a child, called *the Ghost and Mrs Muir*, and I refilmed, from a video screen, sections of the film that I remembered, or thought I remembered..

The sections used in my work *Hold*, showing a woman in the sea holding on to a rope and waving, the little girl across the beach to the bathing hut, and the children playing, are really a series of tiny fragments refilmed in various ways, and extremely slowed down.

"The film we saw is never the one that I remember.." (12)

I now think of these sections of film as 'sequence image'. Having begun to work in this way, I was absolutely fascinated to find out about Victor Burgin's work *The Remembered Film*. Burgin's idea is based on the fragments of cinematic image which emerge into our waking consciousness spontaneously, unbidden..

He describes the emergence of these brilliant memory images:

"A concatenation of images raises itself, as if in *bas relief*.." (13)

Burgin describes our everyday encounters with the media as "...random juxtapositions of diverse elements across unrelated spatial and temporal locations.." (14) and posits the notion that these form a dream like 'rebus' rather than any kind of logical progression. He picks up on the idea from Jean La Planche of the time of the human subject - the individual secreting this time independently of historical time, and how this can be combined with cinematic or fantasy memories.. in the case of his work, with what he calls the 'sequence-image'

Burgin develops the idea of the sequence-image to describe this kind of fragment which is often little more than a still, and goes on to examine its possible significance.

"The elements that constitute the sequence-image, mainly perceptions and recollections, emerge successively but not teleologically. the order in which they appear is insignificant (as in a rebus) and they present an configuration - 'lexical, sporadic' - that is more 'object' than narrative. What distinguishes the elements of such a configuration from their evanescent neighbours is that they seem somehow more 'brilliant'. In a psychoanalytic perspective, this suggests that they have been attracted into the orbit of unconscious signifiers, and that it is from the displaced affect associated with the latter that the former derive their intensity."
(15)

I found it fascinating to reexamine my work in the light of these ideas - I was captivated by the warmth of Burgin's theory - the connections made between public and private memory in his journeys through associations, his work on the resonance of history and on subjective time.

Like Hirsch, he traces a pathway in this work back through Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, and the ways in which, in picking up an emotional resonance from a picture:

"..the affect may not only be detached from the original representation, but displaced on to other representations. It illustrates how in the course of everyday life, a chance encounter with an image may give rise to an inexplicable feeling, and how, by retracing the path taken by the affect, we may be led back to its origin in a suppressed or repressed idea" (16)

So, I want to look now at my particular 'remembered films' -

My 'sequence-image' from a remembered film in *Hold* is from the 1947 film *The Ghost and Mrs Muir*, starring Rex Harrison & Gene Tierney & directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz, the story of a woman at the turn of the 19th/20th century who is widowed with a small daughter, goes to live in a house by the sea, and falls in love with its previous occupant, the ghost of a sea captain.. eventually she writes a book based on his stories.

In my current work in progress, *Home*, I have also begun to use a sequence from another film *Random Harvest*, 1942, directed by Mervyn Le Roy and starring Greer Garson and Ronald Colman. This is a rather complex melodrama about memory - a first world war soldier is in an asylum with amnesia, on armistice day he walks off into the crowd, meets Greer Garson, they fall in love, run off to the country and marry.. he later has a road accident whilst visiting Manchester, loses this other memory, and regains his original identity - discovering that he's the heir to a big business concern.. Greer Garson finds him eventually, gets a job as his secretary, doesn't let on who she is, and eventually, after many twists and turns, they are reunited, back in their country cottage.

So, both of these films are from the 1940s

There is a chance that they would have been films that my parents would have gone to the pictures to see together just before they were married or just after. I saw them on TV as a child sometime in the 1960s or early 70s, almost certainly accompanied by some sort of commentary from my mother, amongst whose favourite films they were.. or so I choose to remember..

The images that have stayed with me in each case, are connected with themes of memory, death, conflict, desire, and dislocation. From *Mrs Muir*, an image of the main character at the end as an old woman, dying peacefully, the glass of milk falls from her hand, and the ghostly sea captain pulls her younger self forward into the afterlife.. an image of a clock shaking in a storm, and the image I have used from the beach of the woman waving, the bathing hut and the little girl.

From *Random Harvest*, one single image that stayed with me is the ending with the cottage gate and the couple reunited, but I also have a very strong sense of the war memorial type image as the amnesiac soldier walks free from the asylum, and of the very beginning where we follow a path down to the main door of the asylum - at present it is this last image that I have been working with.

Both stories have resonance for my work - to concentrate on *The Ghost and Mrs Muir* - my mother marrying a man 26 years older than herself, almost bound to become a ghostly presence her life, and a sailor, a weather-beaten teller of romantic tales, offering excitement.. so perhaps this was my mother's romantic vision...

For me, they belong to the time before I was, a time when I was unmade, a time therefore of fascination. The work I am making is also structured to encompass grief and express loss. I am reminded of Walter Benjamin's angel that became for him the angel of lost things. (17)

As Burgin suggests, the interest in these 'sequence images' is in what we do with the fragments.

" Our forgotten answers to distant questions may reverberate down history to shatter remembered films. But what concerns us most is what we make from the fragments.." (18)

The language of refilming I had been working with in *Hold*, immediately made a different kind of sense in the light of Burgin's work. What I had experienced as the powerful resonance of these 'sequence images', was their ghostly, perhaps uncanny presence, a kind of screen emanation, a 'brilliance', which I did not want to present 'head on'.

On reflection, this seems to relate to the connections made by Barthes in

Camera Lucida and picked up on by Laura Mulvey (19), on the connections between both photography and cinema and death - I am reminded that the reviews of the early Lumiere screenings picked up on this idea, and I have also made a connection with the way in which these 'sequence Images' came to me through the 'medium' of the TV screen, suggestions here perhaps of the spiritualist medium and my father's birth in the Victorian era. The figures do seem revenant like, seen through the refilmed frames/sequences, with their distortions and afterimages, as if through a veil of my parents' memory. I was fascinated recently, in attending a talk by Victor Burgin that 'his' remembered film which he referred to on that occasion was *Smilin' Through*, a WW1 melodrama from the 40s which also has a strong ghostly presence, which he related back to his, at that time, absent, father. The displacement created through using slides and TV screens makes further sense of my refilming work, trying open up the spaces between frames and to seek spaces that would have a kind of resonance of remembrance.

Whilst previously, I had been exploring both this quality of resonant afterimage, and the painterly qualities of refilming from TV, I was now dealing with footage both from my own remembrance journeys and more especially from the ghostly sea captain film. There is much to say of this image - the woman undeniably reminds me of my mother, though almost unbelievably I was not conscious of that at the time of selecting the image, the rope cannot but seem umbilical, a cord connecting the spectator with spaces of memory. So, paradoxically, in searching for my father I find my mother. I am reminded in considering the process of selection of Benjamin's idea of "unconscious optics"; (20)

And, In using Burgin's work, of Merleau-Ponty's idea of memory:

".. a preserved perception is a perception, it continues to exist, it persists in the present, and it does not open behind us that dimension of escape and absence that we call the past. A preserved fragment of the lived-through past can be at the most no more than an occasion for thinking of the past, but it is not the past which is compelling recognition; recognition, when we try to derive it from any content whatsoever always precedes itself" (21)



So far, I have been looking at the journey through memory presented in a dissociated or displaced way. In my work, refracted through distancing lenses. Some of the images I have made through these processes seem, strangely, to capture an essence of what I would think of as both painterly and purely present in the way that Deleuze describes in his work on Francis Bacon's paintings - *The Logic of Sensation*:

"The adventure of painting is that it is the eye alone that can attend to material existence or material presence." (22)

Painterly video images, such as the ones on the right hand screen of *Hold*, seem to hold something of Deleuze's quality of translating cerebral pessimism into nervous optimism through painting. This video piece has a dual formation, and, thinking of the glance and the blink as operations which capture images for us, we have the blink which momentarily closes the eye/shutter, creating an instant of subjective inner vision, including afterimages; set against the glance which Edward Casey has described as a "cutting look composed of shards of perspective.." (23) which seems to lacerate and slice through into a purely present dimension of paint time, perhaps lacerating scar tissue formed over traumatic memory, creating rupture in order to heal. The painterly video images may take on a quality of heightened visuality, as Rosalind Krauss describes:

"Vision had, as it were, been pared away into a dazzle of pure instantaneity, into an abstract condition with no before and no after. But in that very motionless explosion of pure presentness was contained as well vision's connection to its objects, also represented here in its abstract form – as a moment of pure release, of pure transparency, of pure self-knowledge..." (24)

In conclusion, I will return briefly to some of my original concerns:

With the juxtaposition of refilmed fragments of moving images, and painterly freeze frames, I am considering the visual dialectic, not just between the frames

of video, but between the two screen spaces. There is an oscillation affect between the screens which seems both to creates motion, and to allow us an Impossible moment of rest, so that there is always an edge to the beauty of images encountered in this formation.

In making pictures by refilming from screens, another layer is proposed in which to encounter the space of memory and reflect on time passing. A visible distance is made. There is an extra curious eye to look through and tenses can merge. Is it possible that refraction through the time crystal may create a space of safety in which to work with painful material? The use of extreme slow motion may also transform perception, allow for subjective association, and build emotional affect.

The refilming process may catch spaces between frames. This is of course, accidental, random, but these 'accidents' seem to me to create a new space of the imaginary. Paradoxically, even with its oscillations this space can be:

"..a kind of incomprehensible *stopping place* in the spirit, right in the middle of everything.." (25)

The space between frames then, the virtual frameline, the crossing space, the sleeper in the twilight, can be conceived as an opening up of the imaginary, a suspension of time, a landscape of the possible, a space of projection, holding pain simultaneously with desire. I would also want to understand it as a subjective and visionary space of making art, which according to some of the ideas emerging from the field of neuroaesthetics, offers new scope for healing and, because of the brain's ability to regroup, freedom in spite of past trauma. These new liminal spaces seem to emanate motion and therefore life, contrary to the stillness of death in the single frame.

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