

**UNPRESENTABLE LANDSCAPES
AND THE ART OF THE INDEX**

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THE VIDEO PIECE *RE: FLAMINGO* DISCUSSED THROUGHOUT
THIS THESIS MAY BE VIEWED ONLINE HERE:
<http://vimeo.com/mattjamesmith/reflamingo>

ABSTRACT

This practice-led PhD determines an aesthetic approach through which a sense of the 'unpresentable' may be exposed within camera-based representations of the industrial landscape. Through an interrogation of contemporary lens-based media, it proposes ways in which experiences problematic to representation – such as the sublime, the uncanny and the traumatic – might be revealed within photographic/filmic images of such landscapes.

The culmination of the practical element of the project is a 25-minute narrative-based, single channel video piece entitled *Re: Flamingo*, which combines HDV and Super-8 footage with digital and traditional still photography. The narrative structure of the work is based on E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* (1816), which Freud cited in his essay *The Uncanny* (1919). *Re: Flamingo* is a semi-autobiographical variation on that tale, consisting of an email conversation between the artist, his father and the fictional 'Clara'. Through this correspondence, the piece reveals correlations between themes in *The Sandman* and Ridley Scott's science fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982) (e.g. traumatic memory, a fascination with eyes/sight and each protagonist's obsession with mechanized life). It reflects upon how the industrial landscape of Teesside – which inspired many of the visuals in Scott's film – has been remembered in different photographic media by three generations of the artist's family.

The practical submission is supported by a contextual written element, which consists of two parts. Part One is a theoretical review. Firstly it traces philosophical and aesthetic approaches to the sublime, its representation, its status as a subjective experience and its presence within the industrial landscape (Lyotard, Kant, Derrida, Nye). This is continued through an analysis of the related theories of the uncanny and the traumatic (Freud, Vidler, Luckhurst), their association with industrialization and relationship with lens-based media. The uncanny qualities of the photographic and cinematic image are examined alongside correlations of the indexical properties of such images with trauma (Mulvey, Barthes). Finally, an analysis of the camera image's indexical status in the wake of digitization, and its consequent alignment with artforms such as painting (Gunning, Rodowick, Manovich), assesses its potential for expressing subjective experience. Part Two of the contextual element explores creative approaches to the themes outlined in Part One. Firstly, it examines Canadian artist Stan Douglas's film piece *Der Sandmann* (1995), which exposes a sense of the uncanny in the landscape of pre- and post-reunification Germany. Secondly, it reflects upon *Blade Runner's* significance to the practical element and its correlations with the Sandman narrative. The final section of Part Two details the development and formation of the studio research, documenting its distinctive approach to figuring a sense of the unpresentable within camera-based representations of the industrial landscape.

The video piece *Re: Flamingo* is dedicated to
the memory of my grandad, Bill Smith.

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Substitution of the image
for relentless earth. What
do I know of this place ...
We look at the world once, in childhood.
The rest is memory.

from *Nostos* by Louise Gluck

INTRODUCTION

This practice-led research project aims to determine an aesthetic approach by means of which a sense of the 'unpresentable' may be exposed within camera-based representations of the industrial landscape. The PhD submission consists of two parts: a practical element and a written element. The practical submission takes the form of a 25-minute narrative-based film piece, which considers how the industrial landscape of Teesside in northeast England has been represented in different photographic media by three generations of the artist's family. The narrative structure of the piece draws on E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* (1816), which Sigmund Freud cited in his 1919 essay *The Uncanny*. It also makes reference to Ridley Scott's science-fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982), the visuals of which drew inspiration from Scott's childhood memories of the Teesside landscape. The written component of the submission gives context to the practical element through both an analysis of relevant theoretical concerns and an examination of pertinent artworks ('case studies'). It begins by establishing a theoretical framework for the project, examining ideas of the 'unpresentable' and their relationship to the industrial landscape – in particular through the related concepts of the sublime and the uncanny. These ideas are considered in relation to theories associated with lens-based media, with a specific focus on issues of indexicality and subjectivity in the contemporary photographic/filmic image. This is followed by a survey of practical approaches to the themes established in the theory section, looking initially at established film works that have contributed to the development of my own film piece, and then, finally, documenting the evolution of my studio research process.

The Unpresentable

The notion of the unpresentable is approached within the context of this thesis as an aesthetic category embracing a number of concepts that share a problematic relationship with artistic representation. The idea that some objects, situations or events cannot be represented artistically comes about, the philosopher Jacques Ranciere suggests, when “it is impossible to make the essential character of the thing in question present ... [and] nor can a representative commensurate with it be found” (2007: 109-110). He suggests that a thing is deemed un-representable because the feeling of “unreality” brought about by reducing such an event to material representation “removes from the thing represented its weight of existence”, therefore delivering it over “to effects of pleasure, play or distance which are incompatible with the gravity of the experience it contains” (Ranciere: 110). Such ideas come together to suggest that certain phenomena are irreducible to representation – that they are, in effect, unpresentable.¹

¹ It should be noted that, although presentation and representation are distinct terms – presentation generally denoting the staging of an original event or object, representation referring to the interpretation or substitution of the original in a secondary form – the two concepts are to some extent conflated in much of the literature discussed here. This conflation also extends to the terms ‘unpresentable’ and ‘unrepresentable’: for example, Ranciere aligns – rather than differentiates between – the concept of the unpresentable and what he calls the unrepresentable (2007: 109).

It is also interesting to note that Ranciere confesses to “a certain intolerance for an inflated use of the notion of the unrepresentable”, suggesting that the term “subsumes under a single concept all sorts of phenomena...and it surrounds them all with the same aura of holy terror” (2007: 109). In particular he challenges Jean-François Lyotard’s assertion that there is a “coincidence between something unthinkable at the heart of the event and something unpresentable at the heart of art” (Ranciere: 130). In order to align the two, he suggests, the former “must itself have been rendered entirely thinkable, entirely necessary according to thought. The logic of the unpresentable can [therefore] only be sustained by a hyperbole that ends up destroying it” (Ranciere: 138). Further criticism of Lyotard’s conception of the unpresentable is explored later, in Chapter One (see for example p37)

The term 'unpresentable' is perhaps most commonly associated with the idea of the sublime, in particular through the writings of the French philosopher Jean-François Lyotard. In his most well known work, *The Postmodern Condition* (first published 1979), Lyotard argues that the sublime occurs "when the imagination fails to present an object which might, if only in principle, come to match a concept" (1984: 78). He explains:

We can conceive the infinitely great, the infinitely powerful, but every presentation of an object destined to "make visible" this absolute greatness or power appears to us painfully inadequate. Those are Ideas of which no presentation is possible...They can be said to be unpresentable. (1984: 78)

He reiterates this idea several years later in his essay *The Sublime and the Avant-Garde* (first published 1984) when he writes, "[i]n the event of an absolutely large object...or one that is absolutely powerful...the faculty of presentation, the imagination, fails to provide a representation corresponding to this Idea" (Lyotard 1991: 98). Though traditionally associated with the great, the powerful or the awe-inspiring, the sublime's defining characteristic is, ultimately, this irreducibility to any form of cultural framing. From its roots as a theory of rhetoric in ancient Greece (Longinus 1964), through its development in eighteenth-century descriptions of the vast and terrible in the natural landscape (Addison 1718), to its categorization as a form of subjective experience (Burke 1990, Kant 1952), to postmodern theory (Lyotard 1991, 2010) and contemporary visions of a technological sublime (Jameson 1991, Nye 1994), the concept seems to cohere as an aesthetic category only through its resistance to limitations.

Since the concept gained popularity in the eighteenth century, the problem of representing the elusive experience of the sublime has preoccupied visual artists as much as it has philosophers and theorists. The epic landscapes of the painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), for example, provide what have perhaps become the archetypal Romantic-era visualizations of the sublime. However, even before Friedrich's death artists were beginning to experiment with 'new media' – in the form of the panorama and diorama – in an attempt to bypass the limitations that the picture frame imposed upon expressing the sensory overload associated with sublime experience. In the mid twentieth century, abstract expressionists such as Barnett Newman and Mark Rothko dealt with themes that have been discussed in terms of the sublime (Lyotard 1991, Rosenblum 2010), while more recently the work of filmmaker David Lynch has moved at least one theorist to describe a distinctly postmodern version of the sublime in cinema (Zizek 2002).

As has been suggested above, the notion of that which is impossible to present need not be considered only in terms of the great and powerful. In his essay *Presenting the Unpresentable: The Sublime* (first published 1982), Lyotard offers what is perhaps a more encompassing account of the concept. That which cannot be demonstrated, he suggests, is that "for which one cannot cite (represent) any example, case in point, or even symbol...because to represent is to make relative, to place in context within conditions of representation" (2010: 134). This account of the non-demonstrable or 'unpresentable' as that which is irreducible to representation suggests that, as an aesthetic category, the notion need not be specific to the sublime alone.

While a consideration of the sublime is an important aspect of this project – primarily through its associations with landscape in art – my investigation embraces established fields of aesthetic and theoretical enquiry which, though closely related, are distinct from that discourse. In particular, it considers the relevance of the interrelated concepts of the uncanny and the traumatic, both of which possess an important relationship to the idea of the unrepresentable.

Like the sublime, the uncanny resists precise definition. The German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch (b.1867), who was among the first to develop the concept, defined it as a “sensation of psychological uncertainty” (1906: 6). Furthermore Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), expanding upon Jentsch’s theory in his essay *The Uncanny* (first published 1919), echoes much thinking about the sublime when he describes the former concept as belonging “to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread” (2003a: 123). Jentsch and Freud each centre much of their analysis of the uncanny on a reading of Romantic author E.T.A. Hoffman’s short story *The Sandman* (1816), which tells of a student who falls in love with an automaton he mistakes for a real girl. Jentsch focuses on the confusion of representation and reality brought about by the robot-girl, while Freud attributes the uncanny qualities of Hoffmann’s story to its account of a reawakened traumatic childhood memory (Freud 2003a). The relationship traced by Freud between trauma and the uncanny is centred around his theory of the ‘repetition compulsion’, which he suggests occurs when an event is so traumatic or overwhelming that it cannot be assimilated into normal mental processes (that it is, as it were, unrepresentable) and so the mind attempts to master the experience retroactively, by repeatedly returning to it (2003a, 2003b).

This thesis reflects upon the interrelated concepts of the uncanny and the traumatic through their relevance to an examination of the industrial landscape, and its representation through photographic media. As established above, the concept of the uncanny has been associated with the strangely automated 'life' of the mechanical object (Jentsch 1906, Freud 2003a). Furthermore, the history of psychological trauma and its theorization is intimately bound up with the rise of modernity and the machines of industrialization (Benjamin 1999, Luckhurst 2006). Each concept's place within aesthetic discourse, therefore, ties it to some extent to issues important to both the industrial landscape and to the 'industrial' media of photography and film.

This project's examination of the relationship between the mechanical representational technologies of photography and film and the uncanny/traumatic, however, extends beyond such simplistic associations with the industrial. Ideas of the traumatic and the uncanny have been important to a number of theoretical analyses of camera-based imagery (for example Barthes 2000, Mulvey 2006, Gunning 1995). In his book *Camera Lucida* (first published 1980), for example, Roland Barthes speaks of the photographic image in terms of its "intractable reality" (2000: 119): this concept "leads back to Freud's theory of trauma as an event or experience that...leaves a mark on the unconscious, a kind of index of the psyche that parallels the photograph's trace of an original event" (Mulvey 2006: 65). In her book *Death 24x a Second* (2006), from which the above quotation is taken, the film theorist Laura Mulvey also draws upon Freud – in particular his essay *The Uncanny* – to help shape her analysis of the strange, mechanical

temporality of cinema. As part of this analysis, she interrogates the photographic base of the filmic image, examining both its 'intractable reality' – its indexical connection to a real object – and its more subjective, uncanny qualities (the latter in particular through Barthes' alignment of the photograph with death). This dualistic approach to a theory of the camera image – encompassing an interest in both its ability to reiterate objective reality (its indexicality) and its potential for the expression of subjective experience – is central to my project's concerns with the representation of the unrepresentable.

Indexicality

The association of the term 'indexicality' with photography derives from American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce's concept of the index (1894). Peirce classified signs into different typologies, within which he identified the categories of the 'icon', the 'symbol' and the 'index'. A sign, he proposes, can be associated with one of these three categories depending upon the way in which it refers to its referent or 'object'. An icon shares some resemblance with its object (for example a figurative portrait). A symbol denotes its object through an arbitrary convention or rule (e.g. the word 'cat'). An index, however, has an actual connection to its object through causation (for example, Peirce categorized footprints and weathervanes as indexical).

In traditional photography, light reflects off an object, passes through the camera lens and then hits the light-sensitive emulsion of the negative causing a chemical reaction. The chemical-based photograph's status as indexical relies upon this physical connection between the object

photographed and the resultant image. Indeed, Peirce himself directly associates the photograph with the category of the index. As he explains, photographs “are very instructive, because we know that they are in certain respects exactly like the objects they represent ... this resemblance is due to the photographs having been produced under such circumstances that they were physically forced to correspond point by point to nature” (1894: n. pag.).

The notion of an indissoluble connection between a photograph and its originating object forms the basis of much of Barthes’ examination of photography in *Camera Lucida*: “[i]t is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself” he insists, “...they are glued together” (2000: 5-6). It is because of this intractable relationship between image and referent, Barthes argues, that photography stands apart from other forms of representation:

Painting can feign reality without having seen it. Discourse combines signs which have referents, of course, but these referents can be and most often are “chimeras”. Contrary to these imitations, in Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*...What I intentionalize in a photograph...is neither Art nor Communication, it is Reference. (2000: 76-77)

What Barthes feels is absent in the still photograph (‘Art’ and ‘Communication’) can, he suggests, be rediscovered in the moving image (2000: 117). The communication of subjective experience, a capacity traditionally associated with painting in the visual arts, manifests itself in the indexical photograph, according to Barthes, through animation and narrativization. As the media theorist Lev Manovich puts it, “[c]inema is the art of the index; it is an attempt to make art out of a footprint” (2000: 174).

What is more, Manovich suggests that as a result of the advancement of digital capture and editing processes in the late 20th century, and the concurrent potential for seamless integration of manually constructed digital images, cinema is “no longer an indexical media technology but, rather, a sub-genre of painting” (2000: 175). The lack of a direct physical connection to a referent inherent in the encoding and storage processes of digital imaging, coupled with an increased potential for image construction and manipulation, means that the indexical status or ‘truth claim’ (Gunning 2008) of the contemporary photographic/filmic image has been radically called into question (Manovich 2000, Doane 2007a, Rodowick 2007). Thus camera-based imagery in the 21st century has acquired a renegotiated alignment with ‘Art’ and ‘Communication’ – that is, with the expression of subjective experience.

Concurrently, however, digitization has also opened up new possibilities for restoring to the moving image that sense of ‘intractable reality’ that Barthes felt cinema lacked in comparison to the still photograph (Mulvey 2006). What is more, while the digitally captured photographic image may possess a weakened sense of indexical veracity in comparison to its chemical-based predecessor, the medium’s history of a uniquely unmediated connection to the real world, its reiterative “perceptual richness”, remains to a large extent intact (Gunning 2008).

My project’s interest in the representation of unrepresentable experience through lens-based media is informed by the potential of the contemporary camera image to simultaneously figure both the objective (through a sense of indexical veracity) and the subjective (through its potential for artistic

expression). Those registers of the unrepresentable examined in this thesis – the sublime, the uncanny and the traumatic – boast a complex relationship to the contrasting concepts of objective and subjective, occupying an often paradoxical space between the real and the imagined (Kant 1952, Derrida 1987, Freud 2003a, Lacan 1991, Vidler 1994). The capacity of 21st century lens-based media to merge these opposing ontological categories suggests a unique aptitude for figuring a sense of the indeterminate, for developing photo-based forms that might represent an experience of the unrepresentable, or at least point toward its presence.

Research Proposition

Through interrogating the inherent properties of contemporary lens-based media, this research project aims to determine a form or set of forms through which a sense of the unrepresentable may be exposed within camera-based representations of the industrial landscape. This proposition suggests a number of key approaches, which I shall outline below.

Firstly, it suggests a review of ways in which the unrepresentable has been conceptualized both theoretically and creatively. This will involve both an examination of how theories of the sublime, the uncanny or the traumatic might contribute to an understanding of the unrepresentable, and an analysis of how such ideas have been approached by artists in their work. This should lead to a consideration of ways in which the findings of the above might be incorporated into my own studio-based research.

Secondly, my research proposition suggests an investigation into lens-based media's capacity for figuring a sense of the unrepresentable. This will require a consideration of what links might be drawn between photographic/film theory (referring to issues such as indexicality) and theories of the unrepresentable. Consequently an analysis of how digitization has affected such correlations will be necessary, as will a survey of how artists working in lens-based media have explored the relationships between such ideas.

Finally, the proposition suggests an examination of ways in which ideas of the unrepresentable might relate to camera-based representations of the industrial landscape. This will require an assessment of those aspects of the unrepresentable that can be attributed to the industrial landscape, an analysis of how artists have elicited a sense of the unrepresentable in their representations of such landscapes, and a consideration of how such approaches might be incorporated into my own experimentations with lens-based media.

Methodology

[A]esthetic intuition is only intellectual intuition become objective.

(Schelling [1800] 1988: 227)

The above quote from German philosopher Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) pertains to a drive in art of the Romantic era to overcome the split between mind and nature that thinkers of the time believed was brought about by an experience of the sublime (see Chapter One). The sublime pleasure of transcending nature through reason was diminished, the Romantics felt, by

the failure of imagination to provide sensible forms with which to comprehend the ineffable. Schelling believed that the task of reuniting mind and nature in order to adequately represent the unrepresentable could not be accomplished on the basis of philosophy alone (Shaw 2006: 91). As Philip Shaw explains, to do so Schelling felt that “we must draw on the resources made available to us by art” (2006: 91). Schelling, it would seem:

... regards the artwork not as a thing but as the medium through which the sensible is reunited with the transcendental...It is art that gives sensuous expression to the concept of the sublime and which unites the hitherto divided faculties of reason and imagination. (Shaw 2006: 92)

Drawing upon this notion of reuniting mind and nature through art in order to give descriptive form to the unrepresentable, my practice-led project explores lens-based media’s potential for blurring such boundaries (between the sensible and the transcendental, art and index, objective and subjective, the real and the imagined). Although the theoretical approaches outlined at the beginning of this introductory chapter inform and give context to my practical explorations, this project is driven by studio-based research – for, as Schelling suggests, the task of describing the ineffable cannot be achieved through ‘intellectual intuition’ alone. That undertaking is given over to art, for art is not about concepts, “art is the power to think in terms that are not so much cognitive and intellectual as *affective* (to do with feeling and sensible experience)” (Colebrook 2002: 12).

An important aspect of my approach to creative practice is that what I explore in the studio remains open to what Schelling terms “aesthetic intuition” (1988: 227) – that it does not become theory driven. This formal impulse

transfers to the work, allowing its sensible presentations of the unrepresentable to touch the viewer directly, rather than simply present ‘illustrations’ of intellectual concepts. As Gilles Deleuze proposes:

It is a question of producing within the work a movement capable of affecting the mind outside of all representations; it is a substituting of direct signs for mediate representation; of inventing vibrations, rotations, whirlings, gravitations, dances, or leaps which directly touch the mind. (Deleuze 2001: 8)

My artistic impulse is based largely upon a tacit understanding of the concepts of ineffability and ‘unrepresentable-ness’ examined throughout this project. Allowing my inquiry to remain open to aesthetic intuition means that a valuable aspect of that practice remains intact – informed, but not encumbered by theory. As the documentation of a creative, practice-led research project, the written element of my submission reflects upon what is explored in the studio and gives it theoretical context, but it does not seek to define it. As David Lynch, that preeminent purveyor of the unrepresentable in cinema so eloquently suggests, “[i]t’s a dangerous thing to say what a picture is...[i]f things get too specific, the dream stops” (quoted in Woods 2000: 176).

Research Methods

The starting point for this project was a research proposition, from which a set of aims were developed. The specifics of this initial framework were refined throughout the course of the project in response to the findings of my theoretical research and the development of my practice. Practical research – in the form of site visits (to places such as Teesside and Hownsgill in County

Durham), photography, videography and studio based experimentation (generally using digital editing programs such as Final Cut Pro and Photoshop) – drove the project from beginning to end. My first practical experiments with photography and video (for example the *Hownsgill Rip* photo series, the photographic/sculptural piece *Shadowgram* and the video piece *Mottled Screen*)² fed into and were also informed by theoretical reading based around the key themes identified in the research proposition (e.g. the unrepresentable; the sublime, uncanny and traumatic; indexicality and the impact of digitization on lens-based media). The findings of such experiments were augmented by feedback from supervisors, peers and visiting artists. Early theoretical research contributed to a refinement of the project's intellectual framework, which in turn led to a survey of established artists whose work engaged with the themes identified. From this survey a number of possible in-depth case studies were identified, some of which became particularly important to the development of the main body of studio research (for example Stan Douglas's film piece *Der Sandmann* [1995] and Chris Marker's short film *La Jetée* [1962]). These studies gave context to my own practical research, in addition to feeding directly into my studio-based experiments by providing inspiration in terms of form and content. At this stage creative material was also identified that would be integrated into the substance of the final practical submission (e.g. the feature film *Blade Runner* and E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman*). My research into established practical/creative approaches to 'unrepresentable' subject matter informed extensive experimentation periods in the studio (and indeed in the

² These early practical experiments are discussed in detail in the first part of Chapter Seven.

field), leading to the ongoing development of one extended video work. Numerous test screenings of this 'work in progress' generated valuable feedback from supervisors, visiting artists, peers and, in the later stages of the project, public audiences. Such feedback was generally informal, documented through taking notes or asking viewers to contribute to comment books. The evolution of the project was documented informally throughout, in the form of research journals, process notes and electronic portfolios containing draft 'evolutions' of studio research. My theoretical research and case study analysis has been refined and collated here in the written thesis, in order to give context to my practical submission and document its 'findings'. The reflexive process of research, experimentation, presentation and feedback described above led, finally, to my 'research outcome': the single-channel video piece *Re: Flamingo* (2011). This piece presents my 'thesis' or 'argument' in the form of an artwork. It stands as an aesthetic rather than theoretical/textual (what Schelling categorized as 'intellectual') proposition, suggesting ways in which the unrepresentable may be exposed within lens-based representations of the industrial landscape.³

³ It is perhaps important to address here an issue brought about by *Re: Flamingo's* voiceover narration, which presents at certain moments what could be construed as a theoretical/textual proposition. It should be made clear that it is in no way the intention of the piece to make its argument in the manner of a textual/theoretical thesis. Indeed if it was, I would certainly deem it to fall short of the requirements of such an argument. As Victor Burgin suggests, discussing a hypothetical case in which a film perhaps not dissimilar to my own is submitted in lieu of a philosophical essay, "to expose [a] fact is not to *argue* it; although the film provocatively and successfully suggests the basis for an argument, it does not *make* the argument" (2009: 77). My video piece *Re: Flamingo* does in fact make an argument – indeed, its 'textual' elements contribute to and support that argument – but its argument is made, ultimately, aesthetically. For a more extended discussion of this issue, see the section 'Audiovisual Art Practice: an Exceptional Case?' in Burgin 2009: 76-78.

Description of Practical Submission



Figure 1 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. 25 minutes, High Definition Video (16:9), stereo soundtrack.

The practical submission *Re: Flamingo* takes the form of a 25-minute, single channel video piece that combines HDV and Super-8 footage with both digital and traditional still photography. The narrative structure of the work has its foundation in German Romantic author E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* (1816), which is told initially through a series of letters between the protagonist, his fiancée and her brother. A semi-autobiographical variation on Hoffmann's tale, *Re: Flamingo* consists of an email conversation between semi-fictionalized versions of myself, my father and the fictional character Clara from the original story. Through this correspondence, the piece considers correlations between themes in *The Sandman* and the film *Blade Runner* – for example, their shared preoccupation with eyes, a distinct focus on themes of memory and the protagonist of each story's obsession with a robot-woman. In so doing, *Re: Flamingo* reflects upon how the industrial

landscape of Teesside, which formed the inspiration for many of the visuals in Scott's film, has been remembered in different photographic media by three generations of my family. Ultimately, this leads to a consideration of the impact of digitization on how the past is represented through lens-based media.



Figure 2 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still.

For exhibition, the piece requires a 'cinematic' environment: a large HD video projection (ideally no smaller than 2m x 1.1m) from an HD source (e.g. a QuickTime file, BluRay disc or HDV tape) in a darkened room with stereo speakers (ideally placed either side of the video image towards the front of the theatre/exhibition space).

For reference/documentation purposes only, *Re: Flamingo* has been included in this thesis as a watermarked QuickTime file (see DVD insert 'Disk One', inside back cover).

Thesis Structure

The main body of this written thesis is divided into two parts. Part One is a theoretical review consisting of four chapters. Chapter One traces philosophical and aesthetic approaches to the sublime, its representation, its status as a subjective experience and its presence within the industrial landscape (with a particular focus on the ideas of Burke, Kant, Lyotard, Derrida and Nye). Chapter Two analyzes theories of the uncanny and the related subject of trauma, both of which first took hold with the rise of industrialization (Freud 2003a, 2003b; Vidler 1992; Luckhurst 2006). Chapter Three examines photographic and film theory and its relationship to theories of the unrepresentable discussed in the first two chapters (Benjamin 1999, Barthes 2000, Mulvey 2006). Chapter Four considers lens-based media's indexical status in the wake of digitization and its concurrent alignment with 'subjective' artforms such as painting (Gunning 2008, Doane 2007a, Rodowick 2007, Manovich 2000, Mulvey 2006).

Part Two of the thesis looks at creative/practical approaches to the themes outlined in the theoretical section. This begins with Chapter Five, examining Canadian artist Stan Douglas' film piece *Der Sandmann* (1995), a work that exposes a sense of the uncanny in the landscape of pre- and post-reunification Germany (specifically the *Schrebergärten* of Potsdam). Chapter Six assesses Ridley Scott's science fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982), its significance to the ideas discussed in Part One and its correlations with E.T.A. Hoffmann's *Sandman* narrative. Chapter Seven, the final section of Part Two, details the development and formation of my studio research, describing the

distinctive approach of my practical submission – the film piece *Re: Flamingo*
– toward representing an experience of the unrepresentable within the industrial
landscape through lens based media.

PART ONE:

THEORETICAL APPROACHES

CHAPTER ONE: THE SUBLIME

The Sublime and Representation

How does one represent that which, almost by definition, is unrepresentable, is 'beyond expression'?...The Sublime eludes the impulse to consume ... it is pictorially unframeable, and it cannot be framed in words. The vocabulary associated with the experience is one of surrender to a superior power...In the act of surrender we acknowledge the feebleness of our powers of articulate expression and representation. (Andrews 1999: 142)

The problem of how to represent the sublime has preoccupied artists and thinkers since at least the eighteenth century, when the concept was predominantly considered in terms of the overwhelming within the natural world. However, its formulation began much earlier, in a different field of aesthetics. The notion of the sublime was first clearly articulated by a Greek scholar known as Longinus in a text written in the first century AD, in relation to what he termed "elevated language" (1965: 100). This work, entitled *On the Sublime*, is primarily a treatise on rhetoric. It suggests that while there are formal techniques a speaker may learn in order to convince an audience, an instinctively realized "combination of wonder and astonishment always proves superior to the merely persuasive and pleasant. This is because persuasion is on the whole something we can control, whereas amazement and wonder exert invincible power and force and get the better of every hearer" (Longinus 1964: 2).

On the Sublime conceives of sublimity as an experience of irrepressible power brought about through language. Yet although a lesson in rhetoric, the treatise deems it to be indescribable and unteachable. As Philip Shaw points out, "[central] to Longinus' text is the suggestion that the sublime

occurs within representation whilst nevertheless annulling the possibility of representation” (2006: 26). Even in the earliest incarnation of a theory of the sublime, a complex and paradoxical relationship with representation is already apparent.

By the eighteenth century the concept had reached a wider audience and gained importance as a distinct philosophical category. Though influenced by Longinus’ treatise on language, it began to develop in relation to the astonishing and ineffable within the natural landscape. This came about initially through the work of a number of British writers, several of whom drew inspiration from their travels across the mountainous wildernesses of Europe. The English writer Joseph Addison (1672-1719) for example, remarked that “the Alps, which are broken into so many Steeps and Precipices...fill the mind with an agreeable kind of Horror, and form one of the most irregular and misshapen Scenes in the World” (1718: 300).

Such an interest in the emotional impact of such landscapes raises important questions about the location and classification of sublime experience – such as whether it is an internal mental state or whether it exists externally in nature (or, indeed, at the interface of the two). The resistance of the concept to such categorization is of course the very characteristic that identifies it as unrepresentable. As Shaw suggests, “the quest for definition is self-defeating since the sublime is precisely that which frustrates the distinction between cause and effect” (2006: 47).

If other thinkers of the time appear to regard the sublime as residing within the natural object, the writing of the political philosopher Edmund Burke

(1729-1797) lends itself to a reading of the experience as subjective in origin. In his influential work *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origins of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (first published 1757), Burke emphasizes the psychological effects of sublimity upon the individual's soul and mind:

The passion caused by the great and the sublime in *nature*, when those causes operate most powerfully is Astonishment, and astonishment is that state of the soul in which all its motions are suspended, with some degree of horror. In this case the mind is so entirely filled with its object that it cannot entertain any other ... (1990: 53)

Such a focus on emotion and subjective experience with regard to the sublime is also evident in Shaw's reading of Burke. Quoting Burke, he explains that "the expression of what 'really is' is not the concern of a theory of the sublime; where the 'former ['reality'] regards the understanding; the latter [sublimity] belongs to the passions. The one describes a thing as it is; the other describes it as it is felt" (2006: 50).

Burke's ideas about the emotional aspects of the sublime initiated a lasting shift in attention away from the material world of natural phenomena to a greater interest in the psychological experience of the viewer. In 1790 Immanuel Kant published his *Analytic of the Sublime*, adapting Burke's theories to his own. Kant argues that the sensation of the sublime is brought about not through the horrifying realization that we cannot comprehend an object fully, but in the pleasure we derive from our ability to apply abstract reason to what our senses are unable to fully affirm:

All that we can say is that the object lends itself to the presentation of a sublimity discoverable in the mind. For the sublime, in the strict sense of the word, cannot be contained in any sensuous form, but rather concerns ideas

of reason, which, although no adequate presentation of them is possible, may be excited and called into the mind by that very inadequacy itself which does admit of sensuous presentation. (Kant 1952: 92)

Kant, therefore, explicitly regards the sublime as an effect of the mind, a subjective experience brought about through reason, rather than an objective attribute of “sensuous” nature. The viewer becomes aware of a capacity within him or herself to transcend nature, to stand apart from it and give abstract form to a thing it cannot conceive of in material terms. For Kant, the sublime is “at once a feeling of displeasure, arising from the inadequacy of imagination ...and a simultaneously awakened pleasure, arising from this very judgement of the inadequacy of the greatest faculty of sense being in accord with ideas of reason” (1952:106).

In Kant’s formulation, the awareness through reason that a sublime object exists, but that it cannot be imagined in sensuous form, means that its existence can only be presented negatively – it can be expressed only as that which is unrepresentable. As Jacques Derrida later summarizes this idea: “[t]he sublime cannot inhabit any sensible form...[it] relates only to the ideas of reason. It therefore refuses all adequate presentation” (1987: 131). Derrida follows this declaration (from his book *The Truth in Painting*) with the question “how can this unrepresentable thing present itself?” (1987: 131).

Drawing much from both Burke and Kant’s ideas, the difficult question of how to present sublime experience became an important pursuit of the Romantic Era. Roughly dating from the mid-eighteenth to the mid-nineteenth century, Romanticism is characterized by a privileging of the emotional over the rational, subjectivity and individualism over objective consensus, and

imagination over the real or literal. The Romantics therefore lamented the failure, described by Kant, of imagination to provide sensible forms with which to adequately represent the sublime. The inassimilable vastness of the natural world was, for the Romantics, forever divided from the human subject (structured as it is by culture, language and representation). As the poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) observed, “nature is for us nothing but the uncoerced existence, the subsistence of things on their own, being there according to their own immutable laws” (1993: 180).

As the intellect alone was deemed unable to bridge the gap between the sublime pleasure derived from transcending nature (Kant) and the simultaneous melancholy brought about by the knowledge of that very separation, thinkers of the time turned instead to art – for, as we have already heard Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854) remark, “aesthetic intuition is only intellectual intuition become objective” (1988: 227). As Shaw suggests, “Schelling...regards the artwork not as a thing but as the medium through which the sensible is reunited with the transcendental” (2006: 91).

The sense of an immutable void between the human subject and the vastness of nature was a favourite motif of the painter Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840), whose work repeatedly depicted figures upstaged by a luminous and humbling landscape. In its sombre tones, his 1809 painting *The Monk by the Sea* embodies the Romantic model of a solitary individual contemplating in melancholic reverie the ineffability and vast sublimity of nature (see Figure 3, overleaf). The picture’s scarcity of fixed representational forms, which “bewildered spectators when it was first exhibited” (Rosenblum 1975: 10),

echoes Kant's theory of "negative presentation" in its method of denoting the sublimity of nature (1952: 127). As Malcolm Andrews suggests:

... we cannot exercise any control over what the painting offers to us ... we react to it in terms of what is missing from it, the terrible emptiness. Within this luridly tinted vacuum, there isn't even a narrative offered. It is a portrait of near nothingness, its power residing in its accumulation of negatives, absences. (1999: 146)

The painting presents only the barest requirements of a figurative land/seascape. The exception being the monk himself, offering the viewer an inert figure with whom to identify – thus placing one alone and dwarfed in the face of ineffable space.

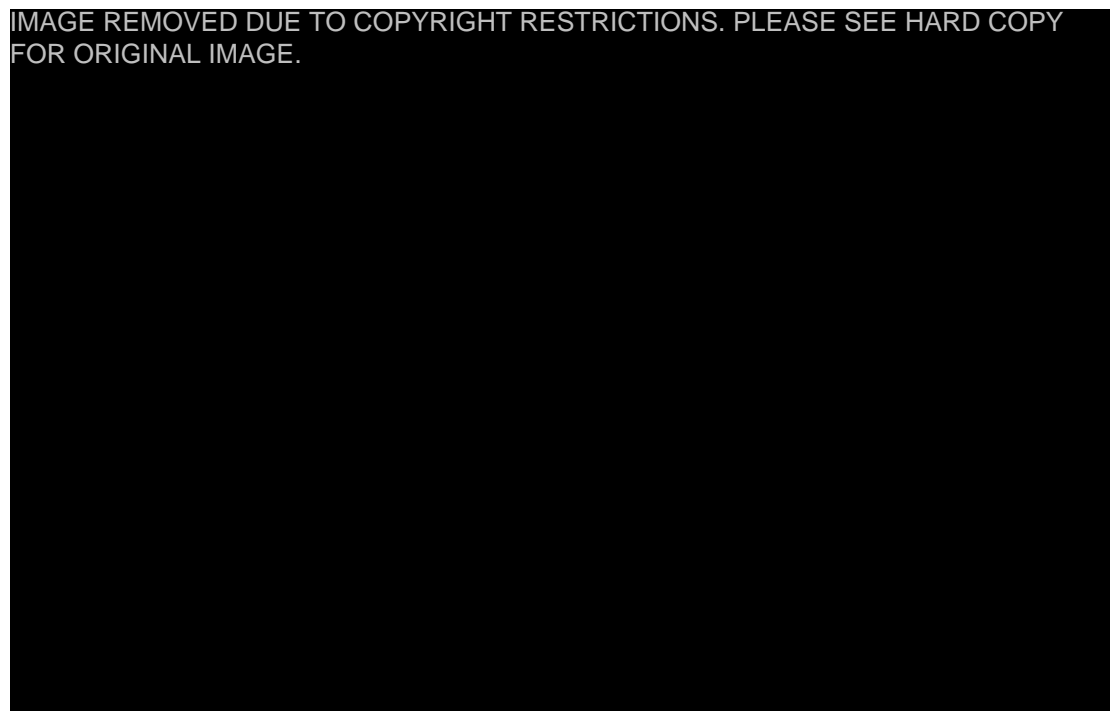


Figure 3 Caspar David Friedrich, *The Monk by the Sea*, 1809. Oil on canvas. 110 x 171cm. Alte Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

It is known that Friedrich's picture originally depicted a number of sailing boats and the suggestion of a moon (Rosenblum 1975: 13; Andrews 1999: 146). In removing what at the time of its painting would have been the

standard (even expected) recognizable visual coordinates of a seascape, the painter presents what was perhaps then the ultimate allegory of the sublime as subjective experience. The sublime, as Andrews puts it, “with its emphasis on obscurity, vacuity and indeterminacy, destabilizes and disorients: in terms of landscape art it seeks to represent less the objects that strike the viewer than the sensations experienced by the viewer” (1999: 147). He continues, underlining the idea that “the ‘negative pleasure’ that constitutes the Sublime emphasizes the subjective status of sublimity”, explaining that therefore “forms of nature, objectively portrayed, are not only inadequate but inappropriate as a means of representing the Sublime” (Andrews 1999: 147). The ‘negative pleasure’ of the sublime, it seems, can manifest itself in art as negative space. The negation of objective form leads, Andrews suggests, to the assertion of subjective encounter.

The near-absence of illusory space in *The Monk by the Sea* has led to a consideration of its ineffable qualities in relation to 20th century abstraction. In 1961 the art historian Robert Rosenblum wrote an article for *Art News* in which he compares Friedrich’s picture to the painting *Light, Earth and Blue* (1954) by Mark Rothko (see Figure 4, overleaf). Rosenblum argues that both paintings place us “on the threshold of those shapeless infinities discussed by the aestheticians of the Sublime” (2010:110). He continues:

Like the mystic trinity of sky, water and earth that, in the Friedrich...appears to emanate from one unseen source, the floating horizontal tiers of veiled light in the Rothko seem to conceal a total, remote presence that we can only intuit and never fully grasp. These infinite glowing voids carry us beyond reason to the Sublime... (2010: 110)

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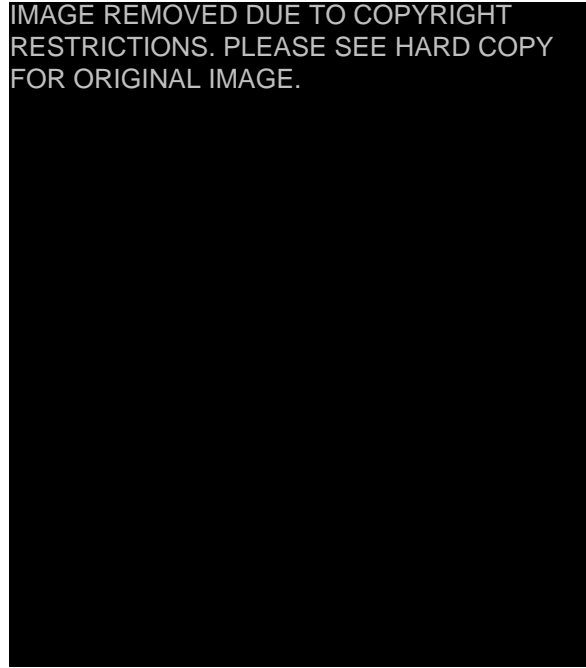


Figure 4 Mark Rothko, *Light, Earth and Blue*, 1954. Oil on canvas. 193 x 170 cm.

The void-like ground of Rothko's mature work seems to present a primal landscape from the genesis of a consciousness prior to any representational system. With reference to what representational elements remain in the Friedrich, Rosenblum suggests that in "the abstract language of Rothko, such literal detail – a bridge of empathy between the real spectator and the presentation of a transcendental landscape – is no longer necessary; we ourselves are the monk before the sea" (2010: 110).

Due to the concept's resistance to representational form, it is perhaps unsurprising to find ideas of the sublime associated with abstraction in art. As Jean-François Lyotard suggests:

...infinity, or the absoluteness of the Idea can be revealed in what Kant calls a negative presentation, or even a non-presentation ... optical pleasure when reduced to near nothingness promotes an infinite contemplation of infinity ... abstract and Minimal art...is thus present in germ in the Kantian aesthetic of the sublime. (1991: 98)

Some abstract painters, such as Barnett Newman, have engaged with the concept of the sublime directly. Newman, another American for whom the colour-field approach offered a commitment to what he referred to as ‘the absolute emotions’, believed that the abstract expressionist movement signaled a departure from pictorial traditions that was necessary to an expression of the sublime.



Figure 5 Barnett Newman, *Vir Heroicus Sublimis*, 1950-51. Oil on canvas, 242cm x 541 cm.

As Friedrich seems to have intuited before him, Newman believed that any concession to the conventions of representation was inherently at odds with a presentation of the sublime. In his 1948 essay *The Sublime is Now*, he outlines his belief that if the sublime is to be present within a work, then it must be entirely free of representational baggage:

The failure of European art to achieve the sublime is due to this blind desire to exist inside the reality of sensation (the objective world, whether distorted or pure) and to build an art within a framework of pure plasticity...In other words, modern art, caught without a sublime content, was incapable of creating a new sublime image...I believe that here in America, some of us, free from the weight of European culture, are finding the answer...The image we produce is the self-evident one of revelation, real and concrete, that can be understood by anyone who will look at it without the nostalgic glasses of history. (2010: 26-27)

Much of what Newman says here is, however, echoed in Lyotard's thoughts on that preeminent precursor of 20th century abstraction, Paul Cezanne. As the philosopher says of Cezanne's working methods, "[t]he task of having to bear witness to the indeterminate carries away, one after another, the barriers set up by the writings of theorists and by the manifestos of the painters themselves" (Lyotard 1991: 103). In much the same spirit, Cezanne himself exclaimed (in 1902), "If only we could see with the eyes of a newborn child!... Today our sight is a little weary, burdened by the memory of a thousand images" (quoted in Andrews 1999: 149).

In Newman's terms however, Cezanne is perhaps somewhat guilty of the "blind desire to exist inside the reality of sensation" (2010: 26)¹ and this is where Lyotard sees the distinction between modern and postmodern approaches to the indeterminate:

[M]odern aesthetics is an aesthetic of the sublime, though a nostalgic one. It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure. (1984: 81)

Cezanne's endeavor, as Lyotard puts it, "to make seen what makes one see, not what is visible" (1991: 102), seems to be taken to its ultimate conclusion in the high-modernism/proto-minimalism of Newman's work, which presents only itself, rather than attempting the *representation* of an unknowable beyond. Lyotard, who looks closely at Newman's engagement with the sublime in his writings on postmodernism, suggests that the postmodern (in contrast to the

¹ Lyotard however does suggest that Cezanne's "sublime was fundamentally not nostalgic and tended toward the infinity of plastic experiment rather than toward the representation of any lost absolute" (Lyotard 2010: 135).

modern) “puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself” (1984: 81). He continues:

...[it] denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste which would make it possible to share collectively the nostalgia for the unattainable; that which searches for new presentations, not in order to enjoy them but in order to impart a stronger sense of the unrepresentable. (1984: 81)

Without prior conceptions formed through the understanding of a historically derived representational system, the viewer experiences the artwork as sublime, as a “self-evident” event of the “*Now*” (Newman 2010: 27). Lyotard describes this effect:

Newman’s *now*...is what dismantles consciousness, what deposes consciousness, it is what consciousness cannot formulate ... when he seeks sublimity in the here and now he breaks with the eloquence of Romantic art but he does not reject its fundamental task, that of bearing pictorial or otherwise expressive witness to the inexpressible. The inexpressible does not reside in an over there, in another word, or another time, but in this: in that (something) happens...Here and now there is this painting, rather than nothing, and that’s what is sublime. (Lyotard 1991: 90-93)

While Friedrich’s *Monk* offered “a bridge of empathy between the real spectator and the presentation of a transcendental landscape” (Rosenblum 2010: 110), Lyotard is suspicious of this Kantian attempt to unite the transcendental with the material. He suggests that for the indeterminate to remain sublime, its resistance to such rationalist appropriation must remain intact (Shaw 2006: 129-130). In the work of artists like Rothko and, perhaps more overtly, Newman, there is no representation of a transcendental beyond, no reference to some ineffable thing other than the work itself. As Lyotard asserts, “[m]atter does not question the mind, it has no need of it...It is

presence as unrepresentable to the mind, always withdrawn from its grasp (1991: 142).

Lyotard's belief in the primacy of matter and presence in the discourse of the sublime – his assertion that “the inexpressible does not reside in an over there” – appears to be shared by Derrida in *The Truth in Painting* (1987). Derrida suggests that Kant's notion of a beyond, what he calls his “subjectivism”, is a fallacy. He argues that the experience of the sublime cannot be explained “in terms of a finite subjectivity. We must on the contrary comprehend the sublime inasmuch as it is founded in the unique absolute substance, in the content to be presented” (1987: 133).

Derrida arrives at this argument through the notion of the *parergon*, the significance of which he elaborates from a brief and relatively immaterial mention in Kant's *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (first published 1790). The word *parergon* is Latin, referring to the border or frame around a work of art – though it can also suggest wider interpretations such as ‘remainder’ or ‘addition’ (Shaw 2006: 117). The significance of the concept to a theory of the sublime is perhaps already implicit within the etymology of the word ‘sublime’ itself, which derives from the Latin *sublimis*: *sub* meaning ‘up to’ and *limen* ‘threshold, surround or lintel of a doorway’ (Morley 2010a: 14). The point here being that it is impossible to think of the boundless nature of the sublime without the concept of a boundary: that which transcends the threshold of our understanding can only be represented as such (as we have already seen, this is Kant's ‘negative presentation’; it is also the root of his ‘negative pleasure’). As Derrida puts it, “[t]he experience and pleasure of the sublime do not stem from the promise of something noumenal, outside a given frame, but

rather from the perpetual, yet always provisional, activity of framing itself, from the *parergon*" (quoted in Cheetham 2001: 107). Derrida's elaboration and critique of what he calls Kant's "finite subjectivity" however, is founded on the assertion that the reliance of one concept upon the other works both ways – that the boundary also relies upon the unbounded, the *parergon* upon the *ergon* (the 'work'). This rationale conceives of subjectivity as an effect of the sublime as much as the sublime is an effect of subjectivity. The privileging of reason, consciousness and subjectivity (that is, representational framing) over absolute matter is for Derrida a bias that misrepresents the sublime, which he suggests is "neither culture nor nature, both culture and nature. It is perhaps, between the presentable and the unrepresentable, the passage from the one to the other as much as the irreducibility of the one to the other" (1987: 143). As Shaw explains it, the *parergon* "is that which cannot be thought within the terms of the system since it discloses the fundamental point of contradiction on which the system is founded" (2006: 120).

The roots of both Lyotard's interest in an art that "denies itself the solace of good forms" (1984: 81) and Derrida's examination of the *parergon* can be traced back to the distinction Burke and Kant drew between the sublime and the beautiful. For Burke, these two concepts "stand on foundations so different, that it is hard...to think of reconciling them in the same subject" (1990: 103). The idea of the sublime, he felt, was founded on pain, filling the mind with terror, while the idea of beauty was founded on pleasure (Burke 1990: 113). He characterized what he saw as their opposing qualities through considering the emotional effect each concept engendered in the viewer:

There is a wide difference between admiration and love. The sublime, which is the cause of the former, always dwells on great objects, and terrible; the latter [of which beauty is the cause] on small ones, and pleasing; we submit to what we admire, but we love what submits to us ... (Burke 1990: 103)

For Kant the two categories are not so diametrically opposed, as each induces some form of pleasure. Nevertheless, he does remark upon significant differences between the two. He regards the pleasure derived from the sublime, for example, as a “negative pleasure” provoking “admiration or respect”, as opposed to the more straightforward pleasure of beauty (Kant 1952: 91). Beauty, says Kant “is a question of the form of [an] object, and this consists in limitation” (1952: 90). In other words, what is beautiful has finite shape, is bounded, and therefore submits happily to framing. The sublime however, “is to be found in an object [that is] devoid of form,” one involving, or provoking, “a representation of *limitlessness*” (1952: 90). What is sublime resists the unification of its elements, has no discernable boundaries, and so therefore attempts at framing such an object become problematic.

Derrida considers these differences between the sublime and the beautiful in terms of the *parergon*:

The presence of a limit is what gives form to the beautiful. The sublime is to be found, for its part, in an “object without form”...you already understand that the sublime is encountered in art less easily than the beautiful, and more easily in “raw nature.”...If art gives form by limiting, or even by framing, there can be a *parergon* of the beautiful...But there cannot, it seems, be a *parergon* of the sublime...First of all because it is not a work, an *ergon*, and then because the infinite is presented in it and the infinite cannot be bordered. The beautiful on the contrary, in the finitude of its formal contours, requires the parergonal edging... (1987: 127-128)

The same qualities which discern the beautiful from the sublime can also be

recognized in the shift we have seen from that art which (as Lyotard put it) “bends itself to models”, to the work of those artists who strove to transcend such conventions of pictorial form (Lyotard 1991: 101). Barnett Newman’s desire to dispense with “the nostalgic glasses of history” (2010: 26-27) has its roots in the tradition of artists such as Friedrich and Cezanne, who looked for new ways of seeing the world (whether by standing on top of a mountain or by visually deconstructing one). Their work, in one way or another, is an attempt to subvert the ‘rules’ of representation, to resist the ‘frame’ of taste and tradition in order to impart something of the boundlessness of the sublime. As Lyotard has said, such work “denies itself the solace of good forms, the consensus of a taste” (1984: 81). This approach stands in stark contrast to the late eighteenth-century aesthetic ideal of the picturesque, which “appreciates landscape in so far as it resembles known works of art” (Andrews 1999: 129).

Burke defined the beautiful as that which submits to us. Similarly, the picturesque makes a natural landscape ‘beautiful’ by submitting it to formal principles. As Malcolm Andrews suggests, it changes “what was strange and wild” into something “increasingly familiarized and commodified” (1999: 129). He elaborates upon this idea, arguing that “natural scenery is, as it were, domesticated...it is aesthetically colonized” (Andrews 1999: 129). To colonize, in this sense, is to render submissive, to dominate.

Derrida defined the beautiful as that which is constrained and limited. The picturesque limits, it reduces the landscape from “novelty and variety to secure uniformity”, with the result that this cultural framing “makes different places seem like each other” (Andrews 1999: 129). Where the picturesque processes the natural world “into aesthetic commodities – ‘landscapes’”, the

sublime, on the other hand, “eludes the impulse to consume...it is pictorially unframeable...[it] is that which we cannot appropriate, if only because we cannot discern any boundaries” (Andrews 1999: 142).

As we have seen, for Lyotard *et al*, the sublime is a matter of aesthetics. It is defined by representation because of its resistance to representation. But this attitude seemingly neglects what was for Burke (and to some extent Kant) a defining characteristic of the sublime – namely, terror. As Burke puts it:

Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*. (1990: 36)

The historian David Nye criticizes Lyotard’s “postmodern” sublime, suggesting that he is “writing not about the sublime but about another form of the unspeakable” (1994: xix-xx). He points out that Lyotard makes “little distinction between the sublime in the arts and the direct experience of the sublime” (1994: xix-xx), going on to argue that:

... [a] volcano, unlike a painting, can kill the observer. An eruption can cause the terror that lies at the core of Burke’s philosophy of the sublime and which later was an essential part of Kant’s theory of the dynamic sublime. Take out terror and the mind is not transfixed; rather, it is free to engage in games of reference and to lose itself in an interior hall of mirrors. Lyotard’s early writing on the sublime...has nothing to do with fear. (Nye 1994: xx)

Nye’s suggestion appears to echo Derrida’s assertion that “the sublime is encountered in art less easily than the beautiful, and more easily in ‘raw nature’” (1987: 127). Derrida does however qualify this statement, claiming that there “can be sublime in art if it is submitted to the conditions of an

‘accord with nature’” (1987: 127). Drawing on Kant, he goes on to make the important point that “although the sublime is better presented by (raw) nature than by art, it is not in nature but in ourselves, projected by us because of the inadequation in us of several powers, of several faculties” (Derrida 1987: 132). As Kant himself put it:

[T]rue sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the judging subject, and not in the object of nature...Who would apply the term "sublime" even to shapeless mountain masses towering one above the other in wild disorder, with their pyramids of ice, or to the dark tempestuous ocean, or such like things? But in the contemplation of them, without any regard to their form, the mind abandons itself to the imagination and to a reason...and it feels itself elevated in its own estimate of itself on finding all the might of imagination still unequal to its ideas. (Kant 1952: 104-105)

Kant distinguished between two varieties of sublime experience: what he termed the “mathematical” sublime and the “dynamic” sublime. The mathematical sublime, which is perhaps most easily aligned with Lyotard’s ideas, occurs when an object is so vast that the imagination is unable to fully comprehend it – for example Kant’s “shapeless mountain masses” and “dark tempestuous ocean” (Kant 1952: 104). Though the dynamic sublime shares the quality of ineffability associated with the mathematical sublime, its defining characteristic is that it provokes fear or terror. In describing the dynamic sublime, Kant listed phenomena similar to those mentioned by Nye, such as “volcanos in all their violence of destruction” and “hurricanes leaving desolation in their track” (Kant 1952: 110). However, the dynamic sublime is brought about not through direct contact with an object as such, but rather at a remove. For the terrible or frightening object to provoke sublime experience, it must be encountered at a safe distance, in order that “we may look upon an

object as *fearful*, and yet not be afraid of it” (Kant 1952: 110). Therefore Kant categorizes it, like the mathematical sublime, as a psychological effect rather than a physical one. For Kant, both the mathematical and the dynamic sublime are subjective experiences.

The Technological Sublime

In his book *American Technological Sublime* (1994), Nye insists that the psychological effects of the sublime are not exclusive to natural phenomena. He argues that sublime experience “when it occurs, has a basic structure. An object, *natural or man-made*, disrupts ordinary perception and astonishes the senses, forcing the observer to grapple mentally with its immensity and power” (Nye 1994: 15, my emphasis). Nye also notes that “Burke took it for granted that two basic categories of the sublime, namely difficulty and magnificence, particularly applied to architecture”, suggesting that following the industrial revolution “cities were filled with structures that were not meant to be beautiful or picturesque, but rather awesome, astonishing, vast, powerful, and obscure, striking terror into the observer” (1994: 126). Nye reflects upon the experience of the industrial landscape through drawing on the idea of the “technological sublime” - a phrase first used by the historian Perry Miller and later elaborated by Nye’s mentor Leo Marx, in his book *The Machine in the Garden* (1964). Marx’s interest is focused upon the psychological effects of witnessing the arrival of the industrial machine in “pastoral” America. He approaches his subject through considering literature of the time. Though Marx’s book contemplates the problematic aspects of this

change in the landscape, it also points out that the experience of the technological sublime was often allied with a positive vision of progress:

Consider how the spectacle of the machine in a virgin land must have struck the mind. Like nothing ever seen under the sun...Is it any wonder that the prospect arouses awe and reverence?...The stock response to the panorama of progress...by-passes ideas; it is essentially a buoyant feeling generated without words or thought. (1964: 206-207)

Similarly, Nye notes that in the work of some writers of the early 20th century, “cavernous factories draped in smoke became sublime” (1994: 124-125):

Their size, obscurity, and danger were converted into assets...these new industries seemed exciting because they were vast, dim worlds of iron, brick and smoke. The new landscape was read as an objective correlative of man’s new powers of transformation. It was understood in terms drawn from the tradition of the sublime... (Nye 1994: 124-125)

Increasingly, in the work of many writers and artists of the early 1900s, “the industrial world was presented as a separate realm, fascinating because it was utterly unnatural” (Nye 1994: 126). The industrial panorama was sublime for them because it “combined the abstraction of a man-made landscape with the dynamism of moving machinery and powerful forces” (Nye 1994: 126). Nye goes on to relate these different feelings of “unnatural” abstraction and “dynamism” to Kant’s categories of the mathematical and dynamic sublime, doing so through considering the position of the viewer in relation to the industrial spectacle:

The factory district, typically viewed from a high place or a moving train ... combined the dynamic and geometrical sublimities. The synthesis evoked fear tinged with wonder. It threatened the individual with its sheer scale, its noise, its complexity, and the superhuman power of the forces at work. (1994: 126)

The position of the artist in relation to the expansive factory scene is perceived by Nye to dictate which of Kant's categories of sublime experience the artwork presents. "Seen close up, [the factory's] productive processes reveal frightening yet exhilarating forces under human control. Seen from a height, it [is] a vast man-made nature reduced to geometric piles of materials" (Nye 1994: 132). Whether provoking terror from up-close, or astonishment from afar, the industrial landscape is experienced as sublime. Nye goes on to consider how the circumstances of viewing the industrial landscape affect how it is experienced, again through a consideration of art of the early 20th century. He notes that manufacturing districts were generally represented as "aesthetically pleasing once one found the proper vantage point...from the top of a skyscraper, or from a train window" (1994: 126). He notes that Elsie Driggs's "darkly precise painting" *Pittsburgh* (1927; see Figure 6) depicts a lucid memory from her childhood of seeing the city – which at the time produced almost half of the USA's steel – from a train window at night (Nye 1994: 126).



Figure 6 Elsie Driggs, *Pittsburgh*, 1927. Oil on canvas. 87 x 101 cm. Whitney Museum of American Art, New York

Nye goes on to associate Driggs's painting with a passage from the 1912 novel *The Olympian* by James Oppenheim, in which, similarly, the author describes the sight of Pittsburgh from a train at night:

A vision shown and passed, swallowed in the night; the sublime spectacle of window-lit mills at the riverside girdling with darkness the fierce flaming of the Bessemer converter, whose several swelling tongues of fire licked at the flaring clouds... (quoted in Nye 1994: 126)

Nye suggests that the "clean air and the comfort of the smoothly rolling train reduce this threatening landscape to a pleasing vignette", thus, at a remove (and as the novelist himself describes it), the scene becomes "sublime" (1994: 126-127). The fact that these experiences, which obviously left a deep impression on each artist, occurred at night, is identified as important by Nye, who notes that Burke had observed "darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light" (Burke 1990: 73). Nye follows this with another passage from Oppenheim's novel, which describes the awesome sight of a steel works, again at night, though this time seen from above. The "powerful" imagery of the passage, Nye feels, is "drawn from the tradition of the sublime in painting" (1994: 127):

[O]ver the vast acreage they saw the shadowy outlines of a dozen immense buildings...craters with waving manes of flame and rolling clouds of luminous vapor. Everywhere they saw sheets of fire, leaping white tongues, glare and smoke and steam, while lightnings flashed at the cloudy skies. And over it all a hundred black chimney-pipes looked through the changing lights. (James Oppenheim (1912), quoted in Nye 1994: 127)

Nye, like Leo Marx, also considers negative experiences of industrialization, noting that in late nineteenth century America "[t]wo quite different literary traditions developed to deal with the new industrial

landscape” (1994: 123). He observes that in most novels, sensitive and educated writers:

...saw little or no sublimity in the industrial scene, and instead took the side of workers in their struggle for higher wages, better working conditions [and] shorter hours...This tradition...often “read” the new landscape as a blighted contrast to the pastoral world that had preceded it. (Nye 1994:123)

He goes on to suggest that such a vision “resembles the older English critique of industrialization, in which the railroad and the mill have usurped the natural world, polluting it with smoke and noise” (1994: 124).

In the first chapter of his book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), the Marxist theorist and critic Frederic Jameson devotes a section to the idea of a technological sublime. Like Nye, Jameson identifies a trend amongst artists in the first half of the 20th century of exalting the sublime powers of technology. Citing Fernand Leger and Diego Rivera as examples, he describes the “excitement of machinery...the exhilaration of futurism” and how “revolutionary or communist artists of the 1930s...sought to reappropriate this excitement of machine energy for a Promethean reconstruction of human society as a whole” (Jameson 1991: 36).

However, (writing in the late twentieth century) Jameson confines this particular trend of representing the sublime forms of industry to the “moment of capital preceding our own”, going on to suggest that “the technology of our own moment no longer possesses this same capacity for representation” (1991: 36). He suggests that the forms absent from the post-industrial landscape – smokestacks, “baroque” elaborations of pipes, even “the streamlined profile of the railroad train” – have been replaced, as Jameson

puts it, in “our own moment”, by a technology that does not lend itself to such awe-inspiring representations (1991: 36-37). The technology of which he speaks is, of course, “the computer, whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power” – a form he compares to the “television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself” (1991: 37). Jameson conceives of such ‘new’ technology as “machines of reproduction rather than of production,” insisting that they “make very different demands on our capacity for aesthetic representation than did the relatively mimetic idolatry of the older machinery” (1991: 37). He suggests that, where the older technology provoked an experience of the sublime through “kinetic energy”, the newer technology’s sublime dimension lies within its “reproductive processes” (Jameson 1991: 37). To represent this new configuration of sublime experience therefore requires a new approach to models of representation. As Jameson puts it:

[I]n the most energetic postmodernist texts...the work seems somehow to tap the networks of the reproductive process and thereby to afford us some glimpse into a postmodern or technological sublime, whose power or authenticity is documented by the success of such works in evoking a whole new postmodern space in emergence around us. (1991: 37)

Jameson suggests that such representations act not as self-referential models of some vast digital matrix, but rather present “a distorted figuration of something even deeper, namely the whole world system of a present day multinational capitalism” (1991: 37). He argues that digital technology is mesmerizing because it offers a “privileged representational shorthand for grasping a network of power and control even more difficult for our minds and imaginations to grasp” – something he defines as “the whole new decentered

global network of the third stage of capital itself" (1991: 37-38). Jameson suggests that the most successful attempts to "think the impossible totality of the contemporary world system" are to be found in science fiction narratives, for example the *cyberpunk* novels of William Gibson, which he (reluctantly) characterizes as "high-tech paranoia" entertainment literature (Jameson 1991: 38). Such fiction is, Jameson asserts, "as much an expression of transnational corporate realities as it is of global paranoia" (1991: 38). In these works he sees an attempt to represent the ungraspable complexity of "that enormous and threatening, yet only dimly perceivable, other reality of social and economic institutions" (1991: 38). It is in engaging with this "other reality", Jameson believes, that "the postmodern sublime can alone be adequately theorized" (1991: 38).

What Jameson identifies is a mode of representation, based upon the model of the computer, that is adequate to a landscape of incomprehensibly vast and complex global power networks – and furthermore, one capable of expressing an experience of such a strange, abstract landscape as sublime. As Malcolm Andrews asserts, "[t]he inexpressible, 'unpresentable' properties of landscape, its power to dislocate and renew vision, are not confined to the great scenic spectacles of the world. The Sublime happens anywhere, once the film of familiarity is pierced" (1999: 149).

The postmodern sublime, then, for both Lyotard and Jameson, is not provoked through terror but through abstraction and ineffability. We have heard Nye argue that Lyotard's version of a postmodern sublime "is not about the sublime but about another form of the unspeakable", which he suggests might be better described as an "aesthetic of the strange" (Nye 1994: xix-xx).

However if, as Andrews suggests, the sublime can be found wherever the “film of familiarity is pierced” (surely to do so is to make ‘strange’), then what of Burke’s insistence that “whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the *sublime*” (1990: 36)? That these questions remain unanswered is perhaps testament to the unknowable, often paradoxical nature of the unrepresentable.

CHAPTER TWO: THE UNCANNY

The Strange Sublime

One manifestation of the unrepresentable that invokes ideas of both terror and strangeness is the notion of the 'uncanny'. As Antony Vidler defines it, the uncanny is "[a]esthetically an outgrowth of the Burkean sublime, a domesticated version of absolute terror" (1992: 3). He argues that the uncanny is closely associated with, but simultaneously strangely different from the concept of the sublime, which he describes as "the master category of aspiration, nostalgia, and the unattainable" (1992: 20). It should be noted, however, that Vidler follows this with the appropriately paradoxical suggestion that, while subgenres of the sublime have been traditionally considered "to be subversive of its overarching premises and its transcendent ambitions", the uncanny "was perhaps the most subversive of all...because it seemed at times indistinguishable from the sublime" (1992: 21).¹ Indeed, when describing the sublime Burke himself includes phenomena that we have come to closely associate with the idea of the uncanny: "[h]ow greatly the night adds to our dread in all cases of danger" he writes, listing those threatening sensations that provoke a feeling of terror (and thus an experience of the sublime), "and how much the notions of ghosts and goblins, of which none can form clear ideas, affect minds." (1990: 54). Such a correlation – between Burke's ghoulish description of the sublime and the notion of the uncanny –

¹ This notion that the uncanny is interchangeable with the sublime also appears to be held by the American artist Mike Kelley, who speaks of the two concepts as though they were synonymous. Kelley describes the sublime as "coming from the natural limitations of our knowledge", suggesting that "when we are confronted with something that's beyond our limits of acceptability...then we have this feeling of the uncanny" (quoted in Morley 2010b).

may also be traced in Sigmund Freud's influential essay on the latter subject. Indeed, it has been suggested that Freud's text *The Uncanny* (first published 1919) – which Nicholas Royle describes as a work “[f]ull of ghostly omissions and emissions...an essay in the night, an investigation in the dark, into darkness” (2003: 108) – is “the only major contribution that the twentieth century has made to the aesthetics of the Sublime” (Bloom 1994: 182). To continue with this reading of the uncanny as a correlative of Burke's sublime, it is also interesting to note that Freud, in the very first sentence of his essay, introduces his subject as “not restricted to the theory of beauty, but described as relating to the qualities of our feeling”, and goes on to define the concept as belonging “to the realm of the frightening, of what evokes fear and dread” (Freud 2003a: 123). Furthermore, Freud asks, “where does the uncanny effect of silence, solitude and darkness come from? Do not these factors point to the part played by danger in the genesis of the uncanny...?” (2003a: 153). Again, these qualities seem to echo Burke's definition of the sublime as something that excites “ideas of pain, and danger...whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror” (1990: 36). Echoing Burke's passage on dark and ghostly phenomena (“of which none can form clear ideas”), Freud suggests that the uncanny may locate itself in “an area in which a person was unsure of his way around” (2003a: 125), or, perhaps, that it is something “[c]oncealed, kept from sight” (quoted in Royle 2003: 108). Furthermore, as Freud points out, the word ‘uncanny’ “is not always used in clearly definable sense” (Freud 2003a: 123). The notion that Freud's uncanny shares the sense of ineffability or ‘unpresentable-ness’ that is often attributed to the sublime seems to be

supported by Royle's deconstructive reading of the psychoanalyst's text (also entitled *The Uncanny*): Royle suggests that Freud's essay demonstrates "that the uncanny is destined to elude mastery, [that] it is what cannot be pinned down or controlled" (2003: 15-16). As a register of the unrepresentable, the uncanny is, like the sublime, closely connected with the way in which we "conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to ourselves, to the world" (Royle 2003: 2). As a concept problematic to representation, the uncanny is nevertheless (or perhaps consequently) bound up with theories of representation – what has earlier been defined as a kind of 'subjective framing'. Echoing Derrida's application of the *parergon* to the notion of sublime, Royle insists that the uncanny resists a straightforward distinction between inside and outside, instead being characterized by "a strangeness of framing and borders, an experience of liminality" (2003: 2).

The concept of the uncanny was first extensively developed by the German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, in his essay *On the Psychology of the Uncanny* written in 1906. Jentsch characterizes the notion as a "sensation of psychical uncertainty" (Jentsch 1906: 6). However Freud, who drew on Jentsch's text when writing his own essay thirteen years later, is ambivalent about this definition, suggesting that it is "clearly not exhaustive" (2003a: 125). In searching for substantiation of his doubts, he studies the meaning of the word in different languages and consults various dictionaries. The title of Freud's essay in its original German is *Das Unheimliche*, for which, one translator notes, "the nearest semantic equivalents in English are [the] 'uncanny' and 'eerie', but which etymologically corresponds to [the] 'unhomely'" (Freud 2003a: 124). Freud's search leads him to a consideration

of the German word *heimlich*, for which he finds two very different, but “not mutually contradictory”, definitions (2003a: 132). He notes that the word has its roots in the meaning “belonging to the house...familiar...homely” (2003a: 126) but that it can refer to “what is concealed and kept hidden” (2003a: 132) (the latter description corresponding with the German word’s standard contemporary usage). Focusing initially on the former definition, Freud points out that “*Unheimlich* is clearly the opposite of *Heimlich*”, suggesting that “it seems obvious that something should be frightening precisely because it is unknown and unfamiliar” (2003a: 124-5). He recognizes, however, that “not everything new and unfamiliar is frightening” (2003a: 125), which leads him to a consideration of *unheimlich* as the opposite of something that is concealed or kept hidden. Here he finds a definition from Friedrich Schelling, who describes the uncanny as “what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open” (quoted in Freud 2003a: 132). Schelling’s account of the term intrigues Freud, and it becomes central to his own formulation. As though merging the two definitions he has found, he suggests that something safe and familiar (*heimlich*) may become uncanny (*unheimlich*) through the “notion of the hidden and the dangerous” (Freud 2003a: 134). Defining the uncanny as “that species of frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar”, it is the notion of the return of the familiar that has been hidden, buried or repressed that becomes fundamental to Freud’s understanding of the concept (2003a: 124). As he describes this idea: “every effect arising from an emotional impulse ... is converted into fear by being repressed” (2003a: 148). It is this

variety of fear that we call uncanny, and it is this link with repression that explains Schelling's definition of the concept.²

Freud establishes the importance of the idea of the 'return of the repressed' to his theory of the uncanny through a review of those phenomena (people, things, impressions, processes, situations) he believes to be capable of provoking "an especially strong and distinct sense of the uncanny in us" (2003a: 135). He begins by considering Jentsch's suggestion that the uncanny can be brought about through "doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive" or, alternatively "whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate" (quoted in Freud 2003a: 135). He notes that Jentsch refers specifically here to those odd sensations aroused in us by waxwork figures, "ingeniously constructed dolls" and automata (quoted in Freud 2003a: 135). Addressing the question of the uncanny in literature, Jentsch suggests that one effective method of inducing such a feeling is to provoke in the reader an uncertainty as to "whether a particular figure is a real person or an automaton" (quoted in Freud 2003a: 135). Here he identifies the German Romantic author E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) as someone who regularly made effective use of this psychological device in his stories. Jentsch focuses specifically on Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* (1816), attributing its uncanny effects to the character of Olimpia, an automaton. In *The Uncanny*,

² It is perhaps interesting to note here that when speaking of repression, Freud uses the term 'sublimation' (although as Simon Morley points out, he does not directly address the philosophical context of the sublime). As Morley describes it: "In his concept of 'sublimation' Freud argued that in order to find psychic stability the 'normal' ego necessarily bases itself upon the suppression of undesirable urges and traumatic memories, and these are transformed into 'purer' and more morally and socially acceptable forms." (2010a: 17). For Freud, the uncanny is generated through the ego's contact with such "destabilizing, only partially repressed, psychological forces" (Morley 2010a: 17).

Freud too draws on Hoffmann's writing, describing him as an author "who was more successful than any other at creating uncanny effects" (2003a: 135). As Jentsch had before him, he focuses specifically on *The Sandman*. In contrast to Jentsch's reading however, Freud attributes the uncanny effects of the story to those elements that tell of repressed memory and the resurgence of traumatic experience.

It is, I believe, worthwhile quoting Freud's summary of *The Sandman* at length here. Not only will this fulfill the necessary function of relaying the story's basic narrative, but, through a consideration of the elements he focuses upon, it should also reveal much about Freud's own interpretation of the tale. It begins:

A student named Nathaniel, with whose childhood memories this fantastic tale opens, is unable, for all his present happiness, to banish certain memories connected with the mysterious and terrifying death of his much-loved father. **TEXT REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS**

[REDACTED]

TEXT REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] In his delirium the memory of his father's death is compounded with this new impression: 'Hurry – hurry – hurry! – ring of fire – ring of fire! Spin round, ring of fire – quick – quick! Wooden doll, hurry, lovely wooden doll, spin round –.' Whereupon he hurls himself at the professor, Olimpia's supposed father, and tries to strangle him. (Freud 2003a: 136-138)

Freud concludes his summary by relaying the final scene of the story, in which Nathaniel and Clara, reunited, climb to the top of a tall tower to admire the view. As Freud interprets it, Nathaniel, looking through his telescope, catches sight of Coppélius below, whereupon he is, once again, seized by madness, shouting "Ring of fire, spin round". In his fit he attempts to throw Clara from the tower, but the story ends instead with him falling to his own death. However, as Laura Mulvey points out, Freud's convictions about the root of

the story's uncanny effect (i.e. Nathanael's traumatic childhood memories relating to the Sandman) bias his interpretation of the ending. As she puts it, his "disavowal of the doll's mediating place in Nathaniel's crisis is so acute that he misreads the tragic ending of the story" (Mulvey 2006: 49). In Hoffmann's original text it is not, as Freud claims, Coppola/Coppelius that Nathaniel looks at through the telescope, but Clara, who he mistakes for the wooden automaton Olimpia. Given Mulvey's exposé of his 'misreading', it is evident that Freud foregrounds – perhaps even embellishes – those elements of the story that best corroborate his hypothesis. Unlike Jentsch, who attributes the uncanny qualities of the story to the intellectual uncertainty generated by Olimpia, Freud insists that "the sense of the uncanny attaches directly to the figure of the Sand-Man, and therefore to the idea of being robbed of one's eyes" (2003a: 138). As Royle suggests, Freud's selective reading of *The Sandman* in *The Uncanny* "is a violent attempt to reduce or eliminate the significance of Jentsch's work...in particular the importance of the figures of the doll and automaton for an understanding of the uncanny" (2003: 41).

Despite the above, there is no denying that *The Sandman* is saturated with images of eyes and allusions to sight – the significance of which, as Freud implies, is figured most prominently by the Sandman himself. Vidler estimates that more than sixty pairs of eyes are described in Hoffmann's tale, in addition to "the sack of eyes carried by the legendary Sandman...the 'myriad' eyes figured by the flashing eyeglasses of the barometer dealer Coppola...[and] the incessant repetition of veiled references to eyes in gazes, glances, and visions" (1992: 33). Even Royle, though having taken exception

to Freud's obfuscation of the significance of the automaton, describes the story as "a magnificent, relentless exploration of the uncanniness of seeing and not seeing, of the optical imagination" (2003: 45).

The significance of Nathaniel's fear of losing his eyes to the Sandman is explicitly ascribed by Freud to a fear of castration. He argues that "[t]he study of dreams, fantasies and myths has taught us...that anxiety about [losing] one's eyes, the fear of going blind, is quite often a substitute for the fear of castration" (Freud 2003a: 139). This equation may be "a good deal less obvious...to a female reader than a male" (Royle 2003: 41), but whatever the veracity of Freud's claim, it allows him to make an important and consequently fertile association between Nathaniel's fear for his eyes – that is, fear of the Sandman - and the traumatic memory of his father's death (Freud 2003a: 140). Indeed, as (feminist film theorist) Mulvey suggests, in Hoffmann's tale there is:

...ample evidence that its hero, Nathaniel, has had traumatic childhood experiences that could have led to intense castration anxiety. Freud sees his symptoms very much in terms of displaced anxiety about his eyes provoked by the two vengeful father figures, the vendor of eye-glasses Coppola (otherwise known as Coppelius), and Spalanzini, the 'father' of the automaton Olympia. (2006: 47-48)

Whether through Nathaniel's fear of the Sandman as 'eye-thief', or his association of the character with his father's death years earlier, the reappearance of the 'father figure' Coppelius as the barometer dealer Coppola personifies Freud's formulation of the uncanny as "that species of frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (Freud 2003a: 124). When, as a student, Nathaniel sees that

Coppola has stolen the eyes of his beloved Olimpia, he is seized by a resurgence of the traumatic memory of his father's death. He cries "ring of fire – ring of fire!" in an "access of madness", as he relives his father's alchemical experiments with Coppelius beside the "brazier that emits glowing flames". This notion of the return or recurrence of something familiar that has been hidden, buried or repressed is, as has been established, fundamental to Freud's understanding of the uncanny. For him, the recurring figure of the Sandman is, in many ways, the 'uncanny element' of Hoffmann's story. The uncanny re-emergence of the Sandman, in the form of Coppola, comes to embody Nathanael's traumatic memory of his father's death. As Freud explains: "the uncanny element we know from experience arises...when repressed childhood complexes are revived by some impression" (2003a: 155). This understanding of such reoccurrences leads him to suggest that:

In the unconscious mind we can recognize the dominance of a *compulsion to repeat*...It is strong enough to override the pleasure principle and lend a demonic character to certain aspects of mental life...[A]nything that reminds us of this inner compulsion to repeat is perceived as uncanny. (2003a: 145)

The sense of a compulsion to repeat imparting a "demonic character to certain aspects of mental life" (2003a: 145) surfaces – repeatedly – throughout *The Sandman*. The notion is in fact explicitly articulated in Clara's letter to her fiancé, when she asks, "Ah, my beloved Nathaniel, do you not then believe that in cheerful unaffected, careless hearts too there may not dwell the presentiment of a dark power which strives to ruin us within our own selves?" (Hoffmann 1908: 96). Giving this particular passage as an example, Royle argues that *The Sandman* is "explicitly concerned with what Freud will call the 'death drive'" (2003: 46). The 'death drive' is the name Freud gives to

his speculative theory that the compulsion to repeat traumatic experience can be strong enough to override what he called the 'pleasure principle'. Although Freud does not refer explicitly to the death drive in *The Uncanny*, the concept "lurks, as if forbidden to speak its name, everywhere in the 1919 essay" (Royle 2003: 86) – its "ghostly presence...evident above all perhaps in [Freud's] focus on the notion of a 'compulsion to repeat'" (Royle 2003: 89).

The concept of the death drive was developed by Freud in his 1920 essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, marking a significant departure from his earlier concept of the pleasure principle outlined in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (first published 1899). In the earlier work, Freud "insists upon the principle that the dream is a fulfillment of a wish" (Ellmann 1994: 7) – hence the term 'pleasure principle'. However, he was forced to re-examine this idea in the aftermath of the First World War, as he attempted to grapple with the traumatic dreams of shellshock victims. This experience led him to conclude that the "dreams of patients with accident-induced neurosis can no longer be viewed in terms of wish-fulfillment, and nor can those dreams...that bring back memories of the psychic traumas of childhood. Instead they obey the compulsion to repeat" (Freud 2003b: 71-72). These compulsive returns to traumatic experience made it clear to him that "no pleasure, in any ordinary sense of the word, could be derived from these horrendous nightmares" (Ellmann 1994: 7). It was through his examinations of the nature of war neuroses and childhood disturbance, that Freud was able to develop a greater understanding of traumatic experience in general.

Trauma, Modernity and the Uncanny

Etymologically, the term trauma derives from a Greek word meaning wound – that is, a physical injury in which the skin is punctured. By the nineteenth century however, the word came to more commonly denote psychological trauma. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud describes the significance of this shift for psychoanalysis, noting that while for physical trauma “the essential thing...is that it directly damages the molecular or even the histological structure of the nerve elements” psychoanalysts seek to understand the effects of shock “in terms of the breaching of the protective barrier around the psyche” (2003b: 70).

In both cases, trauma indicates a shock from the outside that is powerful enough to puncture a protective shield. In terms of psychological [‘psychical’] trauma, that shock originates, Freud suggests, “in the element of fright and in the threat to life” (2003b: 70). The resulting experience of such a shock becomes, quite literally, unrepresentable. As Roger Luckhurst puts it:

[P]sychical trauma is something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be processed or assimilated by normal mental processes. We have, as it were, nowhere to put it, and so it falls out of our conscious memory, yet it is still present in the mind like an intruder or ghost. (2006: 499)

Such ghosts take the form of scars – the index of a traumatic event manifested as a kind of negativity. These psychological scars are formed, it would appear, through the healing process of the repetition compulsion. As Freud understands it, the repetition compulsion is an attempt to gain retroactive mastery over a traumatic event by continually returning to it. The

psychological wound is healed through “mastering the amounts of stimulus which have broken in and...binding them, in a psychical sense, so that they can be disposed of” (Freud quoted in Luckhurst 2008: 9). As Anne Whitehead puts it, this allows the individual to “construct a protective shield against trauma after the event” (2004: 119).

Interestingly, the first diagnoses of psychological trauma by medics were concurrent with the rise of Victorian modernity. For example, Luckhurst points out that:

...[t]he shocks produced by railway accidents were first thought to be the result of direct physical jars to the nervous constitution...[but] [m]edics soon recognized that accident victims could escape physical injury completely, yet suffer persistent forms of mental distress long after the event. (2006: 498)

The rise of modernity and industrialization brought with it numerous forms of traumatic experience similar to those associated with railway accidents – Freud’s analysis of the dreams of shell-shock victims suggesting just one example. For the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin however, modern society in general caused “a disorienting psychic condition of traumatic ‘shock’, with hugely destabilizing consequences not only for the individual but also for society” (Morley 2010a: 17). As Luckhurst points out, in his analysis of modern urban environments Benjamin draws explicitly on Freud’s ideas of “the shock that overwhelms psychic defences” describing the city in terms of a series of “traumatic encounters” (Luckhurst 2008: 20-21). Such an experience of the urban/industrial environment suggests an understanding of modernity as inherently traumatic – rather than being an encounter with one particular,

devastating event, it presents a continuous series of minor shocks to the nervous system.

Given the inassimilable, even ghostly nature of traumatic experience (Luckhurst 2006: 499) and Freud's suggestion of an inextricable association between the two concepts, it is perhaps unsurprising to find modernity also described in terms of the uncanny. Indeed, "to many thinkers of the early and mid twentieth century the conditions of daily life within modern technological society could seem one continuous and disturbingly uncanny or sublime experience" (Morley 2010a: 17). The uncanny was, traditionally, associated with the domestic space of the home – as Vidler suggests, in his book *The Architectural Uncanny*, the concept was, "in its first incarnation, a sensation best experienced in the privacy of the interior" (1994: 4). However, intellectuals such as Benjamin felt that modernity changed this – that the uncanny "was also born out of the rise of the great cities, their disturbingly heterogeneous crowds and newly scaled spaces" (Vidler: 4).

This relocation of the uncanny from the domestic sphere to the 'traumatic' space of the modern urban environment came about, as Luckhurst puts it, through "transformations of the relations of so-called traditional society" (2008: 20-21). With the growth of modernity, Vidler argues, came the "the alienation of the individual" as "community bonds were brutally severed" (1994: 4). Karl Marx adapted the idea of individual estrangement to his theory of class alienation when writing his *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, but the rise of this peculiarly urban experience had been eloquently described by Benjamin Constant some years earlier. In the early 1800s, he wrote that:

Individuals, lost in isolation from nature, strangers to the place of their birth, without contact with the past, living only in a rapid present, and thrown down like atoms on an immense and leveled plain, are detached from a fatherland that they see nowhere. (quoted in Vidler 1994: 4)

In his book *The Trauma Question*, Luckhurst describes how by the end of the nineteenth century, Britain had turned from “an agrarian nation into an urban one” (2008: 20). He points out that in “these sprawling, artificial terrains, divorced from nature, commentators began to worry about the overstimulation and exhaustion caused by prolonged immersion” in urban environments, further noting that with the growth of industrialization, new machinery only added to such complications (Luckhurst 2008: 20). Recalling Nye’s examination of the technological sublime, he suggests that although technology “can be seen as the instrumental vehicle for the liberations of modern space-time”, it can also be thought of as a “‘demonic’ force” (Luckhurst 2008: 20) – a force that, as Karl Marx puts it, “reduces humans to the conscious limbs of the automaton” (1980: 141).

This reading of the traumatic space of the industrial environment as “demonic” – together with Marx’s evocative description of its effect on the human figure – suggests why such surroundings might be thought of in terms of the uncanny. As Vidler argues, the uncanny, with its “individual and poetic origins in romanticism,” became generalized by the end of the nineteenth century as an alienating “condition of modern anxiety” (1994: 6). When it “finally became public in metropolis...[a]s a sensation it was no longer easily confined to the bourgeois interior” (Vidler: 6). Manifesting itself within the context through which Freud would later define the concept:

...the uncanny emerged in the late nineteenth century as a special case of the many modern diseases, from phobias to neuroses, variously described by psychoanalysts, psychologists, and philosophers as a distancing from reality forced by reality. Its space was still an interior, but now the interior of the mind (Vidler: 6).

As Freud began studying the disturbing dreams of shell-shock victims – those nightmares caused by the machine-induced, industrial traumas of the First World War – a feeling of ‘unhomeliness’ also began to take its grip over Europe. As Vidler describes the change, “the entire ‘homeland’ of Europe, cradle and apparently secure house of western civilization, was in the process of barbaric regression”, thus the uncanny’s “traditional links with nostalgia” were reinforced through a sense of “[h]omesickness...for the true, natal home” (1994: 7). This sense of homesickness in the face of industrial war speaks not only of a desire for a return to the familiar culture and security of peacetime, but also, perhaps, of a “profound nostalgia for the premodern” (Vidler: 8) – before individuals came to be, as Constant put it, “lost in isolation from nature” (quoted in Vidler: 4). It is this sense of longing for a time or place devoid of feelings of alienation and estrangement, brought about as they are by the industrial ills of modernity, that can mark such experience as uncanny. As Royle suggests, “the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or ‘homesickness’, in other words a compulsion to return” (2003: 2).

The project of restoring harmony to an industrial society beset by the malady of alienation was taken up by the modernist avant-gardes of the twentieth century, for whom “a world estranged and distanced from its own nature could only be recalled to itself by shock, by the effects of things

deliberately ‘made strange’” (Vidler 1994: 8). From the subjective distortions of the Expressionists to the revolutionary aspirations of the Surrealists, the uncanny “readily offered itself as an instrument of ‘defamiliarization’” (Vidler: 8).

The uncanny has manifested itself, then, as both an aesthetic and a psychoanalytical response to the shock of modernity – “a trauma that”, Vidler proposes, “has not been exorcised from the contemporary imaginary” (1994: 9). Those traumas of modernity that continue into the twenty-first century are marked by a sense of alienation common to all urban landscapes (whether industrial or post-industrial), for the uncanny:

... is not a property of the space itself nor can it be provoked by any particular spatial conformation; it is, in its aesthetic dimension, a representation of a mental state of projection that precisely elides the boundaries of the real and the unreal in order to provoke a disturbing ambiguity, a slippage between waking and dreaming. (Vidler 1994: 11)

Like the sublime, the uncanny may occur wherever one’s experience of reality becomes estranged from the familiar (see Chapter One, p45). Resisting any kind of framing, like the sublime the uncanny is also a somewhat subjective encounter problematic to representation: it is, as it were, ‘unpresentable’.

CHAPTER THREE: THE INDEXICAL UNCANNY

As the uncanny and traumatic effects of modernity took shape in the landscapes of industrial life, they also began to reveal themselves within its representational technologies. Since their invention, the nineteenth-century 'new media' of photography and cinema have elicited feelings of both uncertainty and shock. The story of audiences fleeing screaming from the Lumiere brothers' 1896 film of an approaching train¹ perhaps offers one famous example – leading, as it has, the film theorist Tom Gunning to describe early cinema as “a series of visual shocks” (1999: 820). It would seem appropriate to suggest, therefore, that such media present an interesting and apposite form through which to explore the problem of representing traumatic, uncanny or otherwise 'unpresentable' experiences of the industrial landscape. What follows is a consideration of the ways in which the indexical media of cinema and photography have been associated with ideas of the traumatic and the uncanny. In the next chapter (Chapter Four), this also leads to an examination of how an experience of the sublime might be elicited through such media. The present chapter draws initially on Walter Benjamin's conception of cinema as traumatic, before moving on to examine Roland Barthes' reading of photography in terms of trauma. In particular, Barthes' reflections on photography are considered through Laura Mulvey's book *Death 24x a Second*, which applies the French theorist's ideas to an extended reading of both photography and cinema in terms of the uncanny.

¹ *L'arrivée d'un train à La Ciotat* (1896) d. Auguste Lumière and Louis Lumière.

Trauma, Modernity and Photographic Machines

Proposing that camera-based technologies were “crucial to modernity’s reconceptualization of time and its representability”, the film theorist Mary Anne Doane notes that Walter Benjamin understood this shift in perception in terms of the traumatic (2002: 4). Elucidating, for example, his argument that in cinema “perception in the form of shocks was established as a formal principle” (Benjamin 1999: 171), she suggests that the “very rapidity of the changing images in film is potentially traumatic for the spectator” (Doane 2002: 15). Benjamin tends to align shock in film with montage – a formal principle that embodies “something of the restructuration of modern perception” (Doane 2002: 15). Montage is an editing technique generally employed to convey the passage of time in cinema, structuring, as it were, a film’s ‘temporal logic’. In its rapid accumulation and juxtaposition of dislocated time and space, Doane suggests, montage echoes “the excesses of a technologically saturated modern life” (2002: 15). She explains that for Benjamin, the “shock experience of film makes it adequate to its age” (2002: 15). As Allen Meek puts it, Benjamin “emphasized the ways media technologies served to attune experience to new rhythms and speeds of modernity” (Meek 2010: 6).

Benjamin developed his ideas about shock and its relationship to industrial culture’s representational technologies through Freud’s theories of trauma. His essay *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (first published 1939), for example, draws on Freud’s *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) to suggest that with modernity came, as Meek puts it, “the destruction of earlier forms of communal memory and individual interiority” (2010: 7). Benjamin conceived of

photographic media as replacing the “long memory characteristic of more stable societies, localized communities and traditional cultures” (Meek 2010: 6-7). As the fixed, indexical trace of a past moment, the mechanically derived photographic image represents a departure from more organic (sometimes subjective) forms of memory. Thus despite his focus on the traumatic properties of montage, Benjamin also appears to attribute the shock value of photographic imagery to this, perhaps more fundamental, indexical characteristic. What is more, as Doane notes, “it is clear from [Benjamin’s]...delineation of shock as a surface phenomenon unassimilable to meaning, that the cinema’s shock effect is ineluctably associated with its indexicality” (2002: 15). As has been outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the indexical character of the photographic image invokes complex issues of representation. Photography’s distinctively unbiased imprinting of reality marks it apart from what may be considered more ‘subjective’ representational systems (such as painting or literature). The photographic image may, as such, be more readily understood as ‘unassimilable to meaning’: Laura Mulvey, for example, speaks of the intellectual impossibility “of reducing the photograph to language and a grammatical system of meaning”, because of the “presence of an intractable reality in the index” (2006: 63) (this idea is discussed further later in this chapter). It is this conception of the indexical image as irreducible to meaning through which Doane draws her parallel between the indexical characteristics of cinema and the ‘unpresentable’ nature of traumatic shock.

The ‘intractable reality’ of the photograph is a result of the mechanical process of the camera, which produces “unmediated and spontaneous”

images of the real world (Campany 2003: 39). As Barthes suggests “[a] specific photograph, in effect, is never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents)...the Photograph always carries its referent within itself” (2000: 5).² Barthes speaks of the nature of a photograph’s immutable connection to its referent and its lack of ‘meaningful’ or mediated representational baggage with reference to Jacques Lacan’s concept of ‘the Real’: “In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else...[it is], in short, what Lacan calls the *Tuche*, the Occasion, the Encounter, the Real, in its indefatigable expression” (Barthes 2000: 4). Lacan’s notion of the Real describes “that which resists symbolization...the traumatic kernel at the core of subjectivity and the symbolic order...the ultimate, unspeakable, limit of human existence” (Homer 2005: 94). Like the ‘unpresentable’ concepts of the sublime, the uncanny or the traumatic, the Real exists beyond representation. Lacan defines it as an “object which isn’t an object any longer”, something against which “all words cease and all categories fail” (1991: 164). The Real may, therefore, be described as that state of unmediated nature from which we are permanently severed because of our entry into language (the root of our subjectivity and consciousness). It is inexpressible precisely because our adherence to any system of representation (or ‘language’) prompts a separation from the actuality of the event. As Mulvey describes this impossibility:

Lacan’s category of ‘the Real’ refers to the actuality of a traumatic event, personal or historical. The mind searches for words or images that might

² Barthes does however qualify this statement somewhat: “...or at least [the photograph] is not *immediately* or *generally* distinguished from its referent (as is the case for every other image, encumbered – from the start, and because of its status – by the way in which the object is simulated)” (2000: 5).

translate and convey that reality. But its translation into 'Symbolic' form and into consciousness separates the two, just as an account of a dream is separated from the time of dreaming and loses its original feeling. (2006: 128)

The camera-machine's inhuman nature differs from that of other, more subjective modes of representation through its ability to figure the Real. As Mulvey argues "[t]he human imagination engages with the mechanical integrity of photographic registration", and therefore a photograph, "however influenced it might be by its surrounding culture or its maker's vision, is affected by the Real both in its materiality and in the human subject's response to it." (2006: 58). The photographic image, it would seem, is uniquely capable of presenting something of the traumatic – the unrepresentable – if perhaps only negatively, as a scar, a trace or index of the Real.

This 'Real' that clings to the photograph, its intractable reality, is evoked by Barthes in *Camera Lucida* through his use of Lacan's term *tuche* (2000: 4). As Sean Homer describes it, "[t]he *tuche* presents itself in the form of trauma, that is to say, that which is impossible for the subject to bear and assimilate" (2005: 93). Barthes' concept of photography is structured around this notion of trauma as "the hard impenetrable kernel at the heart of subjectivity" (Homer: 93). As Mulvey points out, Barthes' use of the term *tuche*:

...leads back to Freud's theory of trauma as an event or experience that arouses too much psychic excitement for the subject to be able to translate its significance into words. Trauma leaves a mark on the unconscious, a kind of index of the psyche that parallels the photograph's trace of an original event. (2006: 65)

Parallels between trauma and the indexical nature of the photographic trace are self-evident in much literature on the former subject. For example, the trauma theorist Cathy Caruth suggests that “since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time” (1991: 7). Similarly, Meek writes that traumatic memories “are experienced with a sense of great vividness and immediacy: they seem to retain an indelible imprint of the past and thereby an incontestable link with history” (2007). The descriptions of delay, trace and historicity in these quotes seem interchangeable with a description of the nature of the photographic image. Mulvey describes this correlation between trauma and the indexical camera-image, elaborating upon the idea that they share a similar sense of temporality – and points out that the relationship is not exclusive to the still photographic image:

The cinema (like photography) has a privileged relation to time, preserving the moment at which the image is registered, inscribing an unprecedented reality into its representation of the past. This, as it were, storage function may be compared to the memory left in the unconscious by an incident lost to consciousness. Both have the attributes of the indexical sign, the mark of trauma or the mark of light, and both need to be deciphered retrospectively across delayed time. (2006: 9)

While the indexical camera-image as a trace of the Real marks it, like trauma, as resistant to symbolic form or meaning, its sense of delayed time also seems to be problematic to linguistic reduction. As Mulvey suggests, “language may simply not be adequate to describe the photograph’s tense” (2006: 57). She notes that Barthes describes the essence of the photographic image as “this was now”, citing Ann Banfield’s observation that the phrase is his attempt “to find the linguistic form capable of recapturing a present in the

past, a form that it turns out spoken language does not offer” (Banfield 1990: 75, quoted in Mulvey 2006: 57). Mulvey surmises that “[t]he photograph pushes language and its ability to articulate time to the limits of its possibility, leaving the spectator with a slightly giddy feeling” (2006: 58). She goes on to suggest that this vertiginous sensation, a confusion of temporality caused by the complex relationship between the photographic image and the Real, “gives rise to that sense of uncertainty associated with the uncanny” (2006: 58). As Freud suggests, the delayed resurfacing of a repressed traumatic memory may bring about a feeling of the uncanny. It is, similarly, an ambiguous interaction between the delayed time of the photographic imprint and the traumatic Real of its referent that may confer upon the camera-image a sense of the uncanny.

Death, the Double and Déjà vu

If, as Mulvey suggests, the uncanny manifests itself in the photograph as an intellectual uncertainty about time, such ambiguity may also be traced in Barthes’ association of the photograph with death. Contemplating the portrait of a prisoner who is condemned to die, Barthes considers the relationship between the photograph’s complex ‘this was now’ temporality and, as he puts it, “that rather terrible thing that is there in every photograph: the return of the dead” (Barthes 2000: 9). He observes, “[t]his will be and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake” (Barthes 2000: 96). Throughout *Camera Lucida*, Barthes insists upon the presence of death in photography, articulating this assertion through an extended

meditation on a photograph of his recently deceased mother. He writes, “[i]n front of the photograph of my mother as a child, I tell myself: she is going to die: I shudder...over a catastrophe that has already occurred. Whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.” (2000: 96).

Considering further the uncanny nature of photography, it is interesting to note that Barthes’ contention – that the ‘return of the dead’ is in every photograph – echoes Freud’s description of the uncanny as arising in relation “to death and dead bodies, to the return of the dead and to spirits and ghosts” (quoted in Mulvey 2006: 39). Mulvey reflects that from its beginnings, photography has engendered associations with life after death, suggesting that the medium “marks a point where an indexical sign of Peircian semiotic theory overlaps with an uncanny of Freudian psychoanalytic theory” (2006: 54). As though invoking Freud’s talk of spirits and ghosts, Tom Gunning, too, speaks of the “spectre-like” qualities of photography (1995: 47). He suggests that since its emergence, photography has been experienced as “an uncanny phenomenon, one which seemed to undermine the unique identity of objects and people, endlessly reproducing the appearances of objects, creating a parallel world of phantasmatic doubles” (Gunning 1995: 42-43). Indeed, Freud gave some consideration to the significance of the double in *The Uncanny*, arguing that the doubling or repetition of a person, object or event can evoke a sense of the uncanny (2003a: 143). He also talks explicitly in his 1919 text about the double as “an insurance against the extinction of the self” and cites Otto Rank’s conception of it as “an energetic denial of the power of death” (quoted in Freud 2003a: 142). It is the immortalizing powers of photography

and cinema, their ability to double and hold or 'embalm' the flow of life, which contributes to the uncanny characteristics of such media.

The camera-image's association with the double also exposes, once again, the medium's strange temporality. Nicholas Royle suggests that it is "difficult to imagine a theory of the ghost or double without a theory of *déjà vu*", by which he infers that an experience of the strange, uncanny temporality of *déjà vu* involves the feeling that the present reality has a double (2003: 182-183). Mulvey, too, invokes the concept of *déjà vu* alongside that of the uncanny, in an attempt to articulate the peculiar temporal space of the photograph. Reflecting upon Barthes' discussion of the photograph of the dead-prisoner-awaiting-death (that vertiginous temporality he describes as "[t]his will be and this has been"), she points out that:

... an overwhelming and irrational sense of fate or destiny...is also a mark of the uncanny. Such a disordering of the sensible in the face of sudden disorientation is similar to *déjà vu*, involuntary memory, a suddenly half-remembered dream or the strange sense of reality breaking through the defences of the conscious mind. (Mulvey 2006: 62)

The uncanny temporality of the photographic index, the "trace of the past that persists into present", manifests itself here, and perhaps in all photographs, as "an effect of confusion between living and dead" (Mulvey 2006: 31). This sense of uncertainty recalls Jentsch's suggestion that a feeling of the uncanny may be brought about through "doubt as to whether an apparently animate object really is alive" or, alternatively "whether a lifeless object might not perhaps be animate" (quoted in Freud 2003a: 135). Like a stalled automata – the mechanized figures Jentsch proposes might induce such feelings of uncertainty – the photograph's "suspension of time, its conflation of life and

death, the animate and the inanimate, raises...a sense of disquiet that is aggravated...by the photograph's mechanical, chemical and indifferent nature" (Mulvey 2006: 60-61). This 'indifferent nature' of the photograph, the absence, as Bazin put it, of "the creative intervention of man", leads to its complex categorization as a representational form (1967: 13). What Barthes sees in the photograph – "neither Art nor Communication," but "Reference" – is, ultimately, what leads to his association of the medium with death (2000: 76-77). As Derrida puts it:

Whatever the nature of the art of photography, that is to say, its intervention, its style, there is a point at which the photographic act is not an artistic act, a point at which it registers passively and this poignant, piercing passivity represents the opportunity of this reference to death; it seizes a reality that is there, that was there in an indissoluble now. In a word, one must choose between art and death. (2003: 220)

Like Barthes, what Derrida describes is an understanding of photography's unmediated indexical accord with reality – its lifeless passivity in the face of inflection or meaning – as irreconcilable with the more 'active' subjective expression normally associated with art. The mechanical process of photography allows little room for the resulting image to communicate anything of the experience of the photographer. As Andre Bazin describes the arrival of the photographic process: "between the originating object and its reproduction there intervenes only the instrumentality of a nonliving agent. For the first time an image of the world is formed automatically, without the creative intervention of man" (1967: 13). Reflecting upon photography's lack of creative intervention, Stanley Carvell too suggests that upon its arrival, "[s]o far as photography satisfied a wish, it satisfied a wish not confined to painters,

but the human wish, intensifying since the reformation, to escape subjectivity and metaphysical isolation” (1979: 21). At the moment a photograph is taken “all subjectivity that requires a subject, an I, is eliminated” (Banfield 1990: 81). The thoughts and feelings of the photographer become redundant, superfluous – the resulting photograph takes on an “unthinking existence.” (Banfield 1990: 79). Any representational system that might generate meaning is negated by the indexical nature of the photographic apparatus. Barthes appears to delight in this refusal of the photographic image to be reduced to meaning, asking, for example: “[w]hat did I care about the rules of composition of the photographic landscape? I saw only the referent...looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be primitive, without culture” (2000: 7). A photograph is the result of a mechanical process that indiscriminately records everything in front of the camera lens the moment the shutter is released: it is “indifferent to all intermediaries: it does not invent; it is authentication itself...Every photograph is a certificate of presence” (Barthes 2000: 87). Mulvey suggests that this indiscriminate passivity leads to what she terms a “slippage of language” (2006: 58). Barthes implies much the same thing when, in the first pages of *Camera Lucida*, he writes, “the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially...[it is] somehow stupid” (2000: 4). As he proposes, “a photograph cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is wholly ballasted by the contingency of which it is the weightless, transparent envelope.” (Barthes: 5).

Cinema: Art or Index?

Cinema is the art of the index; it is an attempt to make art out of a footprint.

(Manovich 2000: 174)

While for the most part *Camera Lucida* dwells upon the idea that the camera is a machine of passive registration – that, as Derrida puts it, “the photographic act is not an artistic act” (2003: 220) – in his book’s final chapter Barthes declares that photography “can in fact be an art” (2000: 117). He continues by identifying cinema (or “at least the fictional cinema”) as participating in what he calls “this domestication of Photography” (2000: 117). The photographic image, he feels, loses its compelling “that-has-been” quality through integration into the fictional space-time of the cinema (2000: 77). As Mulvey points out, the space-time of a fiction film’s narrative tends to “mask the primary, the moment of cinematic registration, and [to] subordinate the fascination of movement as recorded time to narrative drama” (2006: 183). She continues: “for the cinema to spin the magic that makes its story-telling work, the cinema as index has had to take on the secondary role of ‘prop’ for narrative verisimilitude” (Mulvey 2006: 183).

Despite his proviso, however, Barthes’ ideas about cinema’s domestication of the photographic image – its translation of document to artform – do appear to extend beyond fictional film. It would appear that, for him, there is something more fundamental about the moving image’s refusal to “protest its former existence” – that in the translation from still to moving image the photograph as index loses something of its basic essence (Barthes 2000: 89). He argues that the cinema’s vision is “oneiric” (dreamlike), while

the photograph's is "ecmnesic" (the hallucinatory evocation of fragments of the past)³ (2000: 117). While he acknowledges that cinema derives from the photographic still, he argues that it has a "different phenomenology" and therefore represents a different art form (Barthes: 78). The moving image's photographic base, "taken in flux," he writes, "is impelled, ceaselessly drawn towards other views" (Barthes: 89) – "the pose swept away and denied by the continuous series of images" (Barthes: 78). While he accepts that cinema retains a photographic referent, he argues that this referent is constantly shifting and therefore "does not make a claim in favour of its reality, it does not protest its former existence; it does not cling to me: it is not a specter" (Barthes 2000: 89). As Mulvey explains:

For Barthes the cinema's relentless movement, reinforced by the masquerade and movement of fiction, could not offer the psychic engagement and emotion he derived from the still photograph. Unlike the photograph, a movie watched in correct conditions (24 frames a second, darkness) tends to be elusive. Like running water, fire or the movement of trees in the wind, this elusiveness has been intrinsic to the cinema's fascination and its beauty. The insubstantial and irretrievable passing of the celluloid film image is in direct contrast to the way the photograph's stillness allows time for the presence of time to emerge within the image. (2006: 66)

Echoing Barthes' conception of the cinema as a 'different phenomenon', Mulvey suggests that through the translation of still images into moving images "[t]he uncanny nature of the indexical inscription of life, as in the photograph, merges with the uncanny of mechanized human movement that belongs to the long line of replicas and automata" (2006: 175). Through this process, she suggests, the uncanny nature of the photograph is transformed

³ I have found no reliable definition for 'ecmnesic', but I take it as corresponding to the French *ecmnésique*, denoting a kind of Proustian delirium in which fragments of one's past resurface.

from “one emotional and aesthetic paradigm into another” (Mulvey 2006: 175). This merging of ‘uncannies’ – the uncanniness of still photography with the uncanniness of its mechanically animated descendant – seems to echo the point at which Freud and Jentsch’s uncannies meet. Jentsch’s conception of the uncanny pertains to an uncertainty “as to whether an apparently living being really is animate and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate” – for which he gives the example of (mechanically animated) automata (1906: 8). For Freud the uncanny is associated with the concept of death and the return of the dead (that is, the revival or reanimation of the lifeless). These linked but differing interpretations of the uncanny meet at the point at which the animate and the inanimate become confused: as Mulvey puts it, “[a] mechanical replica of the human body and the human body from which life has departed both threaten the crucial division between animate and inanimate” (2006: 37-38). In cinema, the deathliness associated with the still photograph merges with the mechanical animation of that very inertness. As she explains:

The cinema combines, perhaps more perfectly than any other medium, two human fascinations: one with the boundary between life and death and the other with the mechanical animation of the inanimate, particularly the human, figure. These porous boundaries introduce the concept of the uncanny... (Mulvey 2006: 11)

At the level of the individual frame, cinema is comprised of the still photographic index that Barthes associated with death. Barthes felt, however, that in animating the image, this association was annulled. Despite his protestations though, it would seem that death does have a place in the moving image. This becomes particularly apparent, for example, when we

consider early cinema. Describing the Lumière's films as "touched with mystery", Mulvey imagines the "disturbing, uncanny sensation of seeing movement fossilized for the first time" and suggests that "the images' silence and lack of colour added to their ghostly atmosphere" (2006: 36). Here, cinema appears not to negate the deathlike quality of the photographic image, but rather retain it, while simultaneously resurrecting the dead as moving ghosts: animated specters that blur the boundary between the living and deceased all the more acutely. As Robert Smith puts it:

Early viewers of film were amazed and moved by this miraculous gift dispensed by film, that of reanimating what had gone...Like Christ calling Lazarus, film seemed to bring back to life what had been irrevocably lost; it blurred the distinction between life and death. (2000: 121)

Over time, it seems, early cinema has taken on yet another, even more acutely uncanny aspect. For viewers of old films today, Mulvey suggests...

[t]o look back into the reality of that lost world by means of the cinema is to have the sensation of looking into a time machine. However clichéd the concept, the presence of that reality, of the past preserved, becomes increasingly magical and uncanny. (2006: 52)

There is, certainly, something about cinema having the still photograph as its base that contributes to the form's uncanny quality. The illusion of movement is created by the mechanical animation of fixed images, but "like the beautiful automaton...a residual trace of stillness, or the hint of stillness within movement, survives, sometimes enhancing, sometimes threatening" (Mulvey 2006: 66). In the final pages of *Camera Lucida*, Barthes describes his experience of watching a scene featuring an automaton in Federico Fellini's film *Cassanova* (1976): "when Cassanova began dancing with the young

automaton,” he writes, “my eyes were touched with a kind of painful and delicious intensity...each detail...overwhelmed me” (2000: 116). He sees in “the figure’s slenderness, its tenuity...something desperately inert yet available”, revealing that, at the same moment, “I could not help thinking about Photography: for I could say all this about the photographs which touched me” (2000:116).

Barthes perceives in the automaton a parallel with the animated yet inert base of cinema – the photographic still. Like the automaton, the cinema’s inert base is brought to life through mechanization. Reflecting upon Barthes’ reaction to this scene from *Cassanova*, Mulvey proposes that “[i]t is as though the movement of the mechanical figure suggested that of the other, the projector, which should have remained hidden” (2006: 179). Paraphrasing Raymond Bellour, she continues, “the automaton leads to the film’s mechanism...which, like the inside of the beautiful doll, needs to be disguised to maintain its credibility. Film...suffers from the violence caused by extracting a fragment from the whole” (Mulvey 2006: 179). The figure of the automaton, therefore, acts as a “metaphor for a fragmented...aesthetic of cinema” (Mulvey 2006: 180). This fragmentation exposes in the moving image what Barthes felt it lacked: the photograph’s attestation to a past reality (and, consequently, its association with death).

Fragmented Cinema

What Mulvey suggests, in her response to Barthes’ comments about *Cassanova*, is that an awareness of the mechanism of cinema – an

awareness of the “time of the index” – is capable of fragmenting the illusory narrative drive of a fiction film (2006: 183). “[T]he presence of stillness” she writes “brings with it a threat to the credibility of the moving image itself, the ghostly presence of the still strip of film on which the illusion of movement depends” (Mulvey 2006: 155).

Just as the sight of the automaton in *Cassanova* led Barthes to reflect upon the still photograph as the inert base of the cinematic image, the presence of an actual still photograph within the narrative space of a film may bring about a similar response. In his essay *The Pensive Spectator* (first published 1984), Raymond Bellour argues that:

...the presence of a photo on the screen gives rise to very particular trouble. Without ceasing to advance its own rhythm, the film seems to freeze, to suspend itself, inspiring in the spectator...a growing fascination...Creating another distance, another time, the photo permits me to reflect on the cinema. (2007: 119-120)

The ‘narrative drive’ of Mulvey’s book *Death 24x a Second* (2006) is her interest in what new possibilities of cinematic spectatorship are offered by digital media. She observes the “obvious, everyday reality” that viewers are now able to pause and repeat favourite scenes from movies at will, thus fragmenting their cinematic experience and allowing a greater space for reflection (Mulvey 2006: 8). This basic premise, however, provokes a more profound inquiry into the subject that gives her book its subtitle: *Stillness and the Moving Image*. As she explains in her 2003 essay of the same name:

...by stilling or slowing movie images, the time of the film’s original moment of registration suddenly bursts through its artificial, narrative surface. Another moment of time, behind the fictional time of the story, emerges through this

fragmentation and excavation of a sequence or film fragment. (Mulvey 2007: 137-138)

As Mulvey implies, it is not only the explicit presence of a still that may provoke a state of awareness and reflection upon the moving image: slow motion or elongated shots may also confront the audience “with a palpable sense of cinematic time that leads back, from the time of screening, to the time of registration” (2006: 129). The repetition of privileged sequences, too, can induce such effects: the unique ability of cinema to resurrect the past may become “both more real and more mysterious” through the repetition of a specific fragment of film (Mulvey 2006: 160). Mulvey proposes that this “return to certain moments or sequences” makes the materiality of a film visible (2006: 192): citing Barthes, she argues that the “more often a sequence is viewed, the more it becomes an extended ‘emanation of an intractable reality’” (2006: 189). What is more, such repetition may elicit a keen sense of the uncanny: “repeated with mechanical exactitude” the film fragment conjures up the “precinematic ghosts of automata” (Mulvey 2006: 170).⁴ Through such fragmentation of cinema, Mulvey proposes, “the loss of ego and self-consciousness that has been, for so long, one of the pleasures of the movies gives way to an alert scrutiny and scanning of the screen” (2006: 165). The space for reflection created by fragmentation invites a “fetishistic scopophilia” in which the “beauty of the screen and mystery of situation” is privileged over “suspense, conflict or linear development.” (Mulvey 2006: 165).

Through the stilling, slowing, extending or repeating of sequences, the

⁴ Continuing this reading of ‘fragmented’ cinema in terms of the uncanny, Mulvey also speculates that “[t]here is something of...the repetition compulsion in the pensive spectator’s urge to return to the same...sequences, the same privileged moments.” (2006: 192).

reality of the image separates from the time of the story. The space for reflection that such fragmentation brings about “restores to the moving image the heavy presence of passing time and of the mortality that...Barthes associate[s] with the still photograph” (Mulvey 2006: 66). Within the forward motion of the cinematic image, the past reality of the referent asserts itself, bestowing upon it an acute sense of that uncanny space between life and death.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE ART OF THE DIGITAL INDEX

Reality, as it evolves, sweeps me with it. I am struck by everything and, though not everything strikes me in the same way, I am always struck by the same basic contradiction: although I can always see how beautiful anything could be if only I could change it, in practically every case there is nothing I can really do. Everything is changed into something else in my imagination, then the dead weight of things changes it back into what it was in the first place. A bridge between imagination and reality must be built.

(Vaneigem 1994, quoted in Keiller 1997)

While fictional cinema has traditionally sought to forget its indexical foundations for the sake of story time, the avant-garde has “consistently brought the mechanism and the material of film into visibility, closing the gap between the filmstrip and the screen” (Mulvey 2006: 67). In the 1960s and 1970s, structural filmmakers (e.g. Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Peter Gidal) created works that explored the specificities of their medium, bringing to the fore its materiality. This was achieved through, for example, scratching the celluloid, highlighting the grain of the film, revealing the gap between film frames or even asserting the presence of the projector itself (Doane 2007a: 129). Through interrogating and exposing the physical mechanism of celluloid imagery, its status as an indexical document is emphasized. Such an awareness of the materiality of film can underline its status as ‘real’, thus confirming the physical reality – and therefore veracity – of the indexical connection to the original referent.

It is, however, not only avant-garde intervention that can bring about such effects. Over time, the material base of the celluloid image becomes subject to degradation and decay. This too bequeaths an aura of 'pastness' or passing time upon the image – affirming what Barthes called the photographic image's "this-has-been" quality (2000: 79). As Doane puts it "[t]he scratches and markings on old film stock, the decay of the image, are the marks of time and a historical trajectory" (2007b: 118). Such damage is the index of another time, parallel to, yet separate from, that time fossilized in the photographic image.

The digitization of photographic capture, however, changes – perhaps even annuls – this relationship between the indexical trace and its material base: as David Rodowick proposes, "the nature of 'representation,' or, better, the act of presenting, changes with digital processing" (2007: 125). This change has led some commentators to speculate whether "the digital effectively annihilates the idea of a medium" (Doane 2007a: 130). Digital images are stored virtually, on camera memory cards and computer hard drives, thereby losing the sense of physical reality associated with the traditional photograph or filmstrip. This immateriality confers upon the image a previously unknown longevity, enabling it to avoid the sense of loss generated by degradation, decay and the marks of passing time (Doane 2007b: 118). This can lead to an uncertainty as to the specificity of an image (arguably evoking that uncanny confusion brought about by the double and *déjà vu*). The scars of time reveal an object's history, and therefore its autonomous identity. Within the physical realm, when images are copied each takes on a separate life, accumulating the traces of their individual trajectories through

time in the form of visible degradation (dirt, scratches, fading, etc.). With digital images however, there is no difference between an original and its copy, its double: “information can simply be transferred, without loss, from one ‘medium’ to another”, and the way in which it is stored “does not make its mark on the representation” (Doane 2007a: 144).

Not only is the digital image unable to profess its own history, but this severance from materiality has also induced a crisis of faith in the reality – or rather the indexical veracity – of the photographic image. The aura of indexical authenticity associated with traditional photography and film is a consequence of a materiality that professes a direct physical connection to its referent – as Doane puts it, “[i]ts promise is that of touching the real.” (2007a: 148). The digital however, “as an abstract information system, made a break with analogue imagery, finally sweeping away the relation with reality” (Mulvey 2006: 18).

Rodowick describes this crisis of faith in the index in terms of the “fundamental separation of inputs and outputs” in digital photographic imaging (2007: 113). He suggests that, on initial inspection at least, the relationship between digital images and indexicality is not problematic, acknowledging that “indexes have no necessary relationship of similarity or resemblance to their causes...[they] are signs of existence: the present or past action of a determinate force” (2007: 115). He does, however, insist that “(analogical) *transcription* should be distinguished from (digital) *conversion* or *calculation*” (Rodowick 2007: 116). Digital capture converts a “nonquantifiable image into an abstract or mathematical notation” and through this process the “indexical link to physical reality is weakened, because light must be converted into an

abstract symbolic structure independent of and discontinuous with physical space and time” (Rodowick 2007: 117). Rodowick suggests that, as a result of its conversion of indexical information into abstract data, digital photography’s connection with the reality of the referent has a lack of integrity – that, in other words, what Tom Gunning refers to as the photograph’s ‘truth claim’ is weakened.

Gunning’s use of the term ‘truth claim’ alludes to photography’s widely held status as a medium that accurately portrays reality. He states, “I use the word ‘truth claim’ because I want to emphasize that this is not simply a property inherent in a photograph, but a claim made for it” (2008: 27). In his essay *What is the Point of an Index*, he notes that “[a] great deal of the discussion of the digital revolution has involved its supposed devastating effect on the truth claim of photography” (2008: 27). Gunning suggests that this is either from a paranoid position, for example people worrying that manipulated photographs will be used falsely, as evidence of events that did not occur, or from what he calls a ‘schizophrenic’ position, in which manipulation opens up a world of subjective play and liberation from the real (2008: 27). He is, however, somewhat ambivalent about such speculation. He argues that while digitization alters the nature of the photographic process in numerous ways, its ‘truth claim’ – in so far as traditional photography had one to begin with – remains to some extent intact. Like Rodowick, he addresses the fact that digital capture’s association with indexicality is not in itself problematic: “storage in terms of numerical data does not eliminate indexicality” he explains, noting that this is why digital photographs “can serve as passport photographs and the other sorts of legal evidence or documents”

(Gunning 2008: 24). Gunning further notes that indexicality is not synonymous with the photographic, pointing out that long before digitization “indexical instruments *par excellence* – such as devices for reading pulse rate, temperature, heart rate, and the like, or speedometers, wind gauges, and barometers – all converted their information into numbers” (2008: 24-25). He concludes, therefore, with the point that an index does not need to resemble the thing it represents:

The indexicality of a traditional photograph inheres in the effect of light on chemicals, not in the picture it produces.¹ The rows of numerical data produced by a digital camera and the image of traditional chemical photography are both indexically determined by objects outside the camera. (Gunning 2008: 25)

If, then, both digital and analogue cameras retain their status as instruments of indexical capture, it is perhaps the digital image’s potential for manipulation post-capture that has called its truth claim most critically into question. However, the truth claim of the photographic image has always been unreliable – its “seemingly mechanical reiteration of the facts” never deemed entirely unquestionable (Gunning 2008: 31). As Gunning notes, traditional photography “also possesses processes that can attenuate, ignore, or even undo the indexical” (2008: 26). He points out that a photographer’s aesthetic decisions in relation to lighting, exposure and composition, as well as processes such as superimposing multiple negatives and solarization,

¹ Gunning notes that the qualities a photograph must possess to pass as an accurate depiction of reality are not necessarily bound up in its indexicality. “Our evaluation of a photograph as accurate (i.e. visually reflecting its subject) depends not simply on its indexical basis (the chemical process), but on our recognition of it as looking like its subject.” He suggests that iconicity (the perceived similarity of form between a representation and its referent) is also an important factor, and points out that “one could produce an indexical image of something or someone that remained unrecognizable...the image must be recognizable for us to see it as a picture of the referent” (2008: 26).

have “always delivered photography from a simple adherence to accuracy and truth claims” (2008: 31). As the Magnum photographer Donovan Wylie observes, “[d]igital photography has cleared away a misconception that should have been cleared away at the very beginning of photography – the camera doesn’t lie. Actually, the camera doesn’t lie, photographers do” (quoted in Badger 2007: 233).

Though digital processes can alter and manipulate images “more quickly and more seamlessly” than their analogue counterparts, the differences between digital and film-based photography are relative rather than absolute (Gunning 2008: 26). The advent of digital photography and the translation of the photographic index into a numerical code represents a significant change, but one that is no more or less revolutionary than the “replacement of the wet collodion process by the dry plate, or the conquering of exposure time with instantaneous photography” (Gunning 2008: 38). In other words, “the digital revolution will change how photographs are made, who makes them, and how they are used – but they will still be photographs” (Gunning 2008: 38).

In contrast to Rodowick, then, Gunning’s analysis suggests that digitization has not radically destabilized the already tentative truth claim of the photographic image. It has simply called attention to the uncertain ground that lies between the photograph as document and the photograph as artwork. Digital photographs have, therefore, retained at least something of the analogue image’s characteristic of indexical veracity, while at the same time allowing a greater and more seamless level of creative intervention.

The Uncanny Art of the Digital Index

Gunning's measured perspective on the impact of digitization appears to stand in contrast to that of a number of other commentators, all of whom have hailed its arrival in terms not dissimilar to those used by Barthes to describe cinema's effect on the photographic image (disassociated from its indexical base through animation and the intrusion of fiction, we have heard Barthes argue, the photographic image transforms from document into artform; see Chapter Three, p75). The possibility of intervention and manipulation afforded by digital imaging processes – not to mention their speculated elision of the real through the loss of a physical connection between object and image – has led theorists such as Mulvey and Manovich to consider these new media in terms of a creative invention traditionally associated with 'subjective' artforms such as painting. As Mulvey proposes:

In the 1990s digital technology brought back the human element and man-made illusions. The story of mechanical, photographic, reproduction of reality came to an end...the painterly character of the illusions of the magic lantern, the tradition of human ingenuity returned to visual culture. (2006: 19-20)

Gunning and Mulvey each make legitimate claims – claims that are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Consider, for example, the one characteristic of digitization that Gunning acknowledges has changed the nature of photographic imaging significantly: its ability to modify pictures seamlessly (2008: 26). The “undetectability of these manipulations”, alongside their “ability to undermine confidence in *any* image” (Doane 2007a: 142) can provoke distinctly disquieting effects. The unsettling effect of such imperceptible alterations relies on the digital image retaining its ability to

convince as an index of reality: if a persuasive impression of the real is imperceptibly aligned with the subjective, creative intervention of the digital outlined by Mulvey, an aspect of the uncanny absent from (or at least less acute in) the analogue photographic image seems to manifest itself. As Freud insists, an uncanny effect often occurs when the distinction “between fantasy and reality is blurred” (2003a: 150)

However, though perhaps less acutely, an uncanny juxtaposition of the real with the fantastic has been associated with the nature of the photographic image since long before the advent of digitization. The analogue photograph as document – the ‘intractable reality’ of its indexical image – is, for example, theorized by Barthes alongside his associations of it with the intellectual uncertainty of death and the return of the dead (Mulvey 2006: 63). As Mulvey points out, in both Barthes’ and Bazin’s writing on photography and cinema:

... expressions of paradox and ambivalence recur, bearing witness to the surprising connection between reality and the uncanny. Both writers evoke a narrow, or blurred, boundary between emanations of the material world and those of the human imagination. (2006: 63)

Though analogue images already professed this uncanny relation between imagination and reality, it may be speculated that the effect is uncannily doubled with the arrival of the digital: “[w]hat we find to be uncanny and unsettling,” suggests Rodowick “is the spatial similarity of digital images to the now antecedent practice of photography and film” (2007: 98). Though perhaps ontologically dissimilar in their indexical processes, the digital photographic image functions without difficulty in place of its analogue counterpart (a notion supported by Gunning’s observation that digital photographs can be used in

legal documents such as passports [Gunning 2008: 24]). This similarity of form means that, regardless of its disputed 'truth claim', the digitally captured image inherits at least something of the analogue image's historical association with reality.

Through digitization, photography and film may have embraced an almost infinite malleability akin to painting, but they will always retain something of the particular power of the indexical trace of the real, which no painting, however objective, possesses. As Rodowick notes, "despite all self-consciousness about the possibility of altering or falsifying photographs, they will still be taken, and questioned, as historical documents in a way that historical paintings or sketches...will not be" (2007: 62).² The aesthetic potential of this fact is articulated by Manovich when, speaking of the digitization of cinema, he declares: "while retaining visual realism unique to the photographic process, film obtains the plasticity which was previously only possible in painting or animation" (2000: 179). Such a conflation of ontologies – the merging of art and index, imagination and reality – brings a new paradox to the realm of artistic representation.

Mulvey identifies Jeff Wall as an artist who often explores the uncertain ground between art and index, noting that he has "brought the 'manual' back into his photographic work, while...also incorporating the aesthetic and emotional resonance of the index" (2006: 20). In Wall's piece *A Sudden Gust*

² Bazin seems to support this last point, observing that no matter how realistic a painting might appear, it is "always in fee to an inescapable subjectivity. The fact that a human hand intervened cast[s] a shadow of doubt over the image" (1967: 12). This 'doubt' occupies a complex position in digitally captured images, for although doubt is an acknowledged issue in terms of their truth claim, the gestural trace of the human hand – the traditional signifier of subjectivity in painting – is entirely absent.

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Figure 7 Jeff Wall, *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)*, 1993. Transparency in lightbox. 229 x 377 cm.

of Wind (After Hokusai) (1993) he combines the camera's ability "to capture a precise moment in time with a technique drawn from the more 'painterly' potential of the digital" (Mulvey 2006: 20). On initial inspection, Wall's image (Figure 7, preceding page) convinces as the document of a 'real' moment. But, as Mulvey points out:

...the photograph seems to go, in a strange way, beyond the instant it represents. It seems to be too visually complex, and too theatrical in its gestures. Rather than catching a decisive moment, *A Sudden Gust of Wind* pays tribute to the aesthetic concept of the indexically caught instant through a detour into non-indexical technology. (2006: 21)

Through combining digital manipulation with the indexical aesthetic of the camera (the subjective with the objective, imagination with 'reality'), Wall's piece "dramatizes the dialogue between the two" (Mulvey 2006: 21). Whilst making use of the creative invention and subjectivity conventionally associated with painting (a nod, perhaps, to the original Hokusai print the piece is based upon), the work retains the aesthetic impact of the indexical trace of the real.

The issues surrounding such a combination of creative invention and mechanical registration in digitally manipulated photographs lead Gunning to contemplate whether users of digital editing software desire the ability to "create an image or, rather...to *transform* an image that can still be recognized as a photograph" (2008: 27). Somewhat echoing Rodowick's assertion that digital photographs "will still be taken, and questioned, as historical documents" (2007: 62), he proposes that the power of such digitally manipulated images "depends on our recognizing them as *manipulated photographs*, being aware of the strata of the indexical (or perhaps better, the

visually recognizable) beneath the manipulation” (2008: 41). This insight leads Gunning to contend that “[r]ather than denying photography’s truth claim, the practice of faking photographs depends upon and demonstrates it”, thereby highlighting an inherent contradiction in any concerns regarding the negative impact of the digital on photography’s truth claim (2008: 29). He concludes:

...the particular artistic and entertaining delight of digitally manipulated photographs depends on a continued investment in the photograph as potentially an accurate representation, causing a playful inversion of associations rather than simply canceling them out. (Gunning 2008: 33)

The powerful effects of a “photographic image of a familiar world skillfully or imaginatively distorted in an unfamiliar manner” are brought about through a merging of art and index that preserves a sense of the real while at the same time adding a sense of ambiguity (Gunning 2008: 33). It is the defamiliarization caused by the imaginative distortions of digital manipulation that brings about a feeling of the uncanny in such images: their amalgamation of art and index leads to an intellectual uncertainty with regard to the borders between fantasy and reality, real and representation.

The uncanny combination of imagination and reality in photographic works such as Wall’s *A Sudden Gust of Wind (After Hokusai)* is brought about, as Doane puts it, by the “seamless combination of image fragments from different sources, and invisible constructions or interventions in image formation” (2007a: 142). Though ‘constructed’, such work relies heavily on the genuine indexical status of its different components: in Wall’s case “over 100 photographs, taken over the course of more than a year, to achieve a seamless montage that gives the illusion of capturing a real moment in time”

(Tate Modern n.d.). Such processes may also involve a certain amount of creative intervention regarding the subtle appearance of each fragment, perhaps even the image as a whole – what Doane refers to as “the manipulation of intensities” (2007a: 142). There is, however, a point at which creative intervention becomes creative invention: as Paul Willeman observes, “[a]n image of a person in a room need no longer mean that the person was in that particular room, or that such a room ever existed, or indeed that such a person ever existed” (2002: 20). The possibility of constructing digital images, or portions of images, entirely ‘from scratch’ in the computer seems to augment the contention that photography and film may now be considered in terms traditionally associated with ‘subjective’ artforms such as painting. As Manovich suggests:

The manual construction of images in digital cinema represents a return to nineteenth century pre-cinematic practices, when images were hand-painted and hand-animated...As cinema enters the digital age these techniques are again becoming commonplace in the film making process. (2000: 175)

Gunning, too, makes a connection between digital imaging processes and the “artificial realities” of 19th century pre-cinematic representational technologies such as the panorama and diorama, observing that such devices may “lack the indexical claim of photography...[but] they absolutely claim the ability to fashion a counterreality through perceptual stimulation” (2008: 37). In line with his argument that digitization represents an evolution of (rather than a complete break from) analogue photographic processes, however, Gunning suggests that there has always been an aspect of the ‘perceptual stimulation’ of such modes of representation in cinema. He notes that Bazin, in his essay *The Myth of Total Cinema* (first published in 1967), “places cinema in the

tradition not so much of indexical photography but of other nineteenth-century devices designed to overwhelm the senses with their perceptual richness, such as the panorama [and] the diorama” (Gunning 2008: 37).

The Return of the Impressed

It is here that my examination of theoretical approaches to the representation of the ‘unpresentable’ returns to its beginnings. The idea of overwhelming the senses with excessive detail or, as Gunning puts it, ‘perceptual richness’, leads us back into the theoretical territory of the sublime and its representation. As Malcolm Andrews suggests, in the nineteenth century, the Panorama “was new technology and offered to replicate the experience of the Sublime much more closely than any medium had done before” (1999: 140). Explaining this idea, he describes the panorama in terms that might just as appropriately be used to describe photography or cinema: “[t]he panorama paintings were detailed, high-definition transcripts from nature...Ideally, they were substitutes for the original scene itself, far exceeding the power of words or painting to reproduce that original” (Andrews 1999: 140). This account calls to mind, once again, the camera’s ability to present an unmediated reiteration of the real – its mechanical, “indiscriminate recording of everything in front of the lens” (Mulvey 2006: 58). The photographic image presents, as Gunning observes, the “sense of an unprecedented visual array, possessing overwhelming detail.” (2008: 37).

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Figure 8 Jeff Wall, *Restoration*, 1993 (detail). Transparency in lightbox. 137 x 507 cm.³

Like the panorama then, the ‘overwhelming detail’ of the indexical image suggests an aptitude for figuring the sublime: as Andrews notes, “[o]ne important constituent of the Burkean, sensationist Sublime is the power of the spectacle wholly to occupy the mind and senses so as to exclude anything else” (1999: 140). Panoramas and dioramas attempted to do this by attaching the reality of a scene as closely as possible to its representation. Louis Daguerre (1789-1851), for example, went as far as to bring real elements into the scenes he depicted: in his diorama *View of Mont Blanc taken from the Valley of Chamonix* (1833), he included an actual chalet and live goat from that mountain region. As Daguerre himself put it, “[m]y only aim was to produce the most complete illusion; I wanted to rob nature, and therefore had to become a thief” (quoted in Andrews 1999: 141). Andrews describes the effect of Daguerre’s attempt to fully *present* that mountain landscape in terms

³ Wall’s photograph shows the restoration of Edouard Castres’ *Bourbaki Panorama* (1881) (15m x 112m) in Lucerne, Switzerland. To the left of the photograph is the viewing platform, from which the audience would absorb the enveloping two-dimensional wall painting and the real three-dimensional foreground ‘set’ (including discarded army equipment and a broken fence). Wall suggests that panoramas were “an experimental response to a deeply-felt need, a need for a medium that could surround the spectators and plunge them into a spectacular illusion” (Wall and Schwander 1996: 129). Michael Newman proposes that the ‘widescreen’ format of Wall’s photograph “alludes to the cinema that historically displaced the panorama as an immersive illusion of reality” (2007: 149)

that, once again, evoke the characteristics of the photographic image: “[t]his ‘complete illusion’ of a landscape” he writes, “is more than simply a transcription of the original: it is partly also a transplanting of the original. Nature has been ‘robbed’ to achieve the illusion” (1999: 141).⁴ Just as we talk of ‘taking’ a photograph, Daguerre and Andrews speak of robbing and transplanting from nature. Indeed, it may be speculated that Daguerre’s desire to lift directly from nature led to his part in the development of the photograph’s most direct antecedent – the Daguerreotype.

The desire to bypass representational systems and present an unmediated, real landscape may be traced back to the Romantic’s conception of the inassimilable, sublime vastness of the natural world as forever separate from culture and language. As the poet and philosopher Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) observed, “nature is for us nothing but the uncoerced existence, the subsistence of things on their own, being there according to their own immutable laws” (1993: 180). The camera’s passive, mechanical registration of the world marks its images as uniquely capable of embodying such a conception of nature. As David Company suggests, “[t]he camera [can be] understood as nature’s industrial other but also as an apparatus with a particular affinity with organic form. It [can] produce ‘natural signs’, images as apparently unmediated and spontaneous as nature itself” (2003: 39).

⁴ Eliding any simple reduction of the photograph to the concept of transcription, Barthes writes: “The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed emanations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium...” (2000: 80-81).

To communicate the sublime effect of a landscape, then, a representation must, it would seem, close the gap between culture and nature: it must blur the boundary between representation and reality. Andrews concludes his discussion of Daguerre's diorama with the observation that "[t]o add to a landscape painting three-dimensionality, sound and movement, blurs the distinction between artefact and nature...Art and landscape materially feed off each other to produce a complex amalgam" (1999: 141). Barthes insists that sound and movement added to the photograph 'domesticates' photography, blurring the distinction between art and the unmediated, indexical 'emanation' of nature that is the camera-image (Barthes 2000: 117). Cinema, then, is surely the modern embodiment of nineteenth century attempts, such as the panorama and diorama, to re-present the sublime. As a towering projection of light in a darkened auditorium, with surround-sound (perhaps even 3D), cinema demonstrates an unsurpassed ability to, as the panorama did before it, "wholly to occupy the mind and senses so as to exclude anything else" (Andrews 1999: 140).

The fact that, in the wake of digitization, cinema has evolved into a hybrid form that seemingly blurs the boundaries between painting and the photographic image, between art and index, only enhances the medium's aptitude for figuring the unrepresentable: as Simon Morley suggests, the uncertain space between painting and the indexical camera-image may offer "a new sense of the sublime as something that gets squeezed out as an intangible and ambiguous supplement in the gap between these two different but related media...[i]t is the experience of an indeterminate yet fertile in-between state" (Morley 2010b).

The many qualities of the contemporary camera-image outlined in the preceding chapters – its ability to figure the sublime; its various associations with the uncanny; its correlation with traumatic memory and the Lacanian Real; its confusion of art and index (through animation, narrativization, digitization); its associations with the mechanical, the industrial and the rise of modernity; its unmediated spontaneity and consequent affinity with natural form; and, what is more, its blurring of boundaries between each of the above – all combine to insinuate an aptitude for representing a sense of the ‘unpresentable’ within the industrial landscape.

PART TWO:

PRACTICAL APPROACHES

Having reviewed a variety of theoretical approaches to the unrepresentable, its presence in the industrial landscape and its representation through lens-based media in Part One of this thesis, Part Two reflects upon how these themes might be approached from a practical perspective. Ultimately this involves an account and analysis of the development of my own practical research. However, in order to give practical context to my studio work, Part Two begins by discussing two films which have acted as important reference points for and directly contributed to the development of the piece that forms the core component of my project – the video *Re: Flamingo*.

The first of these ‘case studies’ discusses the Canadian artist Stan Douglas’s formal and intellectual approaches to figuring the unrepresentable in the landscape, focusing specifically on his film piece *Der Sandmann* (1995) – a work that, in many ways, offers an analogue to my own film’s reimagining of Hoffmann’s story. My second case study looks at Ridley Scott’s feature film *Blade Runner* (1982), the discussion of which is centered around its significance to the narrative and imagery of *Re: Flamingo*. While perhaps not as formally relevant to my own work as Douglas’s film, *Blade Runner* nevertheless offers some interesting and pertinent creative approaches to the themes it lends to my video piece.

CHAPTER FIVE: STAN DOUGLAS'S *DER SANDMANN*

Introduction

Like his compatriot Jeff Wall and a number of other Vancouver-based artists who rose to international prominence in the 1980s and 1990s, the work of the Canadian Stan Douglas (b.1960) frequently draws upon a cinematic aesthetic to explore the social and environmental effects of industrialization on the landscape (see for example Figure 9, below). Many of Douglas's pieces examine the 'ghosts' of failed utopian projects through focusing a camera upon a particular place. These works often excavate the subjective histories of the sites they interrogate, through referencing literary or cinematic works that have contributed to their cultural framing. Douglas's attempts to figure subjective experience through the rather incongruous use of mechanical representational technologies lends an oddly lyrical aspect to all of his work, which can take a variety of forms, ranging from large-scale, panoramic landscape photographs, to complex film and video installations, to combinations of the two.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE
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Figure 9 Stan Douglas, *Gold River Mill*, 1996. From the series *Nootka Sound*.
46 x 91 cm.

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Figure 10 Stan Douglas, *Tahsis Mill*, 1996. From the series *Nootka Sound*.

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Figure 11 Stan Douglas, *Nu•tka•*, 1996. Video installation. Single channel video, quadraphonic soundtrack. 6min 50sec each rotation. Video still.

Figures 9, 10 and 11: In the mid-nineties Douglas developed a body of work in response to the idyllic landscapes of the Nootka Sound on the west coast of Vancouver Island. This resulted in the video installation *Nu•tka•* (1996, see Figure 11) and the photographic series *Nootka Sound* (1996, see figures 9 and 10). As Douglas explains: “[t]he *Nootka Sound* pictures cover an area which to the untrained eye seems like a natural situation. But if you look at it carefully, you realize it’s been logged at least twice...I wanted to show a landscape that was full of people, that was full of human presence” (quoted in Enright 2007). In the video piece *Nu•tka•*, however, the area’s first European settlers’ experience of the then uncultivated landscape is imagined through a voiceover that draws upon the writings of Romantic-era authors: “the whole issue of the sublime comes up...the natural world’s absolute indifference to human will or presence ... the whole question of unrepresentability has been dramatized” (Douglas quoted in Thater 1998: 9).

Der Sandmann (1995)

Douglas's film installation *Der Sandmann* transposes elements of E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story of the same name to the garden allotments or *Schrebergärten* of Potsdam in Germany. Hoffmann's original narrative of 1816 is told, initially, through a series of letters between the protagonist Nathanael, his fiancé Clara and her brother Lothar. Douglas's film updates this correspondence to the late twentieth century, in the wake of the fall of the Berlin Wall.



Figure 12 Nathanael reading his letter to Klara (Stan Douglas, *Der Sandmann*, 1995. Film still). Installation composed of two 16mm films, two manipulated optical sound 16mm projectors; 9:50 min (loop), black and white, sound. Dimensions variable.

Douglas's reimagined Nathanael writes to his friend Lothar to tell him that upon returning (post-*Wende*) to "the scene of our shared childhood" in Potsdam, "places that once simply looked old now seem sinister" (Douglas 1998: 128). Walking past the *Schrebergärten* they played near as children, he recounts, he is seized by "an overwhelming sense of dread" at the sight of an old man working at a strange machine in one of the allotments: "it was the

whole scene that got to me” he writes, “as if I had seen it all before” (Douglas 1998: 128).

Lothar writes back to remind Nathanael that as children they had been fooled by his brother into believing this old man was the fabled Sandman, who “comes to children when they won’t go to bed and throws handfuls of sand into their eyes till they bleed and pop out of their heads!” (Douglas 1998: 129). Lothar recounts how one night, when they should have been in bed, they snuck into the strange man’s garden to “liberate the eyes we thought he kept hidden in his burlap sacks” (Douglas 1998: 129). The old man, however, caught them in the act and chased them off, shouting curses at their families.

Having mistakenly addressed his letter to his sister Klara, Nathanael also receives a reply from her (she read it, before passing it on to Lothar). Nathanael was not afraid of much as a child, Klara remembers, only the Sandman and the blue flame in their gas-powered water heater. However, she is shocked that he could have forgotten the connection between the night he snuck into the old man’s garden and “the saddest moment of our childhood” (Douglas 1998: 130): having fled the old man’s curses upon his family and returned to his bed, she recalls, they were both later woken to be told that their father had been killed. She reminds him how desperately that night he had cried, “*It’s my fault! It’s my fault! It was the Sandman! The Sandman!*” (Douglas 1998: 130).

Like Hoffmann’s original story, the narrative of Douglas’s film piece explores the resurgence of a childhood trauma linked to the figure of the

Sandman. Through historical recontextualization, however, *Der Sandmann* unveils a sense of the uncanny in the landscape of twentieth-century Germany.



Figure 13 The old man/Sandman in his *Schrebergarten* (Stan Douglas, *Der Sandman*, 1995. Film still).

Douglas constructed the fictional *Schrebergärten* sets for *Der Sandmann* within the 1920s-era Ufa film studios at Babelsberg, outside Potsdam. Some of these once world-leading film production facilities came under threat of demolition in 1990s post-reunification Germany; as Scott Watson notes, “[t]heir uncertain fate was part of a vaster picture that included the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe” (1998: 32). For the film, two versions of the same *Schrebergärten* were built. The first set imagined the garden as it may have looked in the 1970s within the German Democratic Republic, when workers would use such sites to grow supplementary food, or as weekend retreats (Douglas 1998: 125). Once the 1970s set had been filmed, a second incarnation that represented the garden in the 1990s (contemporary with the

making of the piece) was built on top of it. This later set shows parts of the garden flattened by construction work – indicative of the fact that post-*Wende* much of Potsdam became prime real estate. Over half of the thousands of gardens were razed to make way for hotels, luxury housing and light industry (Douglas 1998: 125).



Figure 14 Stan Douglas, *Der Sandman*, 1995. Film still. The left half of the screen shows the 1970s garden, the right half reveals construction work in the same place in the 1990s.

Douglas points out that between the two sets: “[the] one abiding feature is the old man – the Sandman – toiling away at some mysterious contraption that, after two decades, is still not quite working” (Douglas 2008: 196, see Figure 13). The old man seems to be oblivious to the passing of time and “the forces that will literally undermine the ground he works on” (Watson 1998: 35). The various references to social change that frame the figure’s activity (the doomed film studio, the gradual transformation of the gardens into a building site) leads Watson to suggest an allegorical reading of the old man’s presence in the film: “the Sandman is the working class. His efforts to make a better world are about to be foreclosed by the triumph of capitalism” (Watson: 35). The two *Schrebergärten* sets, separated as they are by several decades, figure the effects of historical change both upon the landscape, and through it.

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Figure 15 Stan Douglas, *Der Sandmann Set Photos*, 1994. 1970s set.

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Figure 16 Stan Douglas, *Der Sandmann Set Photos*, 1994. 1990s set.

Douglas describes the filming set-up for *Der Sandmann* within the old Ufa studio:

The *Schrebergärten* sets were shot on 16mm film with a motion-control system that allowed the camera to make one continuous 360° pan of the old garden and a second of the contemporary site that, in terms of camera angle and motion, are identical to one another ... (2008: 197)

Through filming a complete pan of the studio, the fiction of the cinematic illusion is exposed: as the camera travels beyond the edges of the Potsdam garden set, we see what would traditionally be 'off-camera' – a voice-actor reading Nathanael's letter and around him the old studio, strewn with random props and filmmaking equipment. *Der Sandmann* presents us with a kind of meta-cinema: the film we see contains the suggestion of another, unrealized film that would be framed entirely within the *Schrebergärten* set, never straying from its fictional conceit.

Douglas's method of presentation for *Der Sandmann's* installation further extends this sense that we are seeing more of the cinematic mechanism than perhaps we should. Rather than employing the traditional montage technique of showing each take consecutively with a 'cut' in time between the two ('past' garden cutting to 'present' garden), his film "rearranges these recollections into simultaneously experienced periods of time" (Inboden 2008: 126). In doing this, the jump or cut in time that fictional cinema traditionally asks us to ignore is figured, quite literally, in the centre of the screen as a split or seam between the two time periods. The installation of *Der Sandmann* focuses two 16mm film projections (the 1970s scenario and the 1990s scenario) onto the same screen simultaneously. However, half of each

image is blocked out: the visible halves meet in the middle, creating a vertical 'seam' or cut in the centre of the screen. This becomes most apparent when there is a marked difference between the two time periods (for example, when the 1970s garden shows a vegetable patch and the exact same space in the 1990s shows a construction site; see Figure 17 below).



Figure 17 Stan Douglas, *Der Sandmann*, 1995. Film still.

As Douglas puts it, “[t]he effect created is that of a temporal wipe” (2008: 197): as the camera pans over the much-changed *Schrebergärten* set (and the not-so-changed studio), the new garden erases the old (while the slight changes to the studio produce a subtle ‘ripple’ effect in the centre of the image). Also noticeable is the fact that Nathanael’s lips are out-of-synch with his voiceover in one half of the image, whilst they are in-synch in the other half. When one circuit is completed, the old garden begins to erase the new in a compulsive, repetitious loop as if we must endlessly relive the trauma of the changes to the landscape the film’s images present to us.

Whether or not we understand how *Der Sandmann*’s temporal wipe is constructed, “once we see the vertical seam, it is hard to see anything else.”

(Clover 1998: 75). Through fragmenting perspective-oriented space and Cartesian time,¹ *Der Sandmann* exposes the illusory mechanism of narrative cinema – its cuts from one scene to the next (the very montage techniques Benjamin associated with trauma; see Chapter Three, p65): it places its discontinuity centre stage.

If Douglas's explicit presentation of the formal edit between the two time periods is to be read, in Benjamin's terms, as 'traumatic', then we may perhaps conclude that the film figures as traumatic that literal break in German history – the reunification that brought with it the (even more literal) breaking of the Berlin Wall. As the Wall had done, *Der Sandmann's* seam spans the divide between the old, communist GDR and Western capitalism.

On an aesthetic level, too, we can infer some socio-political significance from the film's central seam – its traumatic 'wound' – which calls the viewer's attention to the mechanism of its narrative by giving explicit form, if only negatively, to the absence that lies between the two time periods. This approach stands in stark contrast to the language of montage traditionally employed by that bastion of Western capitalism, Hollywood cinema. As Carol J. Clover suggests:

...classical Hollywood cinema is literally defined by its devotion to hiding those absences as completely as possible, and delivering the fantasy as fully as it can be delivered. [Whereas] *Der Sandmann's* seam brings the wound to the surface...a wound...that never lets us forget that this is a film ... the minute the seam appears, the fiction of plenitude and coherence falls apart. (1998: 76)

¹ René Descartes "is thought to have believed in the discontinuity of time; and his conception has been characterized as cinematographic...the support from the established interpretation comes from those passages where he holds that parts of time are mutually independent" (Secada 1990: 45).

Through its 'negative presentation' of the absence between takes, Douglas's seam seems to figure something of the unrepresentable. Recalling one of Barnett Newman's 'zips' (see Figure 18, below), the central line presents the sublime/traumatic gap between the 'now' and the beyond, the past. Like the work of the structural filmmakers (see Chapter Four, p83), it illuminates the materiality of the piece's indexical, filmic base, marking its images with that "this has been" quality through which Barthes aligned photography with trauma (see Chapter Three, p68).



Figure 18 Barnett Newmann, *Onement VI*, 1953. Oil on canvas. 260 x 305 cm. Private collection.

What creates the piece's seam, however, is the same thing that produces *Der Sandmann*'s formal uncanniness: the film's doubling function – its repetition of the same Ufa studio, the same *Schrebergärten*, the same Sandman.² Indeed, Douglas's idea for the split screen derives from an early twentieth-century source that would contribute, albeit indirectly, to Sigmund Freud's delineation of the uncanny in his 1919 essay. Freud's discussion of the motif of the double in *The Uncanny* centers around an appraisal of his colleague Otto Rank's

² As Watson suggests, "*Der Sandmann* is a machine for the production of the uncanny. Repetition itself will generate it...[as will] the displacement of the past by the present and the altogether more troubling displacement of the present by the past" (1998: 35-36).

detailed study on the subject, which “explores the connections that link the double with mirror-images, shadows [and] guardian spirits” (Freud 2003a: 142). Rank had been inspired to write his study after having seen the German silent film *The Student of Prague* (1913, d. Stellan Rye). This film tells the story of a poor student who gives his mirror image to a sorcerer in return for fabulous wealth. When the student finds himself held responsible for his double’s subsequent misdeeds, he kills it, not knowing that he too will die.



Figure 19 Henrik Galeen, *The Student of Prague*, 1926.
Film still. 55min, black and white, silent.

Rye’s 1913 film produced a double of its own thirteen years later – Henrick Galeen’s remake of 1926. Watson describes how this later version inspired Douglas’ split-screen idea:

The film calls for the student and his image to confront each other in several scenes, which were made by shooting the scenes with half the lens blocked and then reshooting with the other half of the stock. It is this technique, originally designed to present an uncanny and frightening split in identity, that Douglas reproduces in *Der Sandmann*. (1998: 34)

Freud's place within the confluence of references Douglas builds around *Der Sandmann* is not, however, limited to this debt to *The Student of Prague*. Beyond even the somewhat transparent allusions to *The Uncanny* via Hoffmann's original tale (not to mention the film's formal 'repetition compulsions'), there lies yet another, more veiled nod to the German founder of psychoanalysis. The *Schrebergärten* take their name from the physician and teacher Moritz Schreber (1808-1861), who believed that taking exercise in such green surroundings could assuage the psychologically damaging effects of industrialization. Schreber's other claim to fame comes via his son Daniel Paul, whose autobiographical account of his own psychological maladies was used by Freud in the development of his theory of paranoia. As a child, Daniel Paul had been the guinea pig for his father's prosthetic inventions designed to correct children's posture – which undoubtedly contributed to the younger Schreber's later mental collapse. As Watson suggests, "[i]n a sense Daniel Paul was himself a product of the *Schrebergärten* and Freud's account of paranoia one of the garden's earliest harvests" (Watson: 32).

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Figure 20 Stan Douglas, *Potsdam Schrebergärten*, 1994. C-print photograph, 47 x 93 cm

What *Der Sandmann* achieves through the convergence of references it sets up between Freud, Hoffman's tale and the *Schrebergärten* is a sense of uncanniness about the moment in history the film presents.³ In Douglas's installation, as Sven Lütticken puts it:

...the uncanny is historicized; what is uncanny is perhaps less the possibly eye-stealing, castrating, automaton-building bogeyman inherited from Hoffmann, than the transformation of society and the status of the Schreber gardens as anachronistic remains of a lost childhood in a defunct state. (2005: 128)

Through his camera-driven interrogations of the history of a particular place, Douglas is able to reveal something of the unrepresentable in the landscape. As Ivone Margulies argues, "Douglas uses film and photography primarily as a simulacrum, a medium to release a disturbance. He suggests that...behind a pastoral landscape or a rational urban design, another, darker history lurks" (1998: 157). Beyond its various historical, literary and cinematic references, it is *Der Sandmann's* disruptive formal approach to conventional cinematic representations of passing time, its looping and doubling mechanism and its assertion of the materiality of the filmstrip that allows a sense of the uncanny to be revealed within the landscape of social change it presents.

³ As Ivone Margulies suggests, "Douglas's ground excavation links repressive practices...to Freud and his discoveries as if responding, through a displaced psychoanalytic thinking, to questions opened on a socio-historical realm" (2008: 158).

CHAPTER SIX: *BLADE RUNNER*

Loosely based upon Philip K. Dick's 1968 science fiction novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, Ridley Scott's 1982 feature film *Blade Runner* presents a dystopian vision of a 2019 Los Angeles.

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Figure 21 The industrial skyline of a future Los Angeles (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

Within this landscape of urban alienation and environmental decay, the film's protagonist Rick Deckard (Harrison Ford) reluctantly agrees to track down and 'retire' a group of fugitive 'replicants' – bioengineered robots that are virtually indistinguishable from real humans. To confirm their status as non-human, suspected replicants are tested with a 'Voight-Kampff' machine, which determines whether their personal memories are the result of real experience or artificial implantation. This test relies upon a video-amplified image of the subjects' eye. The motif of the eye, and sight in general, recurs throughout *Blade Runner* – as both an index of artificiality (for example replicants' retinas reflect a red glow) and as a symbol of 'authentic' experience (e.g. the replicants use photographs to prove that their memories are real).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Figure 22 Image from the opening scene of the film, in which the flaming chimneys of the 'Hades' landscape (see Figure 21) are reflected in a replicant's eye (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Figure 23 The 'Voight-Kampff' machine (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Figure 24 A replicant owl's eyes. The red reflection on its retina betrays the bird's artificiality (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still [detail]).

The prevalence of eye images in *Blade Runner*, along with several other of the film's themes and visual motifs, correlates closely with Hoffmann's *Sandman* story. Parallels may be drawn, for example, between the 'bogeymen' of each piece's inclination toward removing human eyes: Hoffmann's Sandman is said to throw sand into children's eyes "so that they jump out of their heads," while the replicants Roy (Rutger Hauer) and Leon (Brion James) in *Blade Runner* indulge in similar maiming activities (1980: 87). Leon, for instance, attempts to kill Deckard by pushing his eyes out with his fingers, and when Roy confronts his 'father' Tyrell (Joe Turkel) he kills him by pushing his thumbs through the human's eyes. When the two replicants visit the genetic engineer of artificial eyes Chew (James Hong) (himself, in some way, a correlative of the Coppola character from Hoffman's tale, who constructs the automaton Olympia's eyes) they intimidate him with disembodied eyes. Furthermore, when Roy bullies the genetic engineer of replicant toys, J.F. Sebastian (William Sanderson), into helping him find Tyrell, there is a moment of sinister humor when Roy plays with some of the human's 'toy' eyes.

The theme of eyes – or rather sight – is the root of another commonality between *Blade Runner* and the *Sandman* story. Both narratives involve a misperception of the synthetic/mechanical for the real. In Hoffmann's story, Nathanael takes the automaton Olympia for a real woman (see Chapter Two, p53), in *Blade Runner*, the replicants too seem indistinguishable from real humans. In *Ramble City*, her seminal essay on the film, Giuliana Bruno associates the replicants of *Blade Runner* with Jean Baudrillard's concept of the simulacrum (1987: 68). Baudrillard describes the simulacrum in terms of

the double (i.e. indistinguishable from the 'original'), defining it as a "perfect descriptive machine which provides all the signs of the real" (Baudrillard 1983: 4). Bruno suggests that Baudrillard's account provides a fitting definition of the function of the replicants within the film's narrative (1987: 68). Though they are not the 'real' thing, replicants are effectively indistinguishable from it, and it is this uncanny slippage in perceptual reality that gives the film both its narrative drive and its underlying philosophical theme (that is: what distinguishes the real from the unreal, or rather, what constitutes 'real' humanity?). In the world that *Blade Runner* conjures, as in Baudrillard's postmodern world of simulacra, "[t]he unreal is no longer that of dream or of fantasy or a beyond or a within, it is that of *hallucinatory resemblance of the real with itself.*" (Baudrillard 1983: 142). When Deckard first meets Rachael (Sean Young), she does not know that she is a replicant. Her artificially implanted memories give her a personal history and therefore a unique, human identity, making her a perfect, 'hallucinatory' simulation of humanity. The replication is as 'real' as the thing it represents, the line between the real and the imaginary is uncannily blurred.

Another clear parallel that may be drawn between Scott's film and *The Sandman* is the fact that the protagonist of each story falls in love with a kind of robot: Deckard with the replicant Rachael, Nathanael with the automaton Olympia. Bruno notes the parallel between the replicants of *Blade Runner* and the automaton in *The Sandman*, suggesting that we find in Hoffmann's tale "one of the most influential fictional descriptions of simulacra" (1987: 68). There is, however, a critical difference between the two 'robots'. In Hoffmann's story Nathanael becomes infatuated with Olympia because he

mistakes her for a real girl, but eventually “reality triumphs: the android is unmasked and destroyed” (Bruno 1987: 68). Bruno argues that when the *Sandman* story was written in the 1800s, replication was “still a question of imitation” because reality was still an unambiguous concept: in the simulacra-filled futureworld of *Blade Runner* however, “no distinction between real and copy remains” (Bruno 1987: 68). This causes something of an ontological crisis for both the replicants and the humans they live amongst. As Slavoj Žižek points out, when Rachael discovers she is a replicant she cries with “silent grief over the loss of her ‘humanity,’ the infinite longing to be or to become human again, although she knows this will never happen” (1993: 41). Although Deckard is supposed to ‘retire’ Rachael he feels pity for her and, though he knows that she is a replicant, falls in love with her. This suggests an acceptance on his part of her status as ‘real’.

The simulacra-like folding of reality into representation that Bruno suggests *Blade Runner’s* replicants epitomize has clear parallels with photography and its indexical ‘replication’ of reality. In fact, photographs and their function as evidence of reality play an important role in *Blade Runner’s* narrative. Having been subjected to the Voight-Kampff test and realizing that that she may be a replicant, Rachael presents Deckard with a photograph of herself as a child with her mother. As Bruno explains: “(t)hat photograph represents the trace of an origin and thus a personal identity, the proof of having existed and therefore of having the right to exist” (1987: 71). Both the photograph of herself (as evidence of a personal history) and the image of the mother (as evidence of a genetic family history) are invoked by Rachael in order to claim a ‘real’ human identity. As artificial life forms that are ‘born’ as

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Figure 25 Rachael's photograph of her mother (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Figure 26 Leon's photographs (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Figure 27 Deckard's personal collection of photographs (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still). As Mary Ann Doane suggests, "*Blade Runner* is at one level about the anxiety surrounding the loss of history. Deckard keeps old photos...and while they may not represent his own relatives, they nevertheless act as a guarantee of temporal continuity" (Doane 2000: 118).

fully-grown adults and live for only four years, the question of the replicants' place in history, and therefore the figure of the mother, is problematic to their conception of themselves as 'real'. This trouble is perhaps most apparent when Leon is asked a question about his mother during his Voight-Kampff test: he replies "My mother? I'll tell you about my mother!" and proceeds to shoot his interrogator.¹

As Bruno suggests, "[a] theoretical link is established in *Blade Runner* between photography, mother, and history" (1987: 71). In support of her assertion, Bruno proposes that there are distinct correlations to be drawn between *Blade Runner's* plot and Barthes' book on photography *Camera Lucida* – the narrative of which centers around a photograph of Barthes' own mother and its relationship to questions of history (Bruno 1987: 71). Barthes writes, "in photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*. There is a superimposition here of reality and of the past" (2000: 76). Bruno interprets such ideas of Barthes' in relation to *Blade Runner's* replicants and their reliance on photography as evidence of a past:

Photography is perceived as the medium in which the signifier and the referent are collapsed onto each other. Photographs assert the referent, its reality, in that they assert its existence at that (past) moment when the person, the thing, was there in front of the camera. If a replicant is in a photograph, he or she is thus real. (1987: 72)

Mary Ann Doane, too, sees parallels between *Blade Runner* and *Camera Lucida*, noting that "[b]oth film and essay are stories of reproduction – mechanical reproduction, reproduction as the application of biogenetic

¹ Interestingly, photographs seem to be important to Leon too. In one scene Roy asks him about his "precious photographs", a hoard of which Deckard finds in Leon's flat (see Fig. 25).

engineering” (2000: 117). Like Bruno, she suggests that the replicants collect photographs “in order to reassure themselves of their own past, their own subjective history” (Doane 2000: 117). In the simulacra filled world of *Blade Runner*, however, the line between the real and the unreal is uncannily blurred.

This uncertainty, it would seem, extends to the indexical veracity of photographs, their status as ‘evidence’ of a personal history. When Rachael challenges Deckard with the photograph of her mother, he responds by relaying to her intimate memories she has never told anyone about. He explains to her that her ‘recollections’ are implants, that they “aren’t your memories, they’re somebody else’s”. If her memories are not her own, then her photograph of her mother is a lie – its ‘truth claim’, its status as a document of a past reality is annulled. As Doane puts it, in *Blade Runner* “the instances of mechanical reproduction which should ensure the preservation of a remembered history are delegitimized” (2000: 118). Rachael’s fake photograph suggests some sort of digital manipulation or cloning process, as though she has been ‘Photoshopped’ into a past before her time. There is, however, a deeper parallel here with the crisis of faith in the indexical status of digital photography. The suggestion that memories can be transferred from one person to another recalls the fact that with digital images there is no difference between an original and its copy: that “[digital] information can simply be transferred, without loss, from one ‘medium’ to another” (Doane 2007a: 144). Just as a digital image file is incapable of claiming a unique identity, the replicants of *Blade Runner* are deprived of an authentic subjectivity because their history is the double of another, or many others – a

simulation with potentially infinite, identical copies. Such doubling brings about an uncanny distortion in the experience of reality. Indeed, Freud's discussion of the double in relation to the uncanny addresses the "transmission of mental processes" from one person to another, which, he contends, produces an "uncanny effect" (Freud 2003a: 141). He suggests that this uncanniness is intensified when:

...one becomes co-owner of the other's knowledge, emotions and experience...a person may identify himself with another and so become unsure of his true self; or he may substitute the other's self for his own. The self may thus be duplicated, divided and interchanged. (2003a: 142)

It could be said, therefore, that the replicants' experience of the 'real' world is an uncanny one. As Nicholas Royle proposes:

The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, in particular regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced...It is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature': one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world. (2003: 1)

This sense of uncertainty pervades *Blade Runner's* narrative. In the *Final Cut* version of the film released in 2007 – the edit Scott considers to be definitive – it is explicitly suggested that Deckard himself is a replicant. Following the confrontation with Rachael about her photograph, and sitting before a collection of his own photographs, Deckard slips into a daydream in which a unicorn runs through a green forest (see Figure 28, overleaf): in the final scene of the film he finds a small origami unicorn left for him by the policeman Gaff (Edward James Olmos), suggesting that his colleague knows about this undisclosed daydream – and therefore implying that Deckard must be a replicant (see Figure 29, overleaf).



Figure 28 Deckard's unicorn dream (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).



Figure 29 Gaff's origami unicorn (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

The possibility of Deckard's artificiality is hinted at throughout the 2007 version of the film: for example, we briefly see a red reflection on his retinas – elsewhere seen only in replicants' eyes – shortly before Rachael asks him if he ever took the Voight-Kampff test himself (thus implying that she thinks he too may be a replicant). Deckard “is forced to assume that he is not what he thought himself to be, but somebody-something else” (Zizek 1993: 12): for both him and Rachael, it seems, “every positive, substantial content, inclusive of the most intimate fantasies, is not ‘their own’ but already implanted” (Zizek 1993: 41).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

Figure 30 In the 'Final Cut' version of the film, both Rachael and Deckard are revealed as replicants. The reflected red glow on their retinas suggests their artificiality. As Scott says: "that kickback you saw from the replicants' retinas was a bit of a design flaw. I was also trying to say that the eye is the most important organ in the human body. It's like a two-way mirror; the eye doesn't only see a lot, the eye gives away a lot. A glowing human retina seemed one way of stating that" (quoted in Jenkins 1997: 174) (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

The rather philosophical associations generated by the presence of photography in *Blade Runner* are matched, at times, by a more aesthetic role for the medium. When Deckard finds Leon's photographs, for instance, he takes one home and scans it into a computer for analyzing images (see Figure 31). This brings about a 'break' in the narrative flow, echoing Raymond Bellour's suggestion that the presence of a photograph in a cinematic narrative "gives rise to a very particular trouble" (2007: 119, see also this thesis: Chapter Three, p80). Bruno describes this sequence in which Deckard analyzes the image: "[t]he photograph is decomposed and restructured visually through the creation of new relations, shifting the direction of the gaze, zooming in and out, selecting and rearranging elements, creating close-ups" (1987: 73). The effect is that of a hiatus from the narrative drive of the

film, bringing the materiality of the celluloid image – in the form of its photographic base – to the fore. As Doane observes:

The resultant play of colors and grain, focus and its loss, is aesthetically provocative beyond the demonstration of technical prowess and control over the image. Deckard's motivation, the desire for knowledge...is overwhelmed by the special effects which are the byproducts of this technology of vision... (2000: 116-117)



Figure 31 Deckard's image analysis computer (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).



Figure 32 A portion of one of Leon's photographs enlarged by Deckard's computer (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

Doane's description of the scene has echoes of Barthes' description in *Camera Lucida* of his attempt to locate amongst old photographs of his recently deceased mother "the truth of the face I had loved" (2000: 67). He

finds it, he tells us, in a photograph of her as a five year old child: “In a first impulse, I exclaimed: ‘There she is! She’s really there!’” (2000: 99). However, the photograph does not tell him enough, so his search continues:

...I want to enlarge this face in order to see it better, to understand it better, to know its truth...I believe that by enlarging the detail ‘in series’ (each shot engendering smaller details than at the preceding stage), I will finally reach my mother’s very being...Alas, however hard I look, I discover nothing: if I enlarge I see nothing but the grain of the paper... (Barthes 2000: 99-100)

Having searched the photograph for greater depth and found only grain, “I obtain this sole knowledge” Barthes writes, “that this indeed has been” (2000: 100). In the future-world of *Blade Runner* however, a photograph – like a replicant, a simulacrum – can appear as excessive in detail, as ‘perceptually rich’, as its referent. As Deckard zooms in on Leon’s photograph it reveals seemingly infinite depths and dimensions, and therefore new meanings, new knowledge. It presents a world as rich in perceptual detail as are the replicants he searches the image for clues to hunt down. As he analyzes the photograph it shows little evidence that it is not as complete, as ‘present’, as the room itself (though it does eventually, after *extreme* enlargement, show some signs of ‘grain’). Where Barthes’ failed search of his photograph provokes a sense of absence and death, Deckard’s presents a simulated ‘hallucination’ of reality.

It may be suggested that *Blade Runner’s* own sense of perceptual ‘reality’ and excessive detail has contributed to its lasting appeal amongst fans and critics. Though three decades have passed since it was made, it is still widely regarded as one of the most influential films ever made in terms of

its visual effects.² Certainly this has much to do with Scott's painstaking, perfectionist approach to the film's visuals, but it is also largely to do with the nature of the special-effects techniques that were used. In the early eighties, when *Blade Runner* was in production, computer-generated imagery was just beginning to see widespread use in mainstream cinema. In fact, 1982, the year of the film's release, also saw the release of cinema's first entirely CGI-animated sequence (in *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*, d. Nicholas Meyer) and the first live-action film to make extensive use of CGI (*Tron*, d. Steven Lisberger). *Blade Runner*, however, used entirely analogue, "in-camera" special effects – that is, visual effects that are created indexically, on the film negative via the camera lens, rather than in post-production. The film's assistant art director Stephen Dane believes that *Blade Runner* "is probably one of the last great in-camera special effects movies ever done" (*Dangerous Days* 2007). Similarly, the chief art director David L Snyder remarked in 2007: "we didn't have the advantages people have now. And I'm glad we didn't, because there's nothing artificial about it. There's no computer-generated images in the film" (*Dangerous Days* 2007). *Blade Runner's* futuristic landscapes were all 'real' in the sense that they existed as actual, physical 3D models, animated using traditional stop-motion techniques (see, for example, Figures 37 & 38). It is this feeling of physical authenticity – the indexically captured nature of its imagery – that has given *Blade Runner* its lasting appeal to many people. As Daryl Hannah, the actress who plays the replicant Pris, has said of the film, "everything was *really* done, because you can feel

² In 2007 *Blade Runner* was named the second most visually influential film of all time by the Visual Effects Society (Visual Effects Society 2007).

that when you watch a film. I think when you see a film and it's an in-camera effect, it feels real" (*Dangerous Days* 2007).

Though CGI is virtually omnipresent in Hollywood today, following the relatively poor reception of certain films that use CGI extensively (such as the *Star Wars* prequel trilogy [1999-2005]) in comparison to the popularity of older films which relied on models and stop-motion animation (such as the original *Star Wars* trilogy [1977-1983]), a number of mainstream directors have begun to turn once again to the older techniques. *Blade Runner* remains a touchstone for this kind of moviemaking. It has been a major source of inspiration for recent films such as Christopher Nolan's blockbuster *Batman Begins* (2005) and Duncan Jones's critical success *Moon* (2009), both of which made extensive use of 'real' models (Godoski 2010). Douglas Trumbull, *Blade Runner's* celebrated special effects supervisor, has also recently re-emerged from a 30-year hiatus to contribute his expertise to Terrence Malick's *Palme d'Or*-winning *Tree of Life* (2011), because CGI was "too synthetic for [Malick's] more organic methodology" (O'Neill 2011).

The point I hope to make here is that the revival of such practices, and the positive reception of the resulting films, seems to refute claims made by theorists such as Lev Manovich and David Rodowick that CGI has definitively disposed of cinema's indexical powers. Manovich suggests that "it is now possible to generate photorealistic scenes entirely in a computer using 3-D computer animation" creating "something which has perfect photographic credibility, although it was never actually filmed" (2000: 175). Invoking the *Star Wars* prequels, Rodowick makes a similar claim when describing the

interaction between the films' live action characters and their CGI counterparts:

If, in the fictional world they inhabit, Obi-Wan Kenobi and company are perceptually equivalent to characters such as Jar Jar Binks and Yoda, this is so because digital capture imports the actor's image to the world of digital synthesis...These images are perceptually indistinct because, whether captured or synthesized, they are produced from the same kinds of data... (2007: 122-123)

Despite Manovich and Rodowick's claims, model-based special effects have returned to mainstream filmmaking, and I believe that this reveals something absolutely vital about the distinctive nature of the indexically captured image. It is, perhaps, ironic that Rodowick's assertions about the 'perceptual indistinctiveness' between the live-action and CGI elements of the *Star Wars* prequel rest upon a character (Jar Jar Binks; see Figure 33 below) who was widely reviled and became something of a symbol of the films' failures.³

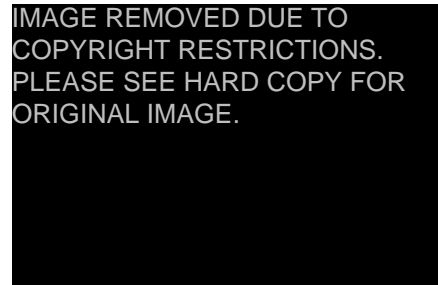
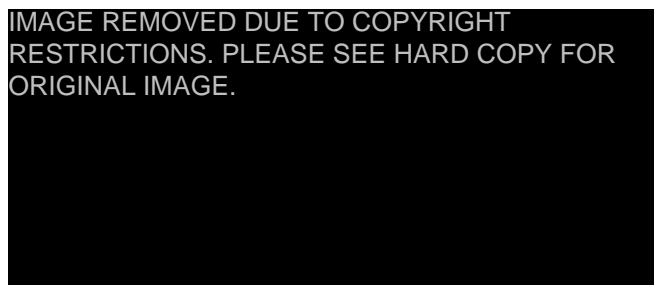


Figure 33 (above left)

Obi-Wan Kenobi (Ewan McGregor) and the computer-generated character Jar Jar Binks 'interact' (*Star Wars: Episode 1 – The Phantom Menace*, 1999, dir. George Lucas. Film still).

Figure 34 (above right)

A live-action Bob Hoskins with the hand-drawn, animated character Roger Rabbit (*Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, 1988, dir. Robert Zemeckis. Film still).

³ As Eric Harrison wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* the year of the film's release: "How annoying is Jar Jar Binks? The comical, animated Gungan is so off-putting that even one of his creators says he found him hard to stomach at first...The floppy-eared, loose-jointed creature...was an immediate hit with children, but many adults walked out of theaters loathing the character..." (Harrison 1999: n. pag.).

I would argue that this is in large part due to the fact that the CGI character is in no way ‘perceptually indistinct’ from his real life counterparts: Binks does not have, as Manovich suggests he could, “perfect photographic credibility.” I suggest that this is, at least in part, due to the character’s lack of a direct indexical connection to a real object occupying real physical space.⁴ *Blade Runner’s* constructed elements have a feeling of weight – of authentic, material presence and an excess of detail or ‘perceptual richness’ that allows the viewer to enter the film’s ‘world’ in a way that I myself often find I cannot with computer generated scenes. It could be argued therefore, in opposition to Rodowick, that digital capture and synthesis do not lose their distinctiveness: that there *is* an ontological difference between Jar Jar and Obi-Wan, that they are not “produced from the same kinds of data” – at least no more so than the hand-drawn Roger Rabbit and live-action Bob Hoskins in the *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* (1988) are ontologically the same because they both, ultimately, end up on the same piece of filmstrip (see Figure 34, previous page).

⁴ Binks was one of the first entirely-CGI characters to have a significant role in a major live-action film. Later films with prominent CGI characters have, however, relied heavily on indexical information to help make them look as ‘real’ as their live action counterparts. Andy Serkis’s acclaimed portrayal of the character Gollum in Peter Jackson’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (2001-2003) perhaps provides the preeminent example of this. For Jackson’s films, Motion Capture technology was used to ‘map’ Serkis’s movements, which were then transferred to a CGI rendering of Gollum. As Tom Gunning explains:

The creation of Gollum shows the pragmatic transgression of the boundary between theoretically distinct modes in its combination of photographic and animation effects. The very concept of Motion Capture, in which the recording of a living actor drives the motion of an animated figure through complex logorhythmic programs, embodies this interdependence. Animation enables a departure from any reference to reality but in the creation of Gollum’s animation often took its cue from the recorded motion of Serkis. Providing animation with a reference to reality demonstrates a desire (and perhaps an anxiety) to found fantasy within a realm of realistic (indeed, in Pierce’s sense, indexical) observation and recording... (Gunning 2006: 346).

It is not within the scope of this thesis to engage in an extensive discussion of computer generated imagery. It has been touched upon by Mulvey (2006: 27) in terms of the “technological uncanny” and the concept of the “uncanny valley” has been widely applied to CGI characters in cinema (see Pavlus [2011] for an interesting article on this subject).

Even digitally captured photographic footage is produced from the indexical 'data' of reality. Although every digital image may be subject to the same levels of manipulation, regardless of the method by which it was initially created, each image retains a distinct 'aura' dependent upon what that method of input was. The indexical trace in a photographic image sets it apart from the digitally constructed image – makes it 'perceptually distinct' – because, as Daryl Hannah suggests, you can sense when something was really there, it "feels real" (*Dangerous Days* 2007).

Much of *Blade Runner's* most extensive model work can be seen in the film's opening scene, which portrays what was known amongst the crew as the 'Hades' landscape – a vast, dark panorama of fire-billowing chimneys enveloped in a thick blanket of smog. As the film's special-effects supervisor Douglas Trumbull puts it, the opening "really establishes the whole look of the film and the whole kind of ambiance of a world gone completely out of control with polluted air – very low visibility, chemical cracking plants in every direction" (Trumbull 2010).



Figure 35 The 'Hades' landscape, bathed in smog (*Blade Runner*, 1982, dir. Ridley Scott. Film still).

Ridley Scott, *Blade Runner's* director, grew-up in North East England, spending his late childhood and formative years at art college on Teesside. The sprawling, smoke and flame-spewing landscape of chemical and steel-works there was arguably a major influence on the opening scene of the film. He describes the impact of Teesside's landscape on his aesthetic sensibility:

It probably goes back to industrial England, and, a lot of people would say, that's why you get *Blade Runner*. There were steelworks adjacent to West Hartlepool, so every day I'd be going through them, and thinking they're kind of magnificent, beautiful, winter or summer, and the darker and more ominous it got, the more interesting it got. (Scott quoted in Monahan 2003)⁵

The actual Hades model used in the opening scene, however, drew on a chemical plant in San Pedro, California to help build its convincing industrial landscape. Trumbull and his team photographed the towers and pipes of that works silhouetted against the sky (see Figure 36, below), in order to use their outlined shapes in the model.



Figure 36 Photographs of the chemical plant in San Pedro, used as reference for the building of the Hades model (stills from *Blade Runner: Hades Landscapes*, Trumbull, 2010). © 2010 Trumbull Ventures LLC.

⁵ The following quote from Scott can also be found online (though it has not been reliably attributed): "There's a walk from Redcar into Hartlepool...I'd cross a bridge at night, and walk above the steel works. So that's probably where the opening of *Blade Runner* comes from. It always seemed to be rather gloomy and raining, and I'd just think "*God, this is beautiful.*" You can find beauty in everything, and so I think I found the beauty in that darkness" (see, for example, Pat 2007).



Figure 37 Production still of the 'Hades' model (still from *Blade Runner: Hades Landscapes*, Trumbull, 2010). © 2010 Trumbull Ventures LLC.



Figure 38 Production still of the 'Hades' model. (still from *Blade Runner: Hades Landscapes*, Trumbull, 2010). © 2010 Trumbull Ventures LLC.



Figure 39 The Hades model with smoke (*Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner*, 2007, dir. Charles de Lauzirika. Video still).

As Trumbull explains, having taken the photographs of the chemical-plant in San Pedro:

...we could then reduce [the shapes] to various sizes and give them to an actual chemical etching plant where these silhouette cut-outs were pasted together in long rows and then acid etched in brass using a photo-lithography process. This gives a tremendous amount of almost photorealistic detail. (Trumbull 2010)

Once again, an actual, direct indexical connection to the 'real' contributed to the convincingly realistic aesthetic of the film's constructed elements.

Once the 'Hades' model was constructed, smoke was added to the scene to give a greater sense of depth between the layers of cutouts. This smoke also gives the landscape its impression of heavy pollution (the environmental problems of the fictional 2019 L.A. are implied throughout the film – the only animals we see are synthetic, and even at street-level everything seems to be bathed in a thick layer of smoke). It would appear from Scott's comments about the visual pleasure he derived from the industrial landscapes of his childhood, however, that the use of smoke might have been aesthetic choice as much as it was intended to be a carrier of meaning. Smoke confers upon *Blade Runner's* landscapes a feeling of uncertainty and ethereality. As Antony Vidler suggests, writing of E.T.A. Hoffmann's deployment of smoke's aesthetic properties in his stories, it can act as an "agent of dissolution" by which architectural forms may slip "into the depth of the dream" (Vidler 1992: 41). He continues by noting, furthermore, that "as an instrument of the sublime, smoke has always made obscure what otherwise would have seemed too clear" (Vidler 1992: 41). The dark forms of *Blade Runner's* vast and terrible industrial landscape, already rendered

sublime through their excess of indexical detail, their 'perceptual richness', are figured as all the more 'unpresentable' by the occluding presence of smoke. This sense of uncertainty is present throughout the film, whether in relation to its foreboding dystopian landscapes, or with regard to its portrayal of a society struggling with the blurred boundaries between reality and representation. The fact that these themes are explored through a medium boasting a sense of perceptual richness and indexical veracity somewhat lacking in today's digital imaging processes makes them all the more compelling.

CHAPTER SEVEN: STUDIO WORK

In this chapter the development of my studio based research is mapped and documented. The chapter is divided into two parts: the first part – ‘Early Development’ – begins by describing the progression of my early practical experiments and their significance to the project as a whole; the second part – ‘Do Grandads Dream of Celluloid Flamingos?’ – details the development of my final practical submission, the video piece *Re: Flamingo*.

Early Development

The initial proposal for this practice-led research project involved the exploration of “relationships between repetition and the subjective nature of memory formation through a body of camera-based work that scrutinizes the process of transformation inherent in such re-presentation”.¹ This would entail, I suggested, “a self-reflexive process analyzing the unstable boundaries between a memory/representation and its point of origin”.²

The first important question I faced in developing the above rather abstract and theoretical starting point into a body of practical work regarded the subject matter or ‘content’ of the lens-based imagery through which I would approach such issues. My work prior to commencement of the PhD had been predominantly concerned with landscape, and more specifically the natural landscape (see for example Figure 40, overleaf).

¹ Extract from my AHRC funding application (2007).

² Extract from my AHRC funding application (2007).



Figure 40 Matthew Smith, *Closer One*, from the series 'Closer', 2006. Digital print. 58cm x 150 cm.

As I considered the implications of continuing with that theme in the context of this project, I became interested in the idea of exploring the industrial landscape. In part this came about because I intuitively felt that such a focus would offer fertile analogies with the questions of mechanical representation I would encounter through working with camera-based imagery. However, I was also very keen to extend my interest in landscape to encompass more explicitly socially engaged issues than my work had previously explored. Furthermore – and perhaps most importantly – my initial proposal's engagement with memory led me in these early stages to consider my own family history as potential subject matter, and through researching this idea there emerged some compelling possibilities relating to my father's recollections of growing up on industrial Teesside.

One factor that made pursuing the Teesside idea particularly attractive was the fact that one of the local landscape's most celebrated cultural framings was a cinematic one: Ridley Scott's dystopian science-fiction film *Blade Runner* (1982). This fact, in turn, led me to draw a connection to a text that had become very important to the evolution of my ideas during these

early stages of research. The second chapter of Laura Mulvey's book *Death 24x a Second* (2006) considers Sigmund Freud's reading of E.T.A. Hoffmann's short story *The Sandman* (first published in 1816) in relation to cinema. *The Sandman*, I realized, had distinct parallels with *Blade Runner*, and so I set about exploring the possibility of applying Mulvey's ideas to a cinematic reading of industrial Teesside.

At this early stage, the Teesside project was only one amongst several possible avenues of exploration in terms of my studio work. However, I had the blueprint for a promising film piece, and more importantly had identified a set of parameters within which to develop my practice: namely themes of memory and subjectivity explored through lens-based representations of the industrial landscape.

In order to determine a practical/artistic context for these themes, I began researching established artists whose work dealt with similar concerns. In the course of this research, in late 2007 I became aware that a major retrospective of the Canadian artist Stan Douglas's work was showing at the Württembergischer Kunstverein and Staatsgalerie in Stuttgart (*Stan Douglas: Past Imperfect, Works 1986 – 2007*). Of particular interest was the fact that the show included the film installation piece *Der Sandmann*, based on Hoffmann's story, which Douglas had made in 1995 (see Chapter 5, and Figure 41 overleaf).

I spent nine days in Stuttgart, from the 10th to the 18th of December 2007, visiting the two galleries in order to make a detailed study of the many works in the exhibition. Though my motivation for visiting the retrospective

was based in large part upon an interest in the themes that pervade Douglas's work as a whole, the piece that had the greatest impact on my ideas was indeed the film installation *Der Sandmann*.

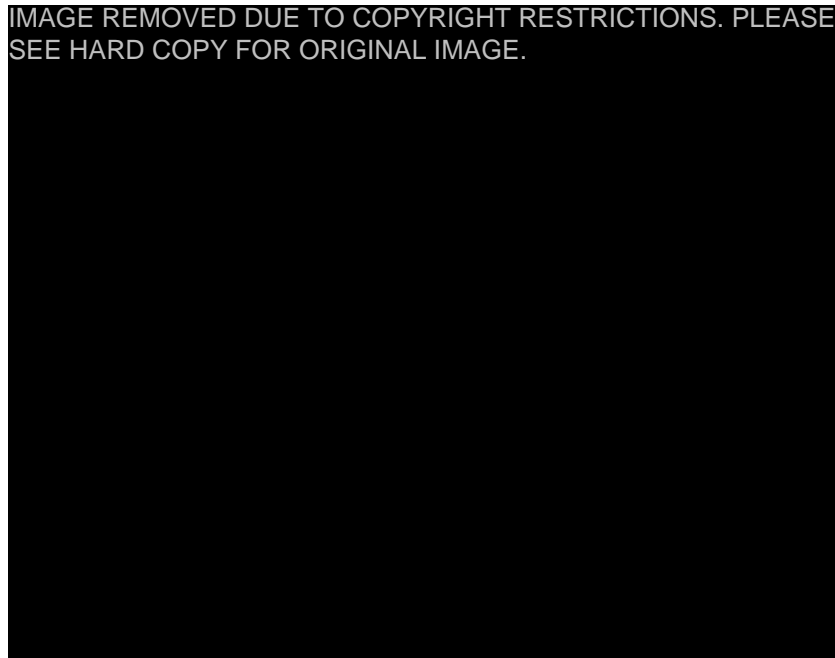


Figure 41 Stan Douglas, *Der Sandmann*, 1995. Installation shot. Installation composed of two 16mm films, two manipulated optical sound 16mm projectors; 9:50 min (loop), black and white, sound. Dimensions variable.

Unsurprisingly, this was to some degree a direct consequence of my interest in developing my own piece of work based around Hoffmann's story. Immediately following my return from Germany however, rather than focusing upon how Douglas had adapted the subject matter of that piece, the work that emerged in my studio developed as a much more general response to his formal concerns. I became particularly interested in a formal convention employed in several of his works, including *Der Sandmann*, which he refers to as 'binary structures'. This approach relies on the juxtaposition of dual elements that are somehow in conflict with one another: for example, the

juxtaposition of two very different time periods in *Der Sandmann*.³ As discussed in my extended analysis of that piece (see Chapter Five), such fragmenting of representational continuity can have the effect of asserting the materiality of the medium, calling attention to the illusionistic nature of a work while also creating an uncanny interchange between its figurative registers.

The Binary Model

The Hownsgill Rip Series (2008)

At this stage I felt that, if I wished to pursue the potential of the 'binary' model, anything I achieved with my own 'Sandman' idea would potentially be too derivative of Douglas's piece, and therefore lack a genuine sense of originality – something that seemed particularly important in the context of the PhD. Consequently, I put my ambitions for developing a work based on Hoffmann's story to one side. Instead I began to focus on exploring, in a more general way, those formal and thematic ideas I had become interested in after visiting the Douglas retrospective.

My first attempts at experimenting with the 'binary' model began via a set of photographs I had taken on the outskirts of the post-industrial town of Consett in County Durham. From the mid-nineteenth century, Consett was one of the world's leading steel manufacturing towns. However, after the British steel industry went into terminal decline in the 1970s – causing

³ Douglas says that his binary approach "began because two is the smallest unit with which you can have conflict" (Enright 2007: n. pag.).

massive job losses at similar plants such as the one at Redcar in Teesside – the Consett steelworks were finally closed down in 1980. The town “became one of the worst unemployment blackspots in Britain” (BBC n.d.) and in the following decades developed an alarmingly high suicide rate, which rose to four-times the national average in 2004 (McAteer 2004: n. pag.). I grew up 10 miles from Consett, and as a child often walked with my parents in the Howns Gill valley, which lies just outside the town. That walk takes in the Hownsgill Viaduct, an impressive 175-foot high Victorian railway bridge that is sadly also a notorious suicide spot.⁴ The disused railway line that crosses the Viaduct forms part of the Waskerley Way walk, and the valley below the bridge boasts beautiful deciduous woodland. There is also a remarkable complex of caves in its eastern cliff face. I remember, however, that as a child the area had an eerie atmosphere. This was in part, I am sure, due to the suicides, but signs of nearby Consett’s economic disadvantages seem to extend into the valley in other ways too, detracting from its natural beauty. Vandalism, for example, is an ongoing problem: large objects such as shopping trolleys are regularly thrown from the bridge; graffiti covers the cave walls, which are littered with cans and bottles from teenage drinking sessions; and scrambler-bike tracks tear-up the field around the small lake that lies just below the viaduct. It was an attempt to figure the childhood memory of this confusion – between the sense of unease I attributed to the valley’s post-industrial detritus and its natural beauty – that led to my first experiments with ‘binary structures’.

⁴ This unfortunate fact is made visible to walkers as The Samaritans have placed signs with phone numbers at intervals along the bridge.



Figure 42 Matthew Smith, *Hownsgill Rip 1*, 2008. Digital print. 19 x 28 cm. See DVD insert 'Disc Two' (inside back cover) for higher resolution image.



Figure 43 Matthew Smith, *Hownsgill Rip 3*, 2008. Digital print. 19 x 28 cm. See DVD insert 'Disc Two' (inside back cover) for higher resolution image.

Each piece in the *Howmsgill Rip* series, which I began in 2008, combines two versions of the same photograph: one 'true' photograph in which can be seen some trace of modernity or 'disruptive' human activity (e.g. a shopping trolley or scrambler bike tracks) layered with a second 'imaginary' version of the same photograph in which that element has been digitally removed in order to present a more idyllic 'natural' scene. The area of the photograph in which the presence overlaps the absence is then torn, in order to juxtapose the difference between the two images (see Figures 42, 43 and 44). The form created by the hole also seems to introduce a third, non-representational element – a negativity similar to that of the central seam in Douglas's *Der Sandmann* (see Chapter Five, pp109-110).

The act of tearing the physical surface of the photographic paper foregrounds each piece's materiality, disrupting its illusory qualities and asserting its status as representational. Each hole also seems to function as a 'frame-within-a-frame', confusing the boundaries of the representation by adding another level to what Derrida refers to as the *parergon* of each piece (see Chapter One, p33). Yet another register of confusion is added here too, in that the collages are themselves re-photographed, meaning that the final piece is in fact a single image in which the tears and protrusions of the rips are themselves flat re-presentations.

I made the decision to tear the photographs (rather than juxtapose the two layers digitally using clean, straight lines echoing the edges of each image) for a number of reasons. Firstly, because of my project's engagement with the subjective in lens-based media I was interested in exploring ways of combining gestural, painterly techniques with the more passive, mechanical

process of photography. Secondly, the act of manually disrupting the surface of the image seemed to echo the real-life, manmade disruptions to the surface of the landscape that the images portrayed. Finally, the theoretical ideas that informed the development of the work seemed to rely on a language evoking such forms. In *Camera Lucida* for example, Barthes describes the subjective elements of the photograph, what he refers to as its 'punctum', with words such as 'cut' and 'little hole': something that 'breaks', 'punctuates' or 'pierces' (2000: 26-27). He describes the punctum as "this element which rises from the scene" and "this wound, this prick, this mark made by a pointed instrument" (2000: 26-27). Drawing on Barthes, Mulvey too speaks of how, through disrupting the illusion of reality in a filmic image, the "moment of registration suddenly bursts through its artificial, narrative surface" (Mulvey 2007: 137-138).



Figure 44 Matthew Smith, *Hownsgill Rip 2*, 2008. Digital print. 19 x 28 cm. See DVD insert 'Disc Two' (inside back cover) for higher resolution image.

Mottled Screen (2009)

As discussed in Chapter Three (pp74-76), Barthes and Mulvey align fictional cinema with a potential for subjectivity – an engagement with what Derrida refers to as the “artistic act” (2003: 220) – that they feel is lacking in traditional still photography. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that my project’s examination of the potential of lens-based media to figure subjective experience led me to experiment with the moving image. My first such experiments attempted to transpose the formal ideas developed in the *Hownskill Rip* series to video. This resulted in the piece *Mottled Screen* (2009) in which a voiceover, through reading a passage from Marcel Proust’s novel *In Search of Lost Time* (1913-1927), reflects upon issues of memory and subjective experience in relation to the natural landscape. The voiceover is accompanied by two identical video tracks that are temporally out of synch with each other, their disparity exposed by a hole or ‘rip’ in the representational surface of the moving image (see Figure 45). The intention is that the temporal interaction between the two out of synch images echoes the text’s philosophically inflected ruminations on past and present, real and representation.

The ‘hole’ in *Mottled Screen* was created, using Apple’s *Final Cut Pro* video editing program, by layering only the dark portions of a third, two-tone image onto the topmost of the two identical images and then removing it along with those parts of the top image it covered. Because the two identical layers are out of synch with each other, this creates a ghost-like effect in which the third image is seen only as a negativity, a shifting gap created by the disparity between the two registers. The hole in the image is as dynamic as the actual

images themselves, continually changing its shape. This rupturing of registers juxtaposes the differing time periods of the two layers in an attempt to visually figure the conceptual ideas suggested in the voiceover. This effect functions in much in the same way as the conflation of time periods in *Der Sandmann* – though where Douglas's piece presents a static seam, *Mottled Screen* presents a continuously shifting rip.

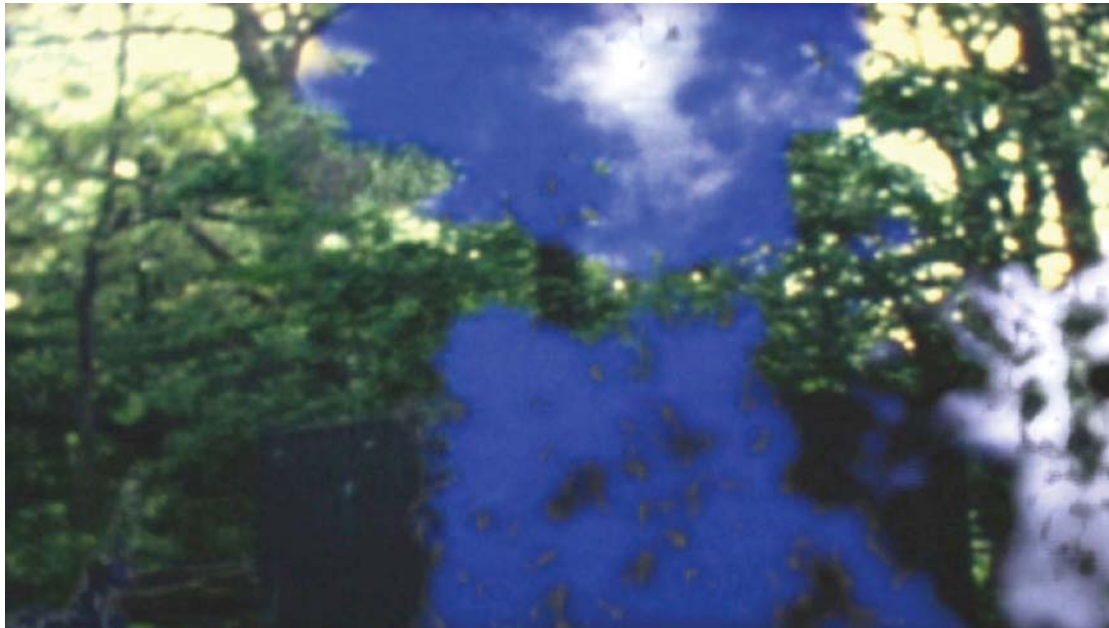


Figure 45 Matthew Smith, *Mottled Screen*, 2009. Video still. Super-8 transferred to digital video. 4:08 min (see DVD insert 'Disk Two', back cover, for full video).

'Juxtapositions'

As both my studio work and theoretical research evolved, I became increasingly interested in what distinctive possibilities digital imaging processes might bring to my project. I began to feel that the binary model I was working to belong, in some ways at least, to an analogue, pre-digital methodology – one of collage, or the limitations of multiple exposures on a single negative. More importantly, I felt that asserting the material,

representational nature of a photographic image as explicitly as I had in the binary experiments somewhat precluded the possibility of figuring the sense of uncertainty and confusion so associated with an evocation of the uncanny (a concept that was becoming increasingly central to my theoretical explorations).

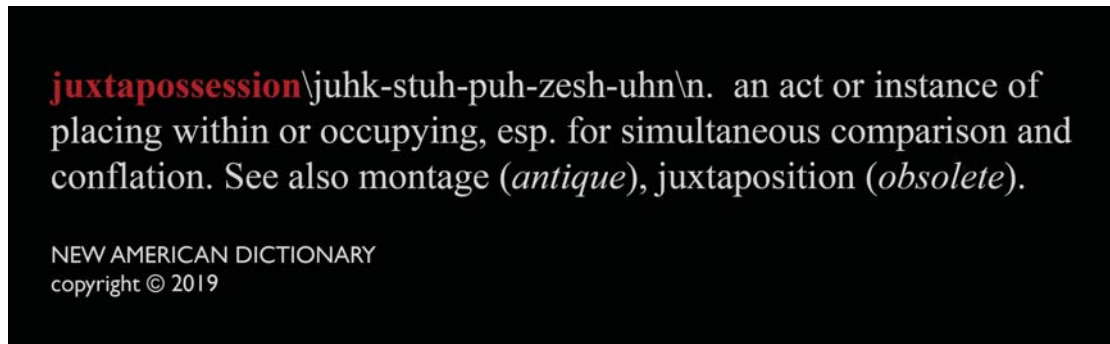


Figure 46 Fictionalized dictionary entry for 'juxtapossession', mimicking the fictionalized dictionary entry for 'replicant' seen in the documentary *Dangerous Days: Making Blade Runner* (2007).

Though the binary model juxtaposes elements within the same frame simultaneously, those elements are nevertheless separated from one another by a 'seam' or second frame within that frame. Such an approach calls attention to the constructed nature of the piece, resulting in a very formal statement that can sometimes appear to be the central concern of the work, therefore detracting from its representational content. Digital imaging processes, however, allow the seamless and subtle integration of infinite, disparate – even conflicting – elements into the same representational space (see Chapter Four). Such an approach retains the illusion of spatial coherence and connection to reality so important to the power of the indexically-charged photographic image, while at the same time facilitating the doubling strategy explored in the binary pieces. As I experimented with these seamless integrations I began referring to them as 'juxtapossessions' (a

corruption of 'juxtaposition' in which, rather than simply existing side-by-side, conflicting elements occupy the same representational space).

Shadowgram (2009)

My first experiment with the concept of 'juxtapossession' drew inspiration from Alain Resnais's enigmatic film about time and memory, *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). The film's most famous image depicts a group of standing figures casting bold shadows on the ground, while the ornamental trees surrounding them cast none.



Figure 47 *Last Year at Marienbad*, 1961, dir. Alain Resnais. Film still.

Shot in the grounds of Schloss Nymphenburg in Munich, the scene's effect was achieved by painting the figures' shadows onto the floor of the garden's central promenade. Parts of *Marienbad* were also shot at Schloss Schleißheim just outside Munich, and it is a photograph I took in the grounds of that palace with which I developed my response to Resnais's film.

The piece, which I named *Shadowgram*, originated as a proposal for a public sculpture; however, because its conceptual elements were all photographic in nature it seemed more appropriate that the final work should itself be a photograph.⁵ The proposal was never realized: what is presented here is a series of maquettes made in Photoshop, including a mock-up of the final piece (see Figures 48, 49 and 50, overleaf).

The concept of *Shadowgram* is to combine ontologically different temporal moments into one image: the 'shadows' representing one, static timeframe and the various figures a variety of other, more fleeting moments. The first stage requires that the shadow of each of a group of standing figures be traced and then painted onto the ground in black paint or similar substance (see Fig. 48). This indexical tracing of each figure's pose via their shadow has an effect akin to photography, in that it transposes a passing/past moment into a more permanent timeframe. Once the shadow-tracing is completed, the people from whom they were traced leave the site. Photographs are then taken, from a camera mounted in a static position above the scene, as new figures encounter the shadows and interact with them (see Fig. 49) – like the actors in the Resnais film pretending the shadows are their own.

⁵ The original intention was that this piece function as a public memorial (not specific to Schloss Schleißheim or related to Resnais' film). I considered, for example, submitting the idea to *iraqimemorial.org*, "an online exhibition of and ongoing call for participation to artists ...to propose concepts for the creation of memorials to the many thousands of Iraqi civilians killed in the War in Iraq" (DeLappe 2009: n. pag.). Like many proposals on that website, my idea would be submitted without necessarily hoping for its realization: "the intent is to facilitate a process that allows for the expression of concepts as a collective, networked, creative act of remembrance that takes place in the present tense" (DeLappe 2009: n. pag.). The piece – perhaps situated in Britain, perhaps Iraq, perhaps the US – would invite the public to align themselves (and thus perhaps identify) with the dead Iraqi civilian symbolized by each shadow marked on the ground. Taken to its logical conclusion, the piece would require many thousands of shadows.



Figure 48 Matthew Smith, *Shadowgram Proposal*, 2009. Painted shadows.



Figure 49 Matthew Smith, *Shadowgram Proposal*, 2009. People interacting with the painted shadows.



Figure 50 Matthew Smith, *Shadowgram Proposal*, 2009. Mock-up of the final piece, showing layered figures. See DVD insert 'Disc Two' (inside back cover) for higher resolution image. Though the photographic execution of the work does not necessarily require a digital process (its layering effect could be achieved simply through long or multiple exposures), its shadow concept draws inspiration from my theoretical inquiries into digital photographic processes in that it seamlessly introduces multiple, distinct temporal elements into the same representational space.

The final piece consists of a digital layering of many photographs of numerous different people standing on the various shadows (see Figure 50). While the boldly painted shadows remain unchanged in each photograph, the difference between each standing figure's pose is revealed through the layering.

The end result is a photograph with an uncanny sense of time: the single moment suggested by the photograph-like fixity of each shadow's pose is offset by the many other moments represented by the differing poses of the figures standing on them. The piece introduces the static time of a photograph, via the shadows, into a changing landscape represented by the changing figures. People attempt to enter the static time of the shadows by aligning themselves with the fixed poses captured on the ground: photographing these encounters and then digitally layering the resulting images reveals both the changing human figures (different body types, different poses) and the 'deathlike' stillness of the shadows. Thus a confusion or uncertainty in the temporality of the image is produced – an uncanny effect not unlike that generated by the originating image from Resnais's film, though rendered in a still photograph while displaying a greater sense of temporal disjunction.

RePlay (2009)

My next attempt to explore the idea of seamless integration – what I was calling 'juxtaposition' – took the form of a short, looped video piece I named *RePlay* (2009). For this work I digitally altered a statically positioned video

shot of three children playing on a beach in order to double the two children who are holding hands to the right of the frame (see the three video stills in Figure 51, below).



Figure 51 Matthew Smith, *RePlay*, 2009. Video stills. HD video, 1:29 min looped (see DVD insert 'Disk Two', back cover for full video).

This repetition of figures effectively makes it appear as though there are five children in the shot. However, the two pairs holding hands perform identical movements simultaneously. The uncanny effect this produces is amplified by the fact that the figures' movements are also repeated temporally as they move backwards and forwards along the beach in a strange, almost mechanistic dance. When figures on film are transformed by such repetition, Mulvey suggests, "actions begin to resemble mechanical, compulsive gestures" and "precise, repeated gestures become those of automata, the cinema's uncanny fusion between the living and dead merges with the uncanny fusion between the organic and the inorganic, the human body and the machine" (2006: 171).

Mulvey proposes that because of this uncanny effect, figures subjected to such repetition "lose their protective fictional worlds...the repeated frames that elongate each movement and gesture assert the presence of [the] filmstrip" (Mulvey 2006: 171-172). Functioning in a similar way to the 'rips' in the *Hownsgill* series, therefore, *RePlay's* repetition foregrounds the representational nature of its image. However, unlike the *Hownsgill* pieces, the illusion of a single, cohesive space remains intact, conferring upon the doubled figures, and indeed the whole piece, a sense of ontological uncertainty.

Do Grandads Dream of Celluloid Flamingos?

Please note: the video piece 'Re: Flamingo' discussed in this section can be found on the DVD insert 'Disc One' on the inside back cover of this thesis (as a watermarked QuickTime file).

While I felt that the *Hownsgill Rip* series was successful in its reconciliation of form and content, my other early experiments (for example *Mottled Screen*, *Shadowgram* and *RePlay*), though formally promising, seemed to offer little scope for development in terms of their subject matter. Having become intrigued by the potential of my digital video experiments, I began to consider once again the idea of developing a moving image work responding to the industrial/post-industrial landscape. The theoretical aspect of my research had by this point narrowed its focus on memory to a more specific interest in the related issues of trauma and the uncanny (in particular their association with the return/repetition of repressed memories). This led me to reconsider my early idea of developing a work which transposed Hoffmann's *Sandman* story to industrial Teesside. The philosophical relationship I had by this point traced between the uncanny and the sublime in my theoretical research seemed to give weight to the concept of approaching the story via the landscape. What is more, the fact that I had deviated from an explicit focus on the binary model in my formal explorations gave me confidence that any resulting piece would contribute something original towards a retelling of the story, rather than simply become a derivative remake or 'double' of Douglas's *Der Sandmann*. I therefore began to consider more seriously the idea of developing a video work that drew on both Hoffmann's story and Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner*.

In the early stages of the development of this piece, I began exchanging emails with my father, telling him about my ideas for a film responding to the industrial landscape of Teesside. He sent me a collection of Super-8mm home movies that his father had shot in the area in the late 1970s and early 1980s. I had seen this footage before, and one shot in particular had stayed with me: a flamingo wading in a lagoon near the ICI chemical works in Billingham, where my grandad used to work.⁶ I transferred this sequence to digital video and began experimenting with ideas similar to those I had explored in *RePlay*, cloning the image of the flamingo and seamlessly integrating the replicated birds into the same space as the original (see Figure 52, below).



Figure 52 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still. *Cloned Flamingos*: Identical 'doubles' of the original flamingo appear one after another, apparently out of nowhere. The possibility of the multiple birds being mistaken for a flock is negated by the fact that they mimic each other's movements identically and simultaneously.

For some time I considered the possibility of this sequence remaining a stand-alone looped video piece like *RePlay*. However, as the emails with my father continued, the potential for a more substantial piece of work became apparent. One of the early emails I wrote to my father mentioned that I had read an interview with Ridley Scott, in which he explained how his childhood recollections of Teesside's industrial landscape had influenced *Blade*

⁶ My father and I have always assumed this bird flew to Billingham from the Flamingo Land theme park, which lies about 40 miles south of Teesside, in North Yorkshire.

Runner's visuals (see Chapter Six, p134). I noted how great an impression the landscape seemed to have made on the director, and asked my father if he had any comparably vivid memories of it.

His reply was surprisingly revealing, detailing his boyhood memories of taking the bus to school through the ICI chemical plant, where he would also sometimes go to meet his father at work. Though the language he used revealed a certain amount of nostalgia for the landscape, in contrast to Scott's rather positive account, my father's email evoked an almost nightmarish panorama of "steaming pipes and leaking valves" (see Appendix Two for this email in full). He concluded by noting that he was able to see the North York Moors from his school and his still vivid recollection of telling himself "I'm getting out of here".



Figure 53 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still. "Steaming pipes and leaking valves."

As I considered how my father's reply might further the development of my piece, I was reminded that Hoffmann used an exchange of

correspondence between his story's protagonists to begin *The Sandman's* narrative (and, of course, that Douglas had relied on this device for his own interpretation). This led to the development of a narrative structured around my email correspondence with my father, relaying a semi-fictionalized exchange between the two of us and 'Clara' – a fictional character borrowed from Hoffmann's story (see Appendix One for full transcription of narrative).

It seemed appropriate that if the Teesside piece were to continue my exploration of the impact of digitization on analogue processes, the letters of Hoffmann's story should become emails. Furthermore, this made even more plausible Hoffmann's plot device whereby Nathanael's initial letter is accidentally addressed to the wrong recipient (an email can be easily sent to the wrong person by accidentally clicking on the wrong contact name). As Royle suggests, the dispatch mistake contributes a great deal to *The Sandman's* feeling of uncanniness:

Nathaniel's is not only a letter about the uncanny...its very address and dispatch make it uncanny, as it comes to be read by someone other (familiar but strange) than the 'intended' recipient. The very sense of what is 'intended' – of so called authorial intention or narrational intention – becomes strange. (2003: 44-45)

Echoing Schelling's definition of the uncanny as "what one calls everything that was meant to remain secret and hidden and has come into the open" (quoted in Freud 2003a: 132), Royle notes that "[Nathanael's] letter is supposed to be private, something that ought to have remained that way" (2003: 44-45). Transposing Hoffman's plot device to my film, therefore, seemed to offer a way of couching those images of the Teesside landscape with which I would be working within an uncanny framework. The translation

of Hoffmann's idea to email also opened up the possibility of structuring the work around a temporal confusion – again an effect often associated with the uncanny. The forwarding and reply functions of electronic mail allow each reader to follow the full history of a correspondence, because all preceding messages are included below the most recent. In terms of the structure of my video piece, this manifests itself as a confusion of voices: somewhat like the shared memories and dreams of the replicants in *Blade Runner*, the memories and dreams described in the emails are narrated simultaneously, in identical format, by each of the three recipients.

I constructed the narrative of the Teesside film, like Hoffmann's story, around three communications. Firstly, an initial email from myself, intended for Clara but mistakenly sent to my father, which recounts how images from *Blade Runner* have begun appearing in my dreams. This is followed by a reply from my father, partly based upon the real email he sent me describing his childhood memories of the Teesside landscape, but also integrating elements of the *Sandman* narrative. Finally a third email, again from me to Clara, considering how various camera-based representations of the Teesside landscape may have contributed to my strange dreams (beginning with *Blade Runner*, before moving on to my grandad's home-movies, my own video recordings, and finally to my father's photographs).

The first drafts of the Teesside video piece (the working title of which was *Do Grandads Dream of Celluloid Flamingos?*)⁷ consisted of sequences

⁷ This early name for the piece is a play on the title of Philip K. Dick's novel *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, upon which the story of *Blade Runner* was based.

from my granddad's Super-8 films – including the flamingo clip – alongside HD video footage I had shot around Teesside myself specifically for the film. I made a number of trips to the Teesside area to get this video footage, eventually settling on a hill east of Middlesbrough known as Eston Nab as the best location from which to shoot. The hill lies just south of the enormous Wilton Works chemical plant site, rising 250 metres almost directly above it, and affords an impressive vantage point from which to see the entirety of Teesside's industrial landscape – from the Redcar Steelworks on the east coast, to the Billingham chemical plant (what used to be ICI when my granddad worked there) across the River Tees to the west, to Hartlepool Nuclear Power Station in the north (see Figure 54 below).

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.



Figure 54 Map detailing industrial sites mentioned in the text.
© Crown Copyright/database right 2011. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service.

It is perhaps interesting to recall here David Nye's suggestion, discussed in Chapter One (pp40-42), that a factory district "viewed from a high place" may evoke "fear tinged with wonder", thus provoking a feeling of the sublime (1994: 126). He observes that artists would often choose such a vantage point from which to develop their representations of such scenes, and furthermore, that these scenes would often be depicted at night (1994: 126-127) – because, as Burke suggests, "darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light" (1990: 73). My growing familiarity with these theoretical ideas led me to do most of my shooting from the top of Eston Nab at dusk, when the lights of the factories had been turned on and the various rising flames would contrast sharply with the dark industrial forms of the works (see Fig. 55).



Figure 55 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still. "Darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light."

Considering my film's recontextualization of Hoffmann's story, it is also perhaps interesting to remember at this point that Royle describes Freud's essay on the uncanny as "an essay in the night, an investigation in the dark,

into darkness” (2003: 108), and furthermore that Freud himself, as though alluding to darkness, suggests the uncanny may locate itself in “an area in which a person was unsure of his way around” (2003a: 125).

Early drafts of my film piece combined HD video and Super-8 footage of Teesside with a voiceover in which I read the entire email narrative myself. Test screenings of these drafts – amongst supervisors, visiting lecturers and peers – helped to determine which elements were successful and which needed further development (see Appendix Three for list of test screenings; see also Figures 56 and 57, overleaf). It became obvious from the feedback generated at these screenings that many people found the single-person voiceover problematic. I was, however, somewhat resistant to the idea of having a different voice reading each letter. I felt that this might give the piece a ‘dramatic’ character too similar to that of traditional fictional cinema. While this in itself would not have been a problem, I was keen to extend my theoretical/formal ideas to all aspects of the film. I intuitively felt that there was room for experimentation with the soundtrack in a manner that echoed the ideas I had been experimenting with in my earlier practical research – in particular, the conflation of temporal registers seen in the *Rip* series and ‘juxtapossession’ pieces.

My ideas about the reply and forwarding function of email led me to consider a form for the soundtrack that, as mentioned earlier, would reveal the transference of identical information between all correspondents. This would also echo the film’s concern (explored in the narration in the third email) with the replication/cloning of memories in relation to both *Blade Runner* and



Figure 56 (above left)

Re: Flamingo looped installation, RENDER10, Newcastle upon Tyne. September 2010. Installation shot.



Figure 57 (above right)

Re: Flamingo, MK Gallery, Milton Keynes. February 2011. Installation shot.

Figures 56 and 57 - Generating Feedback: Later edits of my video piece were tested in both an academic setting (departmental exhibitions, group crits, research seminars, faculty presentations etc.) and public galleries (MK Gallery, Milton Keynes; RENDER10/Globe Gallery, Newcastle – see Figs. 56 and 57 above. See Appendix Three for a more detailed list of such screenings). These screenings tested a variety of installation configurations, and generated feedback from peers, artists, supervisors and the general public. In particular, this helped with determining a final exhibition format for the piece. Feedback suggested that it lent itself best to a cinema-style environment – i.e. a darkened room and large projection. The reasons given for this generally centered around two ideas: 1) that the *Blade Runner* references made the piece somewhat cinematic by default, and 2) that the subject matter of the images ('sublime' landscapes) demanded a large scale panorama/diorama-like presentation. Looped installations were tested, as were 'single showing' cinema-style screenings. The concept of the looped format seemed to lend itself to the subject matter of the piece (repetition in various forms) and to a potential 'reverse temporality' created by the 'Re:' and 'Fw:' function of the emails. Furthermore, looping the piece suggested possibilities relating to numerous ideas explored within the theoretical side of my project, in particular Laura Mulvey's discussion of the effects of re-watching in *Death 24x a Second* (2006: 189, see also this thesis: Chapter Three, p81). However, the essentially linear narrative structure of the piece, adapted as it is from Hoffmann's story, and the prominent allusions to conventional cinema (*Blade Runner* again) seemed to call for a straightforward, 'cinematic' presentation.

digital imaging. This resulted in the concept of the simultaneous voiceover used in the final version of the Teesside video piece, in which each correspondent reads each email.⁸ To achieve this effect, I recorded my father reading his part, and I my own, while the fictional character Clara was voiced by an actor. The results were then layered so that they played simultaneously with one another, creating an uncanny doubling effect brought about by the conflation of different temporalities (that is, the different moments attached to the writing and reading of each email). This confers upon the video piece something akin to what Barthes refers to in still photography as the medium's "That-has-been" quality (2000: 77).

The final version of my video piece, entitled *Re: Flamingo*, attempts to braid a sense of 'that-has-been' or 'past-ness' in the image with a sense of imminence, in order to provoke that feeling of uncertainty associated with the unrepresentable. As has been discussed in previous chapters, evoking a feeling of 'past-ness' is often achieved through foregrounding the materiality of the medium: the seam that runs down the middle of Stan Douglas's interpretation of the Sandman story, for instance, declares the piece's representational status, as do the tears through the photographic paper in my *Hownsgill Rip* series. However, the feeling of uncertain boundaries between fact and fiction, real and imagined, past and present that I wished *Re: Flamingo* to elicit required a subtler approach – a sense of seamlessness similar to that explored in my 'juxtapossession' experiments. My film attempts to build a certain level of insistence on the veracity of the index – the 'truth claim' of the

⁸ The one exception here being that the father does not read the third email, as it was never sent to him.

video image – giving it, to some degree, a documentary feel. Most constructed elements in the piece take minor roles, such as colouring and distortion. Those scenes that are more extensively constructed generally retain a sense of spatial and temporal coherence. When two temporally or spatially distinct images are conflated – for example, the reflections in the eye or the images on the computer screen – they do so with a level of representational seamlessness that exceeds even the ‘juxtaposition’ pieces (see, for example, Figures 58 and 59, below).



Figures 58 and 59 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video stills. *Reflections*: The ‘reflections’ in the two images above, though obviously digitally composited, do not detract from each scene being read as one coherent – if not necessarily ‘truthful’ – physical space.

Rather than asserting their independent temporality through incongruity, as is the case with the layering effect of *Shadowgram*, or the doubling of figures in *RePlay*, the conflicting elements in *Re: Flamingo* are presented in such a way as to not undermine too explicitly the film's feeling of an indexical connection to the real world. As Tom Gunning suggests, "the particular artistic and entertaining delight of digitally manipulated photographs depends on a continued investment in the photograph as potentially an accurate representation, causing a playful inversion of associations rather than simply canceling them out" (2008: 33). The one exception to this lack of explicit incongruity comes towards the end of the film, when the cloning of the image of the flamingo occurs. At this point, the voiceover narrative contemplates the digital image's potential for identical duplication. Though boasting a sense of pre-digital indexical authenticity linked to its apparent materiality, the realization that the scratched and dirty film stock of the Super-8 image is subject to digital manipulation calls into question any prior consideration of the film's images as indexically 'true'.

The sense of uncertainty and confusion caused by the doubling of the birds in *Re: Flamingo* is intended to function somewhat like the famous scene in Chris Marker's science-fiction film *La Jetée* (1962), in which, amid a narrative told otherwise entirely through still photographs, a sleeping woman suddenly opens her eyes and looks directly at the camera (see Figure 60, overleaf).



Figure 60 Stills from the 'eye-opening' scene in *La Jetée*, 1962, dir. Chris Marker.

This brief moment in *La Jetée* provokes a feeling of uncertainty about the status of the film's other, still images. In their inertness these stills possess something of Barthes' "that-has-been" quality, but each photograph is nevertheless subject to cinema's pans and zooms, its fades and transitions and flickering instability. As Janet Harbord describes the effect:

Rushing towards and away at the same time, we are thrown in the opposite directions of recollection and anticipation. The still photograph evokes remembrance, the memory of this place on this day. But the movement across its still surface creates an anxiety about what we are moving towards. This is not a film composed of still images, where both cinema and photography remain distinct. This is a film that finds qualities of movement and stillness in each, that braids together remembering and forgetting, that points us in conflicting directions (Harbord 2009: 2)

It is this sense of uncertainty and confusion described by Harbord that I wished to evoke in my own film. As Mulvey suggests, the moving image tends to be elusive, like "running water, fire or the movement of trees in the wind" (2006: 66). Barthes, she points out, felt that such qualities were "in direct contrast to the way the photograph's stillness allows time for the presence of time to emerge within the image" (Mulvey 2006: 66). However, by braiding together in the video image a sense of 'past-ness' with a sense of elusiveness

and instability, an uncanny space between the dead and the living, the real and the representation appears to manifest itself.

It is perhaps no coincidence that Marker chose the image of an opening eye with which to induce *La Jetée's* most decisively confusing, vertiginous effect. His film is in many ways a homage to Alfred Hitchcock's masterpiece of uncanny cinema, *Vertigo* (1958). *La Jetée's* most direct reference to the earlier film occurs when Marker's time-traveling protagonist admires, alongside the woman who is later the subject of the opening-eye scene, the cut-away trunk of a Sequoia tree. In *Vertigo*, Madeleine (Kim Novak) uses the growth rings of the tree to illustrate to Scottie (James Stewart) her imaginary existence in a distant past: the protagonist of *La Jetée* uses a similar cut-away tree to point, beyond its rings, to his existence in a distant future. Hitchcock's film opens with the image of a woman's eyes looking directly at the camera, gradually zooming in on her right eye until her iris becomes obscured by a swirling spiral representing, we assume, the dizzying experience of vertigo (see Figure 61 below).⁹

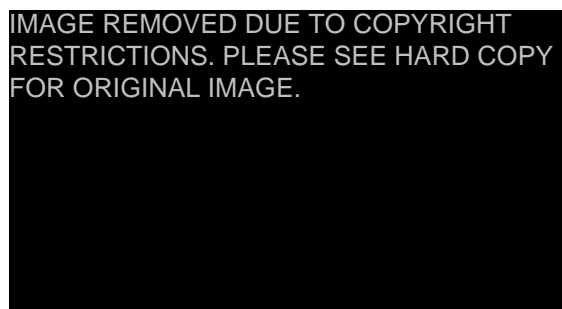


Figure 61 Stills from the title sequence of *Vertigo*, 1958, dir. Alfred Hitchcock.

⁹ The spiral form in the eye is echoed later in the film, in a critical scene in which the twisting stairs of a high bell tower induce extreme vertigo in Stewart's character.

When, in *La Jetée*, the woman in the photograph comes to life and looks directly into the camera, a sense of vertigo is created not only by the confusion of photographic stillness and cinematic movement, but through the dizzying sensation that she is looking out from the protagonist's memory, across the gulf of time that he marked out on the Sequoia tree, and into his post-apocalyptic future. The image of the eye in my own film, perhaps, functions in a manner somewhat analogous to this eye-opening moment in *La Jetée*. It conflates two distinct temporalities: the 'present' time of the narrative, represented by the eye itself, with the 'past' time of the video/film image – the 'reflection' nested in the iris. Beyond simply past and present, however, the eye/reflection image in *Re: Flamingo* appears to integrate other kinds of conflicting registers into the same image. At several moments, the voiceover narrative seems to imply an association between the nested reflection image and, variously: dreaming, memory and artificiality (in contrast to the perhaps wakeful, present 'reality' of the eye itself). These subjective registers, presented as they are through a constructed image, attempt to figure something uncanny in the video image.

Interestingly, the image of the eye as bearer of subjective vision, as opposed to (indexical) reflector of objective reality, is also explored in *The Sandman*. In his story, Hoffmann compares Clara's eyes with "a lake by Ruisdael...the pure azure of a cloudless sky, woodland and flowery meadow, the whole motley life of a rich landscape reflected in them" (1980: 102). However, Nathanael's "dark-sighted eyes are described as flashing with inner light, with fire; they project rather than reflect, thrusting inner forces onto the outside world, working on it to change and distort it" (Vidler 1992: 33).



Figure 62 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still. *Eye image*: “the pure azure of a cloudless sky, woodland ... the whole motley life of a rich landscape reflected in them” (Hoffmann, 1980: 102).

In *Re: Flamingo*, the manner in which the ‘nested’ image sits within the iris suggests a strange uncertainty as to whether, as in Clara’s eyes, it presents an indexical reflection, or, rather, an imaginary, artificial construction – like Nathanael’s eyes, projecting a subjective dream or vision out into the world. This confusion contributes to the film’s blurring of boundaries between imagination and reality – waking and dreaming, real and representation.

The recurring use of the eye image throughout *Re: Flamingo* alludes in part to *The Sandman*’s preoccupation with eyes and sight, but it was the opening sequence of *Blade Runner*, with its close-up image of an eye reflecting the ‘Hades’ landscape, which provided the key reference (see Figure 22, Chapter Six). As has been outlined in the preceding chapter, eyes and allusions to sight function as important signifiers of authenticity and/or artificiality in *Blade Runner*. They seem to appear whenever a confusion

between real and representation arises. While the black pupil of a real human eye might reveal emotional depth, the reflecting flatness of a replicant's retina seems to insinuate the replicated nature of their memories, and, therefore, the artificiality of their emotional responses (see Figures 24 and 30, Chapter Six).¹⁰ The iris in my film's eye has been 'flattened' by a digitally introduced indexical representation grafted from a digital image, which may exist in identical form in a thousand other incarnations. Similarly, each replicant's subjectivity – their memory and emotional response – derives from a copy, the imprint of one real human's experience, implanted into the minds of a potentially infinite number of androids.

In *Blade Runner*, photographs too function as signifiers of the fallibility of supposedly authentic experience. In one scene, not unlike that of the sleeping woman in *La Jetée*, the photograph that the replicant Rachael presents to Deckard in order to claim the truth of her memories (see Figure 25, Chapter Six) momentarily comes to life. The movement in the image seems to symbolize the status of her memory as something closer to a dream than a recollection – an artificial construct rather than an infallible document. As Barthes argues, a photograph's 'intractable reality' "deteriorates when this Photograph is animated and becomes cinema" (2000: 78):

Why? Because the photograph, taken in flux, is impelled, ceaselessly drawn toward other views; in the cinema no doubt, there is always a photographic

¹⁰ As the replicant's creator Dr. Eldon Tyrell (Joe Turkel) explains to Deckard (Harrison Ford): "...they are emotionally inexperienced with only a few years in which to store up the experiences which you and I take for granted. If we gift them with a past, we create a cushion or a pillow for their emotions then consequently we can control them better." (*Blade Runner* 1982)

referent, but this referent shifts, it does not make a claim in favor of its reality, it does not protest its former existence (Barthes 2000: 89).

The unreliability of Rachael's photographic evidence is represented through animation: instead of a fixed record, the image becomes something shifting, subjective and fallible.¹¹ This uncertain line between document and subjective construct is explored in *Re: Flamingo*: its integration of still and moving images leading to a confusion of the opposing qualities by which Barthes distinguished the two media. In *Re: Flamingo*, photographs become activated through zooms and pans – their fixity is integrated into the forward moving 'present-ness' of the narrative, weakening their sense of 'past-ness'. Video passages, on the other hand, slow to stillness, repeat themselves and show other signs of their re-presentational status, revealing the 'intractable reality' of their indexical base.

The role of photographs in my own film draws not only upon the medium's function in *Blade Runner* as evidence of a past, but also as instigator of a certain nostalgia for that past. The sunny suburban happiness of Rachael's photograph is nowhere to be seen in the future-dystopia of *Blade Runner's* industrial landscape, conferring upon her still image the feeling of a lost idyll. Having studied Rachael's picture and sat down in front of his own set of nostalgia-tinged photographs (see Figure 27, Chapter Six), Deckard

¹¹ As Elissa Marder puts it, suggesting the 'unpresentable-ness' of this situation: "Rachel attempts to prove her humanity with a photo that would claim to successfully encase, frame and contain her mother in the square space of a snapshot. But...[s]he, or 'it,' refuses to lie motionless in the frame that has been constructed to contain her. The mother, in *Blade Runner* is no more Rachel's mother than she is anyone else's. Yet this image, this 'it,' disrupts and violates the boundaries of the photographic frame...This photograph, which Rachel offers as evidence of her 'human' origin, is a moving form which cannot be contained by a word, a proper name or a picture frame" (1991: 100-101).

slips into his artificially implanted reverie of a unicorn in green woodland – a dream of an apparently prelapsarian time before his dystopian world became, to use Benjamin Constant’s phrase, “lost in isolation from nature” (quoted in Vidler 1992: 4). Amongst the vast urban/industrial sprawl of 2019 L.A., the only tangible signs of ‘nature’ are artificial, in the form of bioengineered birds and reptiles (Tyrell’s owl being the most prominent example).

In my own film, my father’s black and white photographs perform, perhaps, a similar function to those in *Blade Runner*. As the final email explains:

All his life [my father has] photographed only rural landscapes, as though documenting something that would one day be lost. Perhaps he imagined a future much like the film I saw, where people admire only synthetic birds, and green, sunlit woodlands are only seen through implanted memories. (see Appendix One for full email)

The ‘that-has-been’ quality of these pre-digital, black and white still images – their sense of ‘past-ness’ – bestows a sense of nostalgia upon the natural scenes they portray.

The use of still images of rural landscapes in *Re: Flamingo* (see Figure 64, overleaf) also perhaps owes something to *La Jetée*’s sequence of black and white photographs presenting its protagonist’s recollections of/visits to a pre-nuclear war pastoral landscape. In a scene not dissimilar to that featuring Deckard’s unicorn daydream in *Blade Runner* (see p124 and Figure 28 in Chapter Six), the hero of Marker’s film reclines in a hammock, in his future-dystopia, while, the voiceover tells us, “images begin to ooze like confessions”. The first of these images, we are told, as we are presented with

a photograph of a sunny field filled with animals and trees, is of “a peacetime morning” (see Figure 63, below). This is followed by a photograph of, we hear, “real birds” (perhaps implying that, as in *Blade Runner*, no such thing exists in *La Jetée*’s dystopian future). The images of trees, fields and birds in both Marker’s film and *Re: Flamingo* seem to evoke a sense of ‘past-ness’, and consequently a feeling of nostalgia for a pre-dystopian, rural landscape.



Figure 63 “A peacetime morning.” *La Jetée*, 1962, dir. Chris Marker.



Figure 64 Nostalgia for a pre-dystopian rural landscape? Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still.



Figure 65 A “real” bird? Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still.

Like its still photographs, the Super-8 portions of my film, with their explicit materiality and pre-digital indexical ‘authenticity’, assert the ‘that-has-been’ quality of their subject matter. However, where a sense of intractable reality conferred upon the flamingo image by the Super-8 stock once marked it as a ‘real’ bird (like those in *La Jetée*’s still photographs), digitization has transformed it into a clone: like Tyrell’s owl, it is a construction or representation, subject to infinite replication. This fluctuation of ontological registers – between real and virtual, ‘past-ness’ and imminence – is a feeling I have attempted to evoke throughout *Re: Flamingo*. While I have attempted to confer a sense of ‘present-ness’ onto those elements of my film that seem to “protest their former existence” (Barthes 2000: 89), I have also endeavored to assert the material, representational status of those passages that have a greater feeling of imminence or anticipation, conferring upon them a sense of ‘past-ness’.

Barthes spoke of a sense of 'past-ness' in the photographic image in terms of trauma: to recall Mulvey's explanation, "[t]rauma leaves a mark on the unconscious, a kind of index of the psyche that parallels the photograph's trace of an original event" (2006: 65). Both *La Jetée* and Douglas's *Der Sandmann* seem to feed off this analogy as a means by which to reconcile form with content. The still photographic images of Marker's film tell the story of "a man marked by an image from his childhood", while Douglas's looped and doubled film figures the similar tale of a reawakened traumatic childhood memory. As outlined in Chapter Five, Douglas employed a number of techniques in order to foreground the materiality of his film – and thus its status as a 'traumatic' trace of the past. Repetition was one way in which he achieved this; another was to expose the fictional construct of the narrative. I applied similar ideas to my own piece's story of resurgent childhood memory. For example, like the camera panning past the Schrebergärten set in *Der Sandmann* to reveal the film studio and camera equipment (see p109), the image of the computer screen and camera equipment in *Re: Flamingo* (see Figure 66, overleaf) foregrounds the video image's representational status and its 'materiality' (if indeed the latter term may be applied to the digital image).

While Douglas's various methods of asserting the materiality of the filmstrip and the fiction of his narrative are achieved through disjunction and disruption, *Re: Flamingo* attempts to seamlessly integrate such devices into one coherent representational space. Where Douglas's film utilizes the formal device of a 'cut' down the middle of the screen to present its two distinct

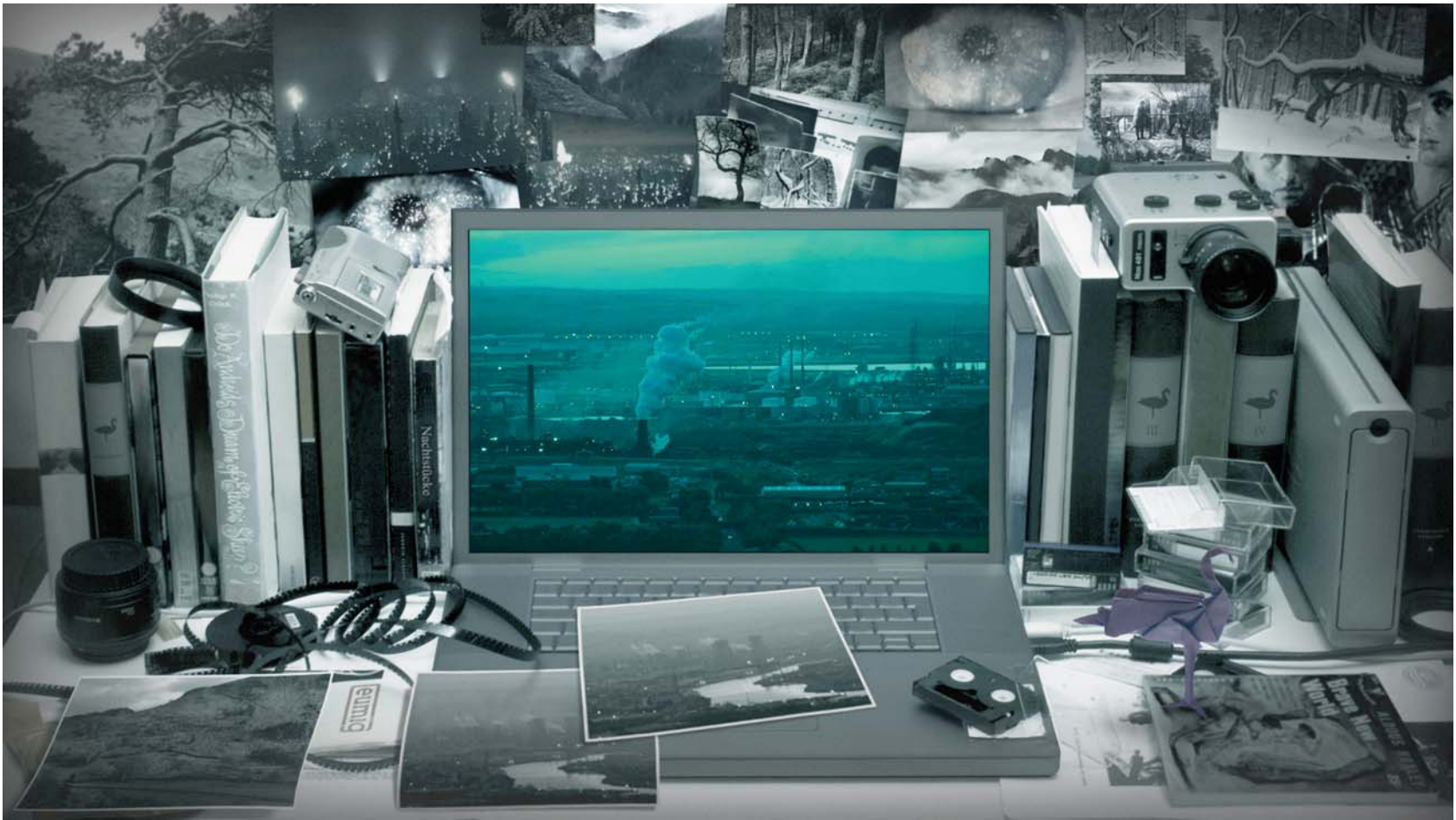


Figure 66 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still. *Desk Image*: While the computer/desk image is intended to smooth a 'formal break' so that, unlike my *Hownsgill Rip* pictures and Douglas's *Sandmann* film, the 'top level' of the film's representational illusion remains unpunctuated, the image also functions to alert the viewer to the material nature of the media of which the rest of the piece consists (showing as it does my father's photographs pinned to the wall, unwound Super-8 reels, DV cassettes and of course the video image on the computer screen).

temporalities, the computer screen in my own film incorporates two such time periods into one continuous, plausible space (therefore functioning in a similar way to the 'reflections' in the eye image). The frame of the laptop screen behaves, in a sense, in the same way as Douglas's central seam, though without announcing the materiality of the whole image.¹² Furthermore, while *Der Sandmann's* methods of foregrounding its representational nature are formally independent (the central seam, the pan past the set to reveal the film studio), *Re: Flamingo* integrates its temporal 'seam' (the edge of the computer screen) and its equivalent of the studio image (the laptop/desk) into the same mechanism. What is more, while the studio pan past the *Schrebergärten* set presents a break from the fiction of Douglas's Sandman narrative, the computer image of my own film remains within the fictional conceit of the story. Through amalgamating disparate and conflicting elements while at the same time retaining the illusion of coherent space and narrative, *Re: Flamingo's* aesthetic of digital 'seamlessness' and, as Gunning puts it, "investment in the photograph as potentially an accurate representation" (2008: 33) remains intact.

In addition to functioning as an amalgamator of registers, *Re: Flamingo's* computer/desk image also helps to bridge the divide between the intimacy of the film's voiceover and the rather detached feel of its vast industrial panoramas. Not only is the desk image on a more human scale than those landscapes, it provides a visual link between the emails read by the

¹² The image within the computer screen's frame is, in fact, a separate, digitally composited video track – therefore the whole image is not in actuality a temporally coherent space, though it does appear to present one.

voiceover (which have of course been written and read on a computer) and the video images of Teesside's factory district (which we see at times displayed on the laptop's screen).

In keeping with the piece's formal aesthetic, *Re: Flamingo's* 'intimate' voiceover is intended to confer a certain level of temporal confusion upon the film's various images. As Mulvey points out, in certain films "varied levels of time are further complicated by the presence of voice...[a] voice-over or the dubbed voice adds a temporality that confuses the moment of recording" (2006: 188). This effect is perhaps amplified in my video piece due to the fact that its multitude of voices, each belonging to a different temporality, read emails discussing issues related to time and memory. While the voiceover bestows a sense of uncertainty upon the temporality of *Re: Flamingo's* video image, it also seems to foreground the image's status as an indexical imprint of a past moment. In contrast to fictional cinema, which endeavors to "mask the primary, the moment of cinematic registration, and [to] subordinate the fascination of movement as recorded time to narrative drama" (Mulvey 2006: 183), the separation of image and voiceover seems somehow to function as an acknowledgement of the recorded nature of the video. Thus what Barthes refers to as the still photograph's 'that-has-been' quality manifests itself, to some degree, in the moving image.

The status of the moving image as document of a past moment of registration is asserted at various points throughout *Re: Flamingo*. This is approached in a variety of ways, but generally involves foregrounding the 'materiality' or re-presentational foundation of the image. One such approach is to enlarge a small portion of an image, thus revealing the grain or pixilation

of which it is constituted. Unlike the photographs in *Blade Runner*, my images do not reveal infinite detail (see Chapter Six, p128) – rather, like Barthes, “however hard I look, I discover nothing: if I enlarge I see nothing but the grain”, I become aware “that this indeed has been” (2000: 99-100). In addition to foregrounding the ‘past-ness’ of an image, the feeling of absence this lack of information evokes seems to figure, as a scar might the trace of a traumatic wound, something akin to Kant’s concept of “negative presentation” (see Lyotard’s account of this idea: Chapter One, p29). In particular, perhaps, in its images of the industrial landscape, this seems to contribute something to *Re: Flamingo*’s attempts to present the sublime, the unrepresentable.



Figure 67 Negative presentation? Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still.

The materiality and re-presentational foundation of *Re: Flamingo*’s images is emphasized in other ways as well. During the various sequences of Super-8 footage, for example, the flickering of dirt and scratches on the film’s surface calls our attention not only to its physicality but, because the damage



Figure 68 (above) Dirty movie? Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still.

Figure 69 (below right) The Super-8 filmstrip 'still' used in *Re: Flamingo*.

is different on each individual frame, also to the fact that the moving image is a series of animated stills (see Figure 68, above). This fact is also revealed in a very direct way, when, in one of the film's sequences, we pan down a 'still' close-up of the filmstrip itself. Speaking of a similar moment in Dziga Vertov's 1929 film *Man with a Movie Camera*, Mulvey suggests that such an image "seems to touch the point between the aesthetic of photography and the cinema. In their stillness, the repeated images...represent the individual moments of registration, the underpinning of film's indexicality (2006: 15). It is this revelation of stillness within movement that leads Mulvey to her definition of cinema as "death 24 times a second", and consequently her correlation of cinema with Freud's understanding of the uncanny as that which exists somewhere



between the dead and the living (2006: 15). *Re: Flamingo* attempts to figure a sense of the uncanny in the landscape of industrial Teesside through representing that landscape in images lying somewhere between the inert and the animated.

The materiality of the Super-8 film used in *Re: Flamingo* is figured most overtly, perhaps, when we see the final frame of the 'still' filmstrip described above. Where preceding frames have shown a blurry image of the River Tees below steam-spewing cooling towers, the final frame reveals a large hole where the projector lamp has burned through the film (see Figure 70 below).

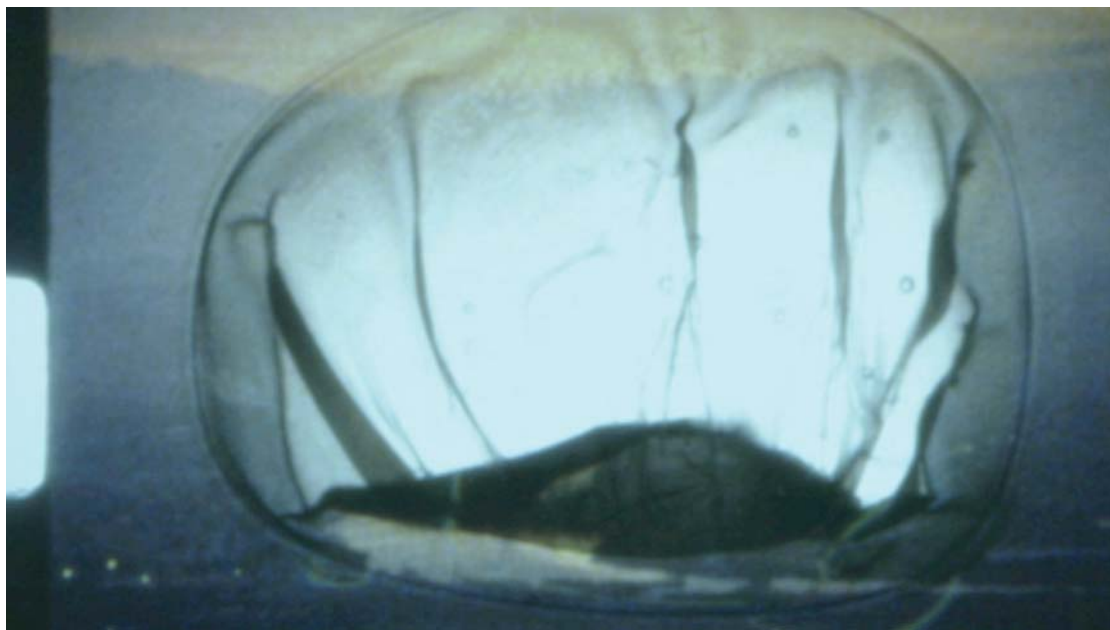


Figure 60 Negative presentation. Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still.

This perforation asserts the physicality of the image surface as explicitly as the torn paper does in the *Hownsgill Rip* photographs. What is more, the violence of the puncture seems to somewhat deflate Barthes' conception of the photographic image as traumatic (see Chapter Three, p68). Lacking the iconicity of a photograph, the burn hole is the simplest of indices, the scar of a

direct encounter with the traumatizing real. It is the unrepresentable figured as a pure absence, an absolute negativity.

While the burn-hole's invocation of the projector lamp signifies nothing more remarkable than the physicality of the mechanical apparatus through which my grandfather's filmic representations of the Teesside landscape were brought to life, it nevertheless has echoes of holes burned in film stock by more authentically traumatic events. The documentary film *The Day After Trinity* (1981), for example, contains footage of the first nuclear detonation at Trinity site, New Mexico in 1945: as the film's director Jon Else explains, the heat from that atomic bomb was "focused so intensely on the film in the camera gate" that it burned a small hole through the negative (quoted in Renov 2004: 120). Watching the footage of the explosion the viewer can actually see, Else points out, "this extraordinary physical imprint of the first atomic bomb" (quoted in Renov: 120-121). He suggests that "[i]n many ways, it's the ultimate movie. It's not just an image on the emulsion; it's actually a hole in the film" (quoted in Renov: 120-121). This hole, like the lesion in my own film, exposes the representational limits of the medium: its inadequacy to fully figure the trauma of the real. Barthes searched his photograph for greater reality but found only the limits of its representation – the grain of the paper marking the point at which the medium could no longer accommodate the real. Similarly, because the heat from both the atomic bomb and my grandad's projector lamp each confront the film stock with more 'reality' than can be integrated into its representational system, the hole created exposes the inadequacies of the filmic medium to fully figure the real.

Reflecting upon the sequence from *The Day After Trinity* described

above• the documentary theorist Michael Renov parallels the trauma to the physical surface of the film with the “absolute unrepresentability” of the nuclear explosion:

This massive release of energy is figurable only as a sheer negativity, commensurable not to the black leader found on every answer print of the documentary but to the void, a hole in the emulsion of the original camera stock, a null set in the domain of indexicality and of signification. (2004: 120-121)

As Renov suggests, the hole – a negatively presented, material-dependent realization of the ‘unpresentable-ness’ of the nuclear blast – cannot be transferred to copies of the film. It remains a trace of the event unique to the original stock, because the gap in the representational surface of the film would be lost through photographic reproduction. The absence that the lesion presents is of course re-presented in copies, but it becomes as flat as the photographic image itself – the hole filled by the material base of whatever medium it is copied to. Within the video image of • , the hole in the Super-8 footage seems to assert both the materiality of the filmstrip and yet, simultaneously, the loss of that very materiality through digital transfer.

Barthes aligned the traditional photochemical image with loss – what he referred to as the medium’s “that-has-been” quality. The advent of digitization, however, has led some theorists to mourn the loss of this feeling of loss: the digital photograph “severs the link between representation and referent” (Doane 2007a: 132) and this absence of a physical, material connection to the subject diminishes the medium’s ‘truth claim’ (see Chapter Four). With this loss, the boundary between imagination and reality becomes uncannily blurred: the photographic image acquires an aptitude for subjectivity

and invention more traditionally assigned to painting (see Chapter Four). The introduction of such malleability leads the contemporary camera-image into an acutely uncertain space between art and index. It is within this uncanny space – between photography and painting, art and index, imagination and reality, death and movement, material and immaterial, past and present, waking and dreaming – that my film attempts to figure an experience of the indeterminate, to present the ‘unpresentable’.

CONCLUSIONS

The central aim of this practice-led research project has been to determine an aesthetic approach by means of which a sense of the 'unpresentable' may be exposed within camera-based representations of the industrial landscape. Although theoretical approaches have informed and given context to this undertaking, the research findings are predominantly aesthetic and studio-based. This project's thesis or 'argument' is therefore presented in the form of an artwork, the video piece *Re: Flamingo*.

The preceding chapter has attempted to clarify the way in which ideas discussed throughout the written thesis – both creative and theoretical – have fed into *Re: Flamingo*'s development. It has mapped the genesis of the piece and detailed the ideas behind a number of its constituent parts. Ultimately however, this account has not endeavoured to translate the video piece's 'findings' into a textual argument. Those findings, as I have said, are aesthetic, and it is important that they remain so. As Timothy Emlyn Jones suggests (paraphrasing Andrew Harrison), for practice-led research in art and design "the medium of communication (of knowledge) must ultimately be works themselves, not descriptions of them or assertions about them" (2009: 44).

Given the above, a concluding textual summary of this project's findings is perhaps somewhat problematic. There are, however, a number of recurring ideas and motifs that have provided a contextual 'spine' for the project's argument, all of which have been clearly articulated throughout the written thesis. Of these, perhaps the most important has been the hypothesis

that lens-based media in its contemporary form(s) offers intriguing possibilities for figuring registers of the unrepresentable. In the wake of digitization, the camera-image's retention of a sense of indexical veracity, allied with its increasingly limitless capacity for manipulation and construction, has facilitated a uniquely promiscuous approach to the opposing ideas of subjective and objective. It is the uncertain space between these two ontological categories, I believe, that has constituted this project's most compelling area of enquiry.

My creative response to the industrial landscape of Teesside has drawn on photographic and film theory, in particular that of Barthes and Mulvey, in order to establish its approach to representing the unrepresentable. Barthes' partiality toward the photographic image's passive, documentary qualities and his resistance to its 'artistic' potential is pertinently revealed in his question, "[w]hat did I care about the rules of composition of the photographic landscape? I saw only the referent...looking at certain photographs, I wanted to be primitive, without culture" (2000: 7).

Such an uncompromisingly objective, documentary attitude toward the photographic image, exemplified perhaps in Bernd and Hilla Becher's compositionally invariant renderings of industrial architecture (see Figure 71, overleaf), is somewhat elided in my own camera-based excavations of the industrial landscape (see, for example, Figure 72 overleaf). My attempt to reveal something of the unrepresentable in such images walks an uncertain line between the subjective and the objective. The inert, objective, indexical

IMAGE REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS. PLEASE SEE HARD COPY FOR ORIGINAL IMAGE.

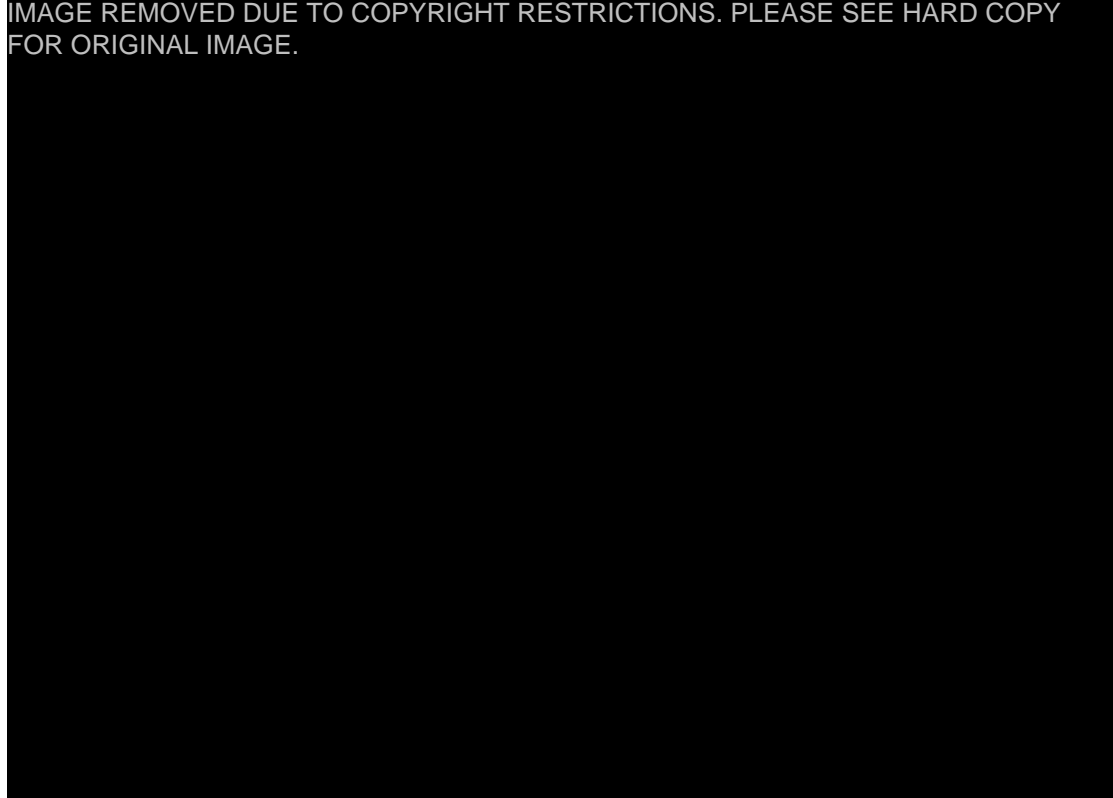


Figure 71 Bernd and Hilla Becher, *Cooling Towers*, 1970s, Gelatin silver prints.



Figure 72 Matthew Smith, *Re: Flamingo*, 2011. Video still.

passivity of the photographic image lends itself to a figuration of the traumatic real (see Chapter Three, p68). What is more, the medium's perceptual richness and ability to graft from objective reality marks it as particularly adequate to a representation of the sublime. However, the sublime and its 'subcategory' the uncanny may be, ultimately, subjective experiences. My attempts to figure a sense of the unrepresentable, therefore, trace the concept's complex, often paradoxical relationship to the ontological registers of subjective and objective.

Re: Flamingo represents its industrial landscapes, to some degree, by means of a documentary aesthetic: it trades in a certain sense of passive registration and objective, indexical veracity. However, that sense of truthfulness is somewhat tempered by various creative incursions throughout the work – distortions that make the viewer question the agenda of the piece. It is the transgressing of such boundaries that contributes, I believe, to this project's distinctive approach to exposing a sense of the unrepresentable in camera-based representations of the industrial landscape.

Non-digital works such as Stan Douglas's installation *Der Sandmann* and Ridley Scott's film *Blade Runner* have been shown to expose a sense of the unrepresentable in the landscape through their reliance on the materiality of the film stock. *Re: Flamingo*, though maintaining that indexical aesthetic as the most appropriate with which to approach such subject matter, does so through a prism of digital immateriality. This brings a new level of uncertainty to a set of forms already functioning as activators of uncanniness, in a medium that has always been intimately bound to a sense of the uncanny.

In 1982, the year of *Blade Runner's* theatrical release, the film theorist Peter Wollen asked:

To what extent does film communicate by reproducing an imprint, in Bazin's term, of reality and of natural expressivity of the world...? Or, to what extent does it mediate and deform (or transform) reality and natural expressivity by displacing it into a more or less arbitrary and non-analogous system and thence reconstituting it, not only imaginatively, but in some sense symbolically? (1982: 2)

This uncertain space in film described by Wollen, somewhere between reality and imagination, is the same space within which a sense of the unrepresentable may be glimpsed. In the 21st century, increasingly uncertain boundaries between media, alongside the omnipresence of digital imaging processes, have given new significance to Wollen's question. This project has explored the spaces revealed by such shifting borders, and in so doing has suggested new forms through which a sense of the unrepresentable may be exposed within camera-based representations of the industrial landscape.

POSTSCRIPT

There are certain ideas raised by this project that suggest interesting possibilities for further research. Of these, for me the most engaging relate to those ideas of alienation, estrangement and a homesickness or “nostalgia for the premodern” (Vidler: 8) discussed towards the end of Chapter Two. The concept of the “sprawling, artificial terrains” of modernity being “divorced from nature” (Luckhurst 2008: 20) was a central, if perhaps implicit theme of *Re: Flamingo*. Considered from this perspective, my video piece explored the alienating effects of the industrial landscape by (to some extent at least) dialectically opposing it to a natural/rural landscape. It seems to me that an interesting evolution of the practical research presented here might be to develop a video piece that reverses this opposition, considering the above ideas from the perspective of a natural/rural landscape.

Some of my most successful experiments with video prior to the commencement of this PhD programme have been developed from footage shot in the northwest Highlands of Scotland (see Figures 73 and 74, overleaf). The ideas behind these pieces have been informed, to a large degree, by my experiences of living for short periods of time over that last twenty years in a small communal setting there.

Leaving that situation to return to modern urban life has always been difficult for me, and I believe the particular feeling that seems to accompany such a departure contains the seeds of an intriguing practical investigation. Building upon the notion that modernity brought with it “the alienation of the individual” – as “community bonds were brutally severed” (Vidler 1994: 4) and

people became “lost in isolation from nature” (Constant quoted in Vidler 1994: 4) – such a project would explore the potential of the ‘industrial’ media of photography and film to map the traumatic departure from an almost edenic natural landscape of ‘connectedness’ to an alienating urban one. As David Company suggests, “[t]he camera [can be] understood as nature’s industrial other but also as an apparatus with a particular affinity with organic form. It [can] produce ‘natural signs’, images as apparently unmediated and spontaneous as nature itself” (2003: 39).



Figure 73 Matthew Smith, *Paper Lanterns*, 2003. Digital video, 10 min.



Figure 74 Matthew Smith, *Sound of Sleat*, 2003. Digital video, 7:41 min.

[A]mid the Ridley Scott images of world cities, the writing about skyscraper fortresses, the Baudrillard visions of hyperspace ... most people actually still live in places like Harlesden or West Brom. Much of life for many people, even in the heart of the First World, still consists of waiting in a bus shelter with your shopping for a bus that never comes.

(Massey 1994: 163, quoted in Keiller 1997)

APPENDICES

Appendix One:

Re: Flamingo – Transcript of Narration

Email 1: Matthew to Clara (mistakenly sent to “Dad”)

Clara,

Sorry I've not been in touch for a while. I think about you but my work is keeping me busy.

Recently I've become preoccupied with thoughts of a film I saw late one night. Some of its images seemed oddly familiar and made such an impression on me they've even begun appearing in my dreams. Watching it seems to have brought back a long-forgotten moment from my past. After the film ended I read an interview with its director, who like my dad grew up on Teesside in the 1950s. He said: “There's a walk from Redcar into Hartlepool ... I'd cross a bridge at night, and walk above the steel works. That's probably where the opening of the film comes from. It always seemed to be rather gloomy and raining, and I'd just think ‘God, this is beautiful’.”

Though what he said didn't quite identify what part of my past watching the film has brought back to me, I think it is somehow related. Set in a heavily industrialized future, the opening scene he talks about shows immense chimneys spitting flames into the sky. As you can imagine it did remind me of the Teesside skyline.

In the film, industry has integrated itself into society to such a degree, that in some cases it's difficult to tell the living from the mechanical. In fact, the main character even falls in love with a kind of machine. It's this part of the story, I think, that made me feel like I'd seen it before - though I'm sure I have not. I can't place the reason for this, but I think the answer lies somewhere in my childhood. That's why I'm writing to you, hoping you might remember something from those days that I can't?

With love,

Matthew

Email 2: Dad to Matthew

Dear Matthew,

I've not heard from you in a while so I was pleased when an email arrived from you. When I read Clara's name I saw your mistake in sending it to me and I should have read no further. I hope you'll forgive me though, as I'm clearly in your thoughts, and I think I may be able to answer some of your questions. Growing up amongst all that industry did affect me – but in stranger ways than you'd imagine.

My bus journey to school went through the centre of the massive chemical-works complex where your Granddad worked. There were two huge lagoons of chemicals that regularly changed colour through fluorescent greens and blues. We went through tunnels of steaming pipes and leaking valves, less than fifty feet from the road. I remember holding my breath through the more colourful ones – scared they were poisonous. Occasionally, I'd go in to meet my Dad. He worked at the Nitrogen Fertilizer Plant where he manually loaded “one hundredweight” sacks on to lorries. He did this all day every day for over twenty years. But from the second floor of my school, beyond all that industry, you could clearly see the North York Moors less than ten miles away. I can vividly remember sitting on the upper deck of that bus, thinking, “I'm getting out of here”. Perhaps I'll never really understand what effect that place had on me, but sometimes, it seems as though the shapes of those chimneys and cooling towers, are fixed permanently in my mind, looming like ghosts on the horizon of whatever landscape I see.

The film you described in your email to Clara reminded me of another ghost that's haunted me since my childhood, and I wonder if it might be this same ghost, that's causing your strange dreams? Once, when you were very young, I read you a story called *The Sandman*. Like the film you saw, the protagonist of this story – who is haunted by the Sandman – falls in love with a robot of sorts. As a child I was read this story too – by my dad. I remember one passage in particular gave me terrible nightmares. It read: “The Sandman is a wicked man who comes after children when they won't go to bed, and throws handfuls of sand in their eyes, so that they jump out of their heads. Then he throws them into his sack and carries them to the crescent moon as food for his little children”.

I used to dream, that unknown to him the sacks my dad heaved all day in the chemical works belonged to the Sandman – filled not with nitrogen fertilizer, but children's eyes! Many years later, just after your granddad died, I found the *Sandman* story amongst his things and soon after I read it to you. I can remember that as I

read it my nightmares about the chemical works came back to me. I think that even then part of me still believed in the Sandman – that my dad had died being forced to take part in his wicked chemical experiments, as this is what happens to the boy's father in the story.

Maybe the film also reminded you of the Sandman story and that sad night years ago when I read it to you? If the industrial landscapes of the film also brought to mind the landscape we would see when we used to visit your granddad, maybe somehow, some part of my childhood nightmare found its way to you?

Again, apologies for reading an email not intended for me. I hope some of what I've said might be helpful ...

With love,

Dad

P.S. With the *Sandman* book I found some of your granddad's old home movies. I'll post them to you. I think there could be some shots of Teesside, which I thought might help with your work.

Email 3: Matthew to Clara

Clara,

It was my own mistake but I regret that my dad read the email I intended to send to you. You'll find it (with his reply) below this one ...

Though I'm sure he has identified the cause of my peculiar dreams, for some reason it hasn't helped – and unfortunately the Super-8 reels of my granddad's he posted to me contain very few shots of industrial Teesside. In what shots of the area there are the factories are out of focus or half cropped out of the frame – the camera zooming in on some piece of wildlife. In one shot a flamingo that had escaped from a nearby theme park is seen wading in a lagoon beneath the chemical works. As I watched this I thought about my granddad, who was a keen birdwatcher. I wondered what he'd think of the novel I'm reading – another vision of a dystopian future inspired by the Teesside landscape. One of its characters announces “a love of nature keeps no factories busy.”

When I realised dad's email hadn't helped me shake the strange images from my mind I decided to drive to Teesside. I thought it might help to see it with my own

eyes. But I took my video camera with me that day and when I returned home I watched what I'd recorded. What had comforted me while I was there returned, on the video, as the same peculiar landscape that's been troubling my dreams! Maybe there was something about my recordings that reminded me of my granddad's old Super 8 films – or perhaps seeing the landscape framed by a screen gave it something of that film I saw? Whatever the answer is I see now that filming a thing can change it. This makes me think again about my dad. In his email, he remembered as a child looking at the chemical works and saying to himself "I'm getting out of here". When he was eighteen, a photography diploma in another city allowed him to leave. But I think it offered another kind of escape as well. All his life he's photographed only rural landscapes, as though documenting something that would one day be lost. Perhaps he imagined a future much like the film I saw, where people admire only synthetic birds and green, sunlit woodlands are only seen through implanted memories.

But industry and technological simulation have, in a way, caught up with my dad. The photochemical processes that intrigued him as a boy have been electronically replicated and replaced. I'm not sure if this matters much to me, but for some reason it makes me think about my granddad's home movies. The dust and scratches on the film surface always remind me I'm watching an animated sequence of frozen moments, but they also seem to give these "memories" their own life independent of the permanence of the images. The sense of lost time this decay evokes is something that digital images don't seem to have. They are memories without their own history. Like the androids in the film I saw who were gifted with other people's memories to convince them of their individuality, like clones one recollection is indistinguishable from another.

Maybe it's this that's been haunting me since I saw that film. A strange image of technology moving in, not only on reality, but on time and on the life of my memories. Perhaps, like the character in the film I saw, and in the book my dad read me as a child, I'm under the spell of a machine – possessed by nothing more than the mechanical representation of a landscape I used to see as a child, and haunted by the strange dream that my memories of that landscape are somehow not my own.

I hope you are well and that I hear back from you soon ...

With love,

Matthew

Appendix Two:

Email from Michael Smith to Matthew Smith

sent 28.12.2008

Dear Matt,

A thought that's occurred to me - one of your questions has more significance than you'd imagine - the Blade Runner one. I've told you some of this before but maybe not with enough emphasis.

From age 11 to 13+ my journey to school by bus went through the centre of that huge complex. A snapshot: Sitting upstairs on an unheated double-decker, dark winter mornings and evenings. Men smoking, 'No Spitting' signs. Driving through took 10 to 15 mins. There were two huge lagoons of chemicals that regularly changed colour - fluorescent greens and blues. The main Billingham outlet to the Tees was usually a primary colour. We went through tunnels of steaming pipes and leaking valves maybe 50 feet away. I remember holding my breath through the more colourful ones - scared they were poisonous. Occasionally I'd go and meet my Dad (pre-security days you could almost wander in). He worked at the Nitrogen Fertilizer Plant where he manually loaded one hundredweight (50 kg) sacks on to lorries - all day every day for over 20 years. At one time the route to find him was through the 'drum plant', where they made large steel drums for the chemicals. It was literally deafening - a different dimension to the nightmare. The point of telling you this is that I can vividly remember sitting on that upper deck age 11 or 12 thinking - I'm getting out of here. Which is obviously relevant to how you came about, eventually.

Love Dad

P.S. Counterpoint: from the second floor of my school you could clearly see the North Yorks Moors less than 10 miles away.

Appendix Three: Test screenings of *Re: Flamingo* (group screenings only)

- Newcastle University Fine Art Lecture Theatre, Newcastle upon Tyne. 21st October 2009. Screening of first draft of *Re: Flamingo* for selected audience.
- *RENDER10*, Globe City Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne. 23rd – 27th September 2010. Looped installation of late draft of *Re: Flamingo* within public group show (see Figure 56, p166).
- Newcastle University Fine Art Seminar Room, Newcastle upon Tyne. 28th – 29th September and 6th October 2010. Three screenings of late draft of *Re: Flamingo* for invited audiences (see Figure 75 below).
- MK Gallery, Milton Keynes. 3rd February 2011. Late draft of *Re: Flamingo* shown as part of '*Matt Smith: Selected Films, 2002-2010*' (see Figure 57, p166).



Figure 75 E-invite/poster for screenings of a draft version of *Re: Flamingo* (then known as *Do Grandads Dream of Celluloid Flamingos?*) within Newcastle University.

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