

left: SUSAN NORRIE, *Undertow*, 2002 (detail), installation view, ACCA (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art), Melbourne. Photographs courtesy Mori Gallery, Sydney.

right: NAOMI BISHOP and RICHARD RABER, *Traces*, 2002 (detail), public imaging installation, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), Melbourne.

far right: EMMA SLEATH, *Pulse*, 2002 (detail), public imaging installation, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), Melbourne.

Cinema and art were regarded as separate fields of endeavour until the 1990s, when several major exhibitions took place exploring the relationships between them.¹ These exhibitions were organised in response to the increasing number of artists who were not only inspired by cinema (which has certainly been the case since the surrealists engaged with the work of Alfred Hitchcock), but were actually using the moving image in their work. Today the definitions of art and cinema are blurred. Many artists investigate the expanded art of the moving image, freely experimenting with all its forms, including film, video and digital media. One notable cinematic interpretation is Douglas Gordon's video *Twenty-four hour Psycho*, 1993, which slows down Hitchcock's original film to twenty-four hours of silent viewing time.

Chris Darke, a British critic and writer, has commented that the job of the film critic is no longer complete if it is confined to the cinema. The moving image has migrated into the houses of contemporary art practice and, while video has been with us for forty years, filmmaking for over one hundred years and digital media for the

last decade, these three broad streams of activity have begun to cohabit. Darke also suggests that the 'overlap of gallery and cinema begs the question of the correct critical language with which to address the interpenetrating worlds of film and art'.² To accommodate such developments, a new critical language is needed, with new curatorial practices and new forms of cultural architecture. It is a challenging moment both to create and exhibit the moving image, precisely because of the plethora of content, the saturation of media and the rapid changes in the tools with which practitioners make and distribute the image. The challenge for the creators is to maintain a critical practice in relation to this context; for the exhibiting institutions it is to find new museological models for the display and contextualisation of the moving image; and for galleries of contem-

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porary art it is to accommodate new and evolving forms of moving-image narratives within the pantheon of current art.

Several major changes in both the popular and cultural landscape have given rise to this expanded form of moving

image. A key practical influence is the lack of interest by mainstream cinemas in screening independent and/or experimental films, resulting in filmmakers presenting their work in a museum or gallery context. This was particularly evident at 'Documenta 11' in Germany in 2002, where key feature-length films, for example by Trin T Min Ha, were shown in dedicated rooms. Furthermore, filmmakers are exploring the architecture of the gallery space as a way of unravelling the narrative structures of conventional filmmaking. Isaac Julien, for example, was a founding member of Sankofa Film/Video Collective, one of a number of film and video workshops set up in the United Kingdom in the 1980s in the wake of the riots against British racism. His *Paradise Omeros*, 2002, is a three-screen digital film projection in which the failed promises of the West are



told in multiple and parallel streams. In Australia most digital-media artists emerged not from filmmaking but from their early and expert embrace of computer graphics programs. Peter Callas, Sally Prior, John Hansen and many others developed digital videos in this way.³

Visual artists have also taken on the role of film director, screening works in film festivals and, at times, achieving a commercial release. The American painter Julian Schnabel is well known for his involvement in full-scale cinematic productions, having made the successful films *Basquiat*, 1996, and most recently, *Before Night Falls*. Internationally acclaimed Australian artist Tracey Moffatt has directed films such as *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, 1990, a seminal work that reconfigured the Australian landscape as a place imbued with complex and tragic stories involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Moffatt works across both film and photography and is currently based in New York.

Today it is not uncommon for an artist to be working in still and moving images, print, drawing and filmmaking, even in painting and video. Susan Norrie's work has explored the moving image for the last

decade as part of an ongoing interest in the principles of the Enlightenment and their basis for our modern age. Her exploration involves details of images from historical sources and surfaces such as oil, glass, paint, mud and film. In her 2002 exhibition, 'Undertow', at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Norrie presented a suite of video projections that reveals a world in slow motion infected by toxic waste, fire, smoke and ecological ruin. At once seductive and haunting, 'Undertow' continually evolved and dissolved through the use of the video image.

The increasing use of video by artists owes much to the accessibility of the relevant technology. Cameras and edit suites are relatively cheap and user-friendly, allowing artists to edit and compile their work at home rather than having to hire post-production suites at commercial rates. The film and video camera has become another artistic tool, along with the stills camera or the paintbrush (though the

cost of exhibiting this work continues to present problems).

Beyond this technical liberation, however, there is a larger set of changes that has influenced the 'interpenetration of art and cinema'.⁴ Such changes have led to the emergence of Melbourne's Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI), a centre dedicated to the moving image in all its forms. Situated at Federation Square in Melbourne, ACMI was designed by the London-based Lab Architecture Studio in collaboration with a local firm, Bates Smart. In many respects the architecture of ACMI reflects these changes. It is a building bisected by arcades that link the Square to Flinders Street. These arcades are lined with almost forty plasma and LCD screens. Silent cinema has been commissioned for the screens in the form of ambient films that play on multiple surfaces at once. This imagery, by emerging filmmakers such as Emma Sleath, Ben Speth, Simon Price and Simon Terrill, accompany visitors on their way to the cinemas, the gallery or various production spaces on the ground floor. These public imaging screens, as they are known, are the glue in the building, binding cinema and art,



left: EMMA SLEATH, *Pulse*, 2002 (detail), public imaging installation, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), Melbourne.

right: EMMA CRIMMINGS, *Federation Faces*, 2002 (detail), public imaging installation, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), Melbourne, footage courtesy Screen Sound Australia.

far right: NAOMI BISHOP and RICHARD RABER, *Traces*, 2002 (detail), public imaging installation, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), Melbourne.

television and digital video. Such a design, and such a concept, could not have emerged without the co-mingling of art and cinema already in place.

The interpenetration of art and film began in the early twentieth century in the work of artists such as László Moholy-Nagy and Hans Richter, who sought to create a form of art that encompassed film, architecture, sculpture, photography and sound. This was the beginning of the European modernist interpretation of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the all-encompassing total work of art most often associated with Richard Wagner, who pursued the total integration of music, drama and spectacle. In Moholy-Nagy's 1930 film *Lightplay Black White Grey* (a documentation of his sculpture *Light space modulator*), there is a continual dissolve between sculpture, architecture, light, cinema and shadow. While perhaps not as ambitious, the work of Australian artist Frank Hinder offers a close parallel. From the late 1960s Hinder created sculptural objects that had both kinetic and light-emitting properties and aimed at a set of experiences beyond object-hood. Similarly, in 1968, Australian émigré artist Stanislaus Ostoja-Kotkowski

began pioneering work with lasers, mirrors and prisms, and synthesised music.

Montage, along with *Gesamtkunstwerk*, is another principle that underpins both the architectural structure and creative direction of ACMI. The term is a cinematic one and is heralded in Sergei Eisenstein's *The Battleship Potemkin*, particularly the pram scene on the Odessa steps in which short, sharp edits collectively build an atmosphere of heightened alarm and emotion. Through montage a viewer can absorb information with a kind of concatenation of visual imagery. Rather than a single, linear narrative, many small fragments are strung together to add up to a larger set of meanings. The Australian filmmaker Gregory Godhard is especially talented in his use of montage, which he renames 'laceration', whereby hundreds of still images are edited together so that the camera appears to be boring at high speed through urban architectural spaces.

While the modernist concepts of

Gesamtkunstwerk and montage laid the foundations for the blurring of art and cinema, more recent changes have had a bearing on expanded forms of the moving image. A twenty-first-century parallel to the notion of montage is the technological network. The idea of a network is not in itself new. A network located in a virtual environment that trades in the moving image is. We are living in a networked environment, not a sequential one, and audiences are becoming increasingly used to absorbing information through fragments that are linked in a myriad of ways rather than through single narratives. This is a form of interdependent 'dataism'. In a book titled *The Moment of Complexity*, Mark C. Taylor claims that 'we are, in effect, incarnations of worldwide webs and global networks whose complexity is fraught with danger as well as opportunity'.⁵

Virtual networks and the ease of communication provide opportunities for collaboration and the establishment of online communities that would not exist otherwise. The Australian artist David Haines, for example, relates the story of going online for advice about modelling a three-dimensional flying saucerpan. The com-



munities with which he conversed were not from the art world. A network can be a living archive, an *aide memoir*, and an environment in which montage is the key experience. A network can facilitate future moments of exchange. However, the danger is that networks are also continually monitored. Surveillance is ubiquitous and freedom of speech can easily be curtailed. As Geert Lovink comments:

The internet has come under the control of telecom carriers, content-driven access providers such as AOL, software giants and the media industry. Many in the IT industry are working in close harmony with legislators, further privatising what is left of the internet public domain, restricting privacy, demanding anti 'cyber-terrorism' legislation, installing content filters and tolerating monopolies.⁶

Taylor also comments that we are increasingly 'governed by electronic media [where] the currency of exchange is image'.⁷

A further danger inherent in this technological network is what Paul Virilio calls 'deterritorialisation'. Virilio has a particularly negative view of advances in telecommunications, internet traffic and virtual societies. He claims that society is losing a

connection with 'territory', with the geography of the landscape, and with the idea that it takes time to travel from one place to another.⁸ The irony is that despite our becoming more accustomed to life as a conduit, communications technologies can have the effect of demobilising us, causing us to sit still, at home, in front of the screen. Virilio says that we now have the 'immobility of all possible journeys or paths ... there is no longer any "here", everything is "now"'.⁹ Such comments conjure the bleak picture of weather balloons traversing an infected sky in Susan Norrie's *Undertow*.

In the light of these changes, this threat of 'deterritorialisation', the emergence of networks of exchange and fragmented experience, it is useful to compare a group of moving-image works that deal with travelling in and through the Australian landscape. While not an Australian film, Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* nevertheless has a firm place in the cinematic psyche of Australia. This 1971 film follows a teenage

girl and her young brother as they wander lost in the Australian desert after their father has tried to shoot them but instead, finally, shoots himself. They encounter a young Aboriginal man (David Gulpilil) who helps them find their way back to the bitumen road that leads them home. Throughout the film, the Aboriginal man makes advances to the girl, though she does not completely understand. Rejected, he kills himself. At the end of the film, the camera focuses on the teenage girl's foot as she literally steps from the bush onto the bitumen road – at this threshold the landscape loses its hold on her as she too loses her hold on the landscape.

There are moments of parched brightness in the desert, passages of intense light and dark, scenes where the desert offers hallucinations of past explorers riding camels across the sand, and imagery of deserted mines and abandoned housing that depict a strange, angular, inhospitable environment. At times the soundtrack mixes radio frequencies with the voices of absent people and the sound of ants scratching in the sand. The photography alternates between close-ups of lizards, snakes and ants in the bush, quick shots



of a butcher at work in the city, and long sequences depicting the majestic vastness of the Australian bush. Though underpinned by this fragmented imagery, the film is not in itself fragmentary. Rather, there is a strong narrative which takes the disorientated characters through a series of spatial thresholds, often marked by blazing light and intense darkness – from city to desert, to bush to farmland, to an abandoned mine and, finally, to the bitumen road.

Almost thirty years later, Indigenous photographer and filmmaker Michael Riley made *Empire*, 1997, a non-narrative film that also presents a sequence of images of Australia. Like Roeg, Riley's camera focuses on the detail of the Australian landscape: lizards, drought-stricken clumps of earth that barely soak up the rain, ants, a dead parrot and cattle carcasses. Such potent imagery is juxtaposed with scenes of a bird soaring through the blue sky and time-lapse imagery of light and shadow shifting across enduring desert boulders, propelling us simultaneously into past and present. Gradually, Riley's film extends to symbols of colonisation: the Christian cross (in flames and as a mirror); stigmata; the British flag; and a sign

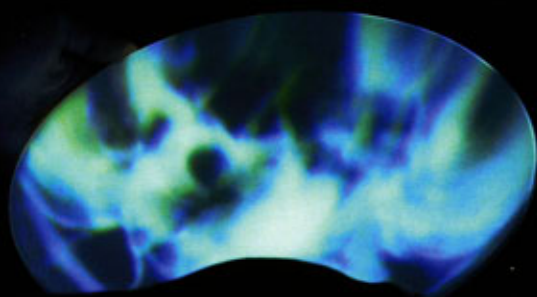
that says 'Slaughterhouse Ck', suggesting that with the onset of Christianity came destruction of both the landscape and its Indigenous people. There is a decaying beauty, as if British hopes for the urban and rural landscapes of Australia have fallen into a languid and languishing dream. Riley's film has been made in the context of a postcolonial apprehension of the Australian landscape, one which, as in Moffatt's *Night Cries*, reveals an earth replete with stories of racial conflict and personal tragedy. *Empire* is also built up from fragments, a montage of elegiac imagery.

When David Haines was trying to model a saucepan in flight it was for a collaborative work with Joyce Hinterding titled *The blinds and the shutters*, 2001. Here the digital image is used to create a science-fiction-like occurrence where domestic items drift out of the apertures of a modernist house in a rural setting. It is as if these objects are travelling on invisible vectors through a space devoid of gravity, yet controlled by



unseen forces. Propelled into outer space, the items eventually reappear in a tree-lined grove after their journey around four screens. The digital artist will create work that looks and feels quite unlike film. The effects of digital imagery are not as rich or seductive as film, and the best artists use this to their advantage. For Haines and Hinterding, rendering objects of domestic use and sending them like satellites into NASA space is an intrinsically digital journey. It is as if the spoons, forks, night-dresses, chairs and television set are floating on the waves of the internet, as both passengers along for the ride and as satellites surveilling what lies below.

It is important to consider this work in the light of Virilio's comments about 'deterritorialisation'. Haines and Hinterding have chosen to reintroduce the notion of travel in fresh conceptual ways. They depict a journey that is certainly dislodged from territory, but is nevertheless a journey. Similarly, the interactive digital video installation *Hold vessel 1*, 2001, by Lynette Wallworth, sends the viewer's vision into places where the naked eye is unable to go. This journey through the landscape is aided by scientific photographic equipment:



left: **LYNETTE WALLWORTH, Hold vessel I, 2001**, 3-channel DVD installation, 3 projectors, digital video imagery, surround sound, glass bowls, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), Melbourne.

right: **NAOMI BISHOP and RICHARD RABER, Traces, 2002** (detail), public imaging installation, ACMI (Australian Centre for the Moving Image), Melbourne.

minute marine life has been captured by microscopic devices, while the turbulent activities of the night sky are recorded through telescopic lenses. Wallworth worked collaboratively with a group of experts and scientific photographic libraries. The work also presents real domestic objects: glass bowls in which the viewer is invited to capture and literally 'hold' the moving, mutating and continually regenerating imagery projected from above. Wallworth's installation integrates sound, image and interactivity. It cannot be experienced without the presence of the visitor and the overwhelming impression is of holding life in one's hands. In this work life is tentative, precious and fragile.

Filmmakers are now experimenting with digital technologies, shooting on digital film, and post-producing with digital effects. Artists are creating work exclusively for the internet in the form of interactive websites. This is an alternative form of distribution in an age when mainstream broadcasters and cinemas tend not to exhibit experimental work. In the future, with advances in compression technologies, we may see films distributed via the internet. Exhibitions, collections, anthologies

of writing and architecture will gradually change to take account of these developments. The Screen Gallery at ACMI, for example, is wired with multiple cables that allow an array of video and digital signals to be sent through the space to various screen devices. The public imaging screens have content delivered to them via a media platform that works like an internal server, using MPEG 2 technology.

In writing and thinking about the moving image it is important not only to consider advances in technology but also the epochal changes that are occurring in our sense of space and time. We live in an era of the coexistence of different spatial sensibilities. These sensibilities are palpable through the increasingly diverse ways in which we experience space and place. They enable the emergence of new forms of the moving image and new ways of approaching the idea of travelling through a landscape, or across a space. As contacts in the real world are further networked

with virtual communications, our moving-image makers will find new conceptual approaches to age-old subjects.

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- 1 Exhibitions of note include: 'Passage de l'Image', Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 1990; 'Phantasmagoria: Pre-Cinema to Virtual Reality', Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1996; 'Notorious: Alfred Hitchcock and Contemporary Art', Oxford Museum of Modern Art and Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1999; 'Between Cinema and a Hard Place', Tate Modern, London, 2000-02; 'Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences', Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, 2001-02; 'Into the Light: The Projected Image in American Art 1964-77', Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, 2001-02.
- 2 Chris Darke, 'Cinema exploded: Film, video and the gallery', in *Light Readings, Film Criticism and Screen Arts*, Wallflower, London, 2000, p. 159.
- 3 Stephen Jones is doing extensive research on this group of artists.
- 4 Darke, op. cit.
- 5 Mark C. Taylor, *The Moment of Complexity: Emerging Network Culture*, University of Chicago Press, London, 2001, p. 17.
- 6 Geert Lovink, *Dark Fiber*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002, p. 2.
- 7 Taylor, op. cit., p. 9.
- 8 Paul Virilio, *Open Sky*, Verso, London, 1997, pp. 25-6.
- 9 *ibid.*, p. 142.

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