

Introduction

None of the difficulties, none of the fevers of the first half of the twentieth century has entirely disappeared from our horizon. But, even while it is still a difficult business constructing modernity in certain parts of the world, it has been overtaken across the whole surface of the planet by powerful movements of acceleration and excess. (Auge 1999:22)

Much of the developed world operates under what is referred to as liberal democratic capitalism. This implies government by the people, operating in a free and profit driven market, which in theory suggests an equality of voice and access to markets for personal profit. However the 'powerful movements of acceleration and excess' which Auge refers to above are less to do with the intentions of a liberal democratic capitalist system and more accidental effects of it. This dissertation explores the constant push of commerce and the digital communication revolution as contributory factors to this hypermodern or globalised state.

My body of work - *Cirque du Pan* - comprises three acts. Each act contains three video pieces. They are not triptychs in the traditional sense, although the works developed out of each other and exist in triangular dialogue. Each of the groups has a thematic title, the first is *Powercycle*, the second is *The Individual Distressed*, and the third is *Innocence Remapped*. These themes radiate around the systems of power and projection, within the hypermodern context, as probed by this dissertation.

My work could be described as symptomatic of this hypermodern state. It operates within the mode of the global media system, both accepting and questioning it. While it understands there is no singular global media system that exists as a truly all-pervasive and homogenous entity, it is instead concerned with the specific limitations of projected and constructed realities and their similarities, as imposed by commerce.

The work explores several key states that operate within these systems. Repetition, construction of reality, cyclicity, and acceleration are states or symptoms that the works probe. This reflects the inherent repetition at the heart of any global media

Capitalist liberal democracy implies government of the people and freedom of speech. In an increasingly globalised world, bodies such as the G8 and the World Bank have a powerful influence upon world affairs and yet they are not subject to the filtering effects of the democratic process.

(www.guardian.co.uk)



system, that requires a series of broadcast worthy events 24 hours a day all year round, and more broadly as part of the human condition. Within this context reality becomes constructed or manipulated to fit the requirements of information communication systems. Cyclicity talks about the emergence of non-linear time frames and an infinity of virtual time and space within the context of digital technologies, While acceleration refers to the logistical pressure exerted by new communication technology such as mobile phones, the internet and e-mail.

At the heart of this technologisation of culture is a shift in the mechanics of power, the appearance of power and the construction of reality, the very boundaries of which are limited by the media mechanism by which it is projected. It is the limitations of what is sound-byte worthy and the mechanics of meaning within this context that the body of work is investigating. These hypermodern conditions are explored by the work and unpacked in this dissertation

The first chapter locates my body of work within a theoretical and historical context. Section 2.1 explores the desire for similarity as a filter of progress and the socio-economic mechanisms that drive it. The desire for similarity, being the desire to conform or to fit in with a perceived set of norms. With these norms or projected reality being increasingly read from the global media system, social and other norms become increasingly constructed by the media. A system which is ultimately driven and limited by

the capitalist mode it operates within. The role amplification and repetition play within the mechanics of meaning is explored. The need to amplify or extend a particular effect yields a pressure that is accelerative. With repetition judged the engine of similarity, the probe shifts to the effects of similarity upon urban space.

Section 2.2 shifts the focus toward repetition in world events, with special reference to war and warfare as one of the most dramatic kinds of world events, the structure and effect of war and the military triggers this exploration. It is here that the repeat event is identified. The repeat event is the repetition of some kind of event or occurrence that has come before such as The Second World War being structurally similar to The First World War. This can apply just as easily to the state of war as it can to any other cultural event. When repeat events are viewed in the context of the pressure of an accelerative time, as a result of the amplifying effect of capitalism, it becomes evident that they are becoming increasingly similar and frequent.

In Section 2.2.1 the relationship between the military and commerce is explored. The Military Industrial Complex is the meeting point between the effects of commerce and war. This complex is identified as a driving engine of national economies, in particular the US economy from whence it developed. The perpetuating effect commerce has on the war machine yields a state of constant war. The cross pollination of these two bodies is identified by commercial strategy influencing current military action, and military technologies being transferred into the civil realm.

Section 2.2.2 focuses on the transfer of military technologies to the civilian realm and its effect. The history of this relationship is explored followed by a probe of some of the technologies that have been transferred. Among these are the communication tools we use as part of our daily lives today. I explore an emerging culture of logistics within civil society that exists as part of this digital communication revolution. The primary tools here are mobile communications and the world wide web, both are military technologies. The synchronising effect of these tools extends this probe.

In Section 2.2.3 I identify the media as our primary source when it comes to experiencing wars and other world events, how the media is subjected to the mechanics of commerce and the limitations this causes. With reality being increasingly projected into our lives by the media, our attitude towards reality itself is

shifting as a result of this state. We are at once enthralled and yet distanced or mediated from it.

Section 2.3 looks at how the repeat event and the desire for similarity influences the effect of history. In the context of an accelerative time, a projected reality and the amplifying effects of capitalism I explore the notion that history itself is receding as opposed to accelerating. This as a result of cultural velocity, pervasive repeat events and a lack of time or space for reflection. This effect on history would appear to be an aberration of capitalism as opposed to an intention of it.

Section 2.4 concludes the theoretical probe with a look at the individual within this accelerative, mediated context. Accelerative time removes the space for reflection so that the Cartesian subject can no longer define themselves as being. Ways of finding the self within the current context are explored. The effect of digital technology upon Foucault's optics of control are examined. This chapter concludes with a dystopian reading of the contemporary human condition contrasted by a pragmatic one, in order to explore both the negative and positive influences of technology.

In the third chapter I locate my practice within contemporary art. I discuss the absurd and its manifestations in the creative arts, followed by an exploration of the work of Bruce Nauman and Mark Wallinger under the lens of the current human condition. I find commonalities between their work and my own practice. In the next section of this chapter I explore the effect and implications of post production on contemporary and my own art, by examining theoretical background and the method and process of several South African and international artists working in this mode.

The fourth chapter is an exploration of my own method and process. Starting with a brief look at the notion of synchronicity and how it enables my own practice. My practice is then explored through the media I have used to create this body of work. I locate my sonic pieces within an historical and contemporary context and then explore my use of both found and shot footage. I conclude this chapter with an exploration of repetition and cyclicity in the works. The fifth chapter explores the individual works in detail.

