

4 Method & Process

4.1 Moving On

Through interrogating systems of control, I have identified synchronisation and repeat events as signs that we are focused on a perpetual present. Continual interrogating of systems of control however is a distraction in itself, a place to become stuck, because it centralizes hierarchy as the discursive focus point and prevents the dialogue from developing while encouraging repetition.

Dutch new media theorist Rob Van Kranenburg⁸ (who visited Michaelis in 2004) pointed out the futility of standing in front of a speeding train. Being a passive consumer is no longer an option. Issues such as globalization and hyper-capitalism and 'broadcast' reality are not going to be rendered obsolete in the mid-to long term as they are structural aspects of the global dialogue we find ourselves within. What can shift however, is the way we regard them and how we operate within these paradigms.

It becomes useful to develop creative strategies to participate in these kinds of explorations. Remaining locked within the parameters of this debate without being productive could be a fatal strategy in itself. In a dictionary, to move from synchronise to synchronicity takes the merest dart of the eye and yet synchronicity requires a kind of openness that synchronized viewpoints would appear to exclude. Synchronised thinking works to the benefit of logistics. Those with the same mindsets never question the reality that has been constructed around them, and thus operate more efficiently. Synchronicity⁸ however is regarded as unrepeatable, unscientific and difficult to prove. It can however be particularly sympathetic to the creative process.

Synchronicity is symmetrical to the notion of the happy accident - a thing I have used in my creative endeavours. Paul Virilio points out the accident as the unintended consequence of human engineering feats, where to invent the Jumbo jet is also to invent the jet disaster (Virilio 2004:8). Creative accidents however have fewer casualties. Entire art movements such as DADA and Surrealism took as point of departure the notion of chance and accident leading to new creative solutions.

4.2 Repetition and Cyclicity

Repetition and cyclicity are elements that I enjoy working with. It is these - in conjunction with time - that forms the central part of my chosen digital palette.

The argument in the preceding pages has looked at the cultural impact of repetition in the liberal capitalist societies we operate within. Personally I perceive repetition as an inability to progress. Characters in my works become trapped in ever repeating cycles of behaviour in their endeavours to engage meaningfully with the world around them. It is the pathological nature of this repetitive action that suggests they are living according to some plan over which they have no authorship.

Cyclicity relates to repetition but also moves away from linearity. Circular forms, cyclical elements and non-linear narratives are interrelated elements that link the body of work I have created. Cyclicity is perhaps a more positivist view on the repetitive nature of the current human condition - there is an element of balance in cyclicity, it talks about the return of conditions that are essential to the sustainability of life, the cyclicity of the seasons for example. Cyclicity ensures that conditions move away from states that could be considered negative, destructive or absent of some element that is necessary to sustain life, change or advancement. My work sets out to explore the tensions between a pathological state of incessant repetition and the essential balancing force of cyclicity.

4.3 Toward Process

Working with the tools of post production is a strategic response to the mediated reality of today. It suggests a particular aesthetic alignment with the language of constructed media and yet allows for much of the work to be process generated (processes that mirror commercial broadcast techniques). The bulk of my works employ re-edited found visual material from films that are part of popular culture. Some of them are iconic and part of the mainstream of popular culture, some of them are more obscure. Once I have selected a work to appropriate, I use a similar strategy in 'finding' my own work within the form that the films director has created, much like Henry Moore spoke about releasing a fundamental form that exists within the raw materials he used.

I believe that, sometimes by accident, often by design, the director has left scraps for me to recycle in my own creations.

Eric Satie 1866-1925 developed a 'stripped down' sound that would later influence the ambient music movement.

(www.imec-archives.com)





Brian Eno developed the contemporary ambient music form.

(www.doublewhammy.com)

It is essentially similar to the making of jewellery and other craft items in the third world out of first world cultural flotsam and jetsam. I believe that it is necessary, in order for culture to remain dynamic, alive and progressing, to remix and reuse its cultural artefacts, to revisit and re-evaluate its truths, its beliefs, its very constructions of reality.

4.4 Sound - Ambient

The soundtrack or musical aspect of the video pieces have primarily been composed, performed and processed by myself. They often also served as starting points for the completed works. They are primarily abstract, yet emotive soundtracks, that could be classified as ambient music.

The term 'ambient' in reference to music was proposed by Brian Eno 'to refer to music that would envelop the listener without drawing attention to itself.' (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambient_music accessed 18-02-06). While Eno is regarded as the father of modern ambient music, Eric Satie (1866 - 1925) is the most obvious precursor to the modern ambient music movement. Satie worked toward stripping the classical from to its most essential elements, and fused this with the moods of French café music which was popular at the time. Mark Prendergrast writes

Eric Satie changed the whole course of musical history, 1887-1893 - with three sets of minitures...with their clear melodic phrases, exquisite lightness and fresh texture he literally blew away the pomp and rhetoric of the older order (Prendergrast 2003:6).

Some elements of this ambience flowed into works of his contemporaries Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel. But this movement was only to gain pace as a result of the contributions of Pierre Schaeffer, Karlheinz Stockhausen, John Cage and finally labelled and concretised by Brian Eno Himself (ibid.).

Eno's seminal work, *Music for Airports*, forefronts the anxieties experienced in these kinds of contemporary transit zones. The music is specifically composed to have a 'calming effect on nervous travellers adrift in worry, confusion and perpetual motion.' (Toop 2002:70) The modern ambient music movement is reflective of the contemporary urban condition that David Toop refers to as 'hypermodern' or Marc Auge as 'supermodern'. This movement is perhaps symptomatic of this accelerative state,

which serves as a starting point for my own body of work.

The ambient music movement continues today, aided by digital technology that has been particularly enabling for practitioners of this genre of expression.

The fact that music is a displacement of air, a periodic vibration, a movement of sound waves, always raises the ambiguity of what is being said when words such as time, space and memory are used in isolation. Digital technology can take away the space, or the air from music production (Toop 2004:99).

Toop speaks about the effect digitisation has on sound and memory here and yet sound remains mostly free from the burden of the mediation of screen, mouse and keyboard that other digital interactive media require. Aside from the equipment you need to play it, the sonic experience happens in the ears and the mind, the focus is internal, the space it offers is reflective.

For me, sound is colour, emotion, space and place, a state of mind, a story, an escape. And while being all these things it is also perfectly abstract which allows a certain freedom of response to the listener. Sound does however impose very efficiently a kind of emotional colour, which in my process, marries with the visual to result in the final pieces themselves.

4.5 Video - found

In constructing the video pieces the sonic element serves as the starting point. I generally compose this, sometimes I use existing music. The sound serves as a structural spine upon which these works are created. A time map of the soundtrack is generated, with the song's typical structural elements (such as introduction, verse chorus, middle 8 etc.) drawn onto this map. The video loops are cut into segments that relate to the pacing of the song. For the most part the video cuts are synchronised with the beat or pulse of the soundtrack.

The found film footage once chosen is mostly detached or 'laundered' from the original movie I source it from. While some residual traces do remain, they are very useful in pointing the viewer in specific directions. The use of the footage in the works themselves are less a comment on the specific films and more about appropriation of the cultural iconography I find useful.

With the Cold War being a marker for the shift in the structure of

warfare, the fact that I grew up at the tail end of this period and the impact it had upon power structures in South Africa, much of the cultural iconography used in the works relates to this period of recent western history. Once I have chosen, what are often the more abstract elements from the film I am using, I then edit these together to create my works.

Similar to a DJ remixing other artist's music, it is primarily a loop or clip-based space where digital manipulation and conjoining or blending of pre-existing and manipulated cultural artefacts takes place. Primarily I manipulate time, with extensions and compressions of it to point the footage in directions away from their original readings or contexts. In this way the footage becomes quite pliable and working in co-operation with the sonic elements can be nudged in various directions. Through time compression or expansion and careful editing, most footage can be extended in a direction that the piece requires. I have also found that detaching the found footage from its original sound track renders it even more flexible.

4.6 Video shot

Act 2, The Individual Distressed includes the works *I am not Ronbeck*, *Jed* and *The Man Without a Trace*, and radiates around the anxieties of the individual who exist in a world of illusion. These works explore and attempt to find the limits of the mechanism of construction. The form is a simplification of the video biography, the kind that you would see on television about a celebrity or politician. A single subject in a simple setting, shot frontally, sets up the discomfort that suggests interrogation. This invites the viewer to reflect on the 'truth' or lack thereof that the speaker is constructing. Deliberate contradictions and absurdities further encourage reflection. The form of the celebrity video biography is turned inside out with its frailties made evident.

5 The Works