

5 The works

My body of work examines anxieties that radiate around the highly systematised and increasingly digitised contemporary global culture, that can be referred to as hypermodern. The work probes the mechanics of meaning within this culture of projection. It operates in a paradigm which favours a reactive mode of operation over a reflective one. It operates in a context where objects, things, places and events, more by an accident of market pressures than design, are increasingly similar. The work understands these similarities and explores how much of this projected reality is constructed. The nature of construction yields similarity, which the work accepts and yet an uneasy tension remains between the work and this state.

The work operates within the mode that it is probing, using this mainstream mode to probe the mainstream itself; the films explore the boundaries of commercially-fueled, media-constructed realities while using the same tools and language of these systems.

Furthermore the work understands the necessary velocity of this hypermodern existence and is geared to the attention spans available within this space. While the work accepts the global, hypermodern space it operates within, there remain tensions between the works and the structural aspects of this condition. Technology is enabling and yet we should remain wary of its promise. Communication tools are efficient, and yet we become slaves of logistics. Global media systems are means by which we can read a broader reality, beyond our own geography, and yet what they reflect is governed by the laws of commerce.

It is within this context that I have created a body of work *Cirque du Pan*, which comprises of three acts. Each act comprises of three video pieces. While they are not triptychs in the traditional sense the works were developed out of each other and exist in triangular dialogue. Each of the groups has a thematic title, the first is *Powercycle*, which explores the projected iconography of power. The second is *The Individual Distressed*, which explores anxieties revolving around the construction of identity in the media age. The third group is *Innocence Remapped* using the iconography of innocence to explore the darker side of contemporary human existence. These themes radiate around the systems of power construction within the hypermodern context I have explored.



5.1 Act 1 Powercycle

Cadillac (2005)

(Includes footage from *Sing Blue Silver**). Music by Charles Maggs.

This video piece shows various Cadillac limousines in motion, moving from A to B but never quite reaching a destination, never quite resolving the purpose of the journey. The identity of the occupants is obscured so it remains for the viewer to consider who these vehicles are conveying. The soundtrack suggests a level of disquiet which is extended by the altered time structure of the original footage. The Cadillacs themselves suggests notions of power or celebrity, they are status symbols amplified by their physicality.

The cars are the visual element that links the work, they are subtly different and yet mostly similar. The cars are in continual motion throughout the piece, always arriving, always travelling, always leaving but never quite getting there. The status of the journey is interrupted by the repetition of various states. The action presents the following kinds of questions: Who are they? Where are they going? Why? Do I even care? The amplified disquiet suggests that the constructed reality projected by these symbols be revisited.

* *Sing Blue Silver* 2004 83min.

Directed by Russell Mulcahy



Right (2005)

(Includes footage from *The Right Stuff**) Music by Charles Maggs

The Right Stuff documented the velocity and space race from the North American perspective, during the height of the Cold War. This mode of technological race was initiated in modern times with a race between the Nazis and the North Americans to be the first to produce and use the atom bomb. The need to compete on the technological front becomes a driving force within the military industrial complex. This marks a shift in the theatre of war from analogue armed conflicts to wars of illusion.

Right explores the kinds of questions that were asked by the myth of Icarus, probing perhaps the notion that while we have experienced millennia of human progress, human vision remains predominantly the same. While *Right* intends to question the perils of human engineering, it is not only a probe of the possible accidents of machismo, it also intends to be a broader, more metaphysical probe of the human condition.

* *The Right Stuff* 1983 193min.

Directed by Philip Kaufman



Cowboy Boy (2006)

(Includes footage from *The Unforgiven**). Music Maximum Black by Boren & Der Club of Gore**

Existing within this cycle of the Cirque du Pan, *Cowboy Boy* extends the use of the constructed iconography of projected power. The Cadillacs from the earlier piece and the horses here are transposed cultural symbols that talk about the New World and the structural changes to the balance of power this implies. The use of such obviously North American iconography talks about how the balance of power in today's world resides with the nation that has mastered the art of projection systems and constructions of iconographies.

There remains little truth in the Hollywood projection of the cowboy - it is a transparently constructed icon that is an intrinsic part of the projected iconography of the United States. The cowboys here alternately invoke the All-American Marlboro man and the Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The wide open spaces suggest an epic narrative and yet this work is structured in a cyclical manner, with the narrative always repeating itself and never resolving itself. The riders go around and around seeking, journeying and finding nothing, it evokes the philosophical concept of the eternal return.

**Unforgiven* 1992 131min
Directed by Clint Eastwood.

** *Maximum Black* 7min.38s. from *Black Earth* 2004
by Boren & Der Club of Gore

5.2 Individual Distressed

I Am Not Ronbeck (2005)

Video, Performance by Sean O'Connor (music *Alina* by Arvo Part*)

This existential interrogation, explores the structure of individuality in relation to who the individual is not. The subject is forced to inhabit a found identity, that of *Ronbeck*. In denying this identity, this otherness, aspects of his own individuality are teased to the surface. Toying with the Cartesian method of doubt, the subject must eliminate the other in order to become himself. We define ourselves in relation to that which we are not, and yet can we be so certain, that that which we are, or believe ourselves to be, does not contain residues of otherness? The vacillation in the subject's denial of that state of being *Ronbeck* exposes the contractions of meaning within language, particularly language that is employed in the art of constructing identity.

* *Fur Alina* 10min.47s. from *Alina* 2002
by Arvo Part





Jed (2006)

Video, Performance and Music by Charles Maggs

The constructive quality of the media is probed here. *Jed* is a fictional individual rendered manifest by the dialogue, he is entirely constructed by the dialogue and in the mind of the viewer. *Jed* exists in dialogue to *I am not Ronbeck*: Where *Ronbeck* is a denial, *Jed* is an affirmation, although the existential tone of *Jed* converges with that of *Ronbeck*.

The unease of the interviewee and the fractured, repetitive dialogue suggest space for the viewer to question their own construction of *Jed* himself and perhaps constructions of other people, with whom they only have a mediated relationship with, or a 'constructed' picture of.



The Man Without a Trace (2006)

Video, Performance by David Malan. Music by Charles Maggs.

In this work individuality is reduced to a mere strategy.

Ironically *The Man Without a Trace*'s identity is constructed around a strategy of invisibility. Some residual traces of personality do remain in order for the narrative action to take place but the space of identity is reduced to that of an idea, much like a celebrity will use the media as a means to construct a persona, that is designed for consumption that has done away with the banal limitations of everyday life.

The mystery of *The Man Without a Trace*'s desire to disappear is never revealed, the fragments of his personality suggest he may be a covert operative or secret agent, but this picture fails to resolve itself as his strategies of invisibility become increasingly absurd or banal.



5.3 Innocence remapped

Sound (2005)

(Contains footage from *The Sound of Music**). Music by Charles Maggs

Sound radiates around notions of innocence and education.

Many pedagogical experiences rely on a certain degree of synchronised behaviour, as do festivals, dances and celebrations. The burden is on the individual to synchronise their emotions and behaviours with that of the mass consciousness.

This work interrogates notions of organised and synchronised mass emotional events and practices. It queries the space that remains for the unique expression and feelings of the individual within these circumstances and society as a whole. The metronomic aspect of the music evokes the clock that we synchronise all our actions to, the clockwork nature of our behaviour as productive individuals and the machines against which we measure this productivity. The work suggests re-evaluating constructed or imposed behaviour patterns triggers or events.

* *The Sound of Music* (1965) 174min.

Directed by Robert Wise



Lagoon (2006)

(Contains aspect of *The Blue Lagoon**) Music by Charles Maggs, remixed by Brendon Bussy

Lagoon explores the pressure of time upon the individual in our current paradigm.

The found footage comes from *The Blue Lagoon*, based on the novel about innocence by Henry de Vere Stacpoole. The pressure upon the individual within a capitalist system is instantaneous, success requires that one maintains a continual performance. Individuals must exist under the increased pressure of velocity in this age of logistics. This work reflects the velocity and structure of the contemporary human condition, and the soundtrack imposes this push, pause, push, pause structure that reflects our daily cycle. The pace, abstractness and repetition suggest that we occupy a matrix that is unfamiliar and infinite. Action is never rewarded by some kind of narrative relief, instead the protagonists are trapped in mechanical repeat actions.

* *The Blue Lagoon* 1980 104 min.

Directed by Randal Kleiser



Elliot (2006)

Video, (Contains footage from *E.T The Extra-Terrestrial**) Music Red Swan By Susumu Yokota**

Elliot is a story of a small boy who occupies a world absent of affection. He explores this world but it fails to make sense. The story starts at night, where at first he is at play, and then waiting. Waiting turns to searching, but it appears he is being watched and then he is chased. He uses a series of illusions to escape. As a result of this he sees through the illusion that has been constructed around him. He is quarantined and probed, but none of this is for his benefit. He must escape this realm in order to retain his innocence.

* *E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial* 1982 115min.

Directed by Steven Spielberg

** *Red Swan* 4min.27s. from *The Boy and the Tree* 2002

by Susumu Yokota

In Conclusion

The relationship between the individual and the world projected is increasingly mediated.

I have created a body of work which is symptomatic of contemporary conditions. In a world where reality is projected by the global media systems, progress is relegated to a state of illusion, governed by the notion of consumer trends, which are less about the will of humanity and more a mechanism of commerce. Time and space have become so elastic that we can hardly locate ourselves within them, instead we must rely upon reflections or images of the self to be sure we still exist. Within this context people, things, places and events have become increasingly similar. World events as projected by the global media system appear to be repeating themselves endlessly in a vain attempt to break out of the perpetual now. My work sets out to explore the mechanics of meaning within this context.

The works use construction and projection as a reflection of the realm within which they operate, accepting the current condition while still probing its outer limits. The reiteration and cyclical forms in my works evoke the repetitive nature of the human condition while still questioning its structural necessity. The works also understand the pressures of cultural time in the age of logistics and acknowledge this state in their format.

By engineering a space for reflection the works encourage the viewer to reconsider the constructed reality that we exist within. The works revolving around the construction of identity unmask the transparency of this technique, that is so central to constructions of the individual by media. This so often becomes the mechanism by which power or status are achieved. Redirecting existing cultural artifacts is a strategy that acknowledges the power in constructed media, while still questioning its supremacy in global culture.