REPROCESSING INTERFERENCE

An artistic exploration of the visual material generated by interference

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COMPULSORY DECLARATION

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Signed by candidate Date: 25.01.06

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INTRODUCTION

My body of work is concerned with the constructed promise of telecommunication – that is, the promise to connect people all over the world via telephone lines, computer networks and, most recently, satellite signals. The development of and access to networked systems has brought about this "utopian promise" (Mitchell 2005: 305), an ideal of instant connectivity that allows a user to be in contact with others through technological devices over vast distances. Connectivity supposedly enables users to develop and sustain relationships on the Internet. However, the question arises whether telecommunication technologies are living up to their promise. My title, *Reprocessing Interference: An artistic exploration of the visual material generated by interference*, refers to the concepts pertaining to this promise and also to the failure of the promise, focusing on the notions of distance and interference. It further encapsulates my working method, a process of degrading and filtering both my own and found footage.

On a daily basis, information is transmitted and received, an exchange that has become almost seamless and instantaneous – or at least, so it tries to be. This dissertation focuses on the flaws within examples of telecommunication[1] by investigating interferences that impede connectivity and instantaneity of communication. This discussion is based on a perceived attitude towards developing telecommunications in the media – that it not only connects everyone but also "connects everything"[2]. Marketing strategies place a great deal of importance on the idea of telecommunications connecting people over vast distances without any obstacles, but do telecommunications live up to these advertised promises?

The key concepts discussed in this paper are "distance" and "interference", two aspects of telecommunications that depend upon and affect one another. I argue that the relationship between distance and interference highlights the misleading promise of telecommunication. There are two notions of distance discussed in this paper. Firstly, the relevance of geographical distance is questioned with regard to telecommunications, particularly the communication structure of the Internet. Secondly, distance, defined as separation, has particular relevance to the conceptual underpinning of my practical work. In this regard, a sense of alienation permeates my video compositions.

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1 "Telecommunication refers to communication over long distances. In practice, something of the message may be lost in the process. Telecommunication covers all forms of distance and/or conversion of the original communications, including radio, telegraphy, television, telephony, data communication and computer networking." (Wikipedia contributors, 2006. 'Telecommunication'.

2 "Connecting everything" is the slogan of Broadcom (http://www.broadcom.com), a telecommunications company founded in 1991 by Henry T. Nicholas III and Henry Samueli. Broadcom is an example of how telecommunications companies advertise their products. The catchphrases 'next generation technology', 'innovation', 'advanced' etc. are often included in these strategies to promote and promise an exceedingly high standard of development. On a recent visit to windows.com, I noticed that the opposite strategy is being employed in an almost responsive campaign aimed at "Real people, Real stories" – and thus, realistic products. At Microsoft.com, however, the page was centred with the phrase, "Ride the new wave of innovation."

I explore the concept of interference by referring to my parents' emigration overseas: our only means of communication is now networked technology. Their departure sparked my exploration of the notion of "real" and "virtual" distance in the context of telecommunications. By drawing on my experience, I shall argue that telecommunication does not fulfil its promise of meaningful engagement. I have, based on this failed promise, created an installation that refers to the need to stay closely connected to my family. Moreover, my works speaks more broadly about the implications of the promise of connectedness posited by modern communication technologies.

In this dissertation, I shall examine ideas pertaining to distance and interference in relation to telecommunication theory and art history, informing the production of an installation. Below, I shall explain the elements of the installation, with reference to the visual interferences – mixed signals, channel noise, loading images, blurred and fragmented imagery – that can occur within communication transmissions. I explain how the interferences introduced in my work reflect the theoretical ideas discussed in this paper as well as the personal narrative that accompanies these ideas.

In Chapter 1, I refer to the key concepts of distance and interference in relation to the theoretical influences of my body of work. I draw from the ideas of theorist Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) pertaining to distance and aura in the context of photography and film. Linked to these ideas, I include some of the writing of Paul Virilio (b.1932) regarding telecommunication theory. I also include William Mitchell (b.1944) on the subject of networked communication systems like the Internet and the social ramifications of these developments.

In Chapter 2, I examine the musical compositions of John Cage (1912-92), with specific interest in his methodology of introducing elements of chance into the creative process. An exploration of the Happenings of the 1960s, especially the work of Allan Kaprow (b.1925), leads into an examination of the works of Myron Krueger (b.1942), one of the pioneers of interactive media.

In the second section of Chapter 2, I discuss a selection of contemporary references that relate to my body of work. I examine the works of video artists Bill Viola (b.1951) and Leslie Peters (b.1974), new media collaborative project jodi.org and the artist Mary Flanagan (b.1969). Some of these artists have influenced my conceptual development, while others have influenced my production and my process towards the representation of the relevant concepts.

In Chapter 3, I examine my process of elucidating the conceptual ideas pertaining to the subject of interference. Here I argue that by reprocessing and manipulating different types of footage, from found material to that which I have generated myself, I reflect upon alienation, specifically the experience of my parents emigrating. The technique used to create the videos and sounds reflects the continual questioning of the promise of telecommunications. Through this process, I find another means of staying connected to my family by reflecting upon the traces of my childhood that still remain. These traces are objects or memories – an old jewellery box or a stream of smoke; these are the subject matter of two of the videos discussed in Chapter 4.

1. THEORETICAL CONTEXT

In my introduction, I referred to the concept of the promise that telecommunication holds, namely, seamless connectivity crossing traditional communication barriers, including politics and culture. In order to question this promise, I explore distance, instantaneous transmission and interference with relation to telecommunications. It is my intention here to examine theoretical writings that share these concerns.

The promise of telecommunications is discussed in the writings of William Mitchell, *E-topia "Urban Life, Jim – but not as we know it"* (2000) and *Me++: The Cyborg Self and the Networked City* (2003). Here, Mitchell discusses the "utopian promise" referred to by Martin Ryder[3] in his article "The Digital Divide", featured in the *Encyclopedia of Science, Technology, and Ethics* (2005). Ryder discusses the separation of those who can access and benefit from computer technology from those who cannot. Writing from a socioeconomic perspective, Ryder describes the promise of modern communication technologies as being that they are ideally democratic, inclusive and community-orientated. Ryder is skeptical about this promise, given that access to computer technology is not all-inclusive, as he had hoped, but rather restricted to the elite.

William Mitchell (2000) paints a beautiful, illusory picture of future digital communities, people connected wherever and whenever without the physical constraints of the material world. As the Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Mitchell's interest lies in the field of developing digital infrastructures and the implications of these for society. On this specific subject, he expresses a definite optimism about the possibilities of digital communication networks. However, in a later text, Mitchell (2003) reflects upon the negative repercussions of connectivity, manifesting in forms of terrorism, vulnerability to viruses and network failures. His focus and attitude here are quite unlike his previous perception of the networked society, which he clearly equated to a utopia[4].

3 Martin Ryder, lecturer at the University of Colorado at Denver School of Education, describes himself as "a technologist by trade, somewhat of a luddite by conviction, a teacher and a learner". (http://carbon.cudenver.edu/~mryder/martin.html) His texts address subjects ranging from semiotics to learning environments, augmentation to enlightenment. Throughout his writings, he displays an interest in technology and its social ramifications.

4 The original meaning of the term 'Utopia' is quite different to the modern usage, being derived from the Greek words 'not' (ou) and 'place' (topos) –meaning 'nowhere' (www.wikepedia.com, accessed on 06.09.2005). There is definitely a parallel between a utopia, in its original meaning, and spaces created by networked systems. 'Utopian' can have both negative and positive implications. It either refers to an imaginary society imbued with perfection, or to the discredited attitude of aspiring to unrealistic ideas about the perfection of society. In the case of Mitchell, however, it seems both definitions are applicable. Mitchell's attitude towards networked systems seems to have become more sceptical with time.

Telecommunication spaces, specifically the Internet, are advertised as democratic arenas, where "gender, race, class, age, and other differences do not work as impediments to any person's ability to meet with success" (Herman & Swiss 2000: 85). Telecommunication is seen to have created a "world in which not only are individual differences not impediments, but in which there are no irritations, no delays, no noise whatsoever when it comes to desires and fulfillment" (ibid.). This perception should be scrutinised: as Ryder highlights, technology has not realised its promise of wide enough access amongst individuals, nor is it free of irritations, delays and noise.

Both Mitchell and Ryder seem to have ambivalent attitudes towards communication technologies and the potential they possess. The efficiency of telecommunications is reliant on many factors, some of which are pointed out in Ryder's discussion on the "digital divide" with regard to the accessibility of new technologies. Mitchell makes reference to the electronically interconnected networks of cities, where system failures could have immeasurable effects. In both cases, the authors speak of the potential that telecommunications possess: access to information and seamless connection between people. Both Mitchell and Ryder also acknowledge the frailties of telecommunications, but they focus on large-scale problems, namely lack of capital, accessibility and negative repercussions such as terrorism. What about smaller, seemingly insignificant aspects of communication technologies? Are interferences not indicators of the same frailties?

This is where I locate a tension between the promise of technology and interferences, which represent the inability to live up to this promise. Interference is a reminder that the person on the phone could be miles away, that a television programme is not the same as a play, that listening to the radio is not the same as being at a concert, and that "chatting"[5] to someone on the Internet is not the same as talking in person. Technology has made these substitutions possible, but the interferences inherent in these media eliminate the sense of presence[6] that they seek to create.

To support this dynamic, I explore texts by Walter Benjamin and Paul Virilio on the subject of distance and aura. Even though they are not contemporary writers, their similar attitudes towards new technologies and distance are relevant to today's thinking. Virilio discusses distance from a telecommunications perspective while Benjamin relates distance to film and photography.

5 The term 'chatting' refers to a synchronous exchange of remarks with one or more users over a computer network. It is predominantly associated with the Internet but has become popular on other mobile devices like cell phones.

6 Presence is the feeling of being "there". Its contemporary use is commonly associated within the context of virtual reality.

In *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936), Walter Benjamin defines the "aura" of an artwork as "the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close the object may be" (Benjamin 1936: 250). However, according to Benjamin, the presence or "aura" (Benjamin 1936: 65) of an artwork is fully experienced from a distance. Hence, distance is a contributing factor in an art-viewing experience, which assists in the understanding of an artwork. Writing half a century later, Paul Virilio revisits this idea of distance in the context of telecommunication. Lev Manovich sums up Virilio's attitude towards technological development when he states that Virilio "mourns the destruction of distance, geographic grandeur, the vastness of natural space, the vastness that guaranteed time delay between events and our reactions, giving us time for critical reflection necessary to arrive at a correct decision" (Manovich 2001: 173).

Manovich (2001: 172) focuses on Benjamin's ideas regarding film and Virilio's ideas pertaining to telecommunications by examining the shared subject of new technologies. Benjamin writes that the camera disrupts the experience of an object and its aura by eliminating the distance required to experience an artwork (Benjamin 1936: 244-250). With specific reference to photography, the camera's ability to zoom into an image eliminates perspective reference. Virilio supports this concept with reference to telecommunication. Distance here represents the elimination of the physical space between objects. Yet, so-called instant electronic transmission becomes disrupted and fragile when interferences occur. Transmissions like these are not without errors, and it is these errors that bring to the fore the distance needed to experience the aura of an artwork.

In *Exposure Time, the Aura, and Telerobotics* (Goldberg 2000: 215), artist and critic Marina Grzinic[7] examines Walter Benjamin's works on photography.[8] Grzinic explores the influence that time delay has on one when viewing an artwork. "It forces us to think about the network of modems, routes, servers and telephone lines that the image must travel in order to get to us, and so reaffirms our sense of spatial relations between those subjects and we, the viewers" (Grzinic 2000: 221). By defending time delay, Grzinic aligns herself with Benjamin and Virilio, translating delay not as a negative symptom of telecommunication but rather a necessary consequence that represents space and time. Grzinic links Benjamin and Virilio's theories concerning aura, distance, telecommunication and interferences (in the form of imperfections), thus linking old and new ideas on the subject of distance and communication. "Blurs and other imperfections in the image, which were evidence of time's passage in the real world, are wholly absent from the idealised imagery of

7 Marina Grzinic is a doctor of philosophy and researcher at the Institute of Philosophy in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Her achievements as an artist include video art projects and installations, interactive CD-ROMs and websites. She is also a media theorist.

8 Walter Benjamin, A Small History of Photography (1931) and The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction (1936).

virtual reality. With the imperfections of early photography, the viewer finds ways to make a place in time. But with the collapsing of exposure time, the image undergoes a process of complete sterilisation" (Grzinic 2000: 216).

Exposure time, in the context of photography, refers to the period of time that light-sensitive film is exposed to light, imprinting an image onto the film. In relation to Benjamin and Grzinic, this moment of time creates an instant where an element of the "here and now" of the environment imprints itself onto the image, capturing a glimpse of reality (Benjamin 1931: 243). Grzinic refers to exposure time by focusing on the elimination of errors. She associates the shortening of exposure time to the shortening of distance, therefore equating distance to speed in telecommunication networks. In this model, the distance that information travels is not as important as the speed in which it arrives, which eliminates any room for error.

According to Benjamin, the longer the exposure time, the greater chance the image has of capturing the aura of its subject. In the contemporary age of "transmission revolution" (Virilio 2000: 9), does this theory of exposure time still apply? As distance becomes a representation and the speed at which actions happen accelerates, exposure time translates into time delay (a form of interferences). Can it be deduced that aura is now dependant on time rather than distance, as distance is represented as time in telecommunications? This theory is clearly stated in the introduction to *The Robot in the Garden* (2000) entitled "The Unique Phenomenon of a Distance" by Ken Goldberg: "The inherent time-delay between a viewer's request on the Internet and the resulting image functions in a way analogous to exposure time, giving the viewer time to consider and invigorating the image with meaning. Time-delay thus emerges as an aesthetic and telepistemological asset, leading to a deeper view of imaging technology and the world it seeks to capture" (Goldberg 2000: 17). Hence, time delay is equivalent to exposure time.

"[I]n the age of the transmission revolution everything comes straight in, arrives immediately, given a general absence of delay, instantaneity of information and the development of that interaction" (Virilio 2000: 127). This statement from Paul Virilio's *The Information Bomb* (2000) highlights the importance of the instantaneous delivery of information, and it is noted that it is delay which stands as a factor which may affect this flow. He further states that it is not so much the content of the information but more the immediacy of its feedback that is important in this information age (Virilio 2000: 143). In the discussion of instantaneous transmission, it is important to acknowledge the ambiguous nature of a sent and received message. The only trace of the distance that an information packet travels is the speed at which it is delivered. The location of this packet is unimportant; rather it is the immediacy of its delivery that is crucial. Therefore, has distance become an obsolete notion with regard to telecommunication?

In new media artworks, do the theories of distance and aura still apply? New media artworks can consist of moving images, sounds and various other elements that become immersive as time passes. In telecommunications and new media, the notions of distance and aura are essential parts of the nature of the medium. Unlike a painting, a website exists nowhere and everywhere at the same time. The important distinction in this context is that a website can be accessed and experienced on any computer with Internet access. Hence, location becomes insignificant, considering the ambiguous nature of Cyberspace, and distance is once again more evident through interferences than in actual space.

I have become progressively more reliant on telecommunications in the past year, due to the emigration of my parents. Spending time communicating via technology brings the difficulties of this situation to the fore. In so many ways, technology creates the illusion of a shared space wherein communication occurs. This shared space, envisioned in William Gibson's novel *Neuromancer* (1984) and labelled Cyberspace, is described as being a "non-space of the mind". It is what one could refer to as a "third space" (Dallow 2003: 135-143) – neither here nor there, but in the space between. It is conceivable to the mind but without physical limitations, as vast as one can imagine yet impossible to locate and quantify. The location of this space is unimportant; more important are the exchanges that occur within it. It is a place created in the mind of a user, a place shared by countless other users. In this sense, it is not a completely abstract notion, but rather a common construct of individual users. It is a paradox, lying between physicality and virtuality, a "third space" where the public and private simultaneously exist.

It is clear that networked computer systems like the Internet eliminate the physical distance between distributed individuals and groups. Even though geographical space is eliminated, a new space is created, a shared "meeting" place. In networked systems, errors, delays and other interferences reintroduce spatial divisions between users. In my work (specifically in my methodology) I reflect upon this interruption by highlighting the in-between space where interferences occur. It is not of so much importance that interferences occur in these spaces; rather, the interferences highlight the fact that these in-between spaces exist. This idea is reflected in my work by the process of reintroducing space into the technology by deliberately staging interference and interruption.

"The constants in my world are no longer provided by a contiguous home turf: increasingly, my sense of continuity and belonging derives from being electronically networked to the widely scattered people and places I care about" (Mitchell 2003: 17).

Mitchell expresses his sense of feeling at home within the metaphorical walls created by networked systems. He describes the sense of belonging that he experiences within this space and among the people that inhabit it, however far away they might be. It becomes apparent that Mitchell equates networked spaces with the familiarity of a home environment – undoubtedly an attitude shared by many people. This association raises questions about the importance of face-to-face communication: being able to see, hear and interact with another is replaced by a self-reflexive communication that highlights one's own experience.

In the theoretical writing that I have discussed, the emphasis is placed on large, significant aspects of technology: the availability of large-scale communication in a shared space, access to information and the connectivity one experiences with others anywhere in the world. Virilio mourns the elimination of distance but acknowledges that we are living in a transmission age, in a place Mitchell refers to as a "networked city" (Mitchell 2003: 1) and a "home turf" (Mitchell 2003: 17). In my work, however, I place importance on the traces of distance that manifest in telecommunication, translating interferences as positive anomalies within telecommunication. Similarly, I place importance on the traces of the past, bringing these elements to the fore in an attempt to reclaim a sense of familiarity.

2. FINE ART CONTEXT

2.1 HISTORICAL REFERENCES

The art-historical foundations of my work are the Happenings[9] of the 1960s, including the work of artists of the Fluxus group, specifically Allan Kaprow and Yoko Ono (b. 1933). What is particularly relevant to my work is the conscious insertion of "chance elements"[10] in the production of their artworks. I refer to composer and writer John Cage in relation to this particular subject. With the inclusion of chance elements, the viewer becomes an active part of the creative process. Yoko Ono further challenged this boundary in her artworks, to the point where the audience actively became part of the performance. The undefined constraints of these works led to the notions of a continuous artwork and an undefined art object, characteristics that are especially apparent in artist Myron Krueger's computer-aided responsive environments.

The move away from object-orientated art focuses on the viewer's experience of an artwork rather than its physical manifestation, which can take form in any medium. One of the forerunners of this school of thought is composer and writer John Cage. Cage is best known for his experimentations with music and musical instruments. His compositions (or movements) rely on elements of chance in their overall structure. By including chance, Cage embraced unpredictability in his compositions.

An illustration of Cage's precision choreography and simultaneous lack of control is evident in his piece *Imaginary Landscape No. 4* (1951). The composition, written by Cage and performed by a group of actors, consists of a list of instructions to set the frequency and volume of twelve radio receivers at set intervals of time. Despite the fact that Cage had complete power over the actions that took place, the broadcaster dictated the sounds transmitted.

Cage's most famous composition is *4'33"* (1952). It is through this piece that he demonstrated that absolute silence does not exist. The elimination of outer environmental sounds only emphasises the sounds of our bodies, for instance the sound of a heart beating or of breathing. It is this theory that Cage puts into practice in *4'33"*. David Tudor (1926-96) performed the premier of *4'33"* in Woodstock, New York in 1952. The audience watched while Tudor acted out Cage's directions on a piano. He repeated a timed action of lifting and

9 Termed 'Happenings' by Allan Kaprow in 1959, these events were much like stage performances, but as Kaprow explains, "The happening is performed according to plan but without rehearsal, audience, or repetition. It is art but seems closer to life" (Arnason 1988: 472). The origin of these events lie in the Dada Manifestations that took place during World War I and the 'chance' musical compositions of John Cage in the 1940s; they are also physical manifestations of the principles of collage.

10 This refers to elements of an artwork that are left to be decided by chance. Creating a situation which is contrived yet uncontrolled by the artist.

Figure 1

Figure 2

Kaprow, A. *18 happenings in 6 parts* (1959)
Source: Schimmel 1998: 61

Figure 3

Figure 4

Rauschenberg, R. *Open Score* (1966)
Peter Moore
Source: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/open-score/images/3/

lowering the lid of the piano, but no notes were played and no sounds emanated. This performance illustrates Cage's inclusion of the audience in his composition. Hence the "music" of the piece was the "silence" of the audience. As they watched in anticipation, the unintentional and insignificant sounds of the environment were brought to the fore as the audience became the instrument, the artwork and, in a way, the artist.

This example exemplifies the confronting presence of the audience in relation to the artwork. It shows a move in our thinking away from the separation of artwork and audience, to where the audience unintentionally become co-authors of the artwork. This notion of co-authorship in art is predominantly situational and variable. It was an essential part of the Happenings of the 1960s, and continues to influence art practices today.

At the beginning of his career as an action painter, Kaprow was influenced by American abstract expressionist Jackson Pollock (1912-56) in the creation of his works. The first official Happening, *18 happenings in 6 parts*, was held at the Reuben Gallery in 1959. (Figures 1 & 2) As a student of John Cage at the New School for Social Research in New York (1958), Kaprow drew from Cage's ideas pertaining to audience inclusion, taking it to a more physical, participatory level. *18 happenings in 6 parts* was, like many other Happenings, a multimedia event that combined performance, painting and projected imagery.

These ideas are also seen in interactive artworks such as Robert Rauschenberg's (b. 1925) *Open Score* (1966), part of John Cage's exhibition *9 evenings, Theatre and Engineering* in New York. (Figures 3 & 4) The canvas was a tennis court; the paint and brushes, professional tennis player Mimi Kanarek and painter Frank Stella; the game, an interactive network of responsive elements. This multimedia exhibition combined elements of sound, performance, interactive devices and real-time visual projection. The court transformed into a stage as the motions of the match triggered different responses within the hall. As the ball passed from player to player, both the sound and placement of the tennis ball triggered different reactions. Firstly, the amplified sound of the ball as it hit the racket echoed throughout the hall. Secondly, the lights in the hall went out according to the whereabouts of the ball as it passed between the players. When the hall was in near darkness, performers flooded the stage and began acting out various gestures. The final element of the work captured the movements of the actors on overhanging screens.

Yoko Ono, Japanese-born American artist and musician, was one of the first artists to explore conceptual and performance art, illustrated in her performance *Cut piece* (1965). (Figure 5) During the performance of *Cut piece,* Ono positioned herself on a stage and invited the audience to cut off pieces of her clothing until she was naked. This is another example where the audience becomes part of the artwork. In this case, the audience had a direct impact on the artwork.

In the examples that I have discussed, the artists embrace chance factors that introduce unpredictable elements to the preconceived artwork. It is the real-time broadcasted sound of *Imaginary Landscape No. 4*, the unpredictable timing of *Open Score* and the active involvement of the audience in *Cut piece* that introduce elements of chance, highlighting distance in relation to authorship and the involvement of a previously passive viewer. In relation to telecommunications, the unpredictable element takes the form of interference. "Internet art is buoyed by the technological, economic and social specifications of its medium" (Greene 2004: 31). Embedded interferences are natural within telecommunications: even though communication technologies have developed to the point where real-time video communication is possible through mobile technology, it is still a common occurrence to experience an echo or mixed line on the telephone.

When an artist creates an environment, installation or website, the foundations are laid, but the viewer is the one who builds their own experience within the created space. "Time is made palpable in the form of delay and lived in the experience of suspense – this temporality is as much an effect as is the illusion of spatiality on the Net" (Herman & Swiss 2000: 158). The notion of a space is an important one when talking about the line between audience and artwork in the case of Happenings and in the work of the previously mentioned artists. In some new media artworks, networked computer systems create this space, which relates specifically to the subject of distance and interference in my videos.

Margaret Morse (1998: 179-200) distinguishes three types of computer spaces. Firstly, virtual spaces created through virtual reality devices. This type of space is reliant on the technology of virtual reality (devices such as head-mounted displays or datagloves). The second type is a networked space created because of technology such as the Internet. Thirdly, there is a virtualised physical space, an artificial environment created "from the introduction of computer-supported agency in the world of material objects and environments" (Van de Vall 2002: 142). The works of Myron Krueger and Charlotte Davis have particular relevance to the different spaces created by computer technology, and to the notions of distance and interference that result specifically from computer-aided artworks.

Figure 5
Ono, Y. *Cut piece* (1965)
The Gilbert and Lila Silverman Fluxus Collection, Detroit
Photograph: George Maciunas
Source: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/cut-piece/

Figure 6
Davis, C. *Osmose* (tree pond red) (1998)
Real time frame capture, screenshot

Figure 7
Davis, C. *Osmose* (forest and grid) (1998)
Real-time frame capture, screenshot

Source: http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/osmose/images/7/

Myron Krueger, an American artist and educator, refers to "artificial reality" as constructed reality that connects body and mind by means of action and reaction. Krueger's installation artworks are constructed "realities" that react to physical movements within their spaces, which determine the outcome and experience of the works. These responsive environments, for example *Glowflow*[11] (1969), *Metaplay* [12] (1970), *Videoplace* [13](1974) highlight the possible interactions that can take place between participants within the exhibition space and illustrate the shifted role of the viewer from an observer to a participant.

Krueger, in the sense of being concerned with the medium itself, was one of the founding fathers of new media and interactive video. Krueger states, "the concept of the piece is no longer appropriate" (Krueger 1991: 55). The concept of the piece, however, was appropriate but was not contained in any sort of illustrative image. The concept lay in the interactivity of the piece – as with the work of action painter Jackson Pollock, where the subject matter of the paintings resided in how they were executed.

Charlotte Davis' virtual world *Osmose* (1998) (Figures 6 & 7) is a clear example of how technology can heighten the experience of a participant. This simulated underwater world invites the participant into an interactive environment, controlled by his/her breathing and movements within the space. The beauty of the visuals enhances the contradictory experience of being underwater while breathing in and out. Placing the controls in the action of breathing "underwater" creates an interesting dynamic in the piece, which is almost suffocating, "even when the water is symbolic. I experience it viscerally as water and as everything smothering that water means to me" (Morse 1998: 209). Virtual reality artworks utilise high-end computer technology to immerse the viewer into a space where he/she can move around, with the ability to view something from all perspectives, similar to a real-world experience. Even though *Osmose* re-creates a space, it is an imagined, virtual space and hence introduces us to a new environment where physical distance is eliminated and experience is a simulation.

Michael Heim explains presence as "the you-are-there feeling" (1998: 23). In Morse's case, "there" is under water. In the context of the Internet, the space created is not a recreation of a real space, but rather a new space, commonly referred to as a Cyberspace. The ability to

11 The environment of Glowflow, conceived by Myron Krueger, Jerry Erdman, Dan Sandin and Richard Veneszky, consists of both sound and light elements. Triggered by sensors on the floor, sounds emanate from four speakers in the corners of the space. The light aspect of the work takes form as tubes, suspended from the ceiling (Dinkla 1994: 78).

12 The environment of Metaplay consists of similar elements to Krueger's other works. Unlike Videoplace, where a computer programme controlled a majority of the visuals, here Myron constructed two spaces where the participant and artist interacted. The artist and participant respond to the real-time imaging captured from the opposite building and projected on the respective screens.

13 Videoplace is a more intricate development of interactive responses, yet at the same time a more playful environment. Visitors to this environment confront a projected image of themselves, one that is continuously changing according to their movements and the computer programme. This interaction process highlights the question of power distribution between user and system (Dinkla 1994: 77).

move around a space and be able to view something from all perspectives creates a sense of spatial reality and presence. Virtual reality realises these ideas through devices such as the head-mounted display and the dataglove (gloves that are designed to convert the movements of the hand and fingers into code that is decipherable by a computer), whereas artificial environments transform physical space into a virtual experience. In networked computer systems like the Internet, the space created is not a real place but rather a connection between places. What I am interested in are the interferences which rupture this connection, or sense of seamless new worlds.

Computers have allowed us the ability to interact with people all over the world. Through virtual reality, maybe one day this interaction will become more of a physical exchange. Along with this phenomenon, online banking, shopping, education, communication and games are replacing everyday physical interactions. My question here, which relates specifically to my own experiences of telecommunications, is whether it will indeed be necessary to mimic reality in virtual exchanges. Are we not becoming more and more accustomed to interacting non-physically with one another? As I have mentioned previously, the media through which we communicate have changed the way in which we communicate. The idea of reinserting distances into virtual communication through interference foregrounds the notion of alienation, which I find inherent in telecommunications.

2.2 CONTEMPORARY REFERENCES

> One day in May, Pam Kramlich tried to serve lunch to two guests, but the artwork kept interrupting. A gentle rain tapped on the window of her stone house atop one of the city's best hills. The antique table was set with salads prepared by the housekeeper, and the video art simply wouldn't shut up (Lewine 2005: 1a).

The context in which video artworks are received has changed dramatically since artists such as Nam June Paik began experimenting with this electronic medium. Part of the incentive to create video artworks was to subvert the associations and characteristics of television and video. Video is a predominantly commercial medium used in the entertainment industry. Artists initially used the broadcasting qualities of this established networked system to challenge the idea of buying and owning an artwork, thus subverting the original intention of the medium. Like many of the examples mentioned in this paper, video artworks were situational and in some cases conditional to broadcasted content. Around the 1980s, however, it became fashionable to own a video artwork. Works by significant artists such as Bill Viola, Doug Aitken and Stan Douglas, which usually hung on the walls of galleries, now dominated the walls of private homes. In a recent *New York Times* article, entitled "Life with artworks that talk too much" (Lewine, 2005:1a), journalist Edward Lewine focused on a number of artists whose works have intercepted the intimacy of private homes.

One of the featured artists was Bill Viola, widely recognised as one of the leading artists in his field. His works consist of sound environments, video installations and performances. Throughout his work, the common theme of human experience, specifically life and death, is evident. However, in one of his earlier works, *Information* (1973) (Figure 8), Viola's concern lay with the materiality of the medium. By tracking the cause of an error, he began manipulating a broken signal like a musical instrument. Rather than sound, patterned interference manifested on the screen. This work captures the attitude of many video artists interested in the materiality of this electronic medium.

In a more recent work, Viola utilised multiple screens to juxtapose five individual videos, creating an overall sense of the cyclic nature of life. *Going Forth By Day* (2002) (Figure 9) comprised five videos: *Fire Birth*, *The Path*, *Deluge*, *The Voyage* and *First Light*. The videos envelop the viewer as they play parallel to each other within the installation space. The nature of the installation creates a stage-like environment where five narratives play out in sequence. In an installation such as this, the narrative is constructed as one moves through

the space. Hence, the viewers' movements in the space determine the experience. This places importance on the moments between the videos, highlighting the process that occurs from one video to the next.

The work of Canadian video artist Leslie Peters reflects a similar concern with the idea of an in-between state. These ideas manifest in her work through visual layering, a play between sound and image and the use of technical effects, creating a sense of distortion and ambiguity. The ideas pertaining to an in-between state are reflected in her works *400 Series: 401:01*[14] (1998) (Figure 10), *Seed*[15] (2002) (Figure 11) and, appropriately, *Interference* (2003).

Interference, a seventeen-minute video, is a collaborative project with Dara Gellman, and consists of crime-scene footage that has been reworked to give the viewer a sense of isolation and threatening emptiness within suburbia. Much of the discussion around interference in artworks defines it as a "negative occurrence", especially in relation to an image that downloads very slowly, a mixed signal on your television screen, or an annoying flashing light or sound. In this work, Peters adopts this attitude towards interference to convey a sense of disorder and turmoil. In contrast, the objective of my body of work is to subvert the negative connotations of interference by using it as a vehicle for my own purposes. In this, it is similar to the work of jodi.org.

The work of the collaborative web-based project jodi.org, whose members are Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans, has particular relevance to the concept of interference. They use a process of deliberate miscoding in such works as *SCRRR.sit* (1999) and *org.sit* (1999). These works generate an onscreen chaos of seemingly malfunctioning interface and a sense of violation as the works automatically download onto a user's computer when a visitor enters their site (www.jodi.org). Journalist Matthew Mirapaul (2003) reflects on this project in an article on the *New York Times* website, entitled "Deliberately Distorting the Digital Mechanism". In this article, Mirapaul best captures the work of Heemskerk and Paesmans as "the first to use the Internet's own language to create what are in effect paintings of the Internet landscape" (Mirapaul 2003).

14 401:01 is the first video in the 400 series. This 1.5-minute video captures an abstracted array of vertical and horizontal lines of the 400-series highway network in Southern Ontario. Recorded from the passenger seat, the abstracted highway turns into blurred colour fields reminiscent of paintings by abstract expressionist Mark Rothko (1903-1970).

15 Seed is a 4.5-minute video of a landscape at daybreak. Peters injects this landscape with the sounds of rustling grain, the whistling of passing traffic and the muffled distortion of the blowing wind. The mesmerizing transitions between the movements of the grain are broken by bursts of locating shots which attempt to draw the viewer away from the field. This interjection suggests the tension between a wild weed and a grain crop.

Figure 8
Viola, B. *Information*. (1973)
Video Still
Source: Ross, D. & Sellars, P. 1998: 44

Figure 9
Viola, B. *Going Forth By Day (The Path)*. (2002)
Video/Sound Installation
Source: Ankeney 2002: 13

Figure 10
Peters, L. *401:0* (1998)
Video Still

Figure 11
Peters, L. *Seed* (2002)
Video Still

Source: http://www.imagesfestival.com/2004/programs/peters.php

The apparent subject matter of the works is the technological disruptions that occur while we are using the Internet. The visual manifestations are representative of the "malfunctioning" parts of a computer programme. Every user's experience of the project is unique, because the programme uses the material of the user's own computer, namely their desktop or what it can find in the memory of the computer. The effect of watching one's desktop scroll vertically before one's eyes is at first amusing but then, as the title suggests, somewhat unnerving.

"Mr Paesmans said they initially wondered if it was ethical to transmit the 'wrong' code to others. 'But we found out quite fast that when you make mistakes in this code, it doesn't affect anything other than the image it creates.'" (Mirapaul 2003) Like interferences, which are associated with miscommunications, the idea of "wrong" code has been utilised to create an interesting subversion of the computer's interface.

Collection (2002), a programme developed by Mary Flanagan, has a similar concept to jodi.org. This project focuses more on the information stored within the memory of a user's computer. The experience of the work is extraordinarily intrusive, as pieces of information are retrieved from the user's hard drive. *Collection* was exhibited at the 2002 Whitney Biennial in Barcelona, amongst other venues, and can also be downloaded from the Internet (www.maryflanagan.com). Once installed, the programme collects information from the computer's hard drive – text documents, pictures and sound files. This information is compiled and displayed to the user in the style of a screensaver. Once again, questions of authenticity and authorship arise as a result of the subject matter of the piece. Similar to the works of Myron Krueger and jodi.org, the artwork in this case is the programme; the imagery that is generated or retrieved is secondary. The imagery retrieved is usually an interesting juxtaposition of private and personal information – for example, the simultaneous display of a personal letter and a help file. The programme's ability to access both general and personal information refers back to the idea of the "third space", being both private and public – a differentiation that seems void of meaning in the age of mediated communication.

Forms of networked interactions have been discussed in this paper in relation to the line between artist, audience and artwork. In the same way that a participant in Yoko Ono's *Cut piece* contributed to the artwork, in the case of the works by jodi.org and Mary Flanagan, the users' contribution lies in the information contained on their computers, either on their desktop or in their hard drive, as well as in the unique parameters of their interaction with the works.

Similarly to jodi.org and Mary Flanagan, South African artist Abrie Fourie (b.1969) utilises familiar computer platforms in his artworks. The use of screensavers as a means of displaying his photographic images brings an element of interaction to the context in which the artwork is viewed. The animated photographic screensavers are part of an exhibition, entitled *Whatever, Wherever* (2001), that was held at the Joäo Ferreira gallery in Cape Town. Fourie's screensavers, collectively titled *Philippians 4.8* (2001), consist of twelve animations made up of photographs that reflect abstracted moments of everyday life within urban environments (Edmunds 2001:1). The interactive element of the artwork forces the viewer into a state of passive contemplation. The images in the screensaver entitled *Cloud* (Figure 12) would be familiar to most South Africans: the three-frame animation re-creates the movements of Pick 'n Pay plastic bags snared on barbed wire. The juxtaposition of the pervasive quality of the bags with the restrictive associations of barbed wire is reinforced by the nature of the screensaver. Similarly to common computer screensavers, these screensavers are triggered by lack of action, disappearing whenever the viewer attempts to interact with the image sequence. The screensaver acts as a barrier between artwork and viewer.

The Internet has given rise to an arena for art in the form of websites, some of which are considered open works because of the ability to interact with or contribute to the artwork. This idea is literally demonstrated in *Communimage* (1999) (Figure 13), created by programmers c a l c (Teresa Alonso Novo, Looks Brunner, tOmi Scheiderbauer, Malex Spiegel, Silke Sporn) and Johannes Gees. Visitors to this website can upload images from their own computers onto the web page. The participants also have the option of communicating with one another. The end product of this submission is a collage of a multitude of uploaded images varying in both scale and subject matter. This kind of work, where the number of participants is unlimited, pushes the idea of a collaborative project to its limits; it also places emphasis on the randomness or "chance" element of the work.

Figure 12
Fourie, A. *Cloud* (2001)
Screenshot
Source: http://www.joaoferreiragallery.com/fourie/

Figure 13
Calc. *Communimage* (1999)
Screenshot
Source: Green 2004:167

3. METHOD AND PROCESS

Forms of interference manifest in my body of work as vehicles of content and give particular relevance to the individual compositions. My method consists of, as the title of this paper suggests, reprocessing interference. By reprocessing images, footage and sounds, the quality of the compositions is degraded. The intentional manipulation of this material captures the way in which information changes in relation to the device that it passes through. For instance, if you look at a cell phone screen and take a picture with it in the dark, you will notice that neither the screen nor the picture appear as one would expect. Rather, the random flickering specks of dust on the screen emulate stars in the night sky. My intention is not to mimic this transformation but rather to acknowledge that information takes on a different nature in the examples that I have selected.

The first stages of this process are to record found footage from the television, and to film my own footage during excursions around Cape Town. With no particular destination, these trips became an exploration of the imagery that I associated with interference. This approach places emphasis on the notion of being in transit, in between, which refers to the theoretical underpinning of my body of work.

The second stage of this process focuses on creating different textures with the footage. On a practical level, the desire to bring texture to the screen stems from a technique, developed in previous years as a painter, of layering texture onto the canvas. This approach is assumed and modified in this new medium. The technique of creating or emphasising texture within the compositions is used as a vehicle to reflect and comment on technological developments that make images clearer, video smoother and transmission faster, eliminating any sense of distance. The ways in which these ideas manifest in my works reside on two levels, determined by the two notions of distance discussed in this paper, namely practical (geographical distance) and conceptual (the feeling of separation).

Technology has become clearer and faster, giving the user no sense of the distance travelled by a particular packet of information. When one receives a letter or postcard, the postage stamps gives the receiver an indication of where the message originated. When one receives an email or SMS (Short Message Service), however, there is no sense of the distance travelled. In my videos, I create degraded footage to reintroduce a sense of process, and hence distance, to the viewer. The second, conceptual notion of distance is expressed in the subject matter of the individual videos, which are discussed in detail in the next chapter. Interference is incorporated into the compositions in various ways, which reinforce the sense of being in limbo, stuck between two places.

The use of video as a means of representing these ideas stems from various concerns. The inherent relationship between instantaneous transmission and interference in video, being an established broadcasting medium, means it lends itself to portraying similar ideas relating

to telecommunications in general. Unlike the Internet, where blank screens, text messages or small icons identify interference, broken television signals create an array of textures, patterns and unusually fragmented imagery. The use of these signals, specifically in the composition *Lost and found* (Figure 18), fulfils both conceptual and practical concerns.

In the case of the body of work produced in conjunction with this paper, the seemingly insignificant aspects of digital technology are used as vehicles of meaning in the six video compositions. This methodology develops a duality within the compositions: the visual interferences comment on the frailties within telecommunication, while the subject matter comments on the need to stay connected through images, objects and sounds because of the failed promise of telecommunication. The intention of this aesthetic is to subvert the view of interference as an insignificant by-product of telecommunication. Through the process of infused subject matter, the interferences become vehicles that comment on the relevant subject of the composition.

In my body of work, the centrality of the screen resides in the role of the screen as a barrier between physical and virtual space, "the window into another space" (Manovich 2001: 95). In light of the discussion on the space created by networked systems, it is appropriate to translate these ideas onto the screen. The grid format used in some compositions adds an interactive dynamic between the individual sections. Rather than being sequential, the grid compositions relate directly to the notion of hypertext links, radial paths and the multiplicity of the Internet.

My interest in the intermediate culminated in my study of new media. As a result of numerous hours spent on the Internet, I began to contemplate the insignificance of time in this new space. I noticed that the longer images took to load, the more interesting the image in my mind became. However, there was a hint of disappointment as the image revealed itself as a mundane object, rather than the sensationalist image I had imagined it to be. The visual material generated by mixed and broken television signals lends itself to a similar imaginative process. The patterns created by distorted signals force the viewer into an almost trace-like state, wherein images and forms emerge.

4. WORK

The ideas discussed in this dissertation manifest within the blacked-out room of the exhibition space. Six LCD Monitors are mounted, without visible wires, on opposite walls of the room. I thereby wish to create a seamless finish. Bridging the gap between the opposing videos is the sound piece. Six laser-pointers stretch from one side of the room to the other, creating a centrepiece to the installation and forcing the viewer to circle the room to view the videos.

The interferences represented in the videos are unlike the subtle interferences created within the installation space. The visual relationship between the imagery of the compositions is emulated within the exhibition space as the centrepiece of the installation creates an interaction between the visitors and the artwork. It is a subtle play on interactivity, as visitors may not automatically be aware of their movements around the space and the responsive elements of the soundscape. This interaction reinforces the seemingly insignificant nature of interference, unpredictable and sometimes intrusive.

4.1 SOUNDSCAPE

The soundscape aims to capture a sense of the "third space", an environment created various sounds, for example "noise" that is created by technological devices. These sounds are captured in the same manner as the footage of the videos, that is, through a process of re-recording and manipulation. The different devices used to record the sounds attribute different qualities to the sound. For example, the sound recorded on a cell phone has a different quality to that recorded on a computer. The devices capture sounds that I associate with the concept of interference, like the slow hum of an air conditioner and the droning tone of a computer.

The movements of the audience around the exhibition space trigger six individual interfering sounds. The laser pointers suspended from the roof work in conjunction with light-dependent resistors on the floor. These resisters are programmed to randomly play the collected sounds when the light of the laser hits the optimal position. As with some of the video pieces, this concept draws particular parallels with the notions of chance elements and interference.

The soundscape creates an audio representation of a ruptured experience created by interfering audio and visual elements. It also plays with the "noise" of technology that have become the surrounding sounds of our environment. These elusive sounds are contrasted on occasion with louder, intrusive noises, sounds associated with interference, namely the sounds that emanate when conflicting devices come into contact. The interactions that occur between the visual and audio elements of the installation represent the idea of an in-between space. Emphasis is placed on the space between the two elements of the installation, rather than on one or the other.

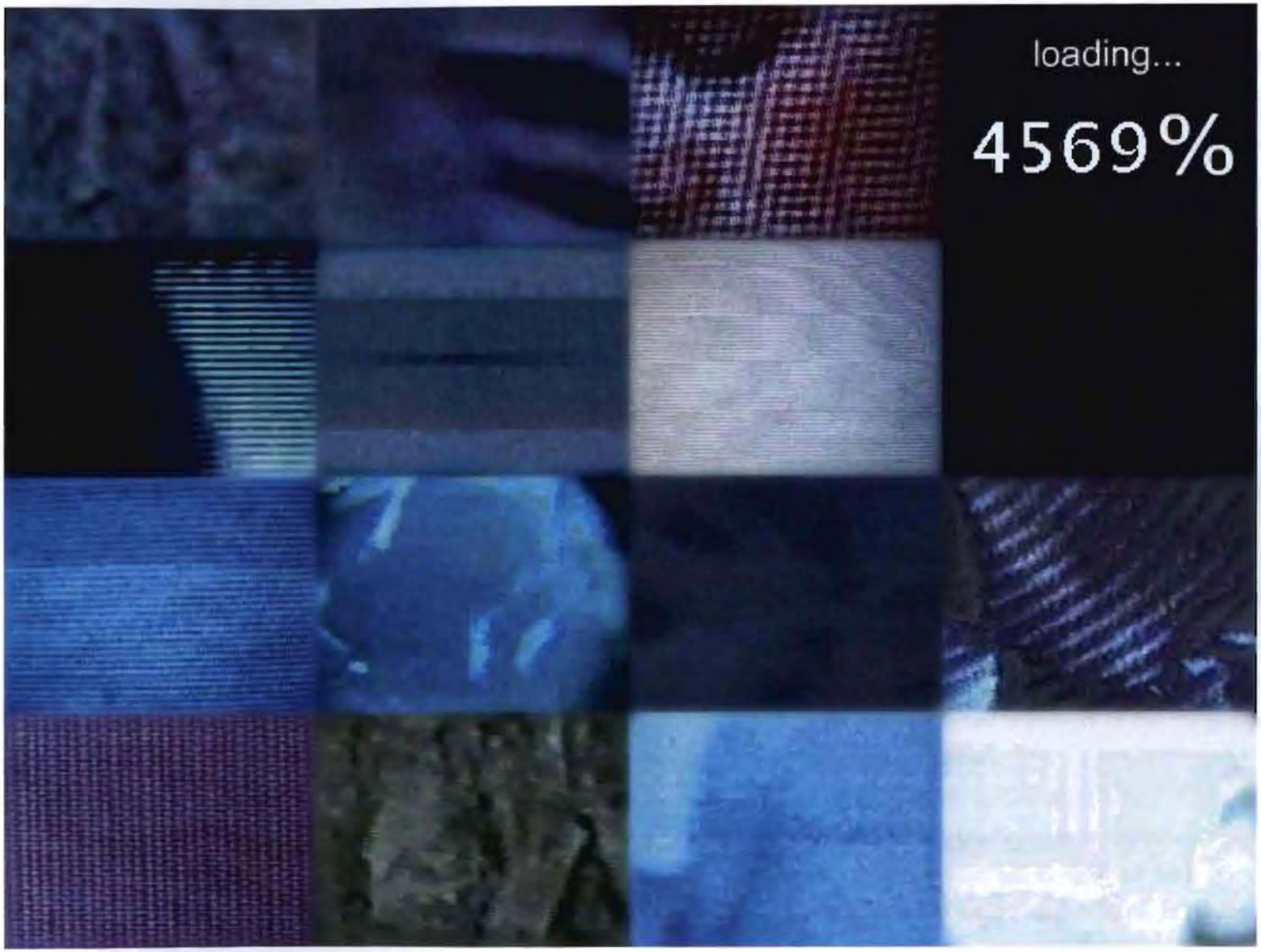

Figure 14
Loaded (2005)

4.2 LOADED

"We're occupying a very undefined place, a non-linear place. The idea of a clock is an obsolete concept, the idea of a numeric structure of time, a reading of a day within 24 hours, when really we are encountering a continuous series of random fragmented experiences. A single short moment may be amplified in the memory for years while spans of several hours are just deleted" (Aitken 2002: 63).

Loaded consists of a four-by-four block grid composition, containing clips that capture the texture of different screens. The textures are created by interferences such as degraded footage, computer refresh rates and other textures normally unseen to the eye. The composition consists of a variety of representative and abstract footage. Most importantly, it recontextualises the idea of a "waiting" icon, in this case a percentage indicator, as one would find on a web page. The footage illustrates the process of degrading images, as it has been recorded and re-recorded using different video cameras. Moreover, through the process of importing and exporting the footage in different computer programmes (such as Macromedia Flash MX and Adobe After Effects), the footage has been further degraded.

The dominant blue-grey tint evokes a sense of technology, an association with semi-blank computer and television screens during loading periods, such as during loading periods of a satellite signal or an image on a computer. The texture of the screen that I refer to is partly due to the refresh rate of a computer screen and the pixellation of a television signal. The included distorted footage from the film *Blow up* (1966) is relevant to the concept of waiting, which underpins the composition.

Blow up, by Michelangelo Antonioni, centres on the obsession of its main character, a photographer, who believes that he has witnessed a murder through his camera lens. He becomes obsessed with enlarging the photographs taken at the scene of the crime, with the hope of finding a clue as to what happened. In the end, the enlarged photographs become abstract renditions of the original. And, however beautiful the images become, they never give the photographer the clues he is looking for. The conceptual framework of this composition mimics the idea of seeking something that is unattainable; the audience waits in vain for the artwork to load.

A percentage indicator is one of the most efficient ways of representing the inner workings of a networked system. Unlike some other "loading" indicators, such as an hourglass that keeps turning or horizontal status bars that slide from left to right and back again, a percentage indicator has a definite beginning and an end. A user expects a web page to be fully loaded when it reaches 100%. In *Loaded,*

this preconceived notion is subverted in the sense that the percentage continues past 100%. On one level, the work of art is never complete, never fully loaded. On another level, the piece does in fact load when it passes 100% – not in a practical sense, but rather in the sense that the concept becomes clear after 100% is exceeded. One can therefore suggest that the piece loads in the mind of the viewer, when he or she realises that the artwork is in the experience of waiting.

"Long delays are one of the most frustrating aspects of the Internet" (Grzinic 2000: 222). Delays are the result of two main parameters of the Internet: the first is latency[16], which should ideally be low, and the second is bandwidth[17], which should ideally be high. Even though technology has developed to a point where broadband has significantly decreased download time and increased access rates on the Internet, short (sometimes imperceptible) delays still occur. Loading icons allow the user to gauge how long they will have to wait for the transfer of information to occur, thus creating a "waiting room" so that the interaction process is not completely disrupted or lost. The purpose of using a preloader like the percentage indicator is not to disrupt the process of interaction but to focus on the end result. In this composition, this assumption is subverted by focusing on the period of waiting rather than the end product.

16 The time between initiating a request for data and the beginning of the actual data transfer (http://www.answers.com)

17 The amount of data that can be passed along a communications channel in a given period of time (http://www.answers.com)

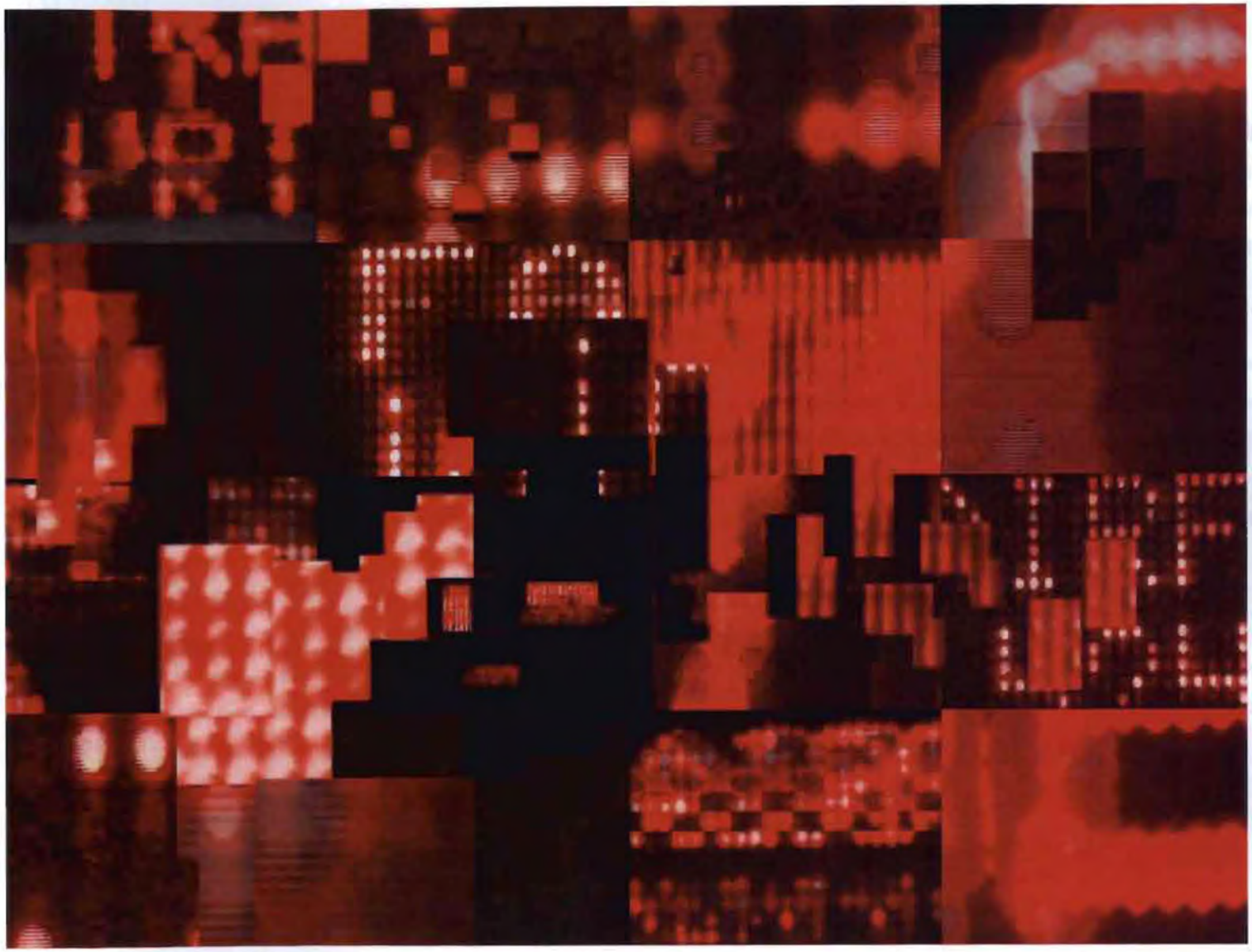

Figure 15
Seeing red (2005)

4.3 SEEING RED

Seeing red, like *Loaded*, takes form in a four-by-four block grid. The red fluorescent letters commonly associated with shop windows dominate the screen. Still or flashing, the sections of this composition create an overall organic pixellated effect held together by a dynamic grid. The composition's grid breaks apart as the piece crescendos into a disjointed mass of smaller blocks. The layering of blocks on top of the original footage introduces a sense of depth to the composition. As the blocks reach a culminating point, the composition reflects a fragmentation of the original composition reminiscent of a stained glass window and similar to a broken video signal when viewed on the Internet. With reference to the title, the composition mimics a flush of mania, as the phrase "seeing red" is usually associated with an uncontrollable moment of fury.

As a child, I attended a Catholic high school in Johannesburg, where we would attend the adjoining church every month. In my later school years, a new church was built to accommodate the growing parish. It was a beautiful, modern building, splashed with stained-glass windows. The most significant and awesome of these windows was the representation of Christ, which ascended behind the altar. To the right of this ethereal representation of Christ scrolled the fluorescent letters of an LCD screen asking the parishioners to turn off their cell phones. *Seeing red* was inspired by this memory, a realisation of how technology has infiltrated our environments, even the most sacred ones.

Perched outside a corner shop, while waiting in a bank queue, at the airport or in church, we are confronted with these screens, either informative or commanding entities. In my piece, the inability to read the original text suggests that this information is really meaningless, more of an unnecessary intrusion than functional technology. One piece of decipherable text ruptures the composition, "Hymn 424", highlights the personal significance of the piece, referencing the infiltration of these screens into churches and reflecting the anger that is suggested by the saying "seeing red".

Figure 16
Jewellery box (2005)

4.4 JEWELLARY BOX

As time passes, memories fade, and life as we know it disappears. The video composition *Jewellery box* captures this sense as its ballerina turns in time to her lingering melody. This treasure holds the memories of my childhood; salvaged by my parents when they moved house, this is one of the last remnants of that chapter in my life.

The composition consists of four sections, all of which capture the ballerina enclosed within the box as she turns on her spoke. In the bottom right section, the jewellery box opens and the dial begins to turn. Viewing the box from a distance reveals the ballerina's small scale. Unlike the other sections that capture her at close range, and therefore seeming larger than she is, this section reveals her as a small, solitary figure. She withdraws into the one side of the section, leaving the other side in a bright haze that highlights the angles of the box that enclose her. Something prevents the ballerina from completing her revolution. At one point, she gets past this obstacle but promptly swings back. These two right-hand sections suggest a conflicting attitude towards growing up. While the dancer wants to complete her turn, as she gets past her obstacle, she chooses to swing back to her original position.

In the two left-hand sections of the video, an asynchronous action takes place between the top and bottom half of the dancer. Her body is uncoordinated. Even if at times her movements are in sync, her body is still unaligned. Here the reflection in the mirror is evidence that there is something beyond this box. Even though the ballerina seems perfect on the outside, with perfect composure, her uncoordinated movements reflect an inner turmoil, giving a confused almost erratic nature to the work. The reflection mimics this state by suggesting that there is more that we cannot see.

The focus on aesthetic beauty in this piece conceals the nervousness, obsession and loneliness that underpin the composition. The looping sections portray an incessant need to hold onto that one moment. This jewellery box encapsulates my childhood memories, reminding me of so many different moments – but they are disjointed, and in a sense keep me trapped in a childhood which I both desire to escape and fear to leave. This piece also evokes the fear of losing the object in the wave of changes, and thus losing the memories.

Figure 17
Dust (2005)

4.5 DUST

Dust is made up of four sections, all of which contain variants of the same footage. The arrangement and treatment of the four sections creates a disjointed composition, which represents the idea of being out of time with one another. Even though the footage is identical it plays out in various ways. A feeling of disorientation is attributed to a previously seamless landscape. Similarly to *Lost and Found* (Figure 18) and *Jewellery Box* (Figure 16), *Dust* comes to terms with alienation, even in this new space, as one realises that there are overlapping moments where the footage corresponds with each other.

The footage was recorded on a recent trip to Dubai, my parents new home. The scene, however, captures a different perspective of Dubai. Unlike the glass coated high-rise buildings of Dubai's city centre the rural outskirts of Dubai reflect a very different lifestyle. In previous compositions my focus lay on technology intercepting the landscape. Here, however, there are no traces of similar examples of any kind. The interception of interferences is realised in the editing process.

The title refers to the aesthetic of the piece and the connotations of lingering particles of sand in the air. *Dust* encapsulates the subject matter and memories created on this trip. The discussed arguments towards telecommunication reside in this composition from a retrospective viewpoint. The memories instilled in the composition capture my own sense of presence to Dubai.

Figure 18
Lost and found (2005)

4.6 LOST AND FOUND

Unlike the previous two compositions, *Lost and found* does not have a block grid format. The composition consists of a sequence of almost unrecognisable elements, captured from a mixed signal on a television set. The notion of chance discussed earlier is evident in the collection of footage used. The elements of the composition consist of indecipherable, completely random footage. The effect is a multi-layered, abstract assemblage of moving images. In this example, it is not the imagery that holds meaning but the ambiguous nature of the footage, which represents the feeling of alienation.

Lost and found, the most personal of the video compositions, reflects the manner in which I dealt with the experience of my parents emigrating. It represents the realisation of adulthood and independence, and of the need to find my place in the world. This composition also illustrates ideas pertaining to an in-between space. As in a waiting room, the signal is neither here nor there, but stuck in between. At the end of the video, the focus is on the streaming droplets of rain on my bedroom window, a window of a house that has been my home for the past five years. I have, however, always seen it as a stepping stone rather than a home. This moment of realisation is juxtaposed with the preceding imagery of alienation and confusion. In the end, this composition creates a sense of peace with the idea of existing in between people and places.

The flashing and repetitious nature of the video highlights my inability to understand, decode or make sense of my situation, an experience that I read into the indecipherable footage. By confronting the viewer with this abstract arrangement, I hope to lead him or her to create their own picture, to project their own meaning onto the piece. Similar to the notion of waiting, literally represented in *Loaded*, this relates back to Cage's involvement of the audience as they waited for something to happen. As the composition plays out and the constant stream of abstract imagery presents itself to the viewer, as with *4'33"*, the lack of clarity encourages self-reflection.

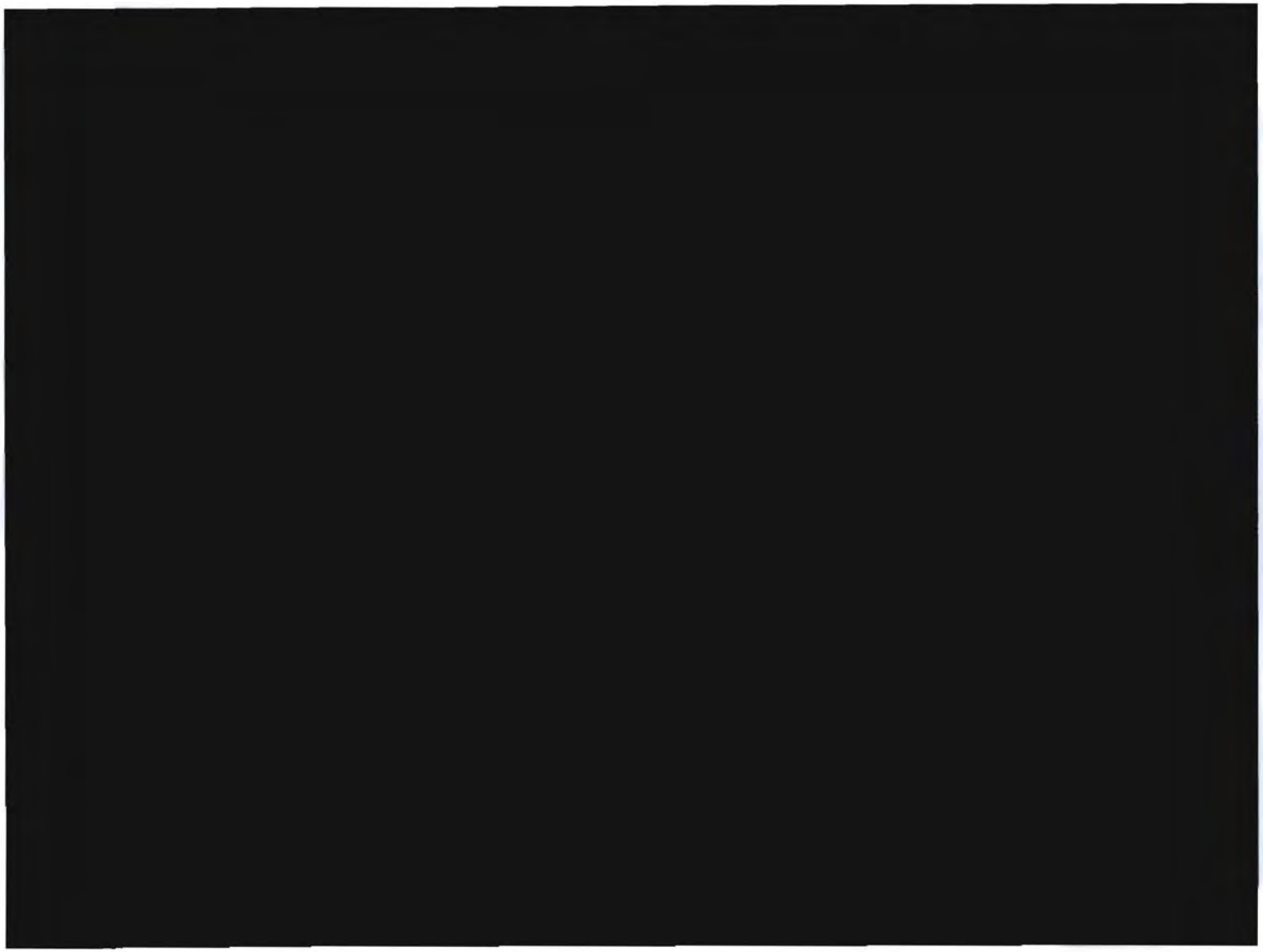

Figure 19
Fluidity (2005)

4.7 FLUIDITY

The composition entitled *Fluidity* consists of footage of a stream of smoke, which twists and turns from one side of the screen to the other. The word "fluid" refers to a "substance capable of flowing freely" (The Oxford Dictionary 1986: 210) – but the motion of the air that encapsulates the smoke controls its movements. Hence, the title embraces the duality inherent in the term "fluidity". The smoke is as graceful and uncertain, as it is mutable and constant.

Even though this composition is the most visually simplistic, it holds the most reference to interference. In conjunction with the idea of interference and distance, this composition holds a particular memory in its stream of smoke. The juxtaposition of meanings is drawn from an experience that forced me into realising that the solid, strong force in my life was as fragile as smoke in the wind. I chose to use smoke as it represents something that is both constant and powerless before the forces surrounding it.

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CONCLUSION

"In spite of considerable talk about the 'death of distance' and the 'end of geography', computer technology appears to accentuate the importance of place, both physical and virtual" (Herman and Swiss 2000: 37). Telecommunications have enabled individuals to communicate over vast distances, to the point where distance seems to have become obsolete. Even though long-distance communication is becoming faster and smoother as technology develops, there are still traceable flaws in these systems. For instance, in "old media" such as television, breaks in transmissions occur. And in "new media", server failures and slow connections transpire. In this dissertation, I have referred to the visual manifestations of these occurrences as interferences, equating them to traces of distance that are still evident within telecommunication.

I have distinguished two notions of distance in this paper, plainly stated as physical and emotional separation. Triggered by my parents' emigration to Dubai at the beginning of 2004, my interest in telecommunication took on a personal nature. Not only did I develop an awareness of the interferences I experienced during this communication, I also became increasingly detached from my family due to lack of face-to-face communication.

The ideas discussed in this dissertation take form in the installation that I have produced. Beyond the apparent referencing of the ideas of distance and interference, on a deeper level the video compositions reflect the process of coming to terms with alienation and a realisation of independence. By isolating different instances of interference, I subvert the inherent negative associations by interjecting moments from my childhood. I further draw attention to the aesthetic nature of this electronic medium through the process of degrading the collection of footage, and through this anaesthetisation encourage the audience to become more reflective of the material.

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