

**STILLNESS AND MOVEMENT STUDIES:
PORTRAITURE, IDENTITY, TIME**

By

Ross Birdwise

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Abstract

This thesis discusses my video art practice in relation to the philosophers Henri Bergson and Gilles Deleuze. Bergson and Deleuze have written extensively on time, consciousness, matter, and the universe, holding that the only constant is change. What I find useful from the two philosophers is their shared attempt to give materialist and immanent (not transcendent) accounts of time, change, movement and representation. In my video art, I have been producing a kind of extended portraiture that introduces time and change into what I think is usually a static form.

The works of Bergson, Deleuze and other philosophers/cultural theorists who write about their work have helped me to develop and discuss what I see to be a different approach to portraiture. My ‘video portraits’ approach questions of identity from the hypothesis that both the self and representations of the self are expressions of material forces, temporality, and change. This has many implications that are discussed in this paper. The most important implications are: One, the self is treated less an unchanging essence and more as process occurring through time. Two, representation, although it tries to delimit and fix a certain idea of the self, is still nonetheless subject to the forces of change.

The thesis begins with a short autobiographical discussion and explanation of some pertinent undergraduate work I did, putting it in Deleuzian/Bergsonian context. It then elaborates two key notions for understanding my recent work: Bergson’s duration and Deleuze’s virtual. Roughly speaking, these are concepts that treat time, consciousness and matter as being continually shifting and indivisible. These concepts are used to explain some recent artistic developments as well as contextualizing my work in a broader artistic context, linking it to painting and music.

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Dedicated to my brother Scott.

STILLNESS AND MOVEMENT STUDIES:

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there is for us nothing that is instantaneous. In all that goes by that name there is already some work of our memory, and consequently, of our consciousness, which prolongs into each other, an endless number of moments of an endlessly indivisible time. (Henri Bergson, Matter and Memory 69-70)

In conventional photography and video art, the individual frame is often considered to reflect an instant of time; movement is represented through static positions; ‘memory’ becomes the divisible totality of these positions, fixed in time through either chemical or digital means. It is forgotten that each individual frame has a specific duration: one-thousandth of a second, one-sixtieth of a second or an infinite set of times far longer or shorter. The static image is a digital or chemical record that acts as a kind of concentration of the time between the opening and closing of a film camera’s shutter. In fact, the photographic image or frame itself is subject to duration and deteriorates in time. Digital data is similarly volatile and must be protected from the forces of digital corruption that occur through time. Furthermore, the context of reception changes the image. In this sense, the popular conception of the timelessness of the image is an illusion. The forces of time constantly change the image, causing it to continuously differ from itself.

Drawing on Bergson’s thinking about duration, my research is concerned with the relationships between portraiture, identity and time. To this end, I have been producing video art that both utilizes and challenges the conventions of portraiture. These ‘video

portraits' attempt to introduce aspects of time and motion into portraiture, breaking from conventional ideas of the photographic image as a static form, the timeless essence of the individual. I utilize time and motion for a number of reasons, including an exploration of identity as something that becomes through time rather than remaining a fixed and unchanging essence.

This paper contextualizes my research, artistic production, and personal interests in relation to the work of philosopher Henri Bergson and, to a lesser extent, that of Gilles Deleuze. In addition to Bergson and Deleuze, I also draw from secondary sources that have inspired or assisted me along the way. In some cases, these secondary sources helped me interpret some of the more difficult primary texts. For the purposes of this paper, I will discuss my work in relation to Bergson's notion of duration, which is, broadly speaking, a philosophy of time, consciousness, matter, and the universe that holds that the only constant is change, and that individuals are only able to grasp a small part of a constantly changing reality. I will also look at Deleuze's notions of the virtual and cinema theory, both of which are strongly related to Bergson's duration. What I find useful from the two philosophers is their shared attempt to give materialist and immanent (not transcendent) accounts of time, change, movement and representation. The works of Bergson, Deleuze and other philosophers/cultural theorists who write about their work have helped me to develop what I see to be a different approach to portraiture.

My portraits approach questions of identity from the hypothesis that the video image is ultimately an expression of material forces, temporality, and change. I look at representation along similar lines, treating it less as a 're-presentation' or distortion of reality, and more along the lines of a filtering process that is nonetheless connected to and reflective of reality. I also try to look at the ways in which different artists have

represented newness, indeterminacy and becoming, in relation to a Bergsonian and Deleuzian context, and to use this to frame my work. Finally, I link my academic research to my most recent portrait works, *Self-Portrait* and *Stillness and Movement Studies*, the latter of which was featured in my graduating show at Emily Carr University, 2008.

Autobiographical Statement

For many years, I have been interested in philosophy and theory in relation to visual art, literature, and music. These interests are still very much alive in the present moment and dovetail nicely with my creative output, which includes photography, video art, and music. For a long time, I have been into questions concerning personal identity, free will and determinism, epistemology, phenomenology and ontology. As teenagers, my friends and I used to debate many topics (many of which we did not understand and which I feel I still do not really understand), including determinism, reductionist accounts of ‘hard’ science, whether or not we could see things in themselves, morality and religion, mystical knowledge, and the ultimate nature of reality. In a sense, you could say I never ceased in being interested in these types of questions and in trying to answer, or simply learn more about them, I wound up becoming interested in other related and possibly more nuanced lines of exploration as well.

After high school I drifted a bit, eventually completing a photography program at a local community college. The program was really disappointing, because it was geared towards technical training and commercially viable forms of photography (and related practices) and tended to downplay or ignore the more critical and exploratory aspects of photography. I felt this acutely in relation to the portraits we were taking of each other.

These portraits tended to be conservative, utilizing established formal vocabularies, often reinforcing traditional gender roles, notions of beauty, as well as other cliché forms of representation. I found the photographic conventions taught in college were extremely rigid, and unimaginative. Many of the students and the professors had uncritical (and possibly cynical) attitudes toward the photographic medium itself, its subject matter, and the representations of that subject matter that we crafted. Feeling unsatisfied with this training, not knowing what else to do with my life, I applied to art school in my last year of college.

As an undergraduate visual arts student at the University of Ottawa, I took philosophy and theory classes, including a course on contemporary continental philosophy and several courses in analytic philosophy alongside courses on the philosophy of art and art criticism. My favorite subjects were phenomenology, epistemology, ontology, the philosophy of mind, genealogy (Nietzsche and Foucault), as well as theories of subjectivity and representation. These are topics seemed to be an extension of what I was concerned with several years earlier in high school. Through my reading I began cultivating an interest in Gilles Deleuze whose work led me to Henri Bergson and a wide variety of topics covered in their work, including matter, the body, sensation, ontology, representation and time. My interest in Deleuze complimented my academic interests, my artistic practice, and my musical output.

As a Masters student at the Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design, I have continued a project I started as an undergraduate student at the University of Ottawa, an exploration into portraiture and time. The first and only piece I completed for this project while studying in Ottawa was called *Videoportraits* (see attached Visual Documentation DVD for examples). For this piece, I was concerned with the tensions between still and

moving images as well as the tensions between memory and present time. In these short videos, shown in the form of a multi-channel video installation with multi-channel sound, we see a variety of people looking into the camera. Framed in head and shoulders shots, the subjects stand out from their backgrounds (sometimes interiors, sometimes exteriors). The middle ground and the background are often distinguishable as separate planes of movement or stasis. In the middle grounds and backgrounds we see incidental movements and animated settings: motor vehicles and people passing by, leaves falling off trees, gusts of wind passing through foliage, flickering computer screens, occupied office spaces, parks, cityscapes and other such mundane spaces and movements. I deliberately chose this kind of framing because I felt that it obviously implied ‘portrait,’ and yet it could show things in the middle ground and the background moving in, within, and out of the frame, at variable speeds to suggest the coexistence of several planes of movement, each with objects moving within their own duration.

These video portraits introduce an aspect of time and motion that I felt was missing from the still photography I was trained to do in college. Not only do these videos depict movement, but they also loop and un-loop, creating alternating zones of stasis and motion, of tension and release. In order to explain this dynamic more fully, I need to explain how the video portraits were made: I gave my subjects minimal instructions, telling them to simply try to stand still and maintain a ‘neutral’ or static expression for the duration of the videotaping, anywhere from one to three minutes. During the course of the individual shots, however, subjects would sometimes laugh, fidget nervously or otherwise break out of their neutral demeanor. I would then take this footage and edit it so that moments of neutrality or stasis would loop longer than the actual duration that they occurred. For example: I would take what was a less than a second of footage, a

twelve-frame sequence (a micro-loop), and loop it for thirty seconds. The suspended moments of stillness and neutrality sometimes take on a strange quality, suggesting a sort of half-life suspended between mechanical stasis and organic movement. Periodically, this looping instant of neutrality would be allowed to un-loop, letting the subjects flow in an unsuspended time (relative to the loop), the frames of the video advancing well beyond the artificial confines of the micro-loop. In some cases, I would loop the opposite kind of moment, a peak of the action moment (like a fidget or a laugh) suspended in a short loop, creating an effect akin to a skipping CD or a glitch in time. In both cases, these looping moments of artificially enforced stasis (enforced by editing decisions in Final Cut Pro) are representative of how I understood still photography (particularly portraiture) to artificially fix and delimit the subject by abstracting it from time. The un-looping moments implied the opposite—they were supposed to represent the ‘after’ that a photograph cannot capture, a kind of metaphor for what exists outside the frame, outside representation, beyond past recollections, and outside of the present moment.

The concern with interpenetrating planes of movement, with objects having their own durations, is related to my thinking about the relationship between stasis and motion. I was viewing photography (and representation itself) as something that simultaneously delimited, yet made experience possible. I was trying to imply that beyond our customary mode of apprehending things as being fixed in time and space that there is something much richer actually going on, an infinite universe of objects moving at differential speeds and forming constantly shifting relationships with other objects. At the time that I made *Videoportraits*, this idea was more of a vaguely defined intuition about reality rather than something coherent and conceptual.

Videoportraits, as I understand the piece, is concerned with two kinds of time: real-

time (living and present) and suspended time (a memory or a tracing of the past). These different temporalities are also related to some notions of identity I was concerned with. In this work, identity is not understood as a state of being, rather as a state of becoming—perpetually evolving interactive process rather than an unchanging core. Intuitively, I felt that conventional portraiture is concerned with static and fixed representations of subjects, and that, as such, portraiture is often an accomplice in the drive to establish and fix subject positions in society. I also felt there was an implicit essentialism in regards to identity. Furthermore, I felt that this notion of a stable and fixed identity, the idea that one could capture or accurately portray someone's identity in film (as fixed *or* shifting) was highly problematic. I saw my work as a furtive attempt to break the mold of stable or recognizable subject positions by drawing attention to the image as social and technological construction. I also saw my work as a critique of the fragmentary and constructed perspective offered by a photograph, and by photographic viewing practices in general—the range of emotional and intellectual habits and expectations that one brings to viewing a photograph.

Bergsonian notions of Duration and the Whole

While I was working on *Videoportraits*, I was reading Deleuzian and Bergsonian theory on questions of subjectivity, time and film-theory. This theory help to provide an interpretative framework and source for further exploration in my creative work.

Bergson's concept of duration was developed throughout his career. At first, it proposed a theory of time. Later, his thinking on duration was extended to help explain the workings of consciousness. Finally, Bergson extended the concept to matter and energy, making duration to encompass the entirety of the universe (also referred to as the Whole).

The three aspects of Bergson's work on duration express what he sees as a vital principle (*élan vital*) of the universe, a principle of movement and change being the core of reality. At the most general level, duration is a conception of time, consciousness and matter as indivisible entities in a perpetual state of transformation or becoming. Duration questions notions of essence, seeing the only constant being change itself.

According to Bergson "movement is reality itself" (*The Creative Mind* 169), meaning that reality is fundamentally a continuous movement of time rather than a set of fixed entities, states or instants; it is not a series of discrete steps, states, causes and effects. For Bergson, reality is an indivisible, yet shifting Whole: the universe considered in terms of becoming. The desire to break reality into discrete chunks is due to our limited human perception and the categorizing tendencies of the human mind. Bergson scholar Donato Totaro suggests that for Bergson, "The intellect is by nature a spatializing mechanism, which means that to acquire knowledge it employs concepts, symbols, abstraction, analysis, and fragmentation. Hence the intellect can only express movement-reality itself in static terms" (Totaro np). As Bergson says, this thinking on reality "substitutes for the continuous the discontinuous, for mobility stability..." (*The Creative Mind* 222-223). In this sense, the intellectual activities of the mind can be compared to a camera, breaking down what was once moving into a set of static representations, discrete photographs or the individual frames of a filmstrip. This division, this breakdown, is often referred to as spatialization, and as such, it is only one modality of reality. Thus the durational is a different modality: one stripped of this intellectual 'gridding' (the spatialization of time) that helps us to understand reality not as an order or succession of discrete moments but a continuous state of motion and becoming. This is the key element of a Bergsonian notion of reality that I draw on in my work.

Another important aspect of Bergson's philosophy is his conception of the Whole. According Keith-Ansell Pearson, *The Whole*, "for Bergson is, in essence, 'universal mobility' or the immanence of becoming (movement and change). As such it is never, and can never be, given" (Pearson 59). The Whole is always in excess of anything that tries to act as its representation, and is always in excess of itself. In this sense, the Whole is unbounded. It always exceeds representation and actuality. Its nature is change. It is that which differs from itself. In this sense, the Whole, never given, is a 'virtual' power, as opposed to the actuality given in our perception of the world. In many ways, the Whole is also related to the future, which although never completely 'given' (actual), is continually passing into the present, and from the present into the past.

Our perception is only capable of grasping a tiny part of the Whole, or so Bergson suggests. This is the given. We only grasp a small part of the whole due to our own finitude and our body's immediate need to act on the world for its continued survival. As Bergson says about our grasping of the partial, it is "the double work of solidification and division which we effect on the moving continuity of the real (*The Whole*) in order to obtain there a fulcrum for our action, in order to fix within it starting points for our operation, in short, to introduce into it real changes" (*Matter and Memory* 211). Our practical, pragmatic forms of knowledge are born out of this limited perception and our struggle to survive. In a sense, one can say that this is a relative kind of knowledge, a knowledge tailored to our need to act upon the world and built out of our fragmentary experience of the Whole.

I like this contrast between the Whole and the small parts of it we are able to grasp. It implies many things for me: first, it suggests that representation delimits its subject, and second, it seems to be a way to ground a practice of portraiture that rejects essences

and fixed identities. This harkens back to what I was saying about my undergraduate piece *Videoportraits*, and my concern with there being something that was not given in any representation, including photographic representations such as portraits. The Whole would stand as a kind of ultimate ground for these kinds of speculations.

In contrast to the actual (the fragmented, the limited), Bergson argues that there is another kind of knowledge, an absolute knowledge (Totaro np). This knowledge seeks to join the Whole. Because the whole is not being, rather, it is becoming (change), this absolute knowledge must also embody change in itself. According to Pearson, absolute knowledge seeks to

cultivate fluid concepts that are “capable of following reality in all its windings and of adopting the very movement of the inner life of things” (Bergson, *The Creative Mind* 190). To achieve this requires relinquishing the method of construction that leads only to higher and higher generalities and thinking in terms of a concrete duration in which a radical recasting of the Whole is always taking place. (Pearson 63)

In other words, the drive for absolute knowledge is a call to upset our normal understanding of things. Normally, we favor generalizations and static conceptions of the world over singularities and change. Absolute knowledge privileges the latter. Pearson elaborates this notion beautifully:

The intellect selects in a given situation whatever is like something it already knows, so as to fit it into a pre-existing mold or schema; in this way it applies the principle that “like produces like.” It naturally rebels against the idea of an original and unforeseeable creation of forms. Similarly, science focuses its attention on isolable or closed systems, simply because anything that is irreducible and irreversible in the successive moments of a history eludes it. (Pearson 64)

Pearson continues, explaining contemporary science's tendency towards fluid concepts:

In cases of organic evolution, Bergson insists that foreseeing the form in advance is not possible. This is not because there are no conditions or specific causes of evolution, but rather is due to the fact that they are built into the particular form of organic life, and peculiar to that phase of its history in which life finds itself at the moment of producing the form. It is clear that the tendency within contemporary science – for example, the focus on open, dynamical systems – is to approach the real in such terms. (Pearson 64)

This is not to say that contemporary science knows the Whole, rather that it has merely expanded our horizons. The Whole stands as a kind of reminder to continually challenge more limited conceptions of a self or a human centered ontology or epistemology (Pearson 65-66). It is wise not to see contemporary science as 'correcting' earlier science. Earlier science (and other disciplines and social practices) grasped and delimited the Whole as well. Contemporary science, at best, has only extended that grasp. Science also holds no privileged access to truth as compared to art and philosophy, or so Bergson suggests. The different disciplines provide different manifestations of our spatializing tendencies, but they also contain within themselves the possibility of reversal. For Bergson, the most effective method of reversal is something called intuition (which is not what is meant by the ordinary sense of the word), rather it is a method or practice. I will discuss this idea in relation to my own work later on in this essay.

In Bergson's writing, duration and the Whole are important aspects of consciousness. We have already established that the intellect is a spatializing mechanism that artificially divides the Whole. In the first instance, we focused for the most part on the spatialization of time by the intellect. However, there is more to consciousness than

the intellect. Our consciousness, although capable of spatialization, is not inherently spatial. We spatialize in order to meet the needs of our bodies, in order to survive. Our consciousness, like real time, has a temporal and indivisible aspect. As Totaro explains, “Our true inner self, our emotions, thoughts, and memories do not lie next to each other like shirts on a clothesline but flow into one another, one sensation gnawing and overlapping into another.” (Totaro np) This flow of our inner self is made constant by the dual, intertwined workings of perception and memory. In consciousness “there is nothing for us that is instantaneous. In all that goes by that name there is already some work of memory, and consequently, of our consciousness, which prolongs into each other, an endless number of moments of an indivisible time” (Bergson, *Matter and Memory* 69-70)”. In the sense of it being rooted in an indivisible flow of becoming, the duration of our consciousness (subjectivity) mirrors the absolute duration of time. Our memory flows from a present moment that is always passing simultaneously into the past and into the future.

Now, one might question this notion of an indivisible aspect of consciousness. Questioning it, one might say that s/he is aware of discrete emotions and other states of being, that s/he can conceptualize or compartmentalize the past into discrete sections, instants and other such units. I agree. However, according to Bergson this compartmentalization is something that is added onto a more primal and indivisible psychological experience that is inseparable from the continuous flow of our perception (which is connected to the sensible world). Bergson describes how our body’s survival needs cause us to carve our selves and others out of the continuity of sensible reality:

Our needs are, then, so many searchlights which, directed upon the continuity of sensible qualities, single out in it distinct bodies. They cannot satisfy themselves

except upon the condition that they carve out, within this continuity, a body which is to be their own and then delimit other bodies with which the first can enter into relation, as if with persons. To establish these special relations among portions thus carved out from sensible reality is just what we call living. (*Matter and Memory* 262)

The same faculty that allows us to spatialize time also allows us to spatialize ourselves and to discern other entities outside of us. We make ourselves and the world around us into inert objects, cloaking the flow of becoming that underlies, supports, animates and connects these otherwise discrete objects, which, in the final analysis, are not so much objects as events occurring through time.

The third kind of duration developed by Bergson applies to matter. In our very materialistic times, matter is often taken as being all that there is. Bergson does not disagree with this, but he contends that matter is far richer and complex than many reductionist accounts would have of it. For Bergson, matter has a durational aspect. It is not as immobile or static as we think. Totaro says that for Bergson matter is “best conceived of as energy, and energy is the ultimate form of motion; thus the shapes of material objects are not properties of the objects but are ‘snapshots taken by the mind of the continuity of becoming’.” (Totaro np) Matter might just be the most stable and enduring form of that energy, but in no way can it be its essence. In this sense, individuated matter stands in the same relationship to the Whole as normal human perception (spatialization, intellect). It is just a limited expression of the Whole.

According to Bergson, human beings, through a process of evolution, have a natural tendency to geometrize space, experiencing it in a conceptual rather than perceptual manner: “Unfortunately, evolution has exaggerated man’s intellectual capacities to the point where consciousness is permeated by the tendency to geometrize”

(Antliff 344). This human space is contrasted with that of the animal: “space is (arguably) not so homogeneous for the animal as for us, and that determinations of space or directions do not assume for it a purely geometrical form” (Bergson qtd. in Antliff 344). The implication seems to be that our basic, evolution-derived experience of geometric space is reflective of the same faculties that allow us to spatialize time, consciousness and matter. It also seems to imply that our perception of space tends to be almost automatic—given as geometrical and divisible space. For Bergson there are two kinds of space, one quantitative, conceptual and geometrical, and the other qualitative and perceptual. Qualitative and perceptual space is durational and experienced as continuous, yet shifting.

Deleuze and the Art of the Virtual

The virtual, a key concept in the work of Gilles Deleuze, is strongly related to Bergson’s notions of duration, the Whole, and spatialization. The virtual is difficult to conceptualize and almost impossible to describe, because, like the Whole, it refers to something that is fundamentally non-representational. The virtual is always richer than the actual, much like the way in which the Bergsonian Whole is always in excess of our spatialized existence, which necessarily reduces its object (Deleuze 41). In this sense spatialization—the activity of the intellect—is comparable to actualization. If we understand the order of actuality as an order of being, concepts, discrete entities and units of space and time, and virtuality as an order of becoming, of an indivisible yet restless multiplicity, then it is possible to link the virtual to many aspects of Bergson’s philosophy, especially duration (in psychological and physical terms) and the Whole.

Since the virtual, like the Whole, is not divisible into concepts, cause and effect, and so on, we might best posit it as the immanent ‘source’ of newness and indeterminacy, but also the source of the only apparent determinacy we sometimes experience in parts of the actual. The virtual would be the ‘cause’ or ground, if we can still speak of such a thing as a cause, of the new, the unpredictable, the unknowable (Deleuze 41). The virtual would not properly be a cause nor outside of reality—unlike some conceptions of God, rather it would be inherent in everything at all times, like duration, which applies to sense experience as much as it does to matter. The virtual is infinite, but it is not a numerical (divisible) infinity (Deleuze 42-43). The actual, including our apprehension of causality, would be nothing but a surface effect that fails to capture the immanent richness of the virtual (Deleuze 41). Even our apprehensions of ourselves (our psychological reality), and our bodies, would be mere surface effects and in no way partake of this impersonal ‘inner’ force, like trying to capture the violence of an explosion by presenting the shrapnel.

As I have suggested the notions of duration and the virtual lend themselves to thinking about contemporary artistic practices and digital modes of representation. These concepts inform my work in key ways. To draw this out, I will look at their impact on contemporary music and thinking about painting and on the work of artists whose work is important my understanding of my own practice of portraiture.

1.) MUSIC

I believe that certain artistic practices have the potential to put is in touch with the virtual. Composer and performer, David Tudor’s comments on playing John Cage’s indeterminate pieces for piano is telling:

When I play a piece which is notated, even though I may have freedom of choice – for instance in Stockhausen – I feel it’s a curious sensation I’m trying to describe, but the whole thing is, whatever you do, is like a stream of consciousness. And if I play something which is so notated, I notice now, after having done it for several years, that it has a tendency to put me to sleep. And it wants, all the time, to recede into an area where my feelings are called upon more and more. And all the features which seem to be so striking when the works we first composed now become much less striking. They don’t seem important and so the whole thing recedes into a stream which is mainly a feeling. Whereas if I play music which doesn’t have any such requirement, but where I’m called upon to make actions and especially if the actions are undetermined as to their content or, let’s say, at least undetermined as to what they’re going to produce, then I feel that I’m alive in every part of my consciousness.

(Tudor np)

When he speaks of playing these indeterminate scores, Tudor says they make him “feel alive in every part of my consciousness”. I believe this is because the indeterminacy of what he plays makes him alert and does not readily allow him to fall into accustomed habits of listening or performing. In this sense, the score might act as a stand in for the Whole or for the virtual, which is never given. The score, being indeterminate, is never given. The indeterminate score is completely self-differentiating in its successive actualizations (performances). This could provide a kind of ultimate or absolute explanation for the feeling of being alive that he felt: the shock of the new actualized forms emerging from the living, breathing score. This feeling of newness would be in contrast to the habituated and largely unconscious feelings generated by the rigidly notated (although with sections a performer can choose to play, not play, or play in a

uncertain order), ready-made, repeatable and quantized scores of Karlheinz Stockhausen. Even though Stockhausen's scores allow some choice on the composer's part, arguably nothing new is created in successive performances. When one finally learns how to play one of these Stockhausen pieces, one can more or less let habit take over, whereas ideally with a Cage score one must expect the unexpected.

It is also worth noting that John Cage often used chance procedures (such as rolling dice or consulting the I Ching) in order to derive the notation of many of his scores, and in some cases calling for the use of chance techniques during the performance of his scores as well. For Cage, this was about removing himself from the compositional process. It is interesting to consider this in light of the virtual. By surrendering one's self to chance, to pre-personal and pre-individual inorganic forces, and using these undefined and random forces to create the work, one is able to actualize something, a score, an action, a performance with many potential outcomes. This surrender to chance, to impersonal (inorganic) forces could be seen as a way of actualizing the virtual in such a way that respects its indeterminacy. It is a kind of work that respects something of the virtual's spirit, even if the openness of the work pales in comparison to the massive and radical openness of the virtual.

The work of John Cage and David Tudor is related to the work of Gerard Grisey, a spectral composer. Broadly speaking, spectral music claims to base its musical modalities less on tradition and more on the physical and perceptual qualities of sound. Furthermore, being sound-based rather than being note-based, spectral music tends to treat sound less as an immobile structure, grouping of pitches, or some other atomized formation, and more as a living entity shifting through time. This is why the music is referred to as spectral, because it is concerned with or draws inspiration from the physical

spectrum of sound and its behavior through time. In one his pieces, *Partiels*, Grisey has a group of eighteen musicians playing a variety of instruments ranging from brass to strings. The instrumentation is unconventional by new music standards (a fairly standard orchestral grouping with no electronics, or unusual or modified instruments) yet the music opens onto a new harmonic and timbral world. Furthermore, the music is less defined by discrete events such as melodies and individual notes than it is by the continual shifting and blurring that occurs between elements such as harmony, texture, timbre, rhythm and between the playing of one instrument and another. Often the form of the piece seems to be in perpetual transition, without a return to identical parts. One is less inclined to hear motifs, melodies and individual instruments playing in counterpoint, as they are to hear a perpetually evolving sound mass that varies in ways far more qualitative than quantitative. As Grisey remarks, “the way in which the work is organized corresponds with the way it is produced within its length.” (Dufourt 293) In this way, spectral music is durational and suggests a relationship between performance strategies and the virtual. The music as a whole, with its shifting timbres and inward agitation, is best described as a kind of mega-gesture that encompasses and subsumes all of its micro-movements. In other words, it pushes the listener towards grasping the piece as a shifting and continuous whole than as a series of discrete parts woven together.

2.) *PAINTING*

According to Slavoj Žižek, Jackson Pollock is a painter of the virtual. Pollock is the

“ultimate Deleuzian painter”: does his action-painting not directly render this flow of pure becoming, the impersonal-unconscious life energy, the encompassing field of

virtuality out of which determinate paintings can actualize themselves, this field of pure intensities with no meaning to be unearthed by interpretation? (Zizek 5)

While Zizek is engaging in hyperbole, his description of Pollock's process is useful. Pollock's paintings can be interpreted as an analogy or metaphor for the virtual. One cannot truly render the virtual, even in a purportedly non-representational painting, but one can hopefully instill a less habitual state of perception (a perception that rigidly fixes or spatializes forms) in the viewer of the work. This less habitual state might help the viewer to break away from commonsense notions of the real. How might this state function? The intense, abstract play of splattered paint might cause one to momentarily experience the space of the painting not in a geometric and spatialized way, but rather in a qualitative and indivisibly shifting way that does away with ideas of figure and ground and of fixed forms and positive and negative spaces within the painting. This process would occur through time: the complex play of the paint causing mirages of form to emerge, dissipate and transform as the viewer views the work through time. This in turn brings one closer to a durational experience of space, time and consciousness in general and grants one an intuition of the ever-changing or becoming Whole. The painting might then be seen as a metaphor for the virtual or the Whole, because one would experience a little bit of the virtual through relating to it, intensifying one's experience of the Whole. One might be able to see, at least in theory, how the experience of the intensity of the painting might be extended to realms outside of the world created in the painting.

Another painter whom I consider to be closely related to my thinking about the virtual is Francis Bacon. Bacon's paintings depict bodies (and to a lesser extent spaces) in a state of becoming. Gestures, bodies, perspectives even, seem to be only partially formed and in flux, a state of simultaneous making and unmaking. It should also be

noted that Bacon would sometimes attack his canvasses with paint and other implements, using these chance-derived, indeterminate markings as non-representational sources of imagery for paintings that walked the line between abstraction and figuration, planning and indeterminacy, stillness and movement. Indeed, the smears not only help in the generative process of the paintings completion, they also act as living elements in the viewer's construction/destruction of the paintings. Even though a Bacon painting is static, it nonetheless preserves something of movement. Philosopher Jennifer Dyer described this movement as a "serially iterative process." She describes how the paintings work in this process:

They tell the viewer where to look and how to look, directing the viewer towards the figure's activity of actualization. There the viewer is presented with the juxtaposition of realist representation and destructive marks and smears which involve the viewer in constructively relating them in order to actualize the figure. Participation in the activity of the figure is a constructive process of relating one part to another, yet each relational construction both changes or destroys previous constructions and leads to further constructions. Thus the figure's activity of actualization is a serially iterative process of continual becoming and continual dissolution in which the viewer participates. (Dyer np)

Thus, Bacon's paintings might be seen to exist in a space between being and becoming. The paintings are always in the process of being actualized but also passing once again into the virtual. This kind of 'double-movement' is something that I am striving for in some of my own work.

3.) *Self-Portrait*

In an essay called “Notes on Gesture,” Giorgio Agamben writes,

Every image, in fact, is animated by an antinomic polarity: on the one hand, images are the reification of the gesture (it is the imago as death mask or symbol); on the other hand, they preserve the dynamis intact (as in Muybridge’s snapshots or in any sports photograph). The former corresponds to the recollection seized by voluntary memory, while the latter corresponds to the image flashing in the epiphany of involuntary memory. And while the former lives in magical isolation, the latter refers beyond itself to a whole of which it is a part. (55)

This passage, which summarizes my interest in time, change, and still and moving images, has a distinctly Bergsonian tone, especially in reference to the image’s “whole of which it is a part” (55). In my own work, starting with *Videoportraits*, and continuing today (many pieces are still in process and as yet untitled), I am trying to embody this ‘antinomic polarity’. I am also trying to introduce those aspects of surprise, continuity, rupture, construction and destruction that I feel are present in some of the artist’s work described in preceding paragraphs.

In order to explain how this functions, I will begin discussion of my work by focusing on a piece titled *Self-Portrait*. *Self-Portrait* is featured on 3 television monitors, each with their own soundtrack (on 3 pairs of headphones). The monitors are displayed left to right in a form resembling a triptych. (Documentation of *Self-Portrait* can be found on the attached Visual Documentation DVD, each monitor can be viewed separately.)

Left monitor: a video showing a series of over 2000 still images of me taken at different times and places during an 8 month period. The individual images are shown for the duration of exactly one frame, that being .033 milliseconds. The video is constantly pulsing, jump-cutting and changing at high speed. The non-diegetic soundtrack is a series of electronic pulses moving in and out of phase, at the rates of .033 and .032 milliseconds respectively, tuned in a ratio of 32/33, and layered overtop of each other in 3 octaves. The sound is very intense, further enhancing (and doubling) the sense of enormous speed of the ‘granular movement’ (a kind of hyperactive montage) of the still images.

Middle monitor: a video-image of myself looking at my reflection in a mirror. At first glance, nothing seems to be happening, I am just leaning towards the mirror, almost motionless, looking intently at my reflection, but closer inspection reveals that my mirror image eventually goes out of phase with the main subject, so that my reflection appears to be either running faster or slower than my self, depending on the viewer’s interpretation. As this is happening, a minimal electronic tone (made from sine waves) gradually increases in volume, and becomes slightly dissonant (in a binaural and microtonally ‘beating’ way, one of the waveforms detuning less than a quartertone in relation to the other one which remains stable) when I begin to slide out of phase with myself.

Right monitor: another video-image of me. The vantage point of the camera is in constant motion, but my image (in this case my head and shoulders) is always centered in the ‘eye of the storm’ of this roving perspective, as if a camera was placed on the edge of a giant turntable, lens facing inwards, my image rotating at the center of that turntable as the camera rotates with it. The background blurs and shifts behind me in a peculiar way, and

my face seems to be traversed by all kinds of distortions, similar to the background but less intense. The image is a composite of many semi-transparent layers of the same footage (created by reducing the opacity of the footage), running at different speeds and slightly staggered in time (somewhat like an uneven staircase). I shot this footage with the video camera in my extended hand, the lens pointing backwards towards me, as I turned in a circle, centrifugally, in my bedroom. Even though I was constantly moving, I tried to keep my face and camera-arm as stable as possible (in relation to my face), to keep a constant kind of framing of myself in the mobile composition, and to minimize the shifting motion of my face relative to the shifts of the room. Each moment (each frame) of the completed video can be said to interpenetrate or co-exist with other moments both before and after it. Linear time is out phase with itself. The room visually blurs, shifts and overlaps with itself more obviously than my face (my face is always central but the room is always peripheral). I am a relatively stable center in relation to the room. The soundtrack is only the layering of the diegetic sound (room tone, traffic in the distance, my footsteps), equally out of phase and co-extensive with itself in time. I feel that this commingling of what are usually regarded as separate image frames and samples of sound and movement is comparable to the blurredness of a Francis Bacon painting or shifting continuity of spectral music.

The entire installation loops continuously, but each monitor (video) of the triptych has its own duration. In this sense, the installation is out of phase with itself, or rather there is no ideal relation in terms of beginning, ending or middle between the videos. There is nothing in the sense of a normal narrative either, no particular way to watch or relate the videos (although I am sure it is more likely to generate some kind of meaning, feeling and affect more than others). The installation is serial as well: it has many

different permutations, even though the ‘content’ (in the sense of the videos shown) is fixed, much like the different permutations of the 12 notes of the chromatic scale used in the 12-tone method of some serialist music.

My work tries to facilitate what Bergson calls intuition. This is not intuition in the normal sense of intuition. Because duration is not spatial, it is not fully graspable or capable of being directly experienced by (human) consciousness, which tends towards spatialization, although we can expand our consciousness to appreciate something closer to the full duration (Deleuze 33). The closest that one can get to grasping duration in its non-conceptual, non-signifying quality is by what Bergson refers to as intuition. According to Totaro, in Bergson’s epistemological system, “...Intuition is the process used to understand the flux of reality, while the intellect gives us a necessary, pragmatic grasp of reality.” (Totaro np) Intuition is best described as a special kind of concentration or thought, detached from pragmatic ends. It is the kind of thought least inclined towards fragmentation or any kind of spatialization (Totaro np). One might consider it as ‘thinking in duration’. Deleuze gives the example of watching a sugar cube slowly dissolving in a cup of tea:

Take a lump of sugar: It has a spatial configuration. But if we approach it from that angle, all we will ever grasp are differences in degree between that sugar and any other thing. But it also has duration, a rhythm of duration, a way of being in time that is at least partially revealed in the process of its dissolving, and that shows how this sugar differs in kind not only from other things, but first and foremost from itself. (Deleuze 31-32)

When you grasp the changing of the sugar in terms of duration, you can extend the idea of duration to other objects, realizing that they too are not static entities but processes

(Deleuze 33).

In my work, I try to depict my subjects in a non-static way, to encourage the viewer to think in duration. I depict my subjects using multiple perspectives (such as multiple monitors and multiple images taken over a period of time), multiple points of view, motion, and various image distortions including layering. I do this to imply multiple states of becoming. I also portray the portrayal of my subjects through the use of self-reflexive strategies that make one aware of the subject as representation, the subject as spatialization.

In the right monitor of *Self-Portrait* I am exploring temporality and intuition in at least two ways. One of these ways is temporality considered not as a series of discrete states but as an interpenetrating, qualitative and shifting multiplicity. My exploration again involves taking multiple transparencies of the same footage (I reduced the opacity of each clip) and overlaying them one on top of the other, slightly out of phase both in terms of start and end points, and also in terms of speed. Some clips are playing slower or faster than others even though they are from the same shot (there are no cuts). In a literal sense I am commingling the past, present and future at any given moment (or frame) of the video. Each moment is haunted by both its 'before' and its 'after', at once ethereal and concrete.

In the right monitor, there is a relative stability of my own image next to its shifting background, implying differential speeds and relative degrees of rest and motion, perhaps implying different time spans with faster or slower rates of change or stability within the subject matter (the entire milieu or mise en scene) of the image. From a Deleuzian or Bergsonian perspective it could be regarded as a metaphor for the emergence of a subject or image from a larger aggregate of all images (duration), as a

metaphor for the fluidity of the transformations of a subject's interior or exterior life or as a metaphor for how in Bergson's system there are no actual entities, only events and processes, 'becomings' if you will.

The middle monitor has a minimal soundtrack that increases in tension. The soundtrack's tension is the result of two sinewaves tuned to the same pitch gradually diverging in pitch over time. As they depart, one hears difference tones. These tones are caused by the relationship between the two pitches and the perceiver's brain, in this sense being the result of a process-based feedback loop where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Concurrent with this psychoacoustic phenomenon we see the reflected image of myself in the mirror depart in frequency from my observing image. The image of myself, like the two tones, comes to differ from itself through time. In this sense, one can see how I am playing with the idea of the self as being that which differs from itself through time. Furthermore, the reflected image, normally identified with the self, comes to differ from the self. In this sense, it could be construed as a metaphor for how we delimit our true, ineffable self through representation.

The left monitor is the most animated of the three, with its propulsive series of still images shown in rapid succession. It is ironic that there is no continuity between the frames, yet in spite of, and likely because of this, it has the greatest sense of motion, of speed and change. Multiple, possibly unrelated images of myself proliferate at hyper-speed. The frames are shown in a deliberately random order and make no attempt to create anything like a natural movement or gesture. In a sense, one could say that this monitor depicts me in a hyper-spatialized way, but in pushing this logic to the extreme, it contains the possibility of reversal. Because of the excessive and random divisions of its subject matter, it challenges rather than compliments our customary way of viewing a

subject in time (and space), that is, from the sensory-motor perspective of our own body (the habituated perspective dictated by our survival needs).

Conclusion: *Stillness and Movement Studies*

By way of a conclusion, I would like to consider Deleuze's notion of a time-image and how it relates to my current body of work, *Stillness and Movement Studies*. This work is a video installation installed in a very dark room, about twelve by twenty feet wide. The video is a single channel projection displayed on a large (one and a half by two meters wide) screen made out of very smooth, painted wood, approximately two inches in relief of the rear wall. The screen was set off because I wanted to imply a subtle physicality to the image, making it more like an object in the sense that a traditional framed portrait, painting or photograph is an object—that is, a material object as well as an image. The gallery walls were painted dark grey to minimize the light reflected in the room and to create a mysterious and contemplative atmosphere.

Stillness and Movement Studies presents a series of faces in close-up, each one shown one at a time. The faces stare at the camera, and move in slow motion, but this is not all that happens. Over time, the viewer witnesses each of the five faces transforming as it is traversed by subtle blurs, distortions, changes in mood (facial expression) and shifts in lighting. The lighting effect was produced by movements of the main light source (a lamp) during the recording. The combined effect is, and aimed to be, uncanny. In addition to moving a light on my subject as I filmed them, I slowed the footage down during editing and created transparent layers (or doubles of the same footage) that could be placed on top of each other. By adjusting opacity levels of the layers in Final Cut Pro successive versions of the same take were made to fade in and out of intensity, and by

remapping the frame rate (speed), I was able to get the various layers to move in and out of phase with one another, in a temporal sense. The overall intention of these studies is to explore a kind of physical and temporal collision, with the video blurring past, present, and future. In this sense, I consider the work to be what Deleuze would describe as a time-image.

Totaro, paraphrasing Deleuze, discusses how a 'non-rational' image (a time-image), of the kind I have produced, can actually break away from our habitual sensory-motor perspective:

the rational sensory motor link is broken down and replaced by the 'non-commensurable' edit characteristic of the time-image. With the breakdown of the sensory motor mechanism the temporal relationship between shots becomes 'non-rational' and 'non-commensurable'...dislodging the edit from the hierarchy of action and movement, it erases the link that acts as a divisible, spatializing element of time...This is what Deleuze means when he says that in the movement-image time is at the service of movement. By not relying on these sensory motor edits the film opens itself up to the whole (duration) and the time-image becomes possible. (Totaro np)

The time-image is not always the image that seems to flow the most smoothly, rather, by breaking away from a 'perceptually natural' or normal flow of time and space, it can bring us closer to an intuition of duration.

Stillness and Movement Studies returns to the Deleuzian equation of unedited or rationally cut series of images with a sensory-motor spatialization of time that subordinates it to an interested perspective and body movement—that is, to an individual body with its own needs and habits. In this work, the flow of images seems smooth at

first but more careful concentration on the video reveals subtle and uncanny disjunctions. The work takes some of the techniques developed in *Self-Portrait*, most notably the layering of successive instances of time, and pushes them further, refining them aesthetically and incorporating a highly controlled use of light. The temporal disjunctions and confusions alluded to by a time-image are present in the piece, but they are so in a manner that is more subtle than abrupt, which creates something almost naturalistic about the portraits. This subtle tension in the work gives it a quality that is at once ethereal and concrete. It is as if each of the portraits/studies is poised between a state of virtuality and actuality. The effect of these studies is much like the left monitor of *Self-Portrait*, but it is considerably subtler. Because the work is installed in a darkened space and because the editing and post-production approach is more seamless, the focus is allowed to shift from the constructed nature of the image toward the continual becoming of the self. The face moves in slow motion, granting an indefinite quality to its expressions, as they exist in several layers of dilated time, all slowed down and all interpenetrating. The faces are illuminated by a moving light source that causes each face to take on alternately sculptural, painterly, and ethereal qualities. These qualities reference conventional photographic lighting techniques such as Rembrandt lighting and chiaroscuro, as well as more indeterminate states of illumination. The work is a deliberate attempt on my part to create an image with variable (and possibly indiscernible) expressive qualities, as well as a variable 'lighting context', as one of my professors used to say in college.

Illumination is often equated with knowledge and truth. In my recent pieces, the relationship with the light reveals but also delimits and distorts the subject. If there is too much or too little light, we see only a patch of blinding light or utter darkness. Between

these two extremes there are multiple potentials and actualizations—both subject and light (context) move and change through time. In this sense, the truth of the situation is defined by the relationship between all of the parts, but these parts themselves are not fixed nor wholes in themselves. The parts are processes occurring through time, processes which subsume other processes occurring inside them. "The truth" in the sense of the conventional photographic moment or essential (transcending time and space) image of the face is never completely given, but is the greater process that exceeds the continually shifting relationships between the parts, and it exists within the parts themselves. This is a key principle that I have attempted to develop through my various *Stillness and Movement Studies*.

Stillness and Movement Studies is part of an ongoing series of works that concern themselves with the virtual and duration. In the future, I want to continue to refine my technique of moving light, in some cases appropriating other lighting situations derived from the history of painting and photography. I would also appropriate some of the accoutrements, gestures and expressions seen in the history of portraiture, and also those accoutrements, gestures and expressions attributed to the various cultures and subcultures we see in our streets and the surrounding world. My aim is to put these things into motion, to reduce them to becomings, rather than as idealized states, quantifiable frames of movement, or teleological goals or ideals. I see myself experimenting again with backgrounds constituted by several distinct planes of movement, applying the layering and moving light technique that I developed in my Graduation project. I look forward to creating new situations where the sense of distinct planes is transient, where one plane, perhaps through movement and lighting, might appear to pass into or become another, in both temporal and spatial terms. These new

situations will continue to explore Bergson's notion that "*there is for us nothing that is instantaneous.*"

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