

CREATIVE IMAGE:

WAYS OF SEEING, REPRESENTING AND RESHAPING REALITY

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'A discussion of what it means to voice a traumatic experience and how does the Cinematic contribute to an affective understanding of a traumatic memory.'

Hal Foster writes, 'the real cannot be represented; indeed, it is denied as such, as the negative of the symbolic, a missed encounter, a lost object.' (1996, p.141) Cathy Caruth argues for a traumatic narrative that must be spoken in a language of temporal disruption, fragmentation, violence, and the breakdown of any mastery or unity. In an effort, to engage with the conflict, we must experience that which rails against being archived and refuses representation, that which halts, recoils and repeats.

For this conference I would like to layer Derrida's links between spectrality and cinema upon Marks' exploration of the haptic visual to consider how sight discovers in itself a specific function of touch that is uniquely its own, distinct from its optical function' (Deleuze, 2003: 109). I would also like to address the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit*, the concept of deferred action, to experience what yet remains to come: a ghost of or from the future.

The spectral for Derrida does not arise out of social or biological death, but rather a future absence in which the ghost is neither present nor absent, but perhaps both at the same time, a presence negated by absence.

'To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time.' (Derrida, 1994, p.13)

Laura Marks emphasises the tactile and contagious quality of cinema as something viewers brush up against like another body, as she writes: "The words contact, contingent, and contagion all share the Latin root *contingere*, 'to have contact with; pollute; befall'" (2000: xii).

I will explore the interrelationship between acceptance and rejection, repression and representation. Trauma is divided from the beginning, a ghost effect as the mark of what wasn't present at the time of happening and therefore remains outside of experience. It is an event yet to arrive, a memory of the future.

This paper will be accompanied by sound and/or moving imagery.

Paper

Today I am going to show two short film clips from research completed last year for my PhD. *Ghost II* which is just over 3 minutes long, and a short excerpt from *Remembering*, which is 17 minutes in length.

The starting point for my research was a personal remembering of 9/11 layered upon a well-established collective memory of the event. It involved deconstructing a personal journal written in the days before, during and after the attack which had remained unread until I started this research in 2012. Making work from this place functioned on a number of levels. As an exploration of trauma from the inside out where my memories and my body existed as a site of trauma, the externalisation of trauma to further an understanding of the collective memory, and a personal bearing witness to a global trauma that was *hijacked* by the media. Through reclaiming the past, I was mourning and memorialising, contextualising, remembering, and contributing to a wider epistemological discussion on trauma.

Through both films I was exploring Derrida's links between spectrality and cinema with Laura Marks' exploration of the haptic visual to consider how 'sight discovers in itself a specific function of touch that is uniquely its own, distinct from its optical function' (Deleuze, 2003: 109).

Show films

Ghost II: <https://www.anna-walker-research.com/about-death-life-and-other-things.html>

Remembering: <https://www.anna-walker-research.com/401/login.php?redirect=/final-password-protected.html>

In *Ghost II* I was specifically researching how fragmented a memory and therefore an artwork can be to communicate something of the *affect*¹ of trauma. I was also seeking what was hidden, or being sheltered in my memory, the Freudian notion of *Nachträglichkeit*: the concept of deferred action, to experience what yet remains to come, a ghost of or from the future.

The Derridean notion of spectrality—that anachronistic spectre, outside of time and place—exists between life and death, absence and presence, as Derrida writes “a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met” (1995: 84). Searching for the spectral was a way to navigate the evasiveness of trauma, a method of entering the space of dissociation as a witness rather than as one subsumed by the memory. The spectral for Derrida arises from the concept of a future absence, as he writes: “To haunt does not mean to be present, and it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time” (1994: 13). This notion of “hauntology,” a pun on “ontology” links being and presence. Through the figure of the ghost, the past and present are indistinguishable. Embodied in the spectral the past is brought to life.

¹ Purposeful use of the word ‘affect’ rather than effect, referencing Massumi’s turn to affect.

The footage is shot with a macro lens pushed up close to the computer screen. The 'knitted' grid of the screen is clearly defined, as is the pixilation of the footage, layers of texture that insert the spectral graininess of memory onto the imagery. It is this textural component that connects *Ghost II* to my body, that serves to mark the passage of time from the origins of the towers to their downfall. It is Laura Mark's haptic visuality, a term derived from the art historian Alois Riegl (1901), and picked up by Deleuze (2002), which looks at the distinction between haptic and optical images as vision that is tactile, "as though one were touching a film with one's eyes" (Marks, 2000: xi).

The footage of *Ghost II* was captured from a section of *Port Authority's* documentation of the construction of the *World Trade Centre*, which began in February 1967, and was completed with the last piece of steel placed on the North tower (*One World Trade Centre*) on December 23, 1970, and the South tower (*Two World Trade Centre*) in July of 1971. My intention was to retain the Kodak film hues from the seventies that had faded, distorted and degraded over time.² I slowed the film down in the editing, stilling fragments of seconds into much longer, and over and under exposed the imagery. Purposefully included was the visual 'noise' that had been gathered in the transference,³ from film stock to its digital rendering and then to my camera and back to the computer. Scratches that were evident in the actual 70's documentary footage, dust on my computer and on the camera lens, light leaking in from the window of my house, my reflection briefly glimpsed on the screen, my hand on the camera. All of which helped to situate the event externally from my body, at the same time maintaining a sensory and tactile link to it.

Through the layering of sounds, the breaking up the footage, and the repetition of both phrase and imagery, *Ghost II* explores the anxiety embedded into the towers and functions as a reminder that this haunting is not over: neither the remembering of the trauma nor the event. As Derrida comments about 9/11: "it comes from the to-come, from the future, a future so radically to come that it resists even the grammar of the future anterior" (2002: 97). In between the fleeting glimpses of bodies, steel and light, of the rumbling sounds and interrupted voices, lies the uncanny spectral, present from the beginning, warning of the traumatic inevitability of their fall. The sounds for *Ghost II* are stitched together from the footage of the falling towers, my voice, and odd snippets of life. Some sounds allude to the eerie quality of electrical interference, of turning a dial to locate a radio station. I used a recording of the wind captured from the top of the towers, and an extract from the 9/11 clean up footage from *YouTube* that has been stretched and deepened, there are also the sounds of 9/11 emergency vehicles right after the first plane struck, and the hum from the earth heard from outer space.

I wanted to capture the noise of the past, of the buildings that once creaked and shifted on their axes. The giant steel girders that once rubbed up against each other, the trains that noisily ran on the tracks beneath the buildings, unseen from above but there nevertheless, rumbling and moving in and out of the subway station. These were once the sounds of life, simultaneously happening on a multitude of levels and into which a man asks: "do you guys hear that?" A question that pauses the moment temporarily before the noise again swallows up the voice. He

² Deconstruction of the Port Authority construction was a subconscious desire to slow down their destruction.

³ Transference of footage from YouTube documentation to screen to camera mimics the transference from client to therapist and vice versa. Something to think about and expand further.

repeats himself: "do you guys hear that?" He is warning the listener that something is about to happen.

The other film—*Remembering*, made for a large screen, was completed in 2017. Here I was researching whether it is possible to find resolution to the traumatic experiencing of 9/11. The imagery was taken from the hundreds of hours of footage of 9/11 videos on *YouTube*. Also shot with a macro lens, the intention was to reveal a close-up, distorted and abstracted perspective of that time to accompany the stripped back simplicity of my voice. For the vocal, I stood in front of a microphone, alone in a sound-proofed room, remembering as much as possible, 14-years after the event, without the aid of my journal.

The moments that surfaced were personal and intimate and resonated throughout my system as I recalled them, a re-visitation from the past rather than a fragmented layering of imposed memories onto the past. In this way, my body and my memories served as a constant point of arrival and departure. A leaning towards a certain form of closure that involved a process of exorcism, a dispatching of the ghost for the last time.

In *Remembering* the uncanny seeks restitution. It is a necessary search for a subjectivity to accommodate the multiplicities of voices and temporalities required to place meaning on the traumatic experience. The ghost: "the double (and its various manifestations such as mirror images, déjà vu, doppelgangers, out of body experiences, etc.)" (Rahimi, 2015: 3), neither claims to be nor is experienced as a replica or a representation of the self as Freud posits, but rather, the "ghost [that] disturbs by producing an uncanny version of the other" (3). This notion of haunting suggests the idea of an externalisation of the haunted interior and creates the potential for a narrative to exist outside of the body as an alternative to negotiate not only individual trauma, but also intergenerational and collective trauma.

In *Spectres of Marx*, Derrida argues that the *true* logic of uncanniness is a phantom-logic, a necessity of learning to live with ghosts, phantoms, and spirits, because "there is no Dasein⁴ without the uncanniness, without the strange familiarity [Unheimlichkeit]⁵ of some specter" (1994: 125). It is a state of *being* that is to be always and everywhere haunted by ghosts, phantoms or spirits: the "visibility of the invisible" (125). Spectral logic is the presence related to the otherness of the self, or the self that is found within the other (whether person, place or time).

In the artwork I am testing out whether, through the cinematic, the sounds of the spectral can fully co-exist with the visual, and I am asking if it is possible to transfer the *affect* of experiencing trauma to an audience. Laura Marks emphasises the tactile and contagious quality of cinema as something viewers brush up against like another body, as she writes: "The words contact, contingent, and contagion all share the Latin root contingere, 'to have contact with; pollute; befall'" (Marks, 2000: xii). The blurry close-up of planes and buildings creates a surreal and eerie interaction. Despite the imagery taken directly from actual footage, I am questioning the reality

⁴ Dasein: Hegelian term for existence/being.

⁵ Unheimlichkeit: uncanny, eeriness.

of the experience, mimicking my fuzzy recollection of events from the past. Black and white, layered with texture and digital pixilation, the footage tracks the planes flying into the Twin Towers and the clearing up of ground zero. The boundaries are suffused, and the edges blurred, the planes melt into the towers, which in turn diffuse into the exploding flames. Rescue workers and firemen blend into each other and into their surroundings, survivors emerge from and return to the dust and the smoke, questioning whether they were present at all. The depiction of the imagery in this way activates the memory of the event and is a reminder of what the event felt like when it was first experienced. Through a blending of existing digital documents and footage from 9/11, layered with effects and digital manipulations, my intention was to add to the existing memories that an audience has already formed of the event, connect the imagery to the bodies of the audience and repeatedly insinuate it into the physicality of the audience body. While owning a traumatic part of my past.

The abstract form spills out of the screen, creates a ghostly relationship with the past, the memory, and reaches out in an endeavour to resolve the representation of the trauma and the chaos of 9/11. Here, the potential for the viewer to engage with all that is revenant is set in motion. It is work that allows for what is already spectral to appear or reappear. The spectral as inscribed as a trace, a 'spectral memory,' to create, as Derrida writes, the potential for 'a magnified work of mourning' (2000).

The hazy quality and broken pixilation of the footage is intended to haptically engage, to create a dream like quality, a flashback, as Marks describes: "a bodily relation to the screen itself before the point at which the viewer is pulled into the figures of the image and the exhortation of the narrative" (Marks, 2002: 17). Phenomenologically, the haptic is a form of the visual that muddies intersubjective boundaries (Marks, 2002: 17), whilst psychoanalytically it is an aspect of the visual that moves between identification and immersion. As she goes on to comment: "The engagement of the haptic viewer occurs not simply in psychic registers but in the sensorium" (18). Haptic vision is the close-to-the-body form of perception of film as skin, which moves the work into "circulation among different audiences, all of which mark it with their presence" (Marks, 2000: xi), "the eyes themselves function like organs of touch," and "move over the surface of its object to discern texture," (62) thereby taking in, or absorbing the imagery into the body. The haptic visual does not depend on the viewer identifying with a recognisable figure or character but on a more sensuous bodily relationship between the viewer and the subject, "haptic images and haptic visuality encourage a subjective position of intimacy and mutual entanglement between viewer and viewed" (Marks, 2015: 227).

Layering the concept of the haptic visual onto *Remembering*, the work is not just about revisiting the past but a process of entering and feeling the past. The artwork brings the virtual and traumatic event into the actual to be freshly perceived, "recreated in higher expansions of memory and on a deeper strata of reality" (Marks, 2000: 48). The optical tactile space draws the viewer closer to the digital screen, it embraces the viewer, asks the viewer not only to remember the event, 9/11, but to position him/herself back in that space, at that time, within such proximity to the event that it feels like it is happening all over again.

Marks articulates this well when she in turn quotes Bergson -

Attentive recognition is the way a perceiver oscillates between seeing the object, recalling virtual images that it brings to memory, and comparing the virtual object thus created with the one before us. In so doing we create anew "not only the object perceived, but also the ever-widening systems with which it maybe bound up" (Bergson [1911] 1988,105). (2000: 48)

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