

Title The ruin and the circular narrative

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THE RUIN AND THE CIRCULAR NARRATIVE

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Abstract

This study constitutes the written component of a practice based Masters by Research in Fine Art.

The research arises from my practice as an artist working in film and video in which I have come across links between the representation of ruins and aspects of narrative structure that have suggested the possibility that the ruin represents a nodal point in the work. Ruins have tended to be treated thematically by art historians and theorists and I will demonstrate that there are very few attempts to take the subject beyond the role of metaphor or allegory. However, Jacques Derrida has taken the idea of ruins into the idea of origin and it is this insight that lies at the core of this study. This leads to the idea of the ruin as a condensation of the end and beginning thereby giving it an important role in relation to narrative structure. The circular narrative is a form in which the end and beginning are stitched together at the same theoretical point as the ruin. In terms of practice the circular structure is explored in the form of film and video loops in which the circle structures the way the works physical production, its contextual background, its content and the ways in which it can be interpreted. Underlining this is Derrida's idea that the ruin is always already present at the origin of the work.

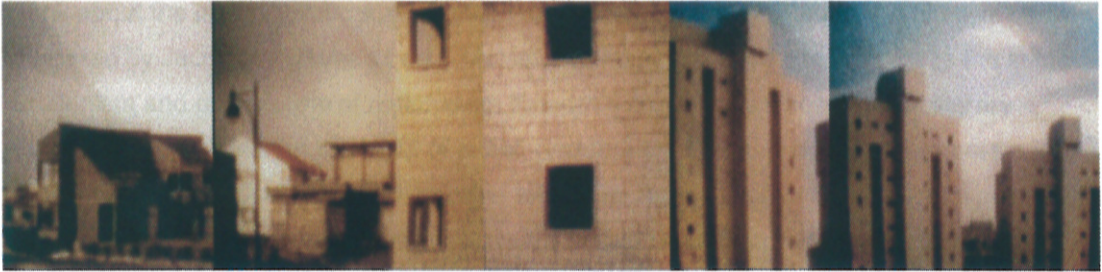
These ideas are also combined with Freud's theory of the Death Instinct which is rooted in the compulsion to repeat. I have extended Peter Brooks' linking of the Death Instinct with linear narrative structure to include the circular narrative and tested this against my studio practice and the work of another artists, a writer and a film maker. In combining this link between the Death Instinct and the circular narrative with the ruin I have used the Freudian Theory of Primal Phantasies. This was also done to resolve the link with fantasy that was identified at the beginning of the project. My argument ends with the consolidation of these strands with Elisabeth Bronfen's use of the navel as a symbolic intervention into the conventional structures of psychoanalysis.

In conclusion the identification of this nodal point in the structure of the work is shown to present an example of the ways in which theory and practice in contemporary art can be dynamically combined. In this way the art work is not only the result of the context from which it has emerged but also provides the means of interrogating that context.

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Introduction



Fantastic Ruins Gordon Hon(2000) Detail of film installation.

In 2000 I made a film installation called *Fantastic Ruins*. It consisted of three film loops projected simultaneously. The films were shot in some of the many housing projects in Israel being built to accommodate the new, mainly Russian, immigrants. The buildings were all at more or less the same stage of completion, or rather incompleteness. The basic structures were built but many important details were not, such as window frames, doors and sometimes roof – in other words the things that would make them habitable. I filmed these sites as 360° pans and the complete panoramas were then edited into loops.

The work came out of two converging lines of enquiry I had been following, one inspired by an enigmatic Ruin painting and the other an interest in the function of fantasy in the Israel/Palestine conflict. The main point of contact between these two disparate interests was fantasy. The painting was called *Fantastic Ruins: St Augustine and the Child* (1673) by Francois de Nome in the National Gallery, London. It depicts an imaginary city crumbling into the sea on the shore of which, in the foreground are two tiny figures. They represent an apocryphal tale of St. Augustine walking on a shore ruminating on the mystery of the Holy Trinity. He comes across a small child attempting to empty the sea into a hole in the ground and when he tells the child that this is futile the child points out that it is no more futile than trying to understand the Trinity. What held my attention to this strange little painting was the



enigmatic arrangement of themes; fantasy, ruins, repetitive circular activity, the structure of the trinity and the idea of the impossibility of understanding something.

Francois de Nome, *Fantastic Ruins: St Augustine and the Child* (1676)
National Gallery, London.

At the same time an abiding political interest in the Israel/Palestine conflict had lead me to apply for an award that gave me the opportunity to make work in the region. I had begun to think about the issues, particularly Zionist nationalism, in terms of fantasy¹. This was partly triggered by Jacqueline Rose's book, *States of Fantasy*² in which she addresses the subject of Zionism and other forms of nationalism through the use of psychoanalytical literary criticism. The Chapter 'In the Land of Israel' explores the levels of fantasy that operate in Zionism via the work of the Israeli novelist Amos Oz. As in the case of de Nome's painting, the ideas of fantasy and apparently impossible problems were converging. Add to this is the politically charged image of the ruin in the region, in the remains of abandoned Palestinian villages and in Israeli biblical archaeology in which the search for origins is tied to Zionism's political claim to the land.³

At the time, I used the loop as a way of representing, through the presentation of the work the affect of a fantasy acted out or imposed on reality. The particular fantasy I had in mind was based on the famous Zionist slogan "A land without people for a people without land."⁴ The work attempted to represent the denial of reality expressed in this phrase through a perpetually turning image of buildings that have never and will never be inhabited and in which the building under construction is simultaneously a ruin. In making this work I came across a strong relationship between the image and idea of the ruin and the enclosed structure of the circular narrative, a relationship that appeared to operate in the register of the fantastic and may even be related to the psychic structures of fantasy. This was the starting point for the present research in which I have set out to establish, theorise and test the link between the representation and idea of the ruin and the circular narrative through the use of psychoanalytic theory.

The ruin has been a ubiquitous image throughout the history of Western art since the renaissance. During the 18th and early 19th centuries, particularly in England, the extent of the fascination for ruins shown by artists, architects as well as in the public tastes was such that it has been referred to as the 'cult of the ruin'⁵. It has been a major subject throughout the history of painting and as soon as photography became a usable technology in the 1840s ruins also became and have remained a popular subject. Images of ruins appear in the digital landscapes of computer games and the Internet offers us virtual tours around Mayan temples,

¹ My use (and Rose's) of fantasy in this context is in the sense of psychoanalytical theory rather than in de Nome's title in which it means imaginary. However I do intend the different uses of the word to be linked.

² Rose, Jacqueline. *States of Fantasy* Oxford University Press (1998)

³ Silberman. Neil, Asher, *Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East*. Doubleday 1989

⁴ This phrase is attributed to the British author and early Zionist, Israel Zangwill (1864-1926). He was an associate of Herzl but broke off from mainstream Zionism to found a territorialist organisation that believed a Jewish state did not necessarily have to be in Palestine, his phrase therefore could have been applied to any chosen part of the world. Ironically, for one who has bequeathed such an uncompromising slogan he also coined the expression "melting pot."

⁵ Macauley, Rose. *The pleasure of Ruins*, Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1953

post-industrial wastelands and digital fantasy ruins.⁶ In contemporary art, which uses every available mode of representation, references to the ruin return consistently. As well as these visual representations the ruin has appeared regularly in western literature from Shelly's *Ozymandias* to Calvino's 'Invisible Cities'. However, the ruin as a generic image or trope in the history of Western art is beyond the scope of this study. A review of the uses and meanings of the ruin in Western culture or even in visual art alone would be an enormous task. This has been attempted to some extent by Rose Macaulay in her book, *The Pleasure of Ruins* (1953) which, as the title suggests, is a rather subjective work in which the ruin is mainly written of in romantic and often lyrical terms. Macaulay's book has had an obvious (and acknowledged influence) on the recent book, *In Ruins* (2001) by Christopher Woodward, which is also lyrical and romantic in its tone. Neither of these books attempts to theorise the subject and, in fact seem to deliberately avoid it – in the case of Woodward, he has a chapter called *Self Portrait in Ruins* which could not be further from (and makes no mention of) Derrida's *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self-Portrait and Other Ruins* (1997). These books demonstrate a tendency of most of the literature I found that deals with ruins; that is, a kind of art historical nostalgia. This appears to have its intellectual roots in the 18th Century when the cult of the ruin was at its peak and Diderot who quite willingly collapses into the subject in his writings on the Paris Salons of the 1760s exemplifies the critical style of the time. However, institutions such as the John Paul Getty Museum have organised exhibitions with critical catalogues such as *Irresistible Decay* (1997) in which the image of the ruin has been explored in the light of contemporary theory. This has also been attempted by CEPA Gallery, Buffalo in an exhibition and journal called *Ruins in Reverse* (1998-99). In an essay accompanying this exhibition Grant Kester asks, "Can the ruin be used to challenge this tendency towards self-satisfied nostalgia? How can artists "excavate" the fragments and ruins of modernity and return to them some of their lost political significance?" To some extent this study is a response to this question. The subject of ruins also appears to attract a tendency towards generalisations in which writers such as Woodward and Macaulay speculate on subjects such as the nature of time without taking on the philosophical provenance of such questions. The fact that this study emerges from the specificity of my practice will assist in avoiding these problems and in maintaining a high degree of focus. It is aimed at establishing and theorising the relationship between ruins and circular narratives in terms of the psychoanalytic theory of phantasy. In order to maintain this focus it will be necessary to be very selective in the choice of artefacts and texts to include in this study.

As a practice lead research project it is necessary at this point to summarise the field in which the practice can be located. The field can be broadly described as film and video, which in this case also includes the use of digital photography. Although there are blurred boundaries between filmmakers and artists in terms of the kinds of work they produce (and this has been the case since the advent of film) there remains an identifiable division between the disciplines with their own, distinct histories. The field to which this project belongs (artists' film

⁶ In fact a google search with the key words 'virtual tour ruins' produces 37,000 results.

and video) has, in its present form, developed along side that of video technology since the 1960s. With the development of digital video the field continues to expand in terms of the proliferation of work produced and the issues and ideas arising from it. An unavoidable aspect of the medium is the consideration of time in both form and content. This has been taken on directly by video artists such as Bill Viola and Bruce Nauman since the 1960s and, particularly in the case of Viola, has become a specific line of enquiry in which Time has come to be regarded as both a medium and subject in itself. At the same time, because video is also used by filmmakers to tell stories in both drama and documentary it has been necessary for artists working in this medium to distinguish themselves from filmmakers in their approaches to the narrative potential of the medium. Many or most artists have chosen to make this distinction in their rejection of (at least explicit) narrative content while others have taken it on. Those who consciously engage with narrative tend to use it as a process that can be manipulated, regarding it as a characteristic of the material rather than as an essential tool or craft to be mastered. An important development in the ways in which contemporary artists have investigated issues of narrative is in the use of the loop as an intrinsic feature of the work rather than simply as a method of film/video presentation in the context of a gallery. To some extent it may have been partly determined by and developed from this context but the uses of the loop as a structuring form in the work has become extensive enough to regard as one of the features that distinguish it from filmmaking. Contemporary artists such as Rodney Graham, Tacita Dean and Stan Douglas have developed the loop as a central concern in their work and the ways in which they have used it have raised many issues related to time and narrative.

Artists' use of the loop has developed from the physical characteristics of film combined with the context of the gallery (as opposed to the cinema). At its most basic level the film loop can be used as a presentation technique in which the beginning and end of a film sequence are spliced together and it is then left to run continuously in the gallery. This way of presenting work has frequently been used by artists to draw attention to the physicality of film, drawing attention to the presence of the medium - an approach that has its roots firmly in the history of modernism. Artists such as Isaac Julian and Tacita Dean continue to use this sculptural aspect of film. However this initial use of the loop has developed along with the available technologies and with the emergence of analogue video as an artists' medium new approaches have been developed. Video is less sculptural than film as well as being less amenable to the loop in the way it is edited. The work of artists who have been involved with video from the beginning such as Nauman and Viola have been exemplary in their approaches and to a great extent set the agendas for the medium in contemporary art. Nauman developed the loop-as-structure into the narrative content of his work in which looped games and narratives were recorded on video while at the same time both he and Viola led the development of video as installation. This can be regarded as the video version of the sculptural uses of film and it developed along side the emergence of installation art as a new practice.

More recently the advent of digital video has made the medium even more accessible to artists while at the same time offering new lines of enquiry and approaches. Digital editing is much more amenable to experimentation and manipulation than analogue video editing and is exerting a strong influence in contemporary practice, the extent of which is yet to be ascertained. In terms of the loop a particularly interesting development for this project has not been in digital video but in the use of digital photography. The digital panorama or virtual tour offers a new kind of enclosed narrative space that raises issues and possibilities similar to that of the film loop.

This is the position from which this project sets out in terms of the studio practice and the mediums that will be used, and that carry with them particular problems and concerns. These concerns will be explored in this research report and form the main point of interaction between theory and practice. Central to this project is the image and idea of the ruin. This can be identified along side the loop or circular narrative as a subject of interest to contemporary artists with its own distinct history.

Structure and Methods

The aims of this study are:

- I) To demonstrate the ways in which an image/idea such as ruins can operate within a work beyond the level of metaphor or theme. The model I will attempt to develop will be based mainly in psychoanalytical theory, combined with fine art practice, to formulate a highly condensed image that operates within the structure of the work.
- II) To demonstrate the theoretical links between the ruin and the circular narrative. This is strongly connected to the first aim in that it will show through this relationship between an image (the ruin) and a structuring device (the circular narrative) the ways in which an image can tacitly act upon the meaning of a work from within its structure.

The study will begin with an investigation into Freud's theory of the death instinct in its basis in the compulsion to repeat. This is particularly relevant to the idea of circular narratives and will be investigated through the work of Peter Brooks in which he uses the death instinct in relation to narrative structure. This will establish the theoretical groundwork for the study and it will be used to retrospectively investigate the work, *Fantastic Ruins* that inspired this study. At the same time I will be planning and making a new piece of work that will form a point of focus for the following chapter as well as a central part of the research. It is intended that this work will combine ruins, circularity and phantasy in a political context. This work, being directly informed by the theoretical research will be used to discover to what extent the ideas explored through reflective practice and theoretical investigation cohere within the work. To some extent the success of this work will be measured by its internal coherence and the extent to which it extends and develops the theoretical terms of this study.

A detailed description and critical exploration of this work will be followed by a further development of the political context of the work. As has been pointed out, my practice is partly informed by an interest in the interaction between politics and psychoanalysis and the intended work will centre on the development of an arms manufacturing research and development centre in Luton. The broader political context will be explored in chapter 3 in which Marx's Theories of cyclical return in the dynamics of capitalism will be combined with Freud's theory of the death instinct. In chapter 4 there will be a detailed parallel examination of two works, a short story by Borges, *The Circular Ruins* (in *Labyrinths* Penguin, 2000) and a short film by Chris Marker, *La Jetée* (1961) in which the substance of my argument will be developed. In both of these works a clear connection can be established between the ruin and circular narratives. This chapter will extend the inquiry into the work of Derrida, specifically his extended catalogue essay that accompanied an exhibition he curated, *Memoirs of the Blind* in which he emphatically places the ruin at the origin of a work. He also formulates the idea of the 'ruinous simulacra' which is taken up and explored in relation to

Freud's theory of the primal scene and through this the idea of the ruin as the shattered image of the primal scene is proposed. This leads to an investigation in chapter 5 into the idea of primal phantasies in which each of the primal phantasies; the primal scene, seduction and castration are explored in relation to ruins and circular narratives. The final chapter before the conclusion begins with a discussion on the limitations of Freudian theory and introduces Elisabeth Bronfen's feminist intervention into the castration complex in which she proposes the symbolisation of the navel as an alternative to the organising structure of castration.

As I have shown in this introduction the theoretical basis and direction of this study was arrived at through my practice (the work made in Israel) which was itself partly directed by theoretical interests (ruins, fantasy, and politics). The interaction between theory and practice is a central aspect of this study, in terms of it's content and the methods used. Although this written study uses conventional academic approaches to theoretical research, it remains a practice lead project and as such the methods used to make the work as well as their uses as investigative tools will be essential aspects of the research. There will be a brief summary in the conclusion in which the effectiveness of the practice in these terms will be assessed.

The research methods used in this study are determined to some extent by the nature and methods of the studio practice. As is the case with most contemporary visual art the work is produced partly as an inquiry into the relationships between form and content, these are themselves determined by the specifics of the subject matter and the mediums used. This is a central structuring aspect of this study in terms of research methods in that the ruin is being investigated as both subject matter and as a structuring concept, as is the circular narrative. As an investigation into the relationship between the ruin and the circular narrative the studio practice will be used to simultaneously test theoretical models developed in the study and gather further data to be analysed. A literature review will be conducted into the subjects of ruins and narrative structure and, apart from critical and theoretical texts this review will include examples of cultural artefacts from visual art, literature and cinema. A selected critical evaluation and analysis of this material will be conducted in terms of their relevance to the aims of the study. This will partly inform the direction of the studio practice, which itself will involve another line of inquiry in terms of identifying a suitable subject and mode of representation. The development of a model based on the theoretical framework drawn from the analysis of existing material will be formulated and tested against selected works as well as through the studio practice. The study will include images of the works made as part of the research as well as any works cited in the study. It is important to note, however that the approach to visual material and the uses of images in this study will be mainly determined by their relevance to the structuring concepts developed in the study rather than as a form of data collection. Because of this the uses of images will be highly selective and the relative lack of images of ruins (given the title) is in itself intended to be illustrative of the argument in that the ruin is being regarded as operating beyond the level of metaphor, trope or theme.

The Death Instinct

Freud positions the phantasy in relation to time as straddling past, present and future. He bases this on his view that a phantasy is built around a wish. The wish is triggered by a stimulus in the present that reminds the subject of an occasion in infancy when this wish had been previously fulfilled and is then projected into a future in which the subject imagines the wish to be once more fulfilled. Freud elegantly sums this up: "Thus past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of a wish that runs through them."⁷ It is possible to see in this a suggestion of the internal temporal structure of the ruin, in which the past and future are compressed into the present image. However, in this image is the inescapable negative charge of ruin, decay and death. This then immediately raises the question "where is the wish in ruin?" which in turn takes us into the domain of the death instinct.

The paper in which Freud develops his theory of the death instinct, *Beyond the Pleasure*⁸ Principle begins with his observations on the compulsion to repeat painful or traumatic events among healthy as well as neurotic individuals. He points out that this compulsion to return to and replay a past trauma runs counter to the pleasure principle in which the aim would be to avoid unpleasure and seek out pleasure. This leads him to speculate upon the regressive tendency within instincts – that within the structuring forces of instincts themselves there is a backward force towards a previous state. It is from here that he arrives at the formulation of the death instinct in which "the aim of all life is death" and the instinctual rout to death is backwards as a return to a previous inorganic state. This remains a controversial theory even within psychoanalysis but in the context of this study it goes some way to explaining the frequent and often inexplicable presence of ruins in works of art.

The relationship of the death instinct to narrative structure is developed by Peter Brooks⁹ who points out that in linear narratives the beginning is dependant upon the end and that the driving force towards the dénouement or resolution of a plot is simultaneously a regressive force towards the beginning. The ending unravels the plot thereby bringing the reader, via the detour of the story, back to the point before anything had happened, before the threads had been entwined. The compulsion to repeat is accounted for in the sense that the telling of a story is always to some extent a retelling and that repetition is eluded to through writerly techniques such as rhythm, rhyme, motifs etc. He does not mention the circular narrative but his argument leads to a subversion of narrative structure that seems to suggest that a plot is always in some way circular.

⁷ Freud, S. *The Complete Psychological Works Standard Edition (S.E) Vol IX*

⁸ S.E. Vol XVIII

⁹ Brooks, P. *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative*. Knopf, New York, 1984

“It may finally be in the logic of our argument that repetition speaks in the text of a return which ultimately subverts the very notion of a beginning and an end, suggesting that the idea of beginning presupposes the end, that the end is a time before the beginning...”¹⁰

If this inherent circularity within the act of narration were to be exposed rather than remain hidden in the familiar (although illusory) narrative progression then we find ourselves in the realm of science fiction or fantasy. In the use of time loop paradoxes or Borges' *The Circular Ruins* the exposure of this circularity is used to unsettle the reader, or to return to Freud, to create a sense of the uncanny. Return is after all the central theme of his theory of the uncanny, the return of the repressed or a return to the *unheimlich* home. However the uncanny feelings evoked by the circular narrative are not really explained by the theory of the uncanny unless we combine it with the death instinct. But if the death instinct is just that - an *instinct* - then why should its echo in the narrative structure unsettle us?

What this question does not take into account is the pathological nature of the circular narrative. Its frisson is derived from the denial of the death instinct. We can regard the linear narrative with its beginning, middle and end as the healthy (or at least non-pathological) example, accepting Peter Brooks' model of Freud's masterplot. In this model the death instinct is echoed and confirmed through a satisfactory resolution of the plot at the end of the narrative. The satisfaction is derived from the retroactive affect of the ending making sense of the beginning. The more extreme examples of this are stories in which a twist or sudden revelation at the end transforms our understanding of all that had previously occurred and takes us back to the beginning all the more forcefully in our need to understand what is being revealed in the end. In the 'healthy' narrative there is a yield of pleasure to be gained from following the twisting detour of the plot towards its end but this pleasure is always deferred or contingent upon the anticipation of its end. The pathological nature of the circular narrative forecloses the possibility of an ending and without an ending there can be no completion. This incompleteness is therefore built in to the structure of the circular narrative in the same way that the incompleteness of the ruin is its defining feature.

Although this drive towards an end that is at the same time a return to the beginning appears to be circular with the end and beginning stitched together with the death instinct, in a conventional story the efficacy of the narrative depends on the disappearance of the circle. In such narratives there is a release of tension that occurs when the reader is released from the grip of the story – the death instinct remains hidden in the structure but is nevertheless reasserted through a paradoxical affirmation of life, propelled by desire. On the other hand the circular narrative denies this release. The audience has been trapped in an interminable loop with no promise of escape. There may be an initial discharge of cathexis at the moment of realisation similar to that of the revelation of a twist or through the limited satisfaction of

¹⁰ *ibid.* p

'getting it' but we still remain trapped. In one of Bruce Nauman's installations, *Clown Torture* (1987) one of the monitors shows a clown reciting a narrative to camera:

*"Pete and Repeat are sitting on a fence. Pete falls off. Who was left?
Repeat! Pete and repeat are sitting on a fence..."* and so on.



Bruce Nauman, *Clown Torture* 1987 (detail)

The clown goes round and round trying to outwit the narrative, speeding up, slowing down, pausing etc. The effect of the piece is typical of the series, at first there is the superficial satisfaction of 'getting it' immediately followed by amusement that increases for a while as one watches the clown's evermore desperate attempts to escape the narrative. The comical madness of the clown is not in his having 'lost the plot' but in his inability to lose it. However, the longer one watches the less funny and more disturbing it becomes, the closer one moves towards the clown's predicament and we begin to share the sense of being trapped. The narrative that traps the audience is not the same one that has caught the clown; it is rather the meta-narrative of the loop that ensnares us. A story needs an end in order to begin, if we are denied one we are denied both so in the case of the loop we have neither beginning nor end and without these there can be no middle. Without any of these recognisable narrative elements, what is left? The circular narrative still depends on the audience believing it is being told a story and therefore what is being related must still resemble a story. The subject of Nauman's story is neither the fate of Pete nor even that of the clown but the compulsion to repeat, a compulsion that has its origins in the death instinct. The key to this childish narrative game in Nauman's work is the use of the imperative, "Repeat!" From where is this command issued that so compels the unfortunate clown to obey? In Laplanche and Pontalis' definition, the compulsion to repeat is "an ungovernable process originating in the unconscious."¹¹ As such the subject has no control over it and the clown is therefore speaking the command of the unconscious, which is also the reason he is compelled to obey. It is this obedience that is funny and disturbing, the clown obeys the command to issue the command to obey the command... and so on. We are also reminded that this compulsion to repeat is an integral, although hidden part of narrative in general.

The film loops I made in Israel (*Fantastic Ruins*) that triggered this study were made before I investigated the link between ruins, circular narrative and the death instinct. It would be illuminating at this point to try to identify the presence of the death instinct in this work retrospectively. To begin with the work was made from the position that the Zionist project of

¹¹ The language of Psychoanalysis, Karnac Books and The Institute of psycho-analysis, London 1988.

the creation of a Jewish state in the Biblical land of Israel was based on a Phantasy¹². Ignoring for the time being the extent to which all forms of nationalism can be understood in terms of phantasy and the specific 19th Century European socio-political roots of Zionism I will concentrate on Israeli nationalism in terms of its basis in phantasy. Firstly, the temporal aspects, taking Freud's formula this would involve a stimulus in the present triggering a memory of a fulfilled wish in the past and then projected into an imaginary future in which it will be fulfilled again. We can regard the present as being any point from the origins of the Zionist movement (late 19th century) until the creation of the state in 1948. This period provided a constant stream of stimulus to European Jewry in the forms of unremitting anti-Semitism and extreme forms of European nationalism. This triggers the wish for a Jewish state based on a cultural belief, here standing in for a memory, in a time when that wish had been previously fulfilled (Biblical Israel) this is then projected into an imaginary future when that wish will again be granted. The work echoes this temporal structure in that it binds an image of the future (housing projects under construction) with the past (ruins) in an unendurable present. The phantasy of a return to Israel was not created by the Zionist movement, it has always been present in the Judaic belief in return, for thousands of years the words "next year in Jerusalem" have been spoken on the seder night. What distinguishes Zionism from Judaism on this point is that Zionism acted out the phantasy. It chose to take the symbolic Israel of Judaism, which represented the identity of the Diaspora, literally and built the political movement for a Jewish homeland around it.

The phantasy of the Biblical return to Israel was appropriated and then acted out. British occupied Palestine happened to be the approximate geographic location of the mythical land. It is the acting out of the phantasy against the evidence of reality that creates the need to deny the existence of the evidence. In the case of the assertion of "a land without people" the reality in question was the existence of the Palestinian people. This psychic formation is not strictly speaking denial but disavowal in which the subject refuses to recognise reality and is a mechanism referred to by Freud in relation to psychosis. The Zionist settlers could see the Palestinians but refused to recognise that they actually existed. In 'Fantastic Ruins' this disavowal was incorporated into the narrative structure through the use of the loop. The intention was to create a fantasy of ruins using the unfinished houses – editing the 360 degree pans created perpetual circles in which the houses have never and will never be occupied and will always remain in an incomplete form. The unreality of these imaginary ruins was intended to represent the unreality of the "land without people". The potential occupiers of the houses were edited out of the narrative in a way analogous to the editing out of the Palestinians from the "Land of Israel". One of the symptoms of this disavowal is the compulsion to repeat the acting out of the phantasy along with an unstable relationship to reality. The ongoing Israeli incursions and occupations of Palestinian, Syrian and, up until recently, Lebanese land could be looked at in terms of a compulsion to reassert and impose a

¹² Unlike in the title of the work, *Fantastic Ruins*, I will be using this spelling of Phantasy to indicate its location within psychoanalytical theory.

phantasy onto reality through force. Using the logic of psychoanalytical theory it could be said that there could be no progress towards a resolution to the conflict as long as the phantasy of “the land of Israel” holds sway over reality.

Looking at this in the light of the death instinct and its relationship to circular narratives discussed above, another layer of denial enters the picture – the denial of the death instinct. The refusal to allow the completion of the buildings (or the completion of the narrative) denies the viewer an end and therefore a beginning. This runs against our instincts or against the proper order of things – a story should begin and end thereby echoing and confirming our instinctive drives that, in turn determines our understanding of reality. This leaves us with a question; do circular narratives necessarily involve the denial of the death instinct and is this denial therefore always implicit in the image of the ruin?

The Seamless Circle



Circles (Revolution Machine) 2003 (still)

As a way of beginning to answer this question it would be helpful to analyse a piece of work made as part of this study. *Circles (The Revolution Machine) 2003* is a looped video of footage shot from a light aircraft circling above the site of the new BAE Systems Electronic Warfare Research and Development Plant in Luton. The image around which the piece is centred is the partially completed buildings that will house the BAE plant. This is a continuation of the use of the building-site-as-ruin metaphor I used in *Fantastic Ruins* and as in that piece it was important that there were no people occupying or working on the buildings. The Israeli footage was shot on Saturdays in order to give the impression that the sites had been abandoned and this filming took place on a Sunday partly for the same reason. The area in which the BAE Systems plant is being built is within a business park called Capability Green. Before I discovered that BAE were moving into the park the area had already begun to interest me because of its banal post-modern pastiche architecture and the feeling of unreality about the place. Walking around the Business Park I found that despite the fact all the buildings were occupied it was a remarkably empty place with a sense that it had been abandoned, this had put me in mind of ruins. This was reinforced by the spectacular views of the gigantic Vauxhall plant on the opposite side of the valley that, since its closure, has become yet another post-industrial ruin.

Capability Green was originally conceived and developed during the 1980s property boom by Nicholas Phillips who was the owner of Luton Hoo country estate. Phillips was a descendant of the Wernher family who made their wealth from South African diamond mines and were connected by marriage to Tsar Nicholas II. Luton Hoo house was designed by Robert Adam

and the gardens by Capability Brown and the estate housed one of the most prestigious art collections in private hands. As the owner of this enormous estate Phillips was reputedly saddled with large death duty debts and as a solution he took advantage of the prevailing economic climate and came up with a property development plan. He borrowed heavily to develop the Business Park, Capability Green, on adjacent land to the estate. The development was hit by the property crash in 1990 and Phillips was left with an estimated £20million of debt. He committed suicide in 1991 in his car on the grounds of the estate. Capability Green was acquired by two property development companies and has since done well, the most recent success being the sale of the largest plot to BAE Systems.

The history of the site consists of a number of inter-connecting themes. Firstly, the history of Luton Hoo that has been a home to the English ruling classes since the 15th Century. The estate then passes into the hands of the Wernher family who represented a new class of 19th century bourgeois entrepreneurs, who in this case had made their wealth from the South African diamond boom. The descendant of this combination of new money and the aristocracy, burdened with the responsibilities of his family's excessive wealth, takes his chance and falls victim to the Thatcherite boom of the 1980s. Combined with this history is the location, opposite the closed Vauxhall plant that encapsulates the 20th century manufacturing history of Britain. The occupiers of Capability Green including a multinational pharmaceutical and genetic engineering company, corporate legal services and now a multinational arms manufacturer represents the new global economy. Throughout all of this is the seemingly endless boom and bust cycles of capitalism.

This was the background to my interest in this site as a possible subject for a video loop. As in the Fantastic Ruins piece there was a political context to the work that was much larger than the work would at first suggest. This is a crucial point and is central to this study. I have attempted to test the extent to which many inter-connecting subjects and themes can be condensed into the image of a ruin. In the case of 'Circles' the ruin is the BAE construction site and by the act of circling the site, attempting to keep it in the frame as much as possible I wanted to formally echo the way in which thoughts revolve around the subject of the ruin, collecting and losing associations and meanings without getting to the centre.¹³ When the work was exhibited it was accompanied by the following information:

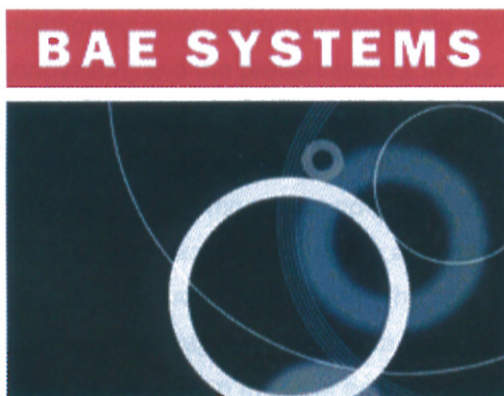
This video was shot from a light aircraft circling over a 'business park' in Luton (UK) called Capability Green. The building you can see under construction is the new BAE Systems Electronic Warfare, Research and Development site.

BAE Systems' advertising slogan is "Innovating for a Safer World" and as part of their corporate identity they use the motif of overlapping circles. In their words the "multiple circles speaks of partnering, precision, strength in depth and global reach. It's a powerful symbol of our single, seamless global organisation and our interaction with our partners and customers."

¹³ The formal structure of this work is in some ways similar to that of Tacita Dean's *Fernsehturm*, 2001, which is shot inside a revolving restaurant in the middle of Berlin. As the audience we never see the view through the windows, which is obviously the restaurants' main attraction. Instead we see the mainly middle aged customers looking at the views, pointing things out etc. Watching this film I found my thoughts revolving around what could not be seen (the views of Berlin) and its terrible history. The longer I watched the wider my thoughts circled until I found that the

The intention was to supply the viewer with the basic facts of the piece, the where, what and how of it. I wanted the audience to make their own connections based on this information and at the same time to be aware of the structure of the circle. An important aspect of the piece is the introduction of another kind of circular narrative – circular arguments, often found in the rhetoric of those who wish to avoid revealing an unpleasant reality. In the case of BAE systems the reality is the unimaginable horror of being on the receiving end of their products while the circular logic is suggested in their slogan, “innovating for a safer world”. It is worth spending a little time unravelling this slogan.

What is immediately striking about the phrase is the Orwellian doublespeak in which peace actually means war. In their publicity material BAE do not explain in what way the production of highly destructive weapons makes the world safer but the implications are quite clear. The argument does not need to be made because it is already built in to the whole concept of ‘defence’, that is in order to be safe from attack from our enemies we need an up to date armoury. The ‘innovation’ is necessary because our potential enemies are also “innovating for a safer world”. We do not know who these enemies will be and, as BAE Systems have ‘global reach’ it is quite plausible that some of our enemy’s innovative weapons are made or developed here. This creates an emphatic and deadly circle.



The fact that the video was shot from the air was intended to bring to mind the fact that the kinds of products designed by BAE are usually delivered from the air. These systems are used in what are often referred to in the rhetoric of warfare as ‘surgical strikes’. The targets of these strikes are meant to be precise and would include sites like

this BAE plant, that is, the very place where the technology to conduct these strikes is developed. The circularity of the defence industry rhetoric is then thrown in to sharp focus. When we look at the BAE site we are theoretically looking at both the origin and the destination of these weapons. This is implicit in the presentation of the video that is edited in such a way as to suggest that the circling over the site will never stop, while below the building site will never change, remaining in its incomplete pre-ruined state. The circular arguments in the rhetoric of companies like BAE demonstrate the way in which a characteristic feature of the structure of a circle – its self-contained exclusivity- can be used to exclude reality. The realities of recent conflicts involving the West can not be included in the

subject of the film seemed to encompass or at least suggest great swathes of European history although all one actually saw was the interior of a restaurant.

circular logic of the defence industry in which we need new weapons to defend ourselves against new weapons. Recent wars against Afghanistan and Iraq were against countries that posed no real, or as yet proven, threat in terms of weapons technology, whereas the real threat, demonstrated by the attacks against America, were perpetrated by people armed with Stanley knives. And yet the BAE website bombards the viewer with a phantasmagoria of hi-tech weaponry of the future and it is here too one can read their description of the circle as “a powerful symbol of our single, seamless, global organisation.”¹⁴ The circle as a symbol or as a figure in the abstract world of Euclidean geometry may, indeed be ‘seamless’ but as an argument or narrative the circle must be stitched together and it is the seam of this stitching that the work aims to reveal.

The Defence industry (as exemplified here by BAE Systems) would appear to offer a model of Freud’s death instinct in that it represents a return to an origin – an origin in this case that does literally involve death. However there is a more complicated relationship to the death instinct here. It can be divided into two aspects; firstly the internal mechanism in its relationship to the implicit circular arguments of the industry, implying a denial of the death instinct and secondly in the external urge towards destruction that suggests a form of acting out. In the first case it is in the interests of the industry to avoid mentioning death, but in a business that depends upon its ability to come up with ever more innovative ways of killing people, this is a difficult task. Particularly because the lethality of their products are their most important selling point. How do you sell something that is designed to kill without mentioning destruction and death? By talking about their opposites, creativity (in the form of innovation) and the preservation of life (or a safer world). This inversion of reality is also used to justify the activities of a company like BAE to its work force and society in general. There was a recent advertising campaign by BAE to launch its revamped image that must have been targeted at more than potential customers for guided missiles. As in the circular narrative the circular logic of the arms industry is constructed to deny or conceal the drive towards destruction and death. The ruin must on no account make an appearance in the language or imagery used by the industry but these images are present nonetheless as your gaze wanders from the slick advert for BAE on the tube to the image of a ruined Iraqi town in the newspaper.

The circular argument also takes us into the second aspect of the death instinct in relation to the arms industry. Part of Freud’s theory of the death instinct is that it is redirected by the libido towards the outside world and in its externalised form he calls it the destructive instinct. In ‘Civilisation and its Discontents’ Freud expands on this theory, setting the death instinct against Eros (as the affirmative life instinct) in a battle that is at the heart of life and the survival of civilisation.

“And now, I think, the meaning of the evolution of civilisation is no longer obscure to us. It must present the struggle between Eros and Death,

¹⁴ Baesystems.com

between the instinct of life and the instinct of destruction, as it works itself out in the human species.”¹⁵

The destructive urge driving the arms industry appears to be directed towards the ultimate form of destruction in terms of individual life and civilisation – that of war. However, war does not originate in the manufacture of weapons, the industry is riding on the back of war along with many other social and political institutions. The destructive drive of the arms industry is closer to its heart as a business; it is the destructive instinct of capitalism.

¹⁵ *Civilisation and its Discontents*, S.E. Vol xxi, pp122

The Ruins of the Bourgeoisie

In 'All That is Solid Melts Into Air' Marshall Berman ironically presents The Communist Manifesto as a kind of paean to capitalism. He points out that Marx does a much better job than the great apologists of capitalism in celebrating the energy, ingenuity and zeal of the bourgeoisie. He adds that it is not humility that prevents the capitalist ideologues from advertising the magnitude of their achievements but an unwillingness to admit or acknowledge the darker side of this force. Berman tells us that, as Marx described it, this force is directed at destruction...

“...from the clothes on our backs to the looms and mills that weave them, to the men and women who work the machines, to the houses and neighborhoods the workers live in, to the firms and corporations that exploit the workers, to the towns and cities and whole regions and even nations that embrace them all –all these are made to be broken tomorrow, smashed or shredded or pulverized or dissolved, so they can be recycled or replaced next week, and the whole process can go on again and again, hopefully for ever in ever more profitable forms.”¹⁶

Berman goes on to describe the capitalist bourgeoisie as nihilists who represent the “most violently destructive ruling class in history.”¹⁷ Images of return and repetition in capitalism are found throughout Marx’s writings in the apparently endless cycles of creating in order to destroy, the boom and bust nature of capitalist economies and the periodic return of crises. It was crucial to Marx’s political philosophy for he believed that with each crisis more irreparable damage was done to the structure of capitalism and that each crisis would be worse until it inevitably destroys itself. However, Berman does not see why capitalism cannot go on indefinitely. In both views we can see the workings of the death instinct, in its externalised destructive forms and in the compulsion to repeat. Evidence for the idea that the forces of capitalism are operating on an instinctual level can be found in Marx’s Faustian imagery of sorcerers and possession, Marshall Berman again,

“But Marx’s images also address what must accompany any genuine sense of wonder: a sense of dread. For this miraculous and magical world is also demonic and terrifying, swinging wildly out of control, menacing and destroying blindly as it moves. The members of the bourgeoisie repress both wonder and dread at what they have made: these possessors do not want to know how deeply they are possessed. They learn only at moments of personal and general ruin...”¹⁸

Freud also invokes Faustian imagery to the extent that he quotes Goethe while discussing the destructive instinct in *Civilisation and its Discontents*;

¹⁶ Marshall Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity*. Simon and Schuster, New York 1982 pp99

¹⁷ *ibid* pp100

"For all things, from the void / Called forth, deserve to be destroyed... /
Thus, all which you as sin have rated / Destruction,-aught with Evil blent,/
That is my proper element."¹⁹

But also when he is first developing the theory in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* he has recourse to Faustian language in describing the compulsion to repeat in terms of "possession by some daemonic power"²⁰ This daemonic possession is an effect of the unconscious directing our actions. It is what possesses Nauman's clown to obey the command to repeat, a command issuing from the unconscious, and it is this that indicates the presence of an instinct. Reading Freud's theory of the death/destructive instinct together with Marxist theories of the destructiveness of the bourgeoisie and the cyclical nature of capitalist economies we arrive at the suggestion of a bourgeois unconscious compelling it towards destruction.

The destructiveness of the bourgeoisie is also a recurring theme throughout Walter Benjamin's work, particularly in the *Arcades Project* (*Passagen-Werk*)²¹ and as Susan Buck-Morris points out it was the image of the ruin that Benjamin uses as its emblem.

"...throughout the *Passagen-Werk* material, the image of the "ruin," as an emblem not only of the transitoriness and fragility of capitalist culture, but also its destructiveness, is pronounced."²²

At the heart of the *Arcades Project* is the image of 19th century Paris as the birth place of modern Europe a time and place that lives up to the energy, revolutionary zeal and destructiveness of capitalism described so well by Marx. Everywhere there was demolition and construction and their similarity to ruins does not escape Benjamin's notice –the ruin recurs as a consistent leitmotif throughout his work.

"The realisation of dream elements, in the course of waking up, is the paradigm of dialectical thinking. Thus dialectical thinking is the organ of historical awakening. Every epoch, in fact, dreams the one to follow but, in dreaming, precipitates its awakening. It bears its end within itself and unfolds it ...by cunning. With the destabilising of the market economy, we begin to recognise the monuments of the bourgeoisie as ruins even before they have crumbled."²³

Here we have the subject, in this case an epoch, bearing within itself its own ruin. The instability of the market economy is at once its dynamism and destructiveness and according to Benjamin, it is through the recognition of this characteristic of capitalism that the bourgeois monuments turn to rubble before our eyes. We can also recognise the workings of the death instinct here too but what is really interesting about this passage is the idea of the mechanism of historical awakening being anticipated in the dreams of a sleeping epoch. According to

¹⁸ *ibid* pp101

¹⁹ S.E. Vol.xxi pp120-121

²⁰ S.E. Vol xviii pp36

²¹ *The Arcades Project*, Harvard University Press Cambridge(Mass.) & London 1999. This project, itself a kind of literary ruin, is an enormous document containing the substantive parts of a number of planned books. The project remains incomplete due to Benjamin's flight from the Nazis and his subsequent (presumed) suicide in Spain.

²² Susan Buck-Morris, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, MIT Press Cambridge (Mass.) & London 1991

²³ *The Arcades Project*, pp13

Freud all dreams carry a wish fulfilment in either the latent or manifest material. It would therefore follow that in respect to the operation of the wish within the dream there would be the same temporal structure as there is in the operation of the wish within fantasy. That is, the stimulus of the residual dream material summons up a recollection of a moment when that wish had been previously fulfilled, it is then projected into the future as the proposed scenario of the dream. The wish is therefore to return and herein lies the 'cunningly' concealed loop within the structure of the dream as well, perhaps, as within the structure of capitalism.

Dreaming in the Ruins



Aztec Ruins, New Mexico



Still from *La Jetee*, Chris Marker (1962)

The complex relationships between dreaming, ruins and circular narratives can be found in two works of art that are central to my argument. A short story by Jorge Luis Borges, *The Circular Ruins* (1956)²⁴ and a short film by Chris Marker, *La Jetee* (1961). Firstly I will give a brief synopses of both narratives.

In Borges' *The Circular Ruins* a man (who remains unnamed) arrives at the ruins of a circular temple that include the remains of a forgotten stone god. He has given himself the task of dreaming a man into existence: "he wanted to dream him with minute integrity and insert him into reality". He spends nearly all his time sleeping and after a false start in which the man he summons from his dreams turns out to be an hallucination, followed by a disastrous bout of insomnia, he begins to make progress. He starts by dreaming a human heart and then slowly, organ by organ he dreams the man from the inside out, eventually dreaming "the innumerable hair" until he has a complete figure of a young man. This figure is also sleeping, "Night after night, the man dreamt him as asleep." He then prays to the stone effigy that then appears in his dreams telling him he is known by mortals as Fire. He promises to give life to his sleeping phantom and "that all creatures except Fire itself and the dreamer would believe him to be a man of flesh and blood". At this point in "the dreamer's dream, the dreamed one awoke." The dreamer then educates his creation while being occasionally "troubled by the impression that all this had happened before..." As part of the training he gives his 'son' tasks to carry out, such as planting a flag and on awakening he sees the flag fluttering on a hill. In this way he adjusts him to the real world. Eventually the young man enters the world properly and the 'dreamer' receives reports of another stranger living in another circular ruin, thus confirming the success of his project. However with these reports comes the news that this stranger has been recognised as a Deity due to his immunity to fire. A forest fire then sweeps through the

²⁴ *Labyrinths* Penguin, 2000

jungle and the man, with "relief, with humiliation, with terror, [...] understood that he too was a mere appearance, dreamt by another."²⁵

²⁵ *ibid.* pp72-77

Chris Marker describes his film, *La Jetée*, as a cine-roman (or film-novel). It is made entirely from stills (apart from one extremely brief moment) with a voice-over narrator and it has also been issued as a book²⁶. It opens with the line "This is the story of a man, marked by an image from his childhood." The scene is a jetty at Orly airport in Paris and the man (as in Borges' story, he remains unnamed) has been taken there as a child to watch the aeroplanes. Here he witnesses the death of a man and at the same time the face of a woman is inscribed in his memory. Sometime later Paris is destroyed in world war III. The man survives and is held captive by the 'victors' in a network of galleries beneath the uninhabitable ruins of Paris. His captors have come to the conclusion that humanity is doomed unless they can receive help from the future through a "loophole in time." They conduct experiments on their prisoners with the aim of sending "emissaries into time, to summon the past and future to the aid of the present". The experiments fail until they decide to concentrate their efforts on a subject who has strong mental images from before the war. Having spied on the prisoner's dreams they discover the man has this image of a woman's face fixed in his memory, and so he becomes the subject of their experiments. They prove successful and he manages to return to pre-war Paris and meet this woman, with whom he conducts a kind of romance. Having proved that time travel was possible they then send the man into the future where he is given a form of energy supply that will enable mankind to continue. His mission thus completed he is marked for liquidation. While awaiting his fate he is visited by the people from the future whom offer to take him with them but he refuses, requesting instead that he be returned to the past to be reunited with the woman. He then finds himself back on the jetty at Orly only to find he has been followed by one of his captors who then shoots the man. He thus discovers that the death he had witnessed as a child was his own.

Both of these stories are, of course, circular in their structure and both reveal this structure in the closing words of the stories: Borges, "he too was a mere appearance, dreamt by another." And Marker, "was the moment of his own death." This is a critical similarity, by making the revelation, which returns us directly to the beginning, literally at the end of the story, brings the *act of ending* into the plot. This immediately creates a meta-narrative in which the mechanisms of narrative structure partly become the subject of the narrative itself. This formal self-consciousness is a defining characteristic of both works. The stories are both 'impossible' fantasies but they demonstrate that they are actually made theoretically possible through the nature of narrative. Borges implies this when his narrator says of the protagonist's project that it "was not impossible, though it was supernatural." If we take this to refer to Borges' writing we can see an implicit reference to naturalism – a genre far removed from the highly contrived and mannered fictions of Borges – with a concomitant suggestion of the possibility of an alternative literary genre called *supernaturalism*. That through the *supernaturalism* of

²⁶ Marker, Chris. *La Jetée: ciné-roman*. New York: Zone Books, 1992.

narrative contrivances and the unnatural powers of language anything is possible.²⁷ The genres of fantasy and science fiction already specialise in the representations of the impossible but Borges brings in the methods of representation as figures within the story. This can also be said of Marker as a storyteller in film. To begin with the use of stills in a film immediately takes the viewer into an uncertain terrain in terms of the category to which the medium belongs, reinforced by the description 'cine-roman' in the title. We are, to some extent, forced to consider our definition of what constitutes a film, in particular it draws attention to the fact that cinema is founded on the illusion of movement created by still images displayed at imperceptible intervals. In this sense, the defining moment in *la Jetee* is during a sequence of images of the woman sleeping, in which the intervals between the images increases until, in the blinking of an eye, the film becomes a 'movie' for a mere second. It is not a coincidence that Marker makes this moment one in which a character wakes up. He is making a link, through his actual use of the medium, between cinema and dreaming. This was not a new connection even in 1961, it had been implied many times before by film makers and the title of Raymond Queneau's novel, 'The Skin of Dreams' (1944) refers to the cinema screen. What is exciting about the connection in *La Jetee* is the way it is made. Like Borges' *supernaturalism* it takes us into a narrative in which the method of storytelling is a constituent of the plot. The circularity of the story is not merely built in to the structure but inhabits it and everywhere we look we find its effects.

I would also contend that the use of ruins in both of these stories is not coincidental. Certainly in Borges the connection between circularity and ruins could not be more clearly signalled but it is not explained. The circularity is explicit enough, but why *ruins*? In attempting to answer this question I will be getting to the theoretical heart of this study.

Why *Ruins*?

La Jetee and *The Circular Ruins* both have a nameless protagonist who is caught up in a circular narrative, trapped in a plot that condemns them to inhabit an interminable present. Both stories incorporate the narrative mechanisms of the medium in which they are told and both have their main characters spend most of the story dreaming. And, of course, there are the ruins. I would contend that it is the image or trope of the ruin that binds these shared characteristics and that the ruin functions in quite specific ways within the two works beyond metaphor, allegory or theme. In this reading of them the stories begin and end with the ruin. This stems from an approach in which the ruin can not be seen as representing an underlying truth within a work of art because the whole idea of ruin undermines the notion of a secure, structuring, conceptual base. This view is expressed concisely by Derrida in connection to the

²⁷ The interaction between the '*not impossible*' and the '*supernatural*' could also be seen as representing the interaction between the *story* and the *plot*. The distinction between *story* and *plot* is an important part of understanding what French literary theory calls *narratologie*. The story (or *Fabula*, as it was termed by the Russian formalists) comes into existence in the mind of the audience or reader and is told through the use of the plot (or *Sjjezhan*).

creation of the self-portrait in which he puts the ruin at the origin of the work as something that at once undermines its foundations while being a necessary part of its emergence:

"[The self-portrait] is like a ruin that does not come *after* the work but remains produced, *already from the origin*, by the advent and structure of the work. In the beginning, at the origin there was ruin. At the origin comes ruin; ruin comes to the origin, it is what first comes and happens to the origin in the beginning. With no promise of restoration. This dimension of the ruinous simulacrum has never threatened –quite the contrary- the emergence of a work."²⁸

Although not, in themselves, self-portraits *The Circular Ruins* and *La Jetee* both have their protagonists confront images of themselves. In both cases the moment of revelation for the characters and the audience/reader comes at the end, an end which immediately returns us to the beginning. At this, the end and the beginning become a single point and it is at this point that they are forced to confront themselves. In the case of Borges it is in the realisation of himself as an identical link in an endless, self-replicating chain. He disappears between the infinite reflections of two mirrors, each enclosed within a circular ruin like an ornate, baroque frame. Fire, in the form of the God, is the thing that gives life to the man's phantom and in the form of a forest fire reveals to him that he too was given life by Fire. The ruins are the remains of a temple destroyed by fire – or rather the ruins too were created by fire. Fire is a transformational element, transforming matter into energy, it destroys and (in the Promethean sense too) creates simultaneously. Borges' ruins are arranged in a circle, in the manner of his narrative, to indicate that (also like his narrative) they have no beginning or end. Or they have both but are joined together at any and every point along the circle. Hidden in this is also the possibility that it is a kind of self-portrait. As we have already established, the tale self-consciously incorporates the act of plotting into the fabric of the story and this does suggest that the dreamer may, to some extent be the author, which in turn implies yet another kind of circle.

The final scene of *La Jetee* proceeds from the logical linear narrative progression of the plot to return us to the opening scene. As in Borges' story the protagonist has an impossible mission which 'is not impossible' due to the 'supernatural' powers of narrative devices. The time loop paradox is a fairly common idea in science fiction but Marker uses it in a precise way to present the ultimate 'impossible' scene – that of witnessing ones own death. From this proposition many 'impossible' paradoxes ensue, not least the fact that in order for the man to live his life story he must necessarily already have died. This is reminiscent of D.W. Winnicott's idea that the thing we fear most of all has already happened²⁹ as well as returning us to the very Derridian idea of the work as *always already* a ruin.

²⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Memoirs of the Blind: The Self Portrait and Other Ruins*, pp65, University of Chicago Press 1993

²⁹ D.W. Winnicott, *The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment*. Hogarth Press London 1965

The apparent tendency towards negation in the form and content of the works cited so far disguises another quite different aspect to the ruin. When Derrida writes, "This dimension of the ruinous simulacrum has never threatened –quite the contrary- the emergence of a work" he is touching upon a crucial aspect of the image and idea of the ruin. This is the image of the ruin as connected to origins in a generative sense, presenting the paradoxical idea of an image of destruction as in some way signifying creation. The image does not represent creativity but signals its presence or even inspires it. In Diderot's descriptions of the Paris Salon of 1767 there are, as one would expect given that the cult of the ruin was in full swing, many descriptions of ruin paintings and they often inspire him to flights of philosophical reverie;

"The ideas ruins evoke in me are grand. Everything comes to nothing, everything perishes, everything passes, only the world remains, only time endures. How old is this world! I walk between two eternities. Wherever I cast my glance, the objects surrounding me announce death and compel my resignation to what awaits me What is my ephemeral existence in comparison with that of a rock being worn down, [...] I see the marble of tombs crumble into powder, and I don't want to die! [...] A torrent drags each and every nation into the depths of a common abyss; myself, I resolve to make a solitary stand at the edge and resist the currents flowing past me."³⁰

The passage goes on in a similar vein, turning into a tragic scenario of lost love. What is notable about this passage is that it is a description of an object, which is the very epitome of stillness (a painting of a ruin), in which the imagery, via the denial of death, becomes that of 'torrents' and flowing currents. From the sublime stillness of a ruin represented in the stillness of a painting we arrive at a great rush into the abyss. At the edge of this abyss Diderot spins a romantic tale of desire, love and loss. Here we have Freud's contest between Eros and Thanatos as it is played out in our instinctual lives, with the clear implication that our urge to create, our generative capacity, partly depends upon our urge towards death, or more precisely our urge to return. It is from Eros that Diderot derives his will to resist the currents flowing past him into the abyss and it is therefore hardly surprising that his thoughts turn to his lover with a mixture of desire and anxiety. It must be remembered that all this originates in his contemplation of a picture of a ruined building.

³⁰ Diderot on Art, Vol. II, The Salon of 1767. pp198-199. Yale University Press, New Haven & London 1995

the sculptures in their coming into being, expressing Michelangelo's belief that the sculpture



The painting that inspires Diderot's speculations is by Hubert Robert who was an 18th century master of the ruin genre. The painting for which he is best known is his *Imaginary View of the Grand Galerie of the Louvre in Ruins* 1796 (left). In his description of the background to this work, the art historian, Christopher Woodward in his book, *In Ruins*³¹ portrays Robert as a slightly tragic figure washed ashore by the

tide of history. In this portrayal Robert, as a survivor of the Terror, (before which he was a celebrated painter of the *ancien regime*) manages to win the favour of his new masters, becoming a leading figure in the conversion of the Louvre into a museum. Woodward says that Robert's painting of the Louvre in Ruins demonstrates his "inner confusion" and that the fact that Belvedere's bust of Raphael and one of Michelangelo's Slaves can be seen intact amongst the rubble indicates that "in times of turmoil the immortality of art seemed the only certainty."³² But do not ruins tell us the opposite? Woodward expresses through Robert a denial of death, the belief that art can be 'immortal' and that Robert's painting is an article of faith in the transcendent status of art. Robert may have believed this himself but there is something much more complicated and interesting going on than Robert's state of mind in



which the 'turmoil' of the French revolution attracts him to certainties.

Looked at another way, it is an exemplary revolutionary painting.

Ruins were, after all, part of the political language of the revolution, vandalism was virtually government policy³³. The Painter David suggested that the monuments to celebrate the revolution should be literally built on the rubble of the statues of the *ancien regime*, that would be used to construct their foundations.³⁴ Robert's painting was one of a pair, the other being his impression of the proposed finished restoration of the Grand Galerie – this mirror of destruction perfectly illustrates Derrida's ruinous simulacra. The origin of the first great museum of art could not even be imagined without its ruin. The bust of Raphael and the Michelangelo can be found intact in the ruins

because, far from being threatened by ruin, their existence partly depends on it. Robert's ruins are generative, they are giving birth to art. It is perhaps no coincidence that one of these works of art is a Michelangelo Slave– a series of sculptures in which the figures are seen stretching and emerging from the stone (above). They are remarkable because the subject of

³¹ Christopher Woodward, *In Ruins*, Chatto and Windus 2001

³² *ibid.* pp156

³³ "Far more than vandalistic the destructions [of the Revolution] were civic and patriotic" Francoise Choay citing Hermant in; *The Invention of the Historic Monument*, Cambridge University Press 2001 p71

³⁴ *ibid* p71-72

the sculptures is their coming into being, expressing Michelangelo's belief that the sculpture already exists in the stone and he is merely liberating it. Stone carving is also a medium in which the work appears to emerge from the rubble. In contemporary mythologies we can find evidence of a belief in the generative powers of ruins – an example would be the way news of devastating earthquakes is reported in the media. It has become almost obligatory for the discovery of a 'miracle baby' after all hope of finding survivors has been given up. These stories have their rational explanations but it is our need for them that guarantees that they are reported. What is this need? Is it for some good news or a symbol of hope in a terrible and hopeless situation? Perhaps ruins puts us in mind of origins and the discovery of an infant in some way crystallises this highly complex association in an image that can also function as a screen to protect us from the unimaginable horror of the real event.

Is it possible to find the idea of ruins as generative in the examples of Borges' story and La Jetee? The Circular Ruins has a very clear generative theme in the intention of the man to create another from his dreams and his subsequent discovery that he too is one in an endless series of beings dreamt into existence. As pointed out earlier, Fire is given the role of both destroyer and creator, thereby synthesising these apparent antithetical roles. This gives the ruin the position of an emblem for both destruction and creation, a place consumed by the same thing it was built to represent. It could never be a true temple to Fire until it had become a ruin, therefore it could not be complete until it reached its ruinous state of incompleteness. They are circular in this sense too. It is within these multiple circles that the phantom births take place. Although the man's stated mission is to create life what he discovers is his own origin. This was not his intention but the story depends upon this discovery and therefore it can be seen (certainly from the point of view of the writer and reader) as the true aim of his mission. His quest to discover the secret of creating life from his own capacity to imagine leads him to the imaginary origin of his own being.

Primal Phantasy

The idea of imaginary origins leads us to Freud's theory of the origins of the pursuit of knowledge in the sexual researches of children. The origin lies in the desire to know where babies come from and, like Borges' character the inquiry will inevitably lead them to the original scene of their own conception. The child is faced with unfathomable mysteries and theoretical aporias and he or she develops all manner of misleading theories to get to the truth and this "brooding and doubting[...] becomes the prototype of all later intellectual work directed towards the solution of problems".³⁵ This is the origin of the pursuit of knowledge, most obviously apparent in the kinds of knowledge that deal with questions of origins. It can be seen, for example, in creation myths and scientific theories such as the Big Bang (Freud would probably have enjoyed the dubious pun). For the child the question, *where do babies come from?* is the same as the question, *where do I come from?* The search for an answer takes the child back to the same point, the primal scene – the sexual union of the parental couple, or rather not the scene itself but in its formation as a "primary Phantasy". According to Freud the primal scene is one of four typical phantasy structures (along with castration, seduction and intra-uterine existence) called "primal phantasies" that underlie and organise phantasy life. These phantasies are bound up with the question of origins or as Laplanche and Pontalis put it:

"If we consider the themes which can be recognised in primal phantasies [...] the striking thing is that they have one trait in common: they are all related to the origins. Like collective myths, they claim to provide a representation of and a 'solution' to whatever constitutes a major enigma for the child. Whatever appears to the subject as a reality of such a type as to require an explanation or 'theory', these phantasies dramatise into the primal moment or original point of departure of a history. In the 'primal scene' it is the origin of the subject that is represented;"³⁶

In terms of primal phantasy the subject of Borges' story becomes that of the revelation of origins, in which fire is the veil lifted on the primal scene to be looked upon "with relief, with humiliation, with terror". As for *La Jetée* the return to the opening scene at the end of the film is a catastrophic return to the primal scene. As Constance Penley points out, awaiting the protagonist on the jetty is a woman and a man representing the parental couple.³⁷ This is a catastrophic return because of the character's Oedipal transgression – he has, through the transgressive medium of time travel, fallen in love with his own mother and his farther/assassin (always already at the scene) is waiting to punish his illicit desire. The ruins could be seen as predicting the catastrophe but at the same time the presence of the ruin indicates the double figure of the end/beginning – the ruin at the origin. If the origin of the work shares the same psychic space as the primal phantasy (in this case of the primal scene)

³⁵ Freud *The Sexual Theories of Children*, SE Vol. ix pp218-219

³⁶ Laplanche and Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, p332

and if we regard this in the light of Derrida's ruinous simulacrum then, to paraphrase Derrida - at the primal scene comes ruin; ruin comes to the primal scene, it is what comes and happens to the primal scene in the beginning.

Could the ruin be the shattered image of the primal scene, its ruinous simulacrum? This may explain the generative myth of the ruin in which the answer to the infantile question, "*where do babies come from?*" could also be, "*from the ruins.*" The search for origins amongst ruins is not an uncommon western preoccupation, to some extent it is the basis of archaeology. The site of the ancient ruin invites scientific as well as romantic speculation on the demise of a civilisation but it also invites enquiry into the birth of the contemporary civilisation. The



expression "Cradle of Civilisation" summons up images not only of our origins but also of ancient ruins (as the expression is usually used in relation to the archaeological significance of Iraq, these images are also accompanied by the pictures of less ancient ruins). In this view the archaeologist can be regarded almost as a kind of midwife to new

Hatra, aerial view from Henry Stierlin, Cités in Hatra, Citta' del Sole, catalogue of an exhibition organized by the Italian Archaeological Mission to Hatra

nations, this is strikingly put by Silberman in his conclusion to his book on the relationship between archaeology, and nationalism in the Middle East:

"Willingly or unconsciously, the region's archaeologists had become the authors of a modern creation myth. [...] Nations have always drawn a picture of their infancy in glittering colours, and those vivid self-portraits have always had an undeniable impact on modern national identities. A new generation of local and foreign archaeologists [...] was beginning to create a new past for that region. And the shape that this past would assume in the coming decades – with its potentially enormous political and ideological implications – was now up to the region's archaeologists to choose."³⁸

³⁷ Constance Penley, *Time Travel, Primal Scene and Critical Dystopia* in *The Future of an Illusion: Film Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Penley, C. Routledge London 1989

³⁸ Silberman. Neil, Asher, *Between Past and Present: Archaeology, Ideology and Nationalism in the Modern Middle East*. Doubleday 1989 p248

This is quite a claim for the power of archaeologists but perhaps the most interesting aspect of this passage is its dizzying mixture of tenses, with its speculations on what a past will become in the future.

If the ruin "is what comes and happens to the origin in the beginning" and primal phantasies are "all related to the origins" then what of the other primal phantasies? Is there an identifiable relationship to ruins and primal phantasies per se? After the primal scene the remaining primal phantasies are seduction and castration. These phantasies are connected to origins in that seduction is the origin of the emergence of sexuality and castration the origin of differentiation between the sexes. These are the acceptable connections to origins that have been extended and developed in post-Freudian psychoanalytic theory, however Freud took the idea much further (and more controversially) into the archaic origins of all human experience.

"These scenes of observing parental intercourse, of being seduced in childhood, and of being threatened with castration are unquestionably an inherited endowment, a phylogenetic inheritance.[...] a child catches hold of this phylogenetic experience where his own experience fails him. He fills in the gaps of individual truth with prehistoric truth;"³⁹

It is not necessary to agree with this idea too see how it reinforces the position of the primal phantasy in the idea of origins.⁴⁰ The phantasy of seduction is that of a passive submission by the child to an older (usually adult) person. The phantasy may have an experiential basis in deliberate sexual abuse or inadvertent stimulation by an adult but Freud emphasised that it need not have any basis in the child's experience (his phylogenetic explanation, for the purposes of this study, adds up to the same thing). The point is that the phantasy is the origin and to some extent the template of the individual's sexuality. The connection between the seduction phantasy and the ruin is not as clear as it is in the case of the primal scene but examples can be found. To return to Diderot's speculations on the representation of ruins we can find this little phantasy;

"Beneath these dark arcades the modesty of a respectable woman would be less marked, the enterprise of a sensitive, timid lover more forward and courageous. Without our realising it we love everything that delivers us up to our inclinations, that seduces us and serves to excuse our weaknesses."⁴¹

In this the ruin as the scene of seduction becomes, in the next sentence, the seducer; an object of love in relation to which the viewer is passive and weak. It is difficult to account for this reaction to the ruin unless we look at it in the light of the seduction phantasy. There is also the example of George Bataille's infamous 'obscene' novella, *The Story of the Eye* (1928). It is a story constructed from sexual fantasies revolving around the development of a

³⁹ S.E. Vol.XVII p97

⁴⁰ Freud was interested in archaeology and had made some analogies between archaeology and psychoanalysis in his work. There is an abiding interest in origins throughout his work and therefore it is, perhaps, unsurprising that references to ruins and archaeology appear in his work.

⁴¹ Diderot on Art, p199

metaphor (the eye). It operates purely in the realm of phantasy without any apparent restraint and is partly a tale of extreme sexual awakening. At the end of the story is a short afterword in which Bataille reveals an unintentional autobiographical source. He was reminded by a photograph in a magazine of an event from his youth that took place at a ruin near his village. He was walking through the ruins at night with his mother and two “perfectly chaste girls” one of whom he was in love with. Suddenly a ghost leaps out in front of them at which the girls scream and he is momentarily dumbstruck with terror. It turns out to be a prank perpetrated by his brother. Bataille tells us that he was reminded of this shortly after writing a scene in the book in which a sheet is used as a kind of flag of masturbation waved from the window of a stone chateau (the remembered ruin was of a castle). He goes on to say, “I was very astonished at having unknowingly substituted a perfectly obscene image for a vision apparently devoid of any sexual implication.”⁴² This memory calls to mind the characteristics of the screen memory which is defined by Laplanche and Pontalis as: “A childhood memory characterised both by its unusual sharpness and by the apparent insignificance of its content. The analysis of such memories leads back to indelible childhood experiences and to unconscious phantasies.”⁴³ Behind this memory may lie the phantasy of seduction that serves as the prototype for the multiple seductions in the book. The presence of both his mother and (chaste) lover at the scene is suggestive of this but what is relevant to us is the fact that it is the image of a ruin that both recalls this memory and serves as its setting. An equally or perhaps more convincing argument could be made for this recalled event being a screen memory concealing the primal scene. Whichever it may be (possibly both) the very fact that this formative scene at the site of a ruin invites a choice of interpretations all involving the operation of primal phantasies certainly does no harm to the argument of this study.

So far we have examined the primal scene and seduction, this leaves the remaining phantasy of castration. This phantasy is at the heart of the castration complex which in turn is inextricably bound to the Oedipus complex – itself the structuring, central concept of psychoanalysis. Castration is the prohibitive threat of the father against the subject's incestuous Oedipal desire for the mother and as such is the primary organising symbol of patriarchal law. In this way it is, in Freudian and post-Freudian terms, an essential phantasy, playing a key role in the resolution of the Oedipal conflict that allows the subject to move into the (patriarchal) symbolic order. Freud regarded the castration complex as universal and as being expressed in many symbolic forms, particularly in which the ‘wholeness’ of the body is threatened. It could be said, for example, that the ruin itself is a kind ‘castrated’ building, in that it can be defined by its ‘incompleteness’. However this is a relatively superficial connection and the argument of this study relies on the idea that the ruin operates at the level of primal phantasy. This would mean that the ruin is not a *symbol* of castration, bearing its mark in its incompleteness, but that the ruin inhabits the structure of the phantasy itself. To

⁴² Bataille, G. *the Story of the Eye*. (1928) Penguin Books 1982

⁴³ *Language of Psy*. P410

examine its relationship to castration we must look for the ruin at the site of the phantasy – in the cut.

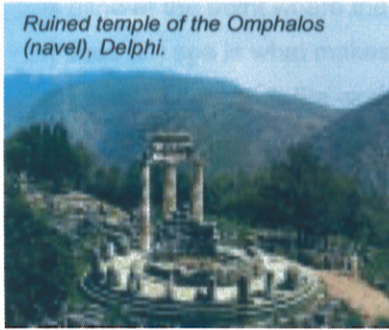
To some extent we have already established the presence of the ruin at the phantasised act of castration in positioning it at the point at which the beginning and end are joined to create a circular narrative. The idea of the join as a kind of cut is best expressed in the description of the creation of a film loop. The beginning and end of the sequence are firstly identified and then cut from the main reel of film, these two 'ends' are then joined or *spliced* together to create a loop. This demonstrates the necessity of an incision or cut to create the effect of circularity. The cut need not, of course be literal as it is in the film loop but it can also be found figuratively in the moment that a narrative becomes a circle. In *La Jetee* the join between beginning and end is marked by the cutting down of the subject. At this moment it is his death that stands in for the ultimate form of castration. The image of the falling man is both the original trauma of the subject as well as his end and as such *splices* the end and beginning together. This cut could also be expressed as the typographical figure, "/" or what is spoken as "slash". This has recently become more common in spoken usage in its use in Internet URLs although it has for a long time appeared, particularly in academic texts, as a way of joining words and concepts. It has, for example, been used in this study in the formula 'beginning/end.'

The idea of the cut as an act of joining or completion has another parallel in the image of the navel. Elisabeth Bronfen describes the navel as: "Visualized as a common point of connection but also as an incision and severing".⁴⁴ She uses the navel as a symbolic figure in an intervention into the Freudian Oedipal model with its dependency on the castration complex. She states the aims of her work *The Knotted Subject* thus:

"By rewriting symbolic castration under the aegis of the navel, speaking of denavelment and the omphalos, I seek a way out of the impasse in psychoanalytic theory, all division and separation inevitably turning into a discussion of sexual differences.[...] Instead I suggest shifting our critical attention to nongendered psychic moments of loss, severance, deprivation and the persistent production of narratives commemorating the impact of traumatic vulnerability at the core of our psychic and aesthetic representations. These phantasies and symptoms hark back to an indeterminable yet ineluctable originary wound and look forward to an equally indeterminable, inevitable human demise that threatens the human subject above and beyond the symbolic significance of a culturally privileged organ."⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Bronfen, E. *The Knotted Subject: Hysteria and its Discontents*. Princeton University Press 1998. p1

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp11-12



The navel is the mark of our mortal origin in which the act of coming into being is indicated by and dependent upon an act of violence that leaves an inverted scar. This 'originary wound' signals not only our entry into the world but our inevitable exit from it. Therefore, like the ruin the navel is the edit, the spliced cut connecting the end to the beginning. Elsewhere in her book Bronfen describes the Naval as the *no thing* or the figure '0', it is easy to see in

this typographic representation a symbol also of the circular narrative. It is possible to add to this figure the '/' (slash) to form another pictographic symbol 'Ø'. This combining of Bronfen's zero/circle navel (or omphalos) with the 'slash' (or splice) gives a highly condensed representation of the join/cut that is the site of the navel, the end/beginning of the circular narrative, the splicing of the film loop and the site of the ruinous simulacra. At the same time the symbol Ø is reminiscent of a sign of prohibition – of no entry. In one sense this takes us back to the structuring function of castration as a prohibition against incest and suggests an alternative to Bronfen's attempt to side step this aspect of castration. This sign Ø by including the prohibitive threat of castration with the point zero of the navel acknowledges an insoluble circular puzzle: Is the severance from the mother and its mark as the navel the prototype for castration or is it retrospectively structured by the castration complex? I would contend that it is not possible or necessary to solve this problem as long as the prohibitive function of castration is included in the idea of the navel. The 'entry prohibited' sign also operates in the sense that the umbilical cut marks a point of no return – the only return on offer being death. In another sense it stands as a no entry sign before the closed opening to the unconscious. In the Interpretation of Dreams, Freud describes a particular problem,

"There is often a passage in even the most thoroughly interpreted dream which has to be left obscure; this is because we become aware during the work of interpretation that at that point there is a tangle of dream thoughts which cannot be unravelled and which moreover adds nothing to our knowledge of the content of the dream. This is the dream's navel, the spot where it reaches down into the unknown."⁴⁶

This spot in the dream could be regarded as the point at which it is connected to the unconscious. Although Freud does not say this how else can we interpret his description of it as a navel – the figure of disconnection and connection. If we were to take his analogy further we would arrive at the conclusion that it is at this precise point that the dream came into being – that the metaphorical umbilical cord is the channel through which the unconscious content entered the dream, therefore bringing it into being. Access into the unconscious is cut off when the dream is born into consciousness and the cord is knotted into a "tangle...which cannot be unravelled". This can also be understood, as is the blind spot. According to Merleau-Ponty (1964);

⁴⁶ S.E. Vol.V. p525

"What [the eye] does not see is what in it prepares the vision of the rest (as the retina is blind at the point where the fibres that will permit the vision spread out into it). What it does not see is what makes it see, is its tie to being, is its corporeity, are the existentials by which the world becomes visible, is the flesh wherein the object is born."⁴⁷

Here we have a description of a kind of navel of the eye and here too our symbol can indicate the blind spot – the scar on the eye that also marks its coming into being, the beginning and end of vision in a single point.



Cell on death row, Florida state Prison from the website of Florida Dept of Correction

The \emptyset is also present in the last piece of work made during this study. In *Eternal Recurrence (Death Row)* I have used a virtual tour of a Florida State Prison cell on death row. This was shot directly from the web page of the Florida State Dept. of Correction and showed a perpetually rotating 360-degree image of the cell.

These virtual tours which, from a fixed position in a room or landscape, can be rotated in any direction showing every possible view from that point, are made from many digital stills 'stitched' together. They create a perfectly enclosed world which could be regarded as a new form of narrative space similar to that of the film loop. The stitching technique can be apparently seamless although there is an inevitable amount of distortion of perspective. The most interesting characteristic of these 'spaces' is their blind spots. In some of these panoramas the blind spot occurs at the point at which the camera has been positioned and where the photographer stood. If the viewer rotates the image towards the floor at the foot of the camera what will be seen is a blank disc or a circular logo for the company that made the image. This is a very graphic representation of the navel of the virtual space, the apparent seamlessness of the digital editing or 'stitching' fails at this point and the illusion is broken at the point at which it came into being. There is a more sophisticated version of these virtual spaces in which it is possible to look at the point on the ground where the tripod and the photographer's feet should be. In these versions the blind spot is effectively erased and the viewer is left to hover in the space. The uncanny feeling that accompanies this virtual out-of-body-experience derives from the viewer being positioned at the same point to which I have given the symbol \emptyset .

⁴⁷Merleau-Ponty, M. *The Visible and the Invisible* Northwest University Press, Illinois, 1968 (1964) p248

Conclusion

This conclusion will begin with a summary of the theoretical relationship so far established between the ruin and the circular narrative. Firstly, in the spirit of the study, the end will be stitched to the beginning. The symbol \emptyset developed at the end of the study to represent the site of connection between the ruin and the circular narrative will be used to retrospectively review the argument from the beginning. The usefulness of the symbol lies in its condensing of the various concepts that can be found at this site of connection. It would be helpful to clarify precisely what is meant by this symbol – what it stands for. As a symbol standing for the connection between the ruin and the circular narrative it necessarily includes the following elements:

- The Navel.

As a point of connection and disconnection and as a mark of origin.

- The Blind Spot.

The point at which the work comes into being as the point at which it cannot be comprehended.

- The Cut.

As in an edit, the severing of the umbilical cord, castration etc.

It has also been established that the ruin and the circular narrative (and therefore \emptyset) operate at the level of primal phantasies, mainly in terms of their concern with origins. On this basis a work involving circularity (in structure) and/or ruins can be decoded or interpreted on the basis of it being organised around these primal phantasy structures.

The work that began this study, *Fantastic Ruins* described in the introduction can now be reviewed in the light of the ideas developed in the study. It can be seen to contain all the elements described above that are components of the symbol \emptyset representing the theoretical connection between the ruin and the circular narrative. It is possible to break this down into a description of how each of these elements operates within the work.

- i) The Navel. This is present in the circular structure and is elided from the slogan “a land without people for a people without land”. The apparent seamlessness of this slogan is an indication of its unreality, in much the same way that a person without a navel could not possibly be real.
- ii) The Blind Spot. This follows on directly from the last point, in that the elision of the navel involved in the slogan was a way of rendering an entire people invisible. From a formal point of view the blind spot is the patch of land on which the camera is standing – that is, the work’s actual physical point of contact with the land.
- iii) The Cut. This is the structuring event that actually makes the work in that it represents the edit by which the film loops were created. It is the act that brought together the beginning and the end; in as much as the creation of the loop fixes the incomplete buildings as both new and ruined.

All these elements are brought together in the image and idea of the ruin at the point represented by Ø.

In terms of the work, 'Circles' the presence of the above elements can also be found throughout the piece in its structure and in its use of the rhetoric of BAE Systems in which the circle represents their "seamless, global organisation". The aim of the work was to put the image of the ruin at the centre, around which a figurative circle was drawn (by literally flying in a circle). The construction site becomes the ruin, which partly stands in for the navel (as the seam) elided from the 'seamless' symbol used by BAE. In this sense the entire piece can be seen to be organised around the figure Ø in that the '/' scars the BAE symbol of the perfect circle.

The symbol may also be usefully applied to the parallel critique of Borges' *The Circular Ruins* and Marker's *La Jetee*. In the case of Borges the *navel* of the story is in the circular ruins of the title. One can speculate that, in the symbolic register of the story, the dreamed beings, not having been born from a mother, cannot possess a navel. However the protagonist and his 'son' (and presumably all his predecessors and ancestors) were created within (and ultimately by) the ruined temples. The circular temples are in ruins because they must bear the scar of disconnection/connection that marks them as the points of origin. In their ruined state, therefore they bare the evidence of the cut. The blind spot is a necessary narrative device – the character can only discover his origin as an imagined being through the act of imagining the creation of another. His not being able to see is essential for the narrative to proceed. Here then we can see the necessary elements to justify the use of the symbol Ø. As for *La Jetee*, the character must witness *without seeing* his own death in order for the story to proceed. However the real blind spot in this story is in the impossibility of the character as a boy and a man in the same place in time and space gazing into one another's eyes. On his arrival at the scene the man thinks, "in a confused way that the child he had been was due to be there too, watching..." This meeting can only take place as death – the circle can only be completed through an act of violence and the seam or scar in this circle cuts across the gaze between the man and boy.

It has been shown that the image/idea of the ruin operates within the cited works beyond the level of metaphor or theme. The ruin does not have a particular meaning that influences the overall interpretation of a work but takes the work into the register of primal phantasies. As such it operates from within the structure of the work and its traces can be found throughout it at different levels of interpretation. As an image it is, therefore, highly condensed and resembles to some degree Freud's idea of condensation in dreams. The implication of this is that its presence in the work may be unconscious. By using the image deliberately with these ideas in mind, I have attempted to test the theory while at the same time pushing at the relationship between theory and practice. It is difficult to assess with accuracy the success of

the work in these terms, however when *Circles (The Revolution Machine)* was shown in an exhibition during the study some problems came to light in the responses of the audience. A number of people said that the information I provided on the background to the work was insufficient for them to understand what the work was aiming at. Talking about the work to the audience did however have the desired effect and they fully understood what I was trying to do. This suggests that, like identifying and interpreting a condensation in a dream, reading the role of the ruin in this work involves too much knowledge of the sources included in the making of the work. This is also the case in the interpretation of dreams which must recognise the highly specific sources of the material and the subject's very particular associations.

To some extent this raises the general issue of the relationship between theory and practice in that the manifest material in the imagery cannot rely on being understood without contextual information or theoretical approaches. Unless the work is intended to only solicit an aesthetic/emotional response it is important for the artist to make the research or background to their work available to the audience in some form. This could be included in the work itself, in an accompanying statement or in the form of a talk or symposium. As has been demonstrated in this study there is a great deal of theoretical, contextual background to a piece such as *Circles* and the initial responses indicated that the audience needs more of this made available to them. It could be argued that this is one of the primary functions of this study – that is, to develop, articulate and present this background as an intrinsic part of the work. This also goes hand in hand with an approach to practice as a form of research, in which the form and content of the work is mainly determined through the formulation of questions and problems. However the most important point when addressing this aspect of theory and practice in visual art is that between the work and its context the traffic moves in both directions. This means we do not only need to understand the context in order to understand the work but also, perhaps more importantly, we should try to understand the work in order to understand the context. It is in this way that studio practice can be understood as research.

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