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**Sydney College of the Arts
The University of Sydney**

On Shifting Ground

**by
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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art**

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This volume is presented as a record of the work undertaken for the degree of
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Abstract

This research paper explores some of the transition/tension between the past and the present (old and the new) in the current socio/political transformation. Through the trajectory of my own Norwegian background, I will investigate the use of heritage and 'soft' nationalism within formation of national identity, and look at some artists' response to the current political discourse, through both their art making or writing. By investigating two distinctive symbols of national heritage, the bunad and Borre National Park, I hope to shine light on the complicated balancing act of the dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion when embracing national identity through a common history. The bunad is an increasingly popular, semi-invented national costume, and Borre is the largest burial site from the Viking era in Scandinavia. Furthermore, I will also explore social anthropological thinking around Eric Hobsbawm's concept of 'the invention of tradition'. The paper will look at the significance of the landscape and geographical identity, as well as the symbioses between place and the concept of the nation state.

Inserted into this, I will discuss some of the outcomes from the intense changeover from analogue technologies to the digital - generating new practices working across the mediums of photography, film/video and the digital. The hybrid medium specificity of the still-motion is of particular interest to my art practice. This video-formatted offspring of the slideshow allows for an expansion of the photographic medium, by viewing it through a cinematic frame, and in the process generating new narrative opportunities and registration of time. Finally, all the concerns articulated in this research will inform my final artwork exhibited in the SCA Postgraduate Degree show in December 2014; a two-piece video installation entitled *On Shifting Ground*.

Introduction

As we progressively increase our global movement (and displacement), driven by a multitude of reasons - war and persecution, in search of prosperity and financial survival, or pure curiosity ('because we can') - the acceleration of intensified contact through movement leads to changed opportunities, contradictions and even conflict, all directly affecting identity and sense of belonging, and in the process we ultimately become altered beings. This new creation of hybridity becomes an important currency of globalization - with the ethos that the better a person is able to adjust to the breaking down of traditional borders and increased multiculturalism, the greater their chances of success within these new parameters. I have an ongoing interest in this effect on cultural and geographical identity and sense of national belonging. This research paper explores this transition/tension between the past and the present (old and the new) through the trajectory of my own Norwegian background and the ongoing transformations within national identity and nationalism.

On a visit to Norway in February 2012, I became acutely aware of current cultural changes occurring in the country. The romantic idea of a perfect social democracy in the north had been shattered on July 22nd 2011 with the twin terrorist attacks on the government quarters in Oslo and the National Labor Youth camp at Utøya. That such horror could happen from within, and be facilitated by one of it's own, was utterly incomprehensible. At this time, I also realized that Norway's social and ethnic mix was undergoing profound changes.

The consequent reflection that followed these instances brought forth a new political dimension to my art practice, which at the time was established at the intersection of time, place and memory with the discourse of displacement. This research paper will over the course of four chapters explore the background for this change further, as well

as my ongoing fascination with national identity, place and the landscape. Inserted into this I will also discuss ideas around the crisis in photography that has led to an expanded field of in-between media, and in particular the “hybrid” medium specificity of the still-motion, a digitalized video-formatted offspring of the slideshow.

Chapter One will consider some of the current political trends in the aftermath of the terrorist attack in Oslo and Utøya. The event of this horror - a direct attack on the country’s liberal youth and the social democratic policies that were considered the founding platform of the modern Norwegian welfare state - brought attention to more complicated undercurrents within the discourse of national identity today. Norway had remained homogenic for longer than most other European countries, due to a geographical isolation and cold climate. However, with globalisation rapidly moving forward, traditional boundaries are blurring. As cultural, political and social structures are shifting, national identities are harder to identify and more extreme political positions are exposed.

In this context I will look at two Norwegian artists works that respond directly to this new political environment, as well as texts by Dutch artist Jonas Staal and Norwegian artist Knut Åsdam, both of whom address issues in their essays around the increased ultra nationalistic sentiment currently manifesting itself throughout Europe (and the world).

Chapter Two will examine the concept of invented tradition¹ in relation to the formation of national identity. Norway is a country with strong established cultural traditions and a firm belief in a national identity. Yet, there are complications that manifest within this discourse. I will consider this through two distinctive symbols of Norwegian national heritage - the bunad and Borre National Park. The bunad is a modernized version of traditional rural folk costumes, while Borre National Park is the

¹ A concept made prominent by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger in their 1983 book *The Invention of Tradition*.

largest burial site from the Viking era in Scandinavia. Both were of significant importance in the development of a uniquely Norwegian national identity in the late 19th century, a period considered to be the height of Romantic Nationalism. Borre and the bunad are still considered active cultural heritage in contemporary Norway, with the bunad's popularity soaring and an estimated 60% of Norwegian women now owning a costume.

Chapter Three will address some of the key elements in the ongoing change within the medium of photography, driven largely by the effects of the disappearance of analogue technologies and their digital replacement. This has propelled a variety of new hybrid digital media models working across film, video and photography. I will focus on the in-between media at the intersection of photography and the cinematic, considered to operate through two different concepts of time - the past as past (photography) and the past as reconstituted present (cinema), and how this intersection in the process creates potential for new narrative opportunities and awareness of time. Belgian artist David Claerbout explores this new perception of time in his still-motion video works. Similarly, French filmmaker Chris Marker considers time through the concept of time travelling, between the past, the present and the future in his 1962 cult sci-fi movie *La Jetée*.

In chapter four I will discuss the process of achieving a clear understanding of the project's conceptual framework and strategies for moving forward in the light of the inherent difficulties in both the undertaking of the art making and the research process when the main subject being investigated is remotely located. A central problem in this regard was how to activate the project here in Sydney prior to a scheduled field trip in semester 3 for the later part of the research project. This was primarily done by reflecting on some of the ideas anchored within (Norwegian) National Romanticism and the related artistic and philosophic representations of nature and identity (past and present). Through this process I created a space where the current geographical

location (Sydney) is 'neutralized' and potentiality is opened up for creative reflection upon this project.

The final chapter will look at the concept of place and the landscape and its impact upon national identity as well as artistic approach. There is no denying that my own geographical background of spending informative years in a remote landscape past the Arctic circle has strongly informed my art practice. To shine light on some of the core elements within this discourse, I will consider American artist Roni Horn's artistic approach and writings around her photographic work from Iceland. The concept of identity and place lies at the heart of her artistic practice. Lastly, the paper will address some of the issues around the 'latecomer' to the project, a family reunion in far north Norway in July 2014. Through the body of work *Citizens of the Twentieth Century* by August Sander, and two contemporary artworks inspired by it, I will conclude with some reflections on the intersection of the portrait, classification and the coding of time. Finally, I will discuss how these various conceptual layers within the project were addressed in the final artwork.

I do not claim exhaustiveness in any of the areas that will be discussed in this paper - each area contains enough content to have a potential for a thesis of its own. But, rather, I have sought to discuss and interrogate the ideas and currents that have informed this MFA research project and my art-making practice.

Chapter 1

Past in the Present

National identity is a modern phenomenon of a fluid and dynamic nature. While awareness of consciousness of forming a nation may remain constant for a long time, the elements upon which such feeling is based may vary.²

Montserrat Gubiernau: *The Identity of Nations*



Figure 2: Marcus Bleasdale, "Utøya Attack – Norway." 2012. Photographic image online. <http://www.marcusbleasdale.com>, Accessed October 13 2014.

² Montserrat Guibernau, *The Identity of Nations* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2007), 11.

Within the discourse of national identity, these ‘variable elements’, that Montserrat Gubiernau suggests, have in recent years become increasingly apparent in Norway. Utøya marked a turning point in the dialogue of what it means to be Norwegian in a contemporary world of cultural diversity.

There was a genuine shock amongst the general population that such right wing extremist views existed, and three days after the heinous events in Oslo and Utøya, more than 150,000 took to the streets of Oslo carrying red and white roses. The objective was to show strong national unity by openly sharing their grief and collectively supporting the victims and their families. The event became known as the *Rally of Roses*. Norwegians have a long history of this sort of coming-together, particularly on their constitutional day, *Syttende Mai* (17th of May). This was later followed by another collective event in reaction to the massacre. The accused terrorist had during the trial uttered a strong hatred for a children’s song called *Barn av regnbuen*³ (Children of the Rainbow) - claiming that this was an example of Marxist propaganda used to brainwash children into inter-cultural coupling. On April 26, 2012, 40,000 people gathered at Youngstorvet in Oslo, near the courts where the trial was ongoing, and sang the song, both in English and Norwegian, followed by a march to the courthouse where they left flowers in remembrance of the victims.

But for many, there was a need to reflect beyond the collective. What happened at Utøya had a devastating impact on people from all parts of the country. With a population of just five million, many Norwegians had at most two degrees of separation from the kids partaking in this popular national event.

Seven Voices (2011) was one artistic response to this tragic event. A K Dolven is a Norwegian artist and a professor at The National Academy of Fine Arts in Oslo. She works between London and the Lofoten Islands in northern Norway. Her work

³ The song was adopted into Norwegian by much-loved folksinger, Lille Bjorn Nielsen in 1973, from an American folk song called ‘My Rainbow Race’, originally released by Pete Seeger on his album *Rainbow Race* in 1973.

traditionally explores the notion of female beauty, the Romantic sublime and temporal transformation and is rich in art history and conceptual references. Dolven's approach is interdisciplinary and often minimalistic - crossing between site-specific sculpture, painting and film, video and photography.

Seven Voices is an interactive installation that was first shown at Gallery Bo Bjerggaard in Copenhagen in 2011 and, later the same year, installed outside MK Gallery UK. The project continues Dolven's ongoing investigation of the voice, and directly relates to her recent work with bells, *Out of Tune* (2011) and *Untuned Bell* (2010). In these works she 're-voiced' bells that have been made obsolete after hundreds of years of sounding. In *Seven Voices*, A K Dolven has recorded seven Norwegian youth (six female and one male) singing the most translated socialist hymn, 'L'Internationale' from 1871, in their own native language.⁴ But, in *Seven Voices*, she moves beyond the focus of the voice and knowingly reveals her political intention - something that is different from Dolven's normally indirect approach to politics.⁵ *Seven Voices* does have a direct link to a national tragedy; it was sung at the youth Labour camp at Utøya. But it also belongs to a worldwide socialist movement, preventing it from being localised within intimate national sentiment, and opening it up to the world beyond Norway.



Figure 3: A K Dolven, "Seven Voices," 2011. Sound installation with two speakers, black rubber cables and a cry baby. <http://www.akdolven.com/sevenvoices04.html>, Accessed June 22 2013.

⁴ A K Dolven, "A K Dolven " Accessed 15 March 2013, <http://www.akdolven.com/index.html>.

⁵ Maxa Zoller, "A K Dolven: Vertical on My Own," Accessed 2 April, 2013, <http://artnews.org/bobjerggaard/?exi=30964>.

Fourteen months later, Norway went to the polls and elected a new government, the Conservative Party (*Høyre*) in coalition with the far right Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*).⁶

In his introduction essay 'Multitude Nation' for the international group show *Grip Friheten!/Take Liberty!* exhibition catalogue (Museum of Contemporary Art Oslo 2014),⁷ Andreas Kroksnes points us in the direction of the Polish sociologist, Zygmund Bauman. In Bauman's book *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World*, he warns us about the potential cost to freedom from the privilege of living in a community - being national or other:

"Identity" means standing out: being different, and through that difference unique - so the search for identity cannot but divide and separate. And yet the vulnerability of individual identities and the precariousness of solitary identity-building prompt the identity builders to seek pegs on which they can together hang their individual fears and anxieties, and having done that, form the exorcism rites in the company of other similarly afraid and anxious individuals. Whether such peg communities provide what it is hoped the offer - collective insurance against individually confronted uncertainties - is a moot question; but no doubt marching shoulder to shoulder along a street or two, mounting a barricade in the company of others or rubbing elbows in crowded trenches may supply a momentary respite from loneliness ... Little wonder, therefore, that - as Jonathan Friedman warns us - in our globalizing world 'one thing that is not happening

⁶ The election of September 9 2013 was won by combining the Conservative Party's (*Høyre*) 26.8%, with the Progress Party's (*Fremskrittspartiet* also known as FrP) 16.3%. The incumbent Labour Party (*Arbeider partiet*) received 30.8%. Andres Behring Breivik, who was found guilty of killing 69 people at Utøya and 8 people near the government building in Oslo, was a former member of the Progress Party.

⁷ *Grip Friheten!/Take Liberty!* was part of the National Museum's 2014 commemoration of the bicentennial of the Norwegian Constitution. The exhibition displayed over 20 Norwegian and international artists who responded to the concept of personal freedom and national identity in a broad sense. A key perspective in the show seemed to be that the goal should not be a homogeneous, harmonious nation-state, but rather a continuous struggle between various and at times conflicting identities. Andreas Kroksnes, "Multitude Nation," in *Grip Friheten!/Take Liberty Exhibition Catalogue* ed. Andrea Kroksnes and Marianne Yvenes (Oslo: Nasjonalmuseet for Kunst, Arkitektur of Design, 2014), 7.

is that boundaries are disappearing. Rather they seem to be erected on every new street corner of every declining neighbourhood of our world.’⁸

One of the artists in *Grip Friheten!/Take Liberty!*, the Norwegian artist Marianne Heier, directly addresses these collective fears and boundary building responses that Bauman discusses in his book. Combining installation, performance and appropriated speech in her piece *Dear Friends* (2014), Heier recites the right wing Progress Party’s leader Siv Jensen’s speech from the 2013 election campaign, while standing amongst a dismantled classic Norwegian post-war Moelven-brakke (pre-made building module).

There is a contradiction between the current mood in politics and the more traditional perspective of the Norwegian spirit of hard work, sobriety, generosity towards others and the sharing of wealth - which is believed to underpin the country’s social/political success since the 1960s.

In her performance, Heier dismantles Jensen’s linguistic pretence by reciting the text at a slower pace and in a softer voice. Jensen’s original speech was delivered in a somewhat aggressive and urgent way - with a deliberate attempt to exploit collective fears under the pretext of security⁹ - the threat of the foreigner, the terrorist, the economic refugee.¹⁰

Dear friends! Dear fellow celebrators! Congratulations on our fortieth anniversary!
Forty years of serving the cause of lower taxes and less government intervention. Of fighting for the individual! For freedom! Against established opinion. For a society where the state does not intervene, but does provide help. For a society where the government exerts less but better control. Safe streets. Safe society. Safe homes. Safety

⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, *Community: Seeking Safety in an Insecure World* (Cambridge: Polity, 2001), 16.

⁹ FrP has a long history of this sort of rhetoric: during the 1987 election campaign, the then chairman Carl I Hagen made a public speech quoting from what became known as the Mustafa-letter. Hagen declared he had received a letter from a group of “Muslim evildoers” - declaring their intent to transform Norway into a Muslim state and replace all churches with mosques. Following Hagen’s speech, Frp had their best election to date with 12% of the votes. The letter was later proven to be false and Hagen forced to apologize. The real Mustafa later sued Carl I Hagen and an out of court settlement was agreed. Bjørn K Bore, “Da Verden Kom Til Norge,” *Dagbladet*, 16/08/2003.

¹⁰ Krogsnes, “Multitude Nation,” 125.

in our daily affairs. Which is why the police force matters! Why visible policing within the community matters. Why police patrols matter! ... Or when criminal asylum seekers without a right of residence in Norway hang out along the Aker River in Oslo dealing drugs to young people. Then the system is getting in the way of reason. Which is why we will guarantee a job to every newly qualified police officer. Because we need them! It is only by appointing more police officers that we will enlarge the police force! This is the only way we can make our citizens safe in their everyday lives. Which is why we will invest in new and modern equipment. In weapons. Helicopters. Cars. Technology. And it is why we will establish closed reception centres for asylum seekers. Because we want control of those who enter Norway! We want control until we have clarified their status. Once a right to reside in Norway has been granted, then things are different. But those who are refused residence permits must leave! And the only effective means to ensure they do is closed reception centres. And this is why we will provide the police intelligence service with greater resources. To prevent terror in Norway. It is this that makes us safe! It is this that makes everyday life easier for the citizens of this country.¹¹



Figure 4: Marianne Heier, "Dear Friends." The artist performing amongst remains of a modular Moelven barrack at the opening of the Lorck Schive's Art Prize 2014 at Trondheim kunstmuseum. The speech was played as sound recording during the rest of the exhibition period. <http://marianneheier.no/?project=dear-friends>. Photo: Marius Meli/ Trondheim kunstmuseum. Accessed June 12 2014.

¹¹ Excerpt from Siv Jensen's speech to FrP's congress in May 2013. Performed at the opening of the Lorck Schive Prize exhibition at Trondheim Kunstmuseum, October 2013 (Marianne Heier was one of two recipients of the Lock Schive Prize 2013, each receiving approximately US\$40,000) and Grip *Friheten!/Take Liberty!* opening April 2014 at Museum of Contemporary Art Oslo. Marianne Heier, "Marianne Heier," Accessed 23 October 2013, <http://marianneheier.no/>.

There is an increasing trend towards this sort of language within what is considered more populist mainstream right-wing parties throughout Europe - including the National Front in France, UK Independence Party and the Danish People's Party. These, and what Dutch political artist Jonas Staal calls in his essay 'To Make a World, Part I: Ultrationalism and the Art of the Stateless State' other ultrationalistic parties, have been seeking to collectively stand against the European Union, and in Le Pen's words: 'Make the EU disappear and be replaced by a Europe of nations that are free and sovereign.'¹² Staal argues that these ultrationalistic parties are locating much of their arguments around the discourse of the EU's "failings" on both immigration and economic prosperity, employing shameless rhetoric like 'Danish for the Danish - culturally as well as economically' (Danish People Party) and Marine Le Pen (National Front) calling the Muslim community 'the new anti-Semitic danger of the twenty-first century.'¹³ The latter statement faced strong opposition - even the far right collective considered its anti-Semitic content too strong. This, alongside other comments like the one made by Dutch Geert Wilder (Freedom Party) that Dutch-born Muslims should be returned to their "country of origin", are what is currently still preventing the far right from achieving enough mandates to 'deliver the final blow to the supra-nationalist managerial project of the European Union'.¹⁴

In 2002 the Danish artist collective Superflex made an artwork in connection with exhibitions held in Denmark, Sweden and Austria. In response to the growing anti immigration sentiment in the country, they turned the question of who should fear whom on its head. These posters featured the ironic text 'Foreigners, please don't leave us alone with the Danes!' and were strategically placed along streets in Odense, Copenhagen, Malmö and Linz. Part of the work was later exhibited in *Grip Friheten!/Take Liberty! (2014)*

¹²Jonas Staal, "To Make a World, Part I: Ultrationalism and the Art of the Stateless State," *e-flux online* 57 (2014): <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/to-make-a-world-part-i-ultrationalism-and-the-art-of-the-stateless-state/>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 5: Superflex, "Foreigners Please Don't Leave Us Alone with the Danes!", 2002. Poster and a pile of flyers, from 'Grip Friheten!/Take Liberty!' Nasjonalmuseet for Kunst, Arkitektur of Design, Oslo, 2014. Photo: Ellen Dahl.

In his essay 'Nationalism: Persistence and Political Upkeep', Norwegian artist Knut Åsdam examines the narrative in today's populist nationalism - with its growing anti-immigrant sentiment and xenophobia.¹⁵ Åsdam brings up two decisive points regarding the contemporary spread of more soft (mainstream) nationalism. The first one is that this might be considered as a firewall against the more extreme ideologically far right parties, who are often considered too incompatible with mainstream thinking (too xenophobic, too racist and often linked to violence). The idea is that the populist mainstream nationalism will create a catchment for more centre-right-wing thinking, and therefore abate the need for more radical views to be voiced. But the other side of the argument is that this sort of populist far right thinking might neutralise more xenophobic nationalist opinions by allowing for a more generally accepted forum for these sorts of ideas to flourish. Both the populist far right and the more extremist right wing national narratives are anchored in the concept of the nation-state and the

¹⁵ Knut Åsdam, "Nationalism: Persistence and Political Upkeep," *Journal* no. 57 (2014).

connection to the history of the land (real or invented). The more populist far-right might channel this sort of national sentiment to form the basis for what they consider democratic politics, while the more extreme right-wing might utilise a similar platform to promote a more totalitarian approach to their politics. In his essay, Åsdam shines light on the Norwegian common thought of an ‘innocent’, soft nationalism - ‘that celebrates the “good” aspect of a Norway’s society.’¹⁶ This somewhat naive way to commemorate a country’s national identity and togetherness is often considered independent of current politics - which of course isn’t possible, since the historical fact is, as Åsdam so correctly points out, that the idea of the nation-state is political and not the source of culture in and of itself. This renewed desire to standardise identity within nationalism and religious revivalism is, in Thomas Hylland Eriksen’s words, ‘a feature of modernity, not tradition, although it is frequently dressed in traditional garb’.¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "An Overheated World," Accessed April 23 2014, <http://www.sv.uio.no/sai/english/research/projects/overheating/publications/overheated-world.pdf>.

Chapter 2

The Bunad

While packing my bags to leave my suburban Norwegian home and move to the US for three years, my mother was wondering if I had packed my bunad. I told her that I couldn't fit it in my luggage, so we would have to organize it to follow me later. After all it was only August.

My mother was not particularly old-fashioned or naïve, but rather a typical modern middle class Norwegian woman - relatively well travelled and well informed. Norway has a long tradition of embracing its cultural heritage to underpin its national identity both at home and when abroad. My bunad made it to the US and was proudly worn at my graduation in California.



Figure 6: Ellen Dahl, Author with friends at Brooks Institute of Photography, California 1992.

The bunad dates back to the period of Norwegian Romantic Nationalism in the mid 19th century. During this period, the Scandinavian upper classes, under the influence of German culture of the time, had taken a liking to traditional rural farmers' folk attire from pre-industrial times. But this nostalgic fashion didn't last long - except in Norway. Here the national sentiment was at its peak, as Norway was looking for independence from Sweden, embracing all things traditional, rural and Norwegian. Cultural historian Nina Witoszek describes this national drive ("the rustification of Norway")¹⁸ in her book *The Origins of the 'Regime of Goodness'*:

As well as National Romanticism, Norway has had "liberal romanticism", "vitalist romanticism", "social-realist romanticism" and "regional romanticism" to mention a few subspecies. There is hardly anything left, so romantic is Norway's cultural heritage and so rhapsodic her people.¹⁹

But there was some resistance to this romantic idea of making women wear traditional folk costumes to celebrate the nation, particularly among younger women who found these traditional outfits tasteless and uncomfortable. In the magazine *Youth* in 1899, a girl named Gudrun wrote that the national folk costumes made 'the most handsome of youth look like a hag.'²⁰

Still, the national activist Hulda Garborg believed in the need for a Norwegian formal outfit and began gathering and systemising rural costume traditions.²¹ She then redesigned and modernised this into the first bunad at the beginning of 1900. Interestingly, she never denied that this partly invented, modern approach to a national

¹⁸ Nina Witoszek, *The Origins of the "Regime of Goodness": Remapping the Cultural History of Norway* (Oslo: Universitets forlaget, 2011), 75.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

²⁰ My translation from Norwegian: 'Ymse nasjonaldrakter er so smaklause og utenelege, at sjølv den stautaste ungdom vert som et hespetre i dei.' By Gunnar Gran, "Hulda Diktet Opp Folkedrakter," *Aftenbladet*, 5/11/2013.

²¹ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Keeping the Recipe: Norwegian Folk Costumes and Cultural Capital," Accessed 24 October 2013, <http://folk.uio.no/geirthe/Bunad.html>.

dress somewhat contradicted her strong emphasis on the importance of the traditional rural Norwegian identity. Eric Hobsbawm called this contradiction ‘invented traditions’:

‘Invented traditions’ is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual of symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past. In fact, where possible, they normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past.²²

This idea of invention was an important part of the 19th century formation of nations. Hobsbawm suggests that European nationalism shifted from a democratic union to a more radical paradigm (more right wing) by defining a nation more on ethnicity and race.²³ Nina Witoszek questions the extent of this, arguing that ‘the postulate that nations are invented reduces history to an ideological construction that serves the particular interest of particular groups’, suggesting that it is subject to insufficient ideological critique.²⁴ She suggests that invented traditions within nationalism are no more invented than other kinds of culture, social organisations and ideology, and adds that ‘these stories are not so much contingents or ad-hoc in Eric Hobsbawm’s sense as they are narrative and symbolic “habits” transmitted from generation to generation and resonating with the past.’²⁵ This does not invalidate the idea, but instead recommends that it should include a greater emphasis on local contexts.²⁶ Recent commentators like Anthony Smith and Jon Hutchinson have expanded on this view of the *Staatsnation* (nation state) and political nationalism, to include a second definition of nationalism, *Kulturnation* (culture state). This is important in understanding the Norwegian model,

²² Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 1.

²³ Daniel M Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity* (Woodbridge; Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 2006), 13.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵ Witoszek, *The Origins of the "Regime of Goodness": Remapping the Cultural History of Norway*, 15.

²⁶ Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity*, 14.

as Norway was not a strong socio-economic country at this time, but rather a poor and underpopulated country on the fringes of Europe,²⁷ and any emphasis on cultural heritage (invented or not) became crucial in the development of Norwegian independence and national identity.

The consensus is that cultural nationalism is a regressive force, a product of intellectuals from backward societies, who, when confronted by more scientifically advanced cultures, compensate for feelings of inferiority by retreating into history to claim descent from a once great civilisation. Somehow or other, cultural nationalism, it is argued, is functional for the formation of nations in such backward cultures, but in itself cannot shape their path to socio-political modernisation.²⁸

Hulda Garbor's creation was a success, and in 1905 it took over from the much-loved traditional costume of Hardanger as the official Norwegian National Costume. By mid 1900 this had catapulted a trend of creating bunads for all regions of the country, and there is now an official bunad for each of the 19 counties of Norway, as well as hundreds of more localized bunads representing an array of small communities.

There is a distinct difference in both look and authenticity between the bunad and folk costumes. The folk costumes were rural everyday outfits dating back to the middle ages, while the bunad is a festive attire worn at formal celebrations like weddings, baptism, confirmations, Christmas Eve and, most importantly, Constitution Day on May 17.

Norway had an official Lutheran state church until 15 May 2012, and included annual religious celebrations as an integral part of the national curriculum. This stems from the overlapping of National Romanticism and Pastoral Enlightenment in the mid 1800s - traditionally placing nature, Christianity and peace at the core of the Norwegian being. Paradoxically, this does not make modern Norway any more religious than other

²⁷ Thomas Hylland Eriksen, "Norwegians and Nature," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs article series* (1996).

²⁸ Grimley, *Grieg: Music, Landscape and Norwegian Identity*, 14.

Northern European countries; but rather that national traditions and the concept of heritage have become the focus of belief.

From the early 20 century, the situation has become even more complex. Referring to previous work by Astrid Oxaal, the Norwegian social anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen states:

The bunad is an important, traditionalist symbol of modern Norwegianness. Most of these costumes are clearly related to regional and minority folk costumes from Central and Eastern Europe, and the German influence has often been commented upon. More importantly, the bunad confirms Norwegian identity as an essential rural one, where personal integrity is connected to roots and regional origins.²⁹

This connection to place and the landscape is an important marker of Norwegian identity. I do believe that when a Norwegian puts on her (and sometime his) bunad in a foreign place, it is the countryside of their home town, the fjords, the snow capped mountains and the smell of spring that they psychologically connect with - even today. Modern Norwegian society might be changing, but nature still has a constant presence in the national psyche. Nature is what Nina Witoszek calls a 'perpetuum mobile' - a semiotic centre around which everything moves.³⁰

Strict rules have been set in place by the Norwegian Institute of Bunad and Folk Costume (NBF), and an advisory board was established in 1947. This academic board is appointed and funded by the Ministry of Culture. Since NBF was established, they have collected a vast knowledge around the bunad; the website states that they have 55,000 different patterns of bunad and folk costumes in their database.³¹

²⁹ Eriksen, "Keeping the Recipe: Norwegian Folk Costumes and Cultural Capital".

³⁰ Witoszek, *The Origins of the "Regime of Goodness": Remapping the Cultural History of Norway*, 19.

³¹ Eriksen, "Keeping the Recipe: Norwegian Folk Costumes and Cultural Capital".

Bunads are expensive to make, with hand-embroidered details on natural fabrics like wool, silk and linen, and a variety of accessories from ornate silver jewellery, belts, hats, shawls and sashes. The total cost of buying a bunad from the traditional Husfliden supplier (i.e. Norwegian made) amounts to somewhere between \$5,000 and \$10,000. It is today estimated that more than 60% of Norwegian women own one of these outfits.³² The number among men is considerably lower, but is on the rise among modern, urban men between the ages of 20 and 40. This means that about an average of one third of Norwegians own a bunad.³³ There are complex issues of identity within the bunad discourse: can it truly move forward from being such a homogenic tradition to a more open and inclusive one? Given that modern Norway now has become a strong socio-economic nation, is the bunad's contemporary surge in popularity more in line with Hobsbawm's original theory of invented tradition, rather than the original drive to elevate the rural Norwegian identity in the fight for independence from Denmark and Sweden? Both neighbouring countries were considered at the time to be more cosmopolitan, or less "backward societies" to quote John Hutchinson.³⁴ This becomes particularly complex when driven by pure nostalgia - relinquishing critical thinking for nationalistic emotional bonding. Svetlana Boym explains this in *The Future of Nostalgia*:

Nostalgia is paradoxical in the sense that longing can make us more empathetic towards fellow humans, yet the moment we try to repair longing with belonging, the apprehension of loss with a rediscovery of identity, we often part ways and put an end to mutual understanding. Algia - longing - is what we share, yet nostos - the return home - is what divides us ... Unreflected nostalgia breeds monsters. Yet the sentiment itself, the mourning of displacement and temporal irreversibility, is at the very core of the modern condition.³⁵

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Many Norwegians believe the contemporary political and financial success of Norway today is deeply rooted with this national identification with a rural and fugal (Lutheran) value system - to the point of smugness.

³⁵ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 10.

Traditional bunad guidelines suggest that one should choose an outfit from where one is born, or from where one's parents or grandparents were born. They are often handed down through generations, and therefore confirm one's attachment to place and bloodlines. But this has become somewhat problematic, as globalization escalates and Norway becomes an increasingly more multicultural society. In response, NBF recommendations now include the possibility of choosing a bunad from the area you currently live in, with the qualification: 'That you must be prepared for people asking you about your connection to the place of origin of your bunad'.³⁶

The contemporary method for approving bunad designs is far more conservative than Garborg's modernized vision of 1903. NBF argues that the main objective in our day and age is that the outfit should be as good a copy as possible of a local folk costume as it was used in a particular historical period.³⁷ This means that many of the more recently created outfits tend to be more simple and humble than some of the earlier creations. There have been many conflicts over the years about authenticity, including defenders of the simpler costume (perceived as a more authentic representation of poor, rural mountain traditions) versus the more colourful and festive ones - 'overloaded with silver and embroideries'.³⁸ This also exposes the many layers within of the bunad discourse - from the romantic idea of bringing together a united proud rural nation, to the bunad being a status symbol of the wealthy modern Norway, and its potentiality for promoting segregation of class and race.

³⁶ "Norsk Institutt for Bunad Og Folkedrakt," Accessed 14 October 2013, <http://www.bunadogfolkedrakt.no/>.

³⁷ Eriksen, "Keeping the Recipe: Norwegian Folk Costumes and Cultural Capital".

³⁸ Ibid.



Figure 7: Ellen Dahl, "Untitled." 2014. Photograph.

Chapter 3

Borre National Park

Perhaps one of the most important aspects of the construction of the 19th century Norwegian identity was the use of archaeology. In Borre National Park, by the inlet of the fjord leading to the capital Oslo, we find Scandinavia's largest number of burial mounds from the Viking. It was long believed that this was the burial site of the Norwegian kings descending from the Yngling dynasty (the oldest known Scandinavian dynasty) as told in Icelander Snorri Sturlason's *Heimskringla: History of Kings of Norway*, often referred to as 'The Sagas'. This belief had been an important part of developing Norway's sense of national pride as an independent country in Scandinavia, with its own unique history. Having previously been under both Swedish and Danish rule, this played strongly into the Norwegian identity after 1900.

Heimskringla was written around 1230, when Snorri Sturlason returned to Iceland after spending a couple of years in Norway. During this time, he visited the town of Tønsberg, and was most likely exposed to the nearby burial mounds in Borre.³⁹ Snorri based much of his writings on remnants of skaldic praise poems from the 10th century. By connecting Borre to the Yngling dynasty, he also made it of considerable importance to the unification of the kingdom of Norway. The High King, Harald Hairfair (*Harald Hårfagre*)⁴⁰ was of direct Yngling decent, and was considered in *Heimskringla* to be the first king of Norway from 860 to 933.

³⁹ Bjørn Myhre, "The Significance of Borre: Necropolis of National or Foreign Rulers?," in *Heritage and Identity: Shaping the Nations of the North*, ed. J Magnus Fladmark (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Donhead, 2002), 20.

⁴⁰ Harald Hairfair, according to *Heimskringla*, was the son of Halfdan the Black and Ragnhild, and he was believed to have fought his way through a large part of the country, defeating the local chieftains, before declaring it one kingdom - including the annexed Orkney and Shetland. The name Hairfair is of a more romantic nature: it is believed to be result of a vow he made after his marriage proposal to Gyda was rejected with the comment that she would not marry Harald before he "was king over all of Norway", and he therefore would not cut or comb his hair until he succeeded 10 years later.

Borre was of relatively little significance between 1200 and 1800. Only in 1852 was there a minor renewed interest in the site - after the first archaeological Viking ship dig by Nicolay Nicolaysen had taken place at Borre. The mound *Skipshaugen* (The Ship-mound) was first discovered by road-workers, who unfortunately inflicted significant damage to the site - and in the end the find drew little enthusiasm or financial support. And in 1880, *Skipshaugen* was completely overshadowed by the excavation of a ship in a substantially better condition at Gokstad, followed by the spectacular Oseberg dig.



Figure 8: Vestfold County Council online. "The Oseberg Dig." September 2 1904. Three months into the excavation of Oseberg. <http://www.vfk.no/Tema-og-tjenester/Kulturarv/Vestfoldhistorie-artikkel/Vikinghistorie/Oseberghaugen/>. Photo: Olaf Væring, Accessed October 16 2014.

Oseberg became particularly important - one might say it was found at “the right time” in 1904 - a year before Norway gained its independence.⁴¹ This fed straight into the political climate at the time and provided a strong link between archaeology and

⁴¹ Barbara G Scott, "Archaeology and National Identity: The Norwegian Example," *Scandinavian Studies* 68, no. 3 (1996): 325.

national identity. During this time *Heimskringla* also became readily available through extra state funding towards distribution of the Sagas.

Borre was brought out of the shadows in 1915 by Anton Wilhelm Brøgger, professor of archaeology at the University of Oslo. He published his book on the importance of Borre and its Viking king graves in 1916, confirming Snorri's connection between Borre and the Ynglings dynasty - with Brøgger going even further by claiming that Harald Hairfair's father, Halfdan the Black, is buried in *Skipshaugen*. He consequently declared that Borre is 'the cradle of Norway's unification'⁴², and in the midst of an ongoing national awakening Brøgger made it his mission to turn Borre into a public park of significant national relevance.

The Borre site became Norway's first heritage park in 1932 and was named The National Park by King Haakon 7 on June 19th. During the elaborate celebration held to mark the occasion, Brøgger made a speech filled with nationalistic sentiment, highlighting his previous claims that 'archaeology, together with history should play an ideological role in strengthening the national culture', citing that The National Park (Borre) was the perfect example of this.⁴³

Unfortunately this sort of sentiment was easily manipulated to fit into the ideological ideas of *Nasjonal Samling* (National Union) - a Norwegian Fascist party under the leadership of Vidkun Quisling.⁴⁴ NS held their annual gathering in the park (The Borre Rally) from 1935 to 1944, during the Whitsun celebrations.

⁴² Terje Østigård and Terje Gansum, "Viking Tiden På Borre: Hvordan Har Fortiden Blitt Brukt Og Formidlet?," in *Tankar Om Ursprung*, ed. Samuel Edquist, Lars Hermanson, and Stefan Johanson (Stockholm: The museum of national antiquities Stockholm, 2009), 259.

⁴³ Myhre, "The Significance of Borre: Necropolis of National or Foreign Rulers?," 22.

⁴⁴ Vidkun Quisling (1887 - 1945), a Norwegian army officer and later a politician, whose alliance with the Nazis during World War II (1939 - 1945) made his name synonymous with traitor. In the 1930s he found the National Union, a fascist party that received subsidies from Germany. After the Nazi invasion of Norway in 1940 (encouraged by Quisling), he declared himself head of government. The Germans installed Quisling as prime minister in Norway in 1942 and throughout the war he collaborated with the Nazis. Quisling was held responsible

Quisling borrowed heavily from Brøgger's hypothesis during these rallies, believing that Borre was a great symbol of Norway's incredible Viking past - speaking of the value 'of bringing renewed life to the history we are born from and protect against damaging impulses taking hold of the Norwegian folk-soul.'⁴⁵ It is important to mention that Brøgger never associated with NS, and was incarcerated during the war.

After WWII, Borre fell back into the shadows, with the park now framed by the memories of wartime and Nazi propaganda. By exploiting Borre's historical associations, NS had destroyed much of the original meaning of the place and its importance in the building of a national identity.⁴⁶ But this was not the final chapter of the story of Borre.

Between 1988 and 1992 archaeologist Bjørn Myhre - in collaboration with the Institute of Archaeology at Oslo University - embarked on a new round of excavations in the park, looking at the burial site chronology and its cultural, economic and political history. Myhre established that the site was from 600. This was 200 years earlier than stated in Snorri's *Heimskringla* - which had been paramount to most of previous archaeological and historical theories on Borre. The implication of this discovery radically changes Borre's history. Most importantly, this indicates that it is not members of the Yngling dynasty who were buried there, and consequently it is not the cradle of the unification of Norway.

for sending nearly 1,000 Jews to die in concentration camps. He was tried and executed after the war. Encyclopædia Britannica Online, "Vidkun Quisling," Accessed 9 September 2014, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/487555/Vidkun-Quisling>.

⁴⁵ My translation from Norwegian; quoting a speech by Quisling printed in the local paper *Gjengangeren* in 1943: "Å levendegjøre det livsgrunnlag som vi er vokst fram av, og hindre at skadelige impulser får innpass og tærer på folkesjelen." Østigård and Gansum, "Viking Tiden På Borre: Hvordan Har Fortiden Blitt Brukt Og Formidlet?," 260.

⁴⁶ Helmut Anheier and Yudhishtir Raj Isar, eds., *Heritage, Memory & Identity* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 2011), 23.

The mounds are more likely part of a cemetery for local chieftains, or even Danish overlords. *Viken*, the old name for the county of the Oslo fjord, was not even considered Norwegian at the time, but under Danish occupation. Myrhe concluded that the mounds have repeatedly been plundered and reused as burial sites throughout history - making Borre and its mounds more a symbol for history's struggles for power and politics - rather than the previous constructed myth of the site as the birthplace of a unified national identity.

Borre cannot any longer be used to create a Norwegian identity, but it is a brilliant example how a heritage has been used and misused to legitimize specific political and ideological identities. The site can also teach archaeologists and historians the lesson that ancient monuments in themselves are not evidence of the past, it is the history of the past that we ascribe to them that matters.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Myrhe, "The Significance of Borre: Necropolis of National or Foreign Rulers?," 28.



Figure 9: Borreminne online. "Ns 8 Borre Rally in The National Park." Poster for NS Borre Rally June 1943. Artist unknown. 5000 copies. <http://borreminne.hive.no/aargangene/1997/14-NSNasjonalparken.htm>. Harolden Annonsebyrå A/S, Accessed October 8 2014.

Chapter 4

Still-Motion

With globalization's increased forward push, the search for frameworks to define 'identity' is progressively manifesting itself across many fields. The medium of photography is at an intense crossroad - with the disappearance of analogue technologies and its digital replacement - creating 'old photography' and 'new photography'. The photographic object today is experiencing a severe on-going transformation, a sort of mid-life crisis. With the current flood of imagery resulting from this digital transformation and everything image-based being considered a photograph, photography itself has been foreclosed and dismissed - confused by the loss of much of its theoretical framework, and 'outmoded technologically and displaced aesthetically'.⁴⁸ Simultaneously, the analogue is still haunting the digital, with constant references to photographic output quality and authenticity within the work. This crisis within the medium is generating new photographic practices working across the mediums of photography, film/video and the digital - often described as the in-between media. In this chapter I will look closer at the use of still images in sequence to create a new experience of motion and/or time. The most common medium in this montage/editing format is the slideshow.⁴⁹ But to expand the concept and allowing the use of multiple media inserted into this 'slideshow format', I will call it still-motion.⁵⁰ This opens up for the use of sound, the mixing of still photography and video and the use of projection other than the slide carousel.

⁴⁸ George Baker, "Photography's Expanded Field," *October* 114 (2005): 121.

⁴⁹ The slide projection dates back to the magic lantern in the 17th century, and then in 19th century the emergence of the use of successive display in both chronophotography and modern film. In the 1960s, many artists turned to the use of the slide projector, considered to be less loaded with medium specificity and a way to deskill and homogenize production (cheaper and readily available) that was in line with then current conceptual thinking within artistic practice. T J Demos, "Slideshow," *Artforum international* 43, no. 9 (2005).

⁵⁰ The term still-motion was inspired by Kate Beckman and Jean Ma's book *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, a collection of essays by a diverse group of scholars discussing the intersection of photography and cinema. I'm not referring to the cinematic method of still-motion, where images are rapidly shown after one another to create an intense, unnerving effect, often used in horror films.



Figure 11: David Claerbout, "Highway Wreck." 2013. Single channel video, HD animation, black&white, silent. Johnen Galerie, Berlin, 14. <http://davidclaerbout.com/filter/work/Highway-Wreck-2013>. Photo Jens Ziehe, Accessed September 29 2014.

In his theory on cinema, Gilles Deleuze identifies montage⁵¹ as one of the fundamental components of cinema and image making. Through the montage 'divergent aspects of an image are brought into proximity and linked together'.⁵² By disruption or synchronisation, the morphological process of montage communicates variable positions for the image to change and be experienced - both in space and time - whether we understand this in what Felicity Coleman calls 'historical, cultural, geo-physical or chronometric time'.⁵³ Therefore the montage embodies the project's determination as a whole. This, argues Deleuze, is what gives us the image of time, and 'the montage is therefore the principal act of cinema'.⁵⁴ Consequently one could argue the importance

⁵¹ Montage: refers to a technique of putting different filmic sequences together or an editing format.

⁵² Felicity Colman, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Film Concepts* (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 59.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁴ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (London: Continuum, 2005), 33.

of the montage in the creation of the perceptual phenomena of the still-motion's temporal presentation.

Susan Sontag calls the photograph an object of contemplation - as they allow the spectator an unlimited time to gaze (a privileged moment) - and she further suggests that photographs might be 'more memorable than moving images, because they are a slice of time, not a flow.'⁵⁵ What happens, then, when the images become a flow of photographs? So, rather than the traditionally presented side-by-side photographs on walls (or in books), they are now presented one after another in the form of a still-motion - operating between the past (photography) and present (the moving image). Or, to borrow from Ann Banfield - instead of the *there-then* and the *here-now*, calling it '*this was now here*'.⁵⁶

Photography is now viewed through the frame of cinema - where meaning no longer only exists inside of a single framed image, but in relation to other photographs/images and (possibly) sound. In his essay 'The Play between Still and Moving Images: Nineteenth-Century "Philosophical Toys" and Their Discourse', Tom Gunning explains the theory of movement paradoxically explained through persistence:

That motion picture devices all employ a continuous series of stills drawings or photographs depicting separate phases of an action on some sort of material support. A device moves these images through some sort of viewer at a sufficient speed to create what is often called "apparent motion".⁵⁷

This is called in cinematic terms 'persistence of vision' - relating to the 'afterimage' effect of the object outline that lingers when an image is removed, and will provide a

⁵⁵ Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1979), 17.

⁵⁶ David Green and Joanna Lowry, eds., *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image* (Brighton: Photoworks / Photoforum, 2006), 17.

⁵⁷ Eivind Røssaak, ed. *Between Stillness and Motion: Film, Photography & Algorithms*, Film Culture in Transition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2011), 29.

link to the next image. This does not appear when the eye or image moves in 'normal' time or circumstances - as this would make a simple task like reading an arduous task. Conceptual psychologist R L Gregory defines afterimages as 'the continuing firing of the optic nerve after stimulation'.⁵⁸

By controlling the order in which the still images are presented and the length of time the images are projected and revealed, and the transitions between them, the artist can generate new narrative opportunities and a new registration of time. By colliding these instances of time, a new in-between time is created, challenging what Edward S Casey calls 'the monolinear view of time' - through a disruption of the 'dispersal and disintegration as each instant arises and dies away'.⁵⁹

It is impossible to discuss the subject of the still-motion without including Chris Marker's classic film *La Jetée* (1962). Made entirely from still images (except for one small moving image towards the end the film), it is a photo-roman in its simplest form - the story told by a voiceover. And, according to Diane Arnaud, for the following 50 plus years since it was made, any use of sequenced images (including freeze frame or photographs), either at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of a film, has been considered 'after *La Jetée*'.⁶⁰

This remarkable film tells of a man going back to the past, through an underground time-travel experiment, to secure the future in a post-apocalyptic world (World War III). It also tells of the same mans desire to resolve his own fragmented memories of the past - presented in the film, in Darsie Alexander's words, 'as stills arranged like fragments that never quite cohere'.⁶¹ Marker uses photography as the embodiment of

⁵⁸ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁹ Edward S Casey, *Remembering: A Phenomenological Study* (Bloomington, IN USA: Indiana University Press, 2000; repr., 2nd), 182.

⁶⁰ Laurent Guido and Olivier Lugon, eds., *Between Still and Moving Images* (Bloomington, IN: John Libbey Publishing, 2012), 261.

⁶¹ Darsie Alexander, *Slide Show: Projected Images in Contemporary Art* (Univeristy Park PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2005), 13.

the flashback (the past) - and, in the process, highlights the intricate connection between the fragmentation of photography and the forward push of the moving image. This effect of the past running in the present, creates in the spectator a consciousness of the image and its transmission that might be greater than of what is depicted - inducing 'a consciousness of image as pure substance of time',⁶² therefore staging the becoming and unbecoming of images. Yet, *La Jetée* goes further than flashbacks, and as eloquently noted by Janet Harbour in her book *Chris Marker: La Jetée* 'takes us in less than 29 minutes into a projected present, a fabricated past and imagined future.'⁶³ It is this triad of time that is a key element of Belgian David Claerbout's artistic practice, which I examine later in this chapter.



Figure 10: Chris Marker, "La Jetée." 1962. French science fiction featurette; 28 min. entre.com/vertigo_magazine/issue-30-spring-2012-godard-is/the-interventions-of-jean-luc-godard-and-chris-marker/, Accessed August 17 2014.

⁶² Translation of Philippe Dubois quote in Guido and Lugon, *Between Still and Moving Images*, 261.

⁶³ Janet Harbord, *Chris Marker: La Jetée* (London, Cambridge, Mass: Afterall Books, Distribution, MIT Press, 2009), 4.

Susan Sontag is right in calling photographs an object of contemplation, but I believe that, when the tension between motion and stasis is activated in the form of the still-motion, it opens up a wider potentiality of contemplation - or as, argued in Kate Beckman and Jean Ma introduction to *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*, it actually 'produces an interval in which rigorous thinking can emerge'.⁶⁴ They further suggest that through the uneasy experience of being out of sync with the now as often induced by the still-motion, it is closely connected to our social and political experience - 'a belated relation to time that passes too quickly, or an inability to catch up with a future that arrives too early.'⁶⁵ In a globalized era, artists working within film, photography and video might increasingly explore this political dimension to the still-moving. By seeking interpretations beyond 'movement', it can create artistic framework and space for reflection and expression in today's environment of increased global transformation and deterritorialization.⁶⁶

The rapid proliferation of photographic images, now readily available through the digital revolution, somewhat undermines traditional photographic theory. Many of the classic theoretical essays cover the intersection of photography, recording of the past (the absent), memory and death. Today we consider the field no longer ruled by the iconic indexicality, Barthes's confirmation of 'what has been' or Bazin's 'mummification desire' (to freeze time).⁶⁷ In 1996 American artist Nan Goldin reflected on the troublesome relationship between photography, memory and the remembrance of

⁶⁴ Karen Beckman and Jean Ma, eds., *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁶ Deterritorialization is considered a central feature of globalization - as a proliferation of translocalized cultural experience, suggesting increased social forms of contact and involvement that expands beyond the boundaries of a specific territory. 'Which takes us to a closer involvement with the external, which generates closeness in distance, and to a relative distancing from what is close': Gil-Manmuel Hernández i Martí, "The Deterritorialization of Cultural Heritage in a Globalized Modernity," *The Institut Ramon Llull online* (2013): 93.

⁶⁷ Mette Sandbye, "It Has Not Been - It Is. The Signalitic Transformation of Photography," *Journal of Aesthetics and Culture* 4 (2012).

death that had underpinned much of the previous critical thinking in the field. She writes in the afterword of *Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1996):

... photography doesn't preserve memory as effectively as I thought it would. A lot of people in the book are dead now, mostly from Aids. I had thought that I could stave off loss through photographing. I always thought if I photographed anyone or anything enough, I would never lose the person. I would never lose the memory, I would never lose the place. But the pictures showed me how much I've lost.⁶⁸

Contemporary photo media artists might still concern themselves with one or more of these traditional frameworks, but it also exists within a new photographic environment, where photography has become part of lived life as a performative device. Making it 'more a social everyday activity than a memory - embalming activity'⁶⁹ - with the endless possibilities of post-photographic effects effectively allowing the reality to be re-written. This means that photography and film no longer can be known as the "reality - truth", or what Andre Bazin calls the "haute couture" of reality.⁷⁰ The loss of this credibility therefore leaves little difference between the recording of reality and the creation of reality - we cannot know for sure if we are looking at a construct or not - often playing tricks with our spatiotemporal consciousness. The still-motion further destabilizes this experience by placing the spectator somewhere between memory and anticipation and, in T J Demos's words, 'exposing an indeterminate zone between the autonomy of the single frame photograph and the uninterrupted continuity of filmic illusion.'⁷¹

David Claerbout approaches this issue of un-certainty through the reality of duration - the time spent as a spectator in front of the work.

⁶⁸ Hilde van Gelder and Helen Westgeest, *Photography Theory in Historical Perspective* (Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 105.

⁶⁹ Sandbye, "It Has Not Been - It Is. The Signaletic Transformation of Photography."

⁷⁰ BAM - Flemish institute for visual audiovisual and media art, "David Claerbout," Accessed 20 May 2014, <http://bamart.be/en/artists/detail/11>.

⁷¹ Demos, "Slideshow."

I try to give to duration a quality of something very large, something which is much larger than yourself, something which keeps on going after you've gone. So for me duration is no longer linked to speed. The triangle of duration is that of past-ness, present, and future. And I kind of try to capture those three elements on the same surface. I try to be aware in the video pieces of the pastness of the picture, the presentness of the picture, and what it will mean in time.⁷²



Figure 12: Douglas Gordon, "24 Hour Psycho." 1993. Single channel video projection; 24 hours. Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery. <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-britain/exhibition/turner-prize-1996/turner-prize-1996-artists-douglas-gordon>, Accessed October 14 2014.

The experience of the “durational spectator” is the subject of both the first and the last chapter in Don DeLillo’s novel *Point Omega*.⁷³ Called ‘Anonymity’ and ‘Anonymity 2’, they describe a nameless man’s obsessive viewing Douglas Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho*⁷⁴ in a dark gallery space. By the time we are introduced to our protagonist, he has spent

⁷² BAM - Flemish institute for visual audiovisual and media art, "David Claerbout".

⁷³ *Point Omega* was inspired by when the author “wandered” into *24 Hour Psycho* at MoMA gallery in 2006. DeLillo returned three times to the exhibition. The novel takes its title from the Omega Point - a concept coined by the French palaeontologist and Jesuit philosopher Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who described the Omega Point as the final stage in the evolution of consciousness. Alexandra Alter, "What Don DeLillo's Books Tell Him," *Wall Street Journal*, 30/1/2010.

⁷⁴ *24 Hour Psycho* is a conceptual art installation by Scottish artist Douglas Gordon from 1993. A slowed down to 2 frames per second appropriation of Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) Lasting 24 hours rather than its original 109 minutes, rendering the fluid space of the film staccato.

over three hours on his fifth consecutive day viewing the artwork, and there is an underlying anxiety that the next day will be the last before the exhibition moves on. His heightened awareness of time is palpable. He has established that the less he can see in the action of the movie, the harder he looks. And the more he sees. For him it is to see what is there - 'to know you are looking, to feel time passing, to be alive to what is happening in the smallest registration of time'.⁷⁵ He contemplates how he would react if he didn't have to comply with the gallery opening hours - watch it for 24 hours straight. Would he survive, physically or otherwise - could he return to the outside world after 'an unbroken day and night of living this radically altered plane of time?'⁷⁶ *Point Omega* is an abstract spatial-temporal reading experience, moving between meditation on time, death and reflection on current political and social anxieties.

The work of David Claerbout often reminds us of the magic lantern shows pre cinematic event-time or the popular Kodak slideshow from the late 1950s. Yet it feels contemporary with its own created time and reflection on the digital transformation of photography and film. David Green writes that it exists in a space of "undecidability" since it possesses the possibility 'of a photograph that unfolds in time (but is not a film) and a film that is stilled in time (but is not a photograph)'.⁷⁷ Claerbout's oeuvre moves between digital activation (photo-animation) of found photographs; by infusing "life" into a frozen-in-time image, by digitally creating the effect of wind subtly blowing the leaves of newly planted trees in the photo *Kindergarten Antonio Sant'Elia, 1932* (1998). And the use of time-lapse in the video work *Bordeaux Piece* (2004), or the complete use of still images (the subjects photographed from multiple angles and shot on location

⁷⁵Don DeLillo, *Point Omega* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2010), 6-7.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 15.

⁷⁷ David Green "The Visibility of Time" - in *David Claerbout*, exh. Cat. (Cologne:Walter König, 2004),p 42. As quoted by Cathrine Fowler, "Obscurity and Stillness: Potentiality in the Moving Image," *Art Journal* 72, no. 1 (2013): 66.

and in a green screen production studio) then presented as still-motion in video works like *Algiers' Section of a Happy Moment* (2008) and *The Quiet Shore* (2011).

Through their stillness, they all send an invitation to the viewer to look harder - to experience time as it unfolds, however imperceptible. He explains:

Slow motion often makes time monumental and so pseudo-memorable that it results in dramatic effects that do not interest me ... Slowing time down is a different thing, but both depend on definitions that dictate the standard according to which they slow down ... In my work, the indicators to time (tree, sun ...) evolve at a speed that is parallel to lived time. Perhaps the spectator who is not used to having natural references in a projected environment (such as wind or the movement of the sun) to predict the movement of time may perceive the time flow as if it had been slowed down.⁷⁸

Barthes writes about the confusion of certainty and madness within photography in *Camera Lucida* - taking on a new meaning in today's hybrid interdisciplinary media world:

The Photograph then becomes a bizarre medium, a new form of hallucination: false on the level of perception, true on the level of time: a temporal hallucination, so to speak, a modest, shared hallucination (on the one hand 'it is not there,' on the other 'but it has indeed been'): a mad image, chafed by reality.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Ibid., 68.

⁷⁹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflection on Photography* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2010), 115.



Figure 13: David Claerbout, "The Quiet Shore." 2011. Single channel video projection, black & white, silent; 32 min 32 sec. Tel Aviv Museum (Helena Rubinstein Pavilion) 2012. <http://davidclaerbout.com/filter/work/The-Quiet-Shore-2011>: Photo Elad Sarig, Accessed September 29 2014.

Chapter 5

The structure of the image(s)

During semester 2 of my MFA, a family reunion was announced for July 19th 2014 (end of semester 3) in far north Norway. After some consideration, I decided that this had a potential of being an exciting new addition to my project, and I postponed my scheduled field trip to fit in with this date.

However, I needed to open up a dialogue with my project beyond researching my thesis - semester 3 was too long to wait without making some kind of work. During a conversation with my supervisor I came to realize that I was in possession of a piece of my Norwegian cultural heritage here in Sydney. It was hanging in the back of my wardrobe. My bunad not only made it to the US, it had also followed me to Australia.

I started taking photographs of a Norwegian friend wearing my bunad in various urban locations in Sydney. I made the intuitive decision to take the photographs after dark - feeling that it produced environments that help neutralise my current location's identity. *After dark* created a spatial temporal intersection between now and then and here and there (or, as Ann Banfield called it, *this was now here*) as well as an uncanny setting for the bunad, generating a melancholy inextricably lined to the natural colour palette in the photographic images - colours often depicted in the Norwegian National Romantic painting tradition and in the material of the bunad itself.

In *Getting Back into Place*, Edward S Casey writes that when Aristotle remarked that we can tell time in the dark, perhaps he should have written especially in the dark where the time and mind collide most intimately.⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Edward S Casey, *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 10.



Figure 14: Left: Adolph Tidemand, "Haugianerne." 1852. Oil on canvas, 147 x 183 cm. Nasjonalmuseet/Nasjonalgalleriet i Oslo. https://snl.no/Adolph_Tidemand; Photo: J Lathion/Nasjonalmuseet/Nasjonalgalleriet, Accessed August 15 2013. Right: Ellen Dahl, "Untitled." 2014. Photograph.

Photographing in the dark often generates a sensory experience of time slowing down and an increased spatial-temporal awareness during the making of the work. These late night sessions created a space of contemplation that helped me work through how to approach the project, and move towards a better understand of its emerging conceptual terrain (both on a private/personal level and in a broader socio/political context). One element that became particularly apparent to me was that the subject was now being observed from the perspective of someone with inside knowledge viewing it from afar.

After dark is also a time when a cooler *dampness* can be felt, inducing a subconscious connection to great forests and tall mountains - filled with smell of the moss, waterfalls, rivers, lakes and a rugged coastline. These are traditional places often depicted in the rural Norwegian folk culture and landscapes believed to be home to subterranean supernatural forces. After dark is a temporal space that frequently destabilizes visual perception, blurring the lines between the real and the imagined. Pat Shaw recounts one of the illustrators in *Norwegian Folktales*, Erik Werenskiold's description of his childhood home:

One sat in the darkness by the oven door ... from the time of the tallow candle and the rush light ... in the endless, lonely winter evenings, where folk still saw nisse⁸¹ and captured the sea-serpent, and swore that it was true.⁸²

Taking these photos after dark was not the only intuitive decision. Each time we went out to shoot, we gravitated towards locations with some sort of a bridge in the background. I realized that bridges was embedded in my memory of my Norwegian upbringing. They are a necessity in a mountainous country with a long coastline filled with archipelagos. But they also represent a more symbolic idea of a psychological bridging device. Here the bridge - built for crossing dangerous waters of unknown depth - can be read as a metaphorical representation of a person's mental capacity to handle the murkiness and instability of the inner psyche. The idea that 'the affective geography of the native land mirroring the melancholic landscape of the psyche was a central trope of National Romanticism.'⁸³

The decision to work with existing light - to place ourselves in the landscape, rather than trying to control it - was to further exploit the subject-place connection central to the National Romanticism in Norway. This was a period favouring a return to the natural and the unaffected, aesthetically concerned with place as a physical setting. In the book *History of Norwegian Literature* (1933), Theodore Jorgenson states in his chapter on National Romanticism:

⁸¹ In Scandinavian folklore, a nisse is considered a "household spirit" responsible for the care and prosperity of a farm. A nisse was usually described as a short man (under four feet tall) wearing a red cap with a tassel. While belief in guardian spirits is a very old tradition in Scandinavia, belief in nisser was prominent in the late 18th and 19th centuries in Denmark, southern Norway and southern Sweden. Many farms claimed to have their own nisse. The nisse took an active interest in the farm by performing chores and was particularly close to the animals - the horse being their favourite. However, nisser were very temperamental, to say the least. If the household was not careful to keep its nisse satisfied (usually in the form of a single bowl of porridge with butter in it left out on Christmas eve) the spirit could turn against its masters. Jason Clarke, "Nisse," Accessed 14 September 2014, <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/n/nisse.html>.

⁸² Peter Christian Asbjørnsen and Jørn Moe, *Norwegian Folktales*, trans. P Shaw, Pantheon Fairy Tale and Folklore Library (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 5.

⁸³ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 12.

Romanticism may therefore in its broad sense be said to be the emphasis on the mystic elements in man and in nature. It means back to nature or, rather, forward to a more intimate identification with nature. It means identification with race and with national group. It means a search for roots, for peculiarities, for common strains, and common emotional experiences.⁸⁴



Figure 15: Mariel Neudecker, "I Don't Know How I Resisted the Urge to Run." 1998. Mixed media incl. water, acrylic medium, salt, fiberglass, 68 x 56 x 57, 5 cm. Tate Britain, London 2001
<http://www.marieleneudecker.co.uk/idon%27tknow.html>, Accessed 15 March 2014.

German-born artist Mariel Neudecker has a long history of engaging with cultural memory, and in her earlier pieces, in particular with German national romanticism. In the essay 'The Magic Mountain: The work of Mariel Neudecker', Maite Lorés considers these early works by Neudecker to be marked by the need to recall the sublime in a postmodern era. It is 'about memory tinged with a brand of self-conscious nostalgia'.⁸⁵ The work at once draws on the classically beautiful while being possessed

⁸⁴ Theodore Jorgenson, *History of Norwegian Literature*, (New York: The Macmillan company, 1933), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/mdp.39015048873353>. 205-06.

⁸⁵ Maite Lores, Francis McKee, and Eszther Barbarczy, eds., *Mariel Neudecker* (Colchester: Firstsite, 1999), 11.

by a somewhat unsettling undercurrent. Neudecker's play on pictorial space - reality that is not real, the familiar yet unknown - makes it a great representation of our complex way of dealing with memory and perception. I find myself attracted to this renewed desire to pitch the landscape up against our inner psyche. Her work often draws on the tradition of landscape painting, creating an uncanny connection to something beyond the physical of the landscape. She plays on the illusionistic idea of the Diorama in her wonderfully fabricated landscapes in glass tanks. The archetypal German forest is a recurring theme as well as the representation of iconic German Romantic landscape artist Caspar David Friedrich. The work *Stolen Sunsets* (1996) is referencing a remark made by filmmaker Hans Jurgen Syperburg in his film *Hitler, A Film from Germany* (1977) - where he used the line 'Hitler stole our sunsets' in reference to how political association can contaminate representation.⁸⁶

Neudecker maintains there is still a need to reclaim the landscape tradition from the perversion of the Third Reich, which pitched Friedrich as the ideal German artist. In his essay 'Mariel Neudecker: More Tracks in the Snow', David Blayney Brown questions the necessity of this reclamation from perversion of history at this point in time.⁸⁷ Given the current rise in ultranationalistic (and other extreme) ideology across the world, we may consider that within this ongoing reclamation lie not only remembrance but also a reminder of what is at stake. Neudecker's work draws us in with its beauty and romantic mysticism. Yet, when walking around the tanks, they become equally unnerving with their distorted angles and the multiplying 3D effects. She has said about this confusion that she wants the illusion to fail,⁸⁸ the work potentially reminding us of the complicated layers within the mix of nationalism, history, cultural heritage and politics and their relevance even today.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ David Blayney Brown, "Mariel Neudecker: More Tracks in the Snow," in *Mariel Neudecker: Over and over, Again and Again Exhibition Catalogue Tate St Ives*, ed. Susan Daniel-McElroy, David Blayney Brown, and Douglas Young (Leeds: Tate St Ives and Triangle, 2004), 11.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

Kant famously ruled that ‘it is the disposition of soul evoked by a particular representation engaging the attention of the reflective judgement, and not the Object, that is called sublime’.⁸⁹



Figure 16: Ellen Dahl, "Borre National Park." 2014. Photograph.

Upon entering Borre National Park through the main gate, the first impression is of a well maintained place that projects a slightly formal museum setting. With the coexistence of man-made mounds amongst large trees slowly reclaiming the ground and surrounded by forest on three sides, it is a landscape that embodies both visible and absent memory.

It might not be the grandest of sublime landscapes as depicted in the old masters paintings from the heyday of romanticism, but its sublime history exists just under the surface, quiet and foreboding. In the manner of many National Parks and forests

⁸⁹ Ibid., 8.

marked by history and myth, they appear like any other similar places - at first we find it hard to see, in Tacita Dean's words, 'the invisible ones of the days gone by'.⁹⁰ But as we spend time in these places we form a response to them, layered with imagination, culture and memory. The National Park draws you in with a formal beauty and then gradually unsettles the experience by summoning its brutish past. But within this complex duality lies Borre's attraction. It is deliberately deceptive, a place that Maite Lorés might consider to evoke memory tinged with a brand of self-conscious nostalgia.⁹¹



Figure 17: Ellen Dahl, "The National Park." 2014. Photograph.

⁹⁰ Tacita Dean and Jeremy Millar, eds., *Place* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005), 25.

⁹¹ Lores, McKee, and Barbarczy, *Mariel Neudecker*, 11.

Chapter 6

A family Reunion

Much of my art practice is rooted in working with or around the landscape. This has often been an entry point to the understanding of my place in the world. I believe this is an embedded cultural way of thinking - part of a strong geographical identity and my *Norwegianness*. Art critic Liz Wells explains in her book *Photography: A Critical Introduction* that while the land itself is a natural occurrence, 'landscape is a cultural construct.'⁹² This is echoed in historian Simon Schama's statement that 'landscapes are culture before they are nature.'⁹³ It is a concept we add to places interpreted by human thinking and then projected back on to the land.



Figure18: Ellen Dahl, "Kvalsund" 2014. Photograph. The location for the family reunion.

Nina Witoszek argues that this strong connection to nature (and the landscape) is a Norwegian *meme* - part of embodied learning. *Memes*, Witoszek explains, are rituals,

⁹²Liz Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2009), 303.

⁹³ Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: FontanaPress, 1996), 61.

images, stories and music that 'replicate and refashion themselves over several generations and which endow human culture with meaning.'⁹⁴ She further explains an important influence of the development of the Norwegian nature *meme* is that Norway's history is first and foremost a rural one:

The sublimity of nature relieved Norwegians from having to apologise for their lack of cities, castles, ruins or libraries. These vast reserves of mountains, fjords and forest have functioned as the equivalents of castles and cathedrals, i.e. as national heritage.⁹⁵

This embedded part of my identity seeps into my artistic perspectives. It gives contextual framework to my projects and affects my technical approach - I am constantly drawn to outdoor locations and tend to choose natural light when ever possible.



Figure 19: Brit Dahl, "Ellen." 2012. Photograph.

I find an innate comfort in returning to the landscape - even if it is new to me. It is an environment imbued with triggers that often give rise to memory of past experiences or an uncanny sense of place, and in the process creates awareness of places beyond the current location. This becomes further amplified when returning to a place of personal

⁹⁴ Witoszek, *The Origins of the "Regime of Goodness": Remapping the Cultural History of Norway*, 17.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 54–55.

importance, enforced by the experience of a corporal–spatial exchange and a sense that place remembers. With the family reunion I now had the chance to view the project from this perspective - the importance of environment upon character and national identity.

Place had a dominant position amongst early thinkers, and, in the 4th century BC, Archytas of Tarentum wrote a treatise on place:

Since everything that is in motion is moved in some place, it is obvious that one has to grant priority to place, in which that which causes motion or is acted upon will be. Perhaps thus it is the first of all things, since all things are in place or not without place.⁹⁶

There was belief in place as ‘all there, the limit of all things and in this it might be considered as a divine being’.⁹⁷ Philo of Alexandria, one of the first thinkers to attempt to synthesize Christianity with Greek philosophy, wrote: ‘God Himself is called place, for He encompasses all things, but is not encompassed by anything.’⁹⁸ But from the 1400s, the pursuit of a definition of a pure dimensionality of limitlessness (the true representation of God) saw *space* take over from *place*. Place was now considered too limited, too bound in comparison with the infinite possibility of space. ‘Place had been eclipsed by the universal space.’⁹⁹

Jumping forward in time to the late 19th century, and we see a shift back to place as a dominant presence within philosophical and sociopolitical thinking. The same considered boundaries (limitations) of place now becomes part of the ongoing politics of the creation of the nation-state. The concept of place emphasizing the idea of

⁹⁶ Dean and Millar, *Place*, 14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

belonging due to a bound space within set parameters (borders) and therefore creating communities with a similar history and cultural heritage. Making 'sense of place' an essential part of the creation of a national identity, or vice versa, national identity superimposing itself on the formation of sense of place. The fluid and dynamic undertaking of the national identity moving between past and the present, constantly comparing what was and what is becoming from the ongoing movement of social, political and geographical change, which generates a new sense of place or a new sense of the old place - or as Proust wrote: 'The real voyage of discovery consists in not seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.'¹⁰⁰

So how does one artistically approach the subject of place on entering or re-entering a landscape? The discussion of the photographer's self-expression, or loss of authorship, is a recurring theme within the photographic conversation. Roland Barthes's philosophical notion 'the death of the author' is particularly relevant in photography: the photographed object often overshadowing the artist by drawing the viewer in to a direct dialogue between itself and the viewer.¹⁰¹ If we consider this true, then the photographer becomes the *enabler* or *activator* of this dialogue - the one who selects the what, when and where from an infinity of possibilities. Or as John Berger simply states: 'Every image embodies a way of seeing'.¹⁰²

There are two positions normally considered within photographic skill as to how much self-expression is granted the activator (photographer). Some believe that a 'true' photographer (lets call him/her photographer A) is the one that knows exactly when to press the trigger - by being present and responsive with a hyper sensitivity to any nuances in one's surroundings - reducing the camera to what Clive Scott calls in his

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 20.

¹⁰¹ For the sake of this argument, I will not consider the layers of authorship added through today's hybrid medium specificity in the expanded field of photography or the in-between media, but will focus on the author-subject relationship.

¹⁰² As quoted by Clive Scott, *The Spoken Image: Photography and Language* (London: Reaktion, 1999), 23.

essay 'The Nature of Photography', a 'sensitive plate'.¹⁰³ Photographer A is therefore rewarded by his or hers ability to capitalize upon chance - or one might say their attempt to *control* chance or are being somewhat able to see into the future.¹⁰⁴

But for others (photographer B) the challenge lies in being present when chance occurs but rendering some control *to* chance and in the process leaving more room for serendipitous accidents. All photographers enter into an environment with a heightened sense of awareness, but the latter with an understood acceptance of their limitations; and therefore - in the moment of creation - the camera becomes more than a sensitive plate, leaving its mark in the process. Photography has an innate ability to record details felt but often hidden to the casual eye. Photographer Guy Le Querrec's explains:

I would like always to be available: available to be surprised by what I didn't expect and sharp enough to recognize what I expected ... Two different kinds of surprise ... The important thing is to succeed in taking those photos which confirm my feeling about life.¹⁰⁵

The before-the-taking of photograph approach to the image making then has a natural flow-on effect to the after-the-taking of photograph process, or as Clive Scott again explains, 'that taking of the photograph is only the necessary bridge between the creative interventions of the pre-photographic and the post-photographic'¹⁰⁶ - implying an emphasis not only on the moment of the image taking, but also on the new narratives created after the shutter closed. Both skill A and B are necessary for a good photographer and it is within the balance of, again borrowing Clive Scott's words, the

¹⁰³ Ibid., 17.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Translated from original text in French published in *Voyons voir*. p.121. As quoted by Clive Scott, *ibid.*, 18.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

reactive and the *anticipatory* where one's photographic identity is created,¹⁰⁷ everything else becomes style.

In Paul Crowder's *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts*, he concludes the chapter on photography with the observation that 'the ontology of photography, then, is intrinsically connected to factors which are basic to our embodied inherence in the world.'¹⁰⁸ This embodied experience can be read as twofold: referring both to the spatial-temporal impact upon the author's active-anticipatory relationship at the moment of the taking of the image, as well as the subject (we know has been).

American artist Roni Horn describes the overwhelming spatial encounter with Iceland when she first arrived in 1979:

With my first attempt, the place disappeared on me. Photography - or really doing anything much more than just being in the place - requires the imposition of a whole other consciousness.¹⁰⁹

Horn kept returning to the island, but it wasn't until a visit in 1988 that she ventured out with the camera and an adequate sense of place to engage with it beyond simply being there. Over the next couple of decades, she kept photographing Iceland and produced a series of books called *To Place*.¹¹⁰ In her Icelandic odyssey I found significant connections to my own artistic practice. Place, experience and identity from an existential phenomenological position - of being in the place - are her primary objectives through most of her photographic work. Her consciousness arises from her engagement with the landscape through her phenomenological spatial awareness of her own body in space. Iceland is a place of Roni Horn's becoming: 'I come here to place

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Paul Crowther, *Phenomenology of the Visual Arts (Even the Frame)* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2009), 152.

¹⁰⁹ Louise Neri, Lynne Cooke, and Therry de Duve, eds., *Roni Horn* (London: Phaidon, 2000), 109.

¹¹⁰ *To Place* is an open-ended series of books that started in 1990. They take their starting point in Iceland and the authors relationship with this country. Each book has a distinctive narrative addressing the relationship between place and identity. Ingvild Goetz, Larissa Michelberger, and Rainald Schumacher, eds., *It's True That It's Been a Long Time since I Thought About Turtles* (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), 38.

myself in the world: Iceland is a verb and its action is to centre'.¹¹¹ The second connection I feel to Horn's work is that photography plays a supporting role. This approach appeals to me - photography is not her agenda; she does not even see herself as a photographer.¹¹² Yet she uses the medium very precisely. This separates her greatly from other photographers in the field (Gursky, Wall, Sherman etc.), who tend to directly address photography in their work.

My first reading of Roni Horn's photographic work from Iceland was as a viewer, not as a photographer. This differentiation is important, because the emotional motivation is different (even though one could possibly argue that as a photographer I cannot separate the two). In *To Place* I found uncanny details that made me *feel* the particular color green of the moss or a single pole penetrating a barren and flat land. Like Barthes's *punctum* - my eyes were 'marked with a higher value'¹¹³ There was a melancholy and sense of isolation manifesting itself in these images through these details. It connected with my own past and my own belonging in the world.

Or as John Muse explains in his dissertation *The Rhetorical Afterlife of Photographic Evidence: Roland Barthes, Avital Ronell, Roni Horn*:

The punctum points to another, more disturbing intensity. If the studious dimension of a photograph shows me that I necessarily know and feel along with everyone else, then the punctum assures me that I and I alone am attached to and moved by something – inexplicably. Something touches me. I can speak of punctum, but no one feels what I feel.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Diarmuid Costello and Margret Iversen, eds., *Photography after Conceptual Art* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 124.

¹¹² Neri, Cooke, and Duve, *Roni Horn* 111.

¹¹³ Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflection on Photography*, 42.

¹¹⁴ John Hancock Muse, "The Rhetorical Afterlife of Photographic Evidence: Roland Barthes, Avital Ronell, Roni Horn" (PhD thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 2006), 15-16.



Figure 20: Roni Horn, "To Place - Book II: Folds." 1998. Mary Boon Gallery New York. Reproduced in 'Roni Horn' Phaidon, 2000.

There is a distance in her work that foregrounds its formal appearance, yet I find it has a deep personal undertone. Her minimal, almost passive approach to her images I implicitly understand; they are at once compelling and comforting. Whether Iceland or Northern Norway, the natural forces in these northern landscapes are self evident - with all the attendant ramifications. In this barren place without trees, the air and the sea runs riot around a land so still. I strongly believe that this is a place that you have to succumb to - it's power undeniable. The renowned Canadian pianist Glenn Gould¹¹⁵ once wrote:

Something really does happen to people who go north - they become at least aware of the creative opportunity which the physical fact of the country represents and come to measure their own work and life against that rather staggering creative possibility: they become, in effect, philosophers.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Glen Gould (1932–1982): renowned Canadian pianist and composer, who withdrew from his public career at the age 31 to spend the rest of his time in solitude in his studio. Here he continued as a prolific contributor to music journals and radio broadcasts. *The Idea of North* was produced in 1967 and presented as part of The Solitude Trilogy radio documentaries for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

¹¹⁶ Neri, Cooke, and Duve, *Roni Horn* 67. In 'The Idea of North: An Introduction' in *The Glen Gould Reader*, Gould continuous to say that the idea of north' is itself an excuse—an opportunity to examine that condition of

Having spent my last 20 years in Sydney, I consider (Northern) Norway as geographically remote and topographically as different as can be to Australia. There is a Lutheran sensibility that lives in these northern landscapes, where nature dictates the terms of human existence and creates a dependence on the surrounding environment. Throughout the work in *To Place*, Roni Horn blends landscapes with portraits and the effect is that faces can be read as landscapes and the landscape becomes personal and can be experienced as a face.



Figure 21: Roni Horn, "You Are the Weather." 1994 - 95. 64 C-printed photographs and 36 gelatin-silver prints 26.5 x 21.4 cm / 10 7/16 x 8 7/16 in ea. Matthew Marks Gallery, New York, 96. <http://www.hauserwirth.com/artists/14/roni-horn/images-clips/91/>, Accessed September 3 2014.

This particularly manifests itself in *Book VI, Haraldsdottir*, with its 61 portraits of Margrét Haraldsdottir. The work was later exhibited as 100 color photographs in *You Are the Weather* (1994–95). Horn photographed Margrét in various pools of water around Iceland, each frame with a very similar expression and crop, letting the variable be the changing weather conditions. There is an attunement of subjectivity and environment that leaves us with as much sense of the environment as Margrét. She is not lost, as her gaze is strong and direct, but the repetitiveness of the images makes her lose identity and 'the face becomes the place'.¹¹⁷ *You Are the Weather* not only provokes us to experience atmospheric conditions, like heat and moisture in Margrét's face, but also encourages us to empathize with them. Ossian Ward asks: How can you feel like

solitude which is neither exclusive to the north or prerogative of those who go north but which does appear, with all its ramifications, a bit more clearly to those who have made, if only in their imagination, the journey north'. Ibid., 75.

¹¹⁷ Costello and Iversen, *Photography after Conceptual Art* 118.

weather, the environment or the landscape?¹¹⁸

In considering the family reunion, I was highly conscious of all the elements that would impact upon my approach to the project - location, weather, number of participants and time spent with them. I used social media to make contact with the girls/women and arranged two locations at two different times that was convenient to the participants and would allow the project to come together as a whole in the final artwork. I needed a formula that allowed for a low impact approach that felt casual and left room to move with the elements, and included a minimal interference with the arrangements planned by the organizers of the reunion. But most importantly, the formula employed would impact upon the participants' response to me. I wanted a setting that encouraged a behavior somewhere between the formal and the natural. Golo Mann writes about this balance within the photographic portrait in his foreword to August Sander's *Citizens of the Twentieth Century/Photographer Extraordinary* (1973):

Like the storyteller, the photographer captures individual qualities best in movement. When someone is trying to be natural, or, better, when he does not even know he is being photographed, then he reveals character. But if he approaches the camera with a certain solemnity, with the intention of showing himself off, then he becomes something more than himself: he is revealing a secret self-image.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Ossian Ward, "Profile: Roni Horn Ossian Ward Finds Eddies and Labyrinths in the Artist's Work," Accessed 29 September 2011, <http://www.contemporary-magazines.com/profile68.htm>.

¹¹⁹ Gunter Sander, ed. *August Sander: Photographer Extraordinary* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), 7.



Figure 22: August Sander, " People of the Twentieth Century; Boxers, Paul Röderstein and Hein Hesse, Farm Children, 1926–32. Black/white photographs. Edwynn Houk Gallery New York, 2012. http://www.houkgallery.com/exhibitions/2012-04-05_august-sander/#/images/: Die Photographische Sammlung/SK Stiftung Kultur, August Sander Archiv, Köln; ARS, NY, Accessed August 28 2014.

August Sander was a German documentary and portraiture photographer. His most well known work is *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*, a photographic survey of the German people from 1910, an attempt to unveil a cross-section of society during the Weimar Republic. He developed a classification system where he divided his photographic subjects into seven categories: The Farmer, The Skilled Tradesman, Woman, Classes and Professions, The Artist, The City and The Last People. The first part of the project was published in 1929. His work has in many ways, both literary and photographically, come to represent what Joanna Lowry describes as ‘that anxiety about the social inscription of individuality within the photographic sign’.¹²⁰ *Citizen* was intended to disclose the effect lifestyle and social position have upon people’s features and appearance. Much of the success of the work can be located in Sander’s ability to reveal subtleties in the poses and expressions that divulged more than his subject was conscious of, and in the process ‘provided a mechanism for turning the subject into a text that could be read.’¹²¹ Central to Sander’s methodology was the recognition of the collective power of the images.

¹²⁰ Green and Lowry, *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, 73.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

Contemporary artists Sharon Lockhart and Fiona Tann have both either indirectly or directly addressed Sander's work in their projects. Sharon Lockhart's *Pine Flat* (2006) consists of one 138 minutes film *Pine Flat* and a series 19 photographic portraits called *Pine Flat Portrait Studio*. The focus in both works is children she befriended and documented over a three-year period in the rural town of Pine Flat, California. Both the film and the photographs have a classification structure within both the approach and the presentation. But the portraits also points to Lockhart's interest in the traditional standardization and a typographical approach of the 19th century portrait photographers, and in particular August Sander.¹²² Her decision to use a black background, a 4x5 camera and natural light enhanced the participant's experience of time - making the children very focused and self-aware, and in the process revealing their secret self-image. She then breaks with Sander's logic by scaling the images so that all the children appear the same height. Lockhart explains that this was to eliminate any hierarchies within the portraits.¹²³ This approach now makes it hard to detect the changing ages between images of participants represented multiple times - highlighting 'the difficulty of locating the continuity of personal identity across the constant flux of time.'¹²⁴

¹²² "Ci08 Interview with Sharon Lockhart About Pine Flat Carnegie Museum of Art," YouTube video, 7:38, Artforum online, <http://artforum.com/video/id=20859%26mode=large>.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ "Sharon Lockhart's Pine Flat Provides Intimate View of Contemporary Rural Life," Accessed 14 October 2014, <http://www.walkerart.org/press/browse/press-releases/2006/sharon-lockharts-pine-flat-provides-intimate->.



Figure 23: Sharon Lochart, "Pine Flat Portrait Studio Jessie, Breanna, Kassie." 2005. 3 Framed Chromogenic Prints, 45.5 x 36.7 inches each. <http://www.lockhartstudio.com/index.php?/works/pine-flat-portrait-studio/>, Accessed October 21 2014.

Fiona Tann's project *Countenance* (2002) has a direct starting point in Sander's *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*. Tann informed her participants about the relationship between his work and the new work being made, and produced an archival system grouping the portraits by occupation, family type, or social group.¹²⁵ But instead of photographing her participants, she filmed them for one minute at the time, creating 'film-portraits'. Posed like traditional portraits, but set against a variety of active backgrounds both indoors and outside, they disrupt the photographic portrait with the temporal framing of film. Tann also challenges Sontag's *privileged moment* by sometimes playing the film-portraits for only a few seconds - just long enough for us to adjust our gaze and begin to contemplate the context. Joanna Lowry argues that Tann's filmed portraits refuse the semiotic of Sander's portraits that turned the subject into text that could be read - but rather Tann's portraits expose the instability of the pose. By projecting them in sequence on three large screens, the works further interrupt the privileged moment by destabilising the normally implicit dynamic power of time that is on the spectator's side.¹²⁶ Our experience of time, duration and presence is increasingly supported by the contemporary media technologies in modern culture that underpin our society. But Joanna Lowry reminds us that 'media such as these do not "represent"

¹²⁵ *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image*, 72.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 73.

time as such: they play a significant role in producing the cultural phenomena through which we understand time.¹²⁷ And through this understanding we can use time as a mode of reflection back upon contemporary culture, identity and belonging.

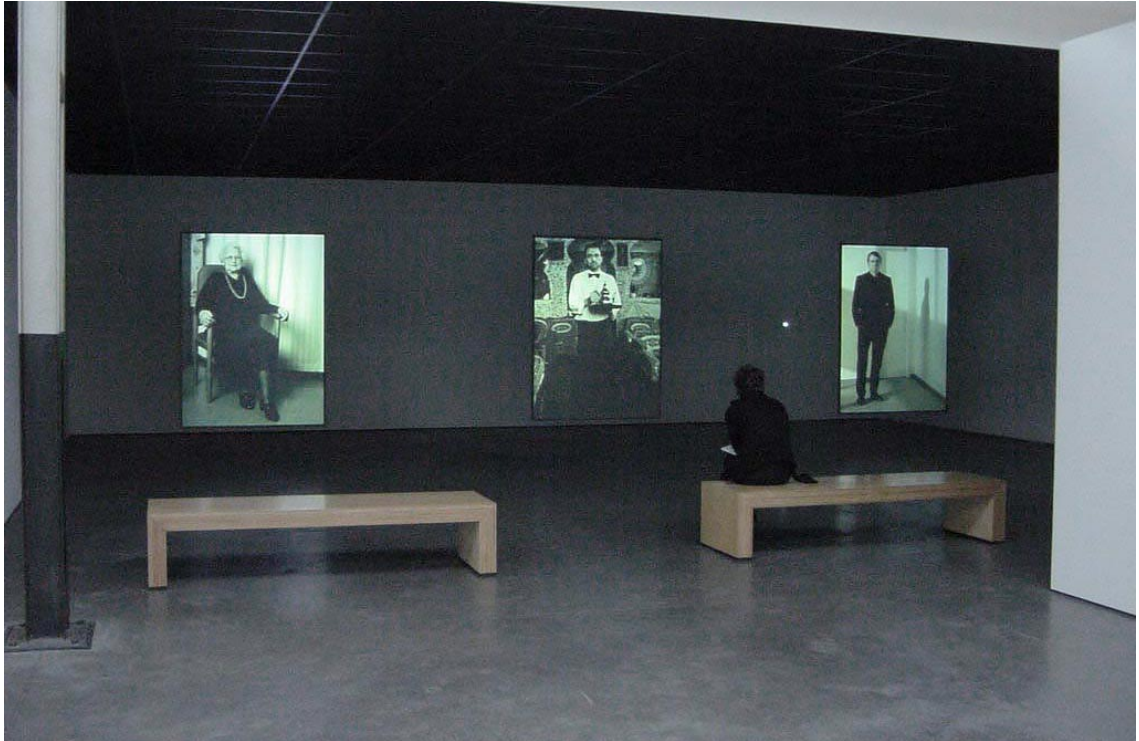


Figure 24: Fiona Tann, "Countenance." 2002. Video installation, tinted b&w, mono, 3 digital betacam safety masters, 3 dvds, 3 video projectors, 3 hifi audio speakers, De Pont Foundation for Contemporary Art, Tilburg, 2003. <http://www.leftmatrix.com/tanlist.html>, Accessed 12 September 2014.

Photography's unique ability to catalogue and archive makes it the perfect medium to document the family reunion. My intention was to photograph a group of females linked by heritage and connection to place. The choice and limitation to one gender was not considered explicitly a political one, but rather it felt like an obvious decision since this was a reunion on my mother and her mother's side of the family. I wanted to see if the portraits would reveal as a group the effect of environment upon character. Or whether the subject might in fact come to inhabit characteristics of the environment, embodying a sense of place and belonging. While Borre National Park had an obvious overarching link (real or invented) to the making of a national identity, could the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 77.

portraits (as a group) represent a small place and still reflect beyond its boundaries? The group of women photographed no longer exclusively lived in their original place of birth, but were spread all over the country. Their personal stories are complex and layered. But could what Susan Sontag describes as ‘photography’s potentiality to democratize all experience by turning them into images’¹²⁸ construct a cohesive outcome conveying a snapshot of the past in the present of a national identity? These were the questions that were foremost in mind as I undertook this photographic survey. They also informed my methodology in understanding how these images can relate to both each other and the broader project.



Figure 25: Ellen Dahl, "Nora." 2014. Photograph.

¹²⁸ Sontag, *On Photography*, 7.

During the post-photographic process of the two projects, I found that applying a ‘democratic’ shooting approach to the family reunion (*Video 2*) succeeded in increasing the experience of the collective power of the portraits. This approach was based on the predetermined strategy of using a similar interaction with each of the family member, and in the process also worked against the establishment of any hierarchy among the participants. Furthermore, it exposed a shared embodied sense of place and belonging, projecting a local/national pride mixed with a self-conscious gaze. This methodology also created a relatively linear flow-on from the pre-photographic approach to the post-photographic narrative outcome for *Video 2*. And in the end this work was certainly much more predetermined than the final body of work from Borre National Park (*Video 1*), where the true narrative intent of the video only came into full light during the final editing process. The two projects had required a different balance of the *reactive* and the *anticipatory* (Clive Scott) in their photographic method.



Figure 26: Ellen Dahl, “On Shifting Ground Video 2.” 2014. Single channel HD video projection; 10 min. Looped. Sydney College of Arts Gallery, December 2014.

While considering how to approach The National Park pre-photographically, I was mindful that my intentions were layered with culture, memory and knowledge of the

site's complicated history. What I wasn't so aware of, and was struggling to create a methodology for, was how to expose the narrative within the landscape in the limited time available to me. The impression one gains of the site can be can be deceptive with the weather and time of the year visited playing a large part in the process. On my previous visit during winter, the park had naturally appeared as a cold, barren and foreboding place. But this time I was visiting at the height of summer, when the grass was green and the sun was (mostly) shining. I considered using the *after dark* method (applied to the bunad images to evoke a sense of place and melancholy away from its place of origin) but it made the site appear over-dramatic and lack subtlety. My artistic approach and my sensitivity to the place, '*my way of seeing*', were pushed to find a way to move beyond the pictorial postcard in front of my lens. In the end I had to render some control *to* chance to leave room for the images I *felt* (were there) to reveal themselves. This allowed for my consciousness to arise from an unscripted engagement with the landscape.



Figure 27: Ellen Dahl, "On Shifting Ground Video 1." 2014. Single channel HD video projection with sound; 10 min. Looped. Sydney College of Arts Gallery, December 2014.

In *Video 1* each image of the landscape depicted entered into a dialogue with the next to create a new narrative operation, something that Felicity Colman identified in Deleuze's concept of montage as when 'the divergent aspects of an image are brought into proximity and linked together'.¹²⁹ My decision to insert two sequences of moving images into *Video 1* was to further underpin the transition/tension between the past and the present - the 'this was now here'. As a deliberate *after La Jetée* moment, it was seeking to achieve a similar disruptive experience in the otherwise 'meditative' effect of the slideshow. And by doing so, extracting a present time that exists within the park's historical past. The same challenges were not felt during the making of *Video 2*. There, once the two locations had been chosen, the narrative of the landscape was exposed, and it played only a supportive (if important) role to the portraits.

I have no doubt about the importance of Deleuze's concept of the montage in the creation of the perceptual phenomena in *On Shifting Ground's* temporal presentation and upon the project's determination as a whole. However, the experience of persistence of vision (afterimage) and the creation of in-between-time, operated differently between the two works. While a longer morphing time between the images in *Video 1* became an important part of revealing the narrative intent of the work, the same did not apply to *Video 2*. Here the effect of a longer transitional time took the project away from its intention of conveying a snapshot of a national identity with an undeniable presence of the past, and instead brought forth an awareness of the various ages between the participants (something that this project did not set out to investigate).

¹²⁹ Colman, *Deleuze and Cinema: The Film Concepts*. 59.



Figure 28: Ellen Dahl, Video stills from “On Shifting Ground Video 2.” 2014. Single channel HD video projection; 9 min.

From the outset, a sound component for the installation was considered as a potential element of the project. However, I was unsure if the final artwork would require another dimension to deliver its final conceptual intention. Only when the two works had been completed as (silent) *Video 1* and *Video 2*, did I feel assured that *On Shifting Ground* would benefit from another layer. I concluded that an audio component would operate like a ‘motor’ for the work, that would further underpin the narrative intent of revealing the National Park’s sublime and complex history, and its consequent effect upon future cultural traditions (real or invented). This operation was reflected in the relationship between the audio-visual *Video 1* and the silent *Video 2*. The sound would also enhance the desired immersive aspect of the installation upon the spectator. And just like the decision to insert two sequences of moving images was done to disrupt the flow of time, so was the use of diegetic sound - like the field audio recording of the footsteps inserted into the drone-driven soundscape.

The audio piece was composed from a collection of sounds that felt uncanny in their familiarity, and through the use of digital processing become both ominous and drifting. In composing the sound I had to follow a certain narrative path that was now imbedded in *Video 1*’s cinematic montage whilst keeping in mind the relationship to *Video 2*. I had used sound in a previous still-motion work, *From Place* (2012), to drive the narrative of a landscape from the same part of the world, and therefore had a well-researched idea of what type of sound that I was looking for. But I was also aware of the skill needed to produce a sophisticated and well-layered narrative sound terrain, and

therefore approached sound designer Shaun Hay to collaborate with me. I kept a strong directorial roll in the relationship, but Shaun's skill and suggestions were invaluable in achieving the multilayered final result. We also realised that while the visuals were not negotiable, the sound had to be malleable, and I would need multiple versions of the final audio piece. This was to accommodate the space in which the work would be installed and prevent the sound from over or under performing as the 'motor' in the work.



Figure 29: Ellen Dahl, "On Shifting Ground Video 1 & Video 2." 2014. Single channel HD video projection with sound; 10 & 9 min. Looped. Sydney College of Arts Gallery, December 2014.

The bond between the two videos and the sound would be further interrogated during installation. I decided early on that work would be projected onto two relatively large screens (space permitted) to increase the experience of place. The challenge was to unpack the relationship *between* the two screens and the consequent dialogue between them. Originally I proposed that the two screens should be installed at right angles to each other so they could be viewed in tandem. But when I entered the space in which the artwork was to be presented in, I quickly realized that the videos should be

projected opposite to each other. This would further underpin the conceptual depth of the work by highlighting the duality of the past and present and the real and imagined, and the complicated balancing act of the dichotomy between inclusion and exclusion. By allowing the two videos to enter into a direct dialogue with each other - by directing the (proud/self-conscious) gaze of the women towards the National Park - the installed art-work comes across as both accessible and distant. My intention was for the spectator to be surrounded by the work, creating an immersive, intimate experience. Yet, at the same time, due to the physical challenge of viewing two videos at once, the audience would experience a sense of being out of sync and partly excluded from the bond between the two works.

I feel that the final installation achieved what I set out to explore throughout my research by providing a dynamic exploration of the themes of history and nationhood. *On Shifting Ground's* three components mobilizes the viewer across time. In doing so it provides an insight into the syntax between past and the present in the ongoing political and cultural transformation within national identity and nationalism, and within the photographic process itself. And in this process of slowly revealing its political disclosure it encourages the spectator to look harder.

Conclusion

Living in an age of intense transformation is no doubt challenging. We are presented with a flow of constantly contradictory dichotomies that are difficult to navigate, both on a local, transnational and global level. Through the increased human contact that results from globalisation, we experience an intensified awareness of each other. This tends to manifest itself in two distinct though interrelated ways: with the increased knowledge and interaction through communication, technologies and travel, we are now a lot more informed about the *other* and their existence, and therefore in a position to undertake more enlightened interaction with one another. Yet, at the same time, the acceleration of global change leads to an increased experience of uncertainty and fear, with the constant pressure of the need to negotiate these external relationships causing a crisis of identity.

This research project has attempted to view this rather large subject from a relatively small local perspective to bring awareness to some of the complex (and at times perplexing) issues within the discourse of national identity. The two exhibited video works (title, output style etc.) are made in response to this research. They are not intended to be conclusive, but rather a proposition arising from the concerns and terrain articulated in this paper. In this way I consider the works irreducible to a single subject, but rather operating in oscillation across the multiple themes, histories and geographies that are explicitly and implicitly addressed. The production method used in the works was adapted in accordance with the development of the project. They were initially framed by the photographic lens, but with an artistic desire to expand beyond the single frame. This shift from the singular photographic image allowed for new narrative opportunities through the use of time to underpin the conceptual ideas

further. This made the use of still-motion a natural progression in my art-making process.

By reflecting on the medium, the discourse of its technological change, and the concepts at the core of photography under pressure, we often revisit earlier instances in the development of the medium. As new photographic forms emerge, it is possible to gain clarity through the prism of change, and view the medium with a new understanding. In this way, the use of still-motion allowed additional contextual layers to be articulated within the project, with the intention of the final art works to hover somewhere above the fault line of past history, present action and the undisclosed stories of the future.

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