EDUCATION KIT
VIDEO ART: SHAUN GLADWELL

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Designed for Year 11 and 12 secondary teachers and students, this Artspace Education Kit is presented in association with the major exhibition, *In a Station of the Metro* of video work by Australian artist Shaun Gladwell at Artspace, Sydney (20 September – 20 October, 2007) and a touring exhibition of his work presented through 2008 & 2009 in association with Museums and Galleries NSW.

The Kit and the NSW Visual Art Syllabus

The Kit has been developed with reference to the New South Wales Visual Art Syllabus, and considers Video Art and in particular Shaun Gladwell's practice and its relationship to audiences and the artworld in terms of art-critical writing and the art market. It uses the following syllabus structuring principles: the Frames, Practice and Conceptual Frameworks.

The Kit introduces key issues and themes relating to the history of Video Art, including reference to a brief selection of artists and artworks that have been key to these developments. Material covered here is not exhaustive but intended to provide starting points for further research. The questions, activities, and references that feature through this Kit should assist students to take the study of Video Art further in subsequent reading and exploration.

Use of the Kit

At Artspace this resource can be used to assist or enhance a self-directed visit to the Shaun Gladwell exhibition, or a group discussion hosted by the Artspace Education Officer. The Kit can also be used in relation to any of the touring versions of the Gladwell exhibition.

The Kit will assist students and teachers in understanding and interpreting the concepts and visual languages present in the exhibited artworks; in considering the approaches the artist has used in making the works; and in thinking about both how the works address audiences and the context in which the works are positioned both in the gallery and in the artworld generally.

The Kit is made up of a two-page information and worksheet introducing key concepts relating to Video Art and then a single page information and worksheet on each of the individual works shown at Artspace and/or as part of an exhibition tour. It includes:

• a general discussion on the development of the Video Art as a distinct genre;

• interpretative introductions to individual artworks in the Shaun Gladwell exhibition;

• quotes from interviews with the artist;

• excerpts from writings about the works by arts writers, critics and historians;

• a list of keywords and explanations related to the moving image or issues raised in the artworks;

• a series of references in the form of books and journal articles, and links for online resources such as video history databases where students and teachers can view excerpts from historic video works;

• questions, activities or suggested topics for further research or enquiry.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO
THE HISTORY OF VIDEO ART

ALTHOUGH OFTEN THOUGHT of as a new medium, Video Art has a history dating some 40 years or more. As an emerging art medium in the mid-1960s, video was a highly experimental analog practice involving the recording of images onto magnetic tape.[1] Positioned alongside other avant-garde art forms such as experimental film, performance and conceptual art, the subject matter and approach of many early works in video challenged existing social conventions and at times had overt political agendas. Whilst work over subsequent decades has often reflected this history, video has become one of contemporary art's more prevalent mainstream practices. According to Australian artist and critic, John Conomos, "video art has shifted, over the last three decades, from being an avant-garde medium of representation-production located in the margins of our art world to now being at its centre." [2] In addition to ties to conceptual and performance art many contemporary video works have a connection to more traditional art and cultural forms such as painting and cinema.

In order to present an overview of both some historical and more recent approaches to the medium, this introduction will draw on the three phases in video art identified by the Whitney Museum curator Chrissie Iles: phenomenological/performative, sculptural and cinematic.[3]

Phenomenological/Performative Phase

The phenomenological or performative phase describes a range of approaches where artists used the properties of video to examine the sensory experiences inherent in existence, reality and human consciousness. Artists like Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, Eleanor Antin, William Wegman and John Baldassari among others, used this technology to explore conceptual art methodologies in a performative way within a studio environment. In these works, the idea for the work, its system of ordering or the structuring principles of language took precedence over the materials the work is made from, or its aesthetic qualities. The recordings on videotape showed artists carrying out a series of actions or engaging in conversations (with themselves or the subsequent audience), where they tested out a premise or an intention.[4] These would subsequently be viewed in an exhibition framework, usually on a video monitor. The psychological relationship between the viewer in

the gallery and the artist represented on the tape was sometimes explored, as in Vito Acconci's *Theme Song,* 1973 where the artist lay on the floor curled around the camera, speaking in an intimate tone of voice, as if to a lover. [5]

Another approach at this time was the use of a 'live feedback' video system within a gallery. Here a camera was connected to a monitor allowing the simultaneous screen representation of action taking place in front of the camera. Live feedback installations gave audiences a direct experience of being in a space represented in real time on video screens as their own movements were recorded and concurrently replayed in the same space. This technologically mediated experience of oneself had the potential to create a sense of personal estrangement from self and surroundings. Bruce Nauman's *Live/Taped Video Corridor,* 1970, is one such celebrated live feedback work where Nauman amplified the disquieting nature of the experience by building a deliberately narrow and claustrophobic space for the video installation.

Many video installations employing a feedback system presented the images in real time, while others added a time delay of a few seconds, which added to the sense of dislocation felt by the viewer. Examples of these kinds of works are *Interface*, 1972 by Peter Campus and *Time Delay Room*, 1974, by Dan Graham. The artists mentioned so far are all American, and all feature prominently in standard art-historical accounts of video art. However, artists in other parts of the world were also investigating these systems in interesting ways, for instance Valie Export and Peter Weibel in Austria.

Sculptural Phase

Artists working with video in its early forms also utilised the sculptural potential of video presentation equipment such as the video monitor. The monitor itself had a physical form and occupied space in a gallery in the way a sculpture might do. The resemblance and close relationship at that time between the video monitor and the television set produced works that addressed the content of television programming, or its position as a mass media capable of reaching a nation wide or even international audience. A number of artists and activists in the United States and Europe in 1970s and 80s set up alternate TV stations, for which made and broadcast material critical of mainstream culture and television.

The Korean artist Nam Jun Paik, based in New York produced works that made reference to the medium of television and exploited the sculptural and distinct properties of the video monitor or medium. His *TV Magnet*, 1975, for example, featured powerful magnet placed on the top of a TV that pulled and distorted a television image. Other of Paik's works came out of his connections with Fluxus, a loose international grouping of artists whose conceptual and performance works often involved public presentations of musical concerts where the instruments had been radically altered. Paik produced *TV Cello,* 1971, one of a series of works made with musician and performance artist Charlotte Moorman, in which two television sets positioned one above the other roughly resembled a cello. Strings and electronic pickups connected to the TVs allowed the sculpture to be 'played' with the resulting sound played on the TVs along with electronic signals sent from the pickups, and live video images of the performance mixed with other video images.

Video art of subsequent decades, for instance the works of Shigeko Kubota, Adrian Piper and Tony Oursler have continued to work with the three-dimensional potential of video as part of sculptural installations, Shigeko Kubota's, *The River,* 1979–81, suspended three video monitors over a water filled steel container. Since the early 1990s Tony Oursler has made use of small video projectors to cast recorded images of people or body parts for instance faces, eyes and mouths onto soft oval sculptures.

Cinematic Phase

Much video art of the last 15 years tends to sit within Isles' notion of the cinematic phase in which large-scale video projections are presented in darkened gallery environments much like the space of the movie theatre. Many such works are comprised of multiple projections that sequence or montage viewpoints, narratives and images. The content and structure of such video works owes much to the narrative and grammatical structures of cinema.

The work of a huge number and variety of artists could be discussed in relation to cinematic video works, including Bill Viola, Gary Hill, Pipilotti Rist, Stan Douglas, Douglas Gordon, Doug Aitken, Olga Chernysheva, Anri Sala, Raqs Media Collective, Hassan Khan, Shirin Neshat and Rodney Graham.

Shirin Neshat is an Iranian artist based in New York known for her black and white two-channel videos and photographic works, which address her cultural heritage, often highlighting the position of women and gender differences in Iranian society. In *Turbulent*, 1998 as with many of her video works, two projections are situated directly opposite each other. In this case two theatre stages are represented, one with a large audience and a male singer in close-up facing the gallery viewer, the other with a single female performer singing to an empty auditorium. Blair French has written, "On one (screen) a male singer neatly dressed in the same white shirt as his male audience beautifully sings a traditional song of love. As the applause from the audience fades out, the lone facing figure of a woman veiled in black begins a stunning wordless song." [6] The projected images of *Turblence* position the audience in the space between the projections, with viewers turning their heads back and forth to follow the call and response of the singers, whilst taking in the performances and interpreting the relations portrayed on the screens. In this way, positioning the parts of a story (which in a film might be shown in a sequence, one after the other) in three-dimensional space on different screens, a sequential narrative becomes spatialised.

Many other video projection works are, in contrast, presented on a single screen. Rodney Graham, a Canadian artist who frequently uses projected images has often made single screen works, such as *Halcion Sleep,* 1994 – a work in the conceptual mode where Graham has himself filmed after taking a hypnotic drug. His journey, literal and metaphoric, is recorded, as he lies asleep dressed in striped pajamas in the back of a taxi.

Halcion Sleep and *Turblence* introduce a key quality of numerous video projection works – unlike a movie or film screening, many videos from the 1990s were presented on a continuous 'loop' which the viewer can enter and exit at any time, perhaps remaining long enough to experience the work cycle through in repetition, rather than as a sequence, which the audience should watch from a beginning to an end.

Video in Australia

While the breadth of artists working with video in Australia cannot be cataloged here, a small selection of Australian artists is offered, with activities and references

at the end of this section to introduce a number of other Australian artists working with video that students can use as the subject of further research.

As John Conomos notes, a comprehensive history of video art in Australia is yet to be written. His essay *'Framing Video Art in Australia'*, does, however, sketch out an account of early Australian video works:

> "Australian video art first emerged – both as single channel video tape form and as installation / performance – in the early 1970s in several Sydney art galleries: the Tin Sheds of Sydney University, Bush Video at Nimbin's Aquarius Festival, and the independent video access centres during Whitlam's era, seminal exemplars being Mike Parr, Tim Johnson, Michael Glasheen ... Jill Scott, Tim Burns, David Perrry, John Kirk, Phillipa Cullen, Jeune Pritchard, Stephen Jones, Peter Callas, Leigh Hobba to name a number." [7]

Mike Parr and artist Peter Kennedy worked together on performances in the early 1970s at Inhibodress, a gallery they and other artists ran in Sydney. These collaborative works can be considered in light of the Chrissie Isles' Phenomenological or Performative phase described above. They frequently involved carrying out an action on the body, as part of the investigation of an idea.

Jill Scott an Australian artist, who has worked extensively overseas, also explored the use of video in an extension of bodily engaged performance works. From these works, she and other artists such as Peter Callas moved into an investigation of the distinctive properties of video as a medium, and manipulated its electronic images with color synthesizers.

While video works produced in Australia from the 1990s to the present day have not been exclusively video projections, this form of video has been the most prevalent. As with the video projection works discussed above by Shirin Neshat and Rodney Graham, Australian artists working in video during the last decade or more have similarly drawn on the narrative and formal conventions of film for their work. Artists such as Philip Brophy, Lyndal Jones, Monika Tichacek, Joyce Hinterding, David Haines, Kate Murphy and Shaun Gladwell have all employed cinematically scaled projected images, often as multi-channel, multi-screen immersive installations. For instance, *Crying Man 4* (from the series *Tears for*

What Was Done, 2005, by Lyndal Jones) is a multi-screen video installation work that positions three double sided video projections parallel to each other to represent three men, all of a similar, middle age, in business suits showing visible sign of emotion and tearfulness. Multi-screen projections of this kind can present a number of different parts of an artwork concurrently on separate screens, with viewers free to move around the space, choosing different vantage points from which to view the work, while they construct their own experience of relationships between the images on the individual screens.

Conclusion

Video has become one medium among many for contemporary visual artists and is often combined with other forms and processes such as sound art, installation and media arts (technologies such as computer graphics, animation, internet projects and interactive technologies). The ability to bring images from the material world into art is a strong attraction for many artists, as is the familiarity contemporary audiences have with moving image languages which have grown out of the proliferation of screens in our everyday experience (the movie screen, television, atm's, mobile phones as well as, in virtual spaces we increasingly interact with on the internet). In a reflexive way, developing an understanding of video art and its histories contributes to the ability to consider the place of video and screen technologies in our public and private lives.

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NOTES
1. The Sony Portapak in the mid-60s made the analog video camera relatively affordable. To this point, video technology was only available to TV broadcast stations. Digital video and desktop video editing systems available today have extended video's accessibility for artists.
2. Conomos, John, *Mutant Media: Essays on Cinema, Video Art and New Media*, Artspace & Power Publications, Sydney, 2007, p. 97.
3. Iles, Chrissie, 'Video and Film Space', in Erida Suderburg ed., *Space, Site, Intervention: Situating Installation Art*, pp. 252–262.
4. For instance, how long they can carry out a particular activity as in Bruce Nauman's *Bouncing in the Corner, No. 1,* 1968.
5. Excerpt from *Theme Song*, 1973, viewable at: www.eai.org/eai/tape.jsp?itemID=1957
6. Blair French, *Voiceovers*, Like, No. 1, p. 53.
7. Conomos, John, *Mutant Media*, p.100.

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Australian and International Video related websites

Australian Centre for the Moving Image
www.acmi.net.au

d /Lux Media Arts, an Australian Screen and media arts organisation
www.dlux.org.au

Electronic Arts Intermix (EAI) an online resource for video art and interactive media.
www.eai.org/eai

Experimental TV Center
www.experimentaltvcenter.org

Media Art Net
www.mediaartnet.org/mediaartnet

Video Data Bank
www.vdb.org

FILM/VIDEO KEYWORDS

Aspect ratio: The relationship of the frames width to its height.

Camera angle: The position of the frame in relation to the subject it shows. A high angle is when camera is looking down, low angle when looking up.

Cut: In the finished film, an instantaneous change from one framing to another.

Diegetic sound: Any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the fllm's world.

Direct sound: Music, noise, and speech recorded from the event at the moment of filming.

Following shot: A shot with framing that shifts to keep a moving figure onscreen.

Framing: The use of edges of the film to select and to compose what will be visible onscreen.

Hand-held camera: The use of the camera operator's body as a camera support.

Jump cut: An elliptical cut that appears to be an interruption of a single shot. It occurs within a scene rather than between scenes, to condense the shot. Either the figures seem to change instantly against a constant background, or the background changes instantly while the figures remain constant.

Mask: An opaque screen placed in the camera ... that blocks part of the frame off and changes the shape of photographed image.

Mise-en-scene: All the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed, that is, part of the cinematic process that take place on the set.

Offscreen space: The six areas blocked from being visible on the screen but still part of the space of the scene: to four sides of the frame, behind the set, and the behind the camera.

Sequence: A term commonly used for moderately large segment of a film, involving one complete stretch of action and consisting of one or more scenes.

Shot: One uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. Also called a *take*.

Slow motion: a technique in filmmaking whereby time appears to be slowed down. Typically this is achieved when each film frame is captured at a rate much faster than it will be played back. When replayed at normal speed, time appears to be moving slower.

Unless otherwise stated, all Film/Video Keyword definitions taken from: David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: an introduction*, 6th ed., New York, McGraw Hill, 2001.

VIDEO ART: SHAUN GLADWELL
Busan Triptych, 2006

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Negative Calligraphy and Skull

Oncheonchon

Calligraphy and Slowburn

Naming, locations and languages

Busan is a large city in Korea; a triptych generally refers to a painting in three panels. The location for one part of the video is a watercourse called Oncheonchon, a Korean name meaning Natural Spring. The artist has spoken about using place names in the titles of his work as a way of keeping a connection to landscape painting.

One part of the video has a young woman and man riding a BMX bike alongside the storm water channel; the area is an unofficial urban short cut or thoroughfare. Gladwell described this section of the work as depicting the psychological downtime between performances.

Daniel Baumann, an Australian art critic writes,

In *Calligraphy and slow burn*, 2006, Gladwell complicates the setting. Jeong Kyu-tae, a BMX trick rider, presents himself not outdoors in an urban environment, but in a museum, in front of a calligraphy wall. The rider calmly mounts his bike, finds his balance, goes up into some sort of handstand and then returns to the floor ... The film makes us realise that we are watching a language and its visualisation: the movements performed by Jeong Kyu-tae are like drawings: they are signs which on first glance appear just as abstract as the calligraphy in the background. In both cases, we have to learn a language which is the result of precise and controlled movements. *Art & Australia*, p. 575

KEYWORDS:

Diegetic sound: Any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film's world.

Mise-en-scene: All the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed.

Real time: Film or video recorded at the same rate as the action that takes place.

Shot: In shooting, one uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. Also called a *take*.

Tracking shot: A camera shot filmed from a moving dolly (platform on wheels), following the movement of someone or something.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Why do you think the artist has positioned two parts of this work alongside each other as a triptych? What might this add beyond seeing each part separately? Research another artwork that uses the triptych form.

2. Many contemporary artists have the opportunity to travel the world in order to produce or exhibit their artworks. How do you think artworks translate from one cultural context to another? Take *Busan Triptych* as an example and consider how audiences in Korea and Australia might experience the work.

3. What do you make of the contrast between the westernised clothing worn by the male bike rider and the more traditional costume of the female pillion passenger in the other part of the triptych?

4. The sounds made by the BMX performer have been included in the video. What impact does this have on your experience of the work?

5. Think about the two 'languages' the artist is juxtaposing: the performance language of a body in space (in this case a static body), and the graphical language of calligraphy. What do you think the artist intends us to glean from seeing a BMX bike performer alongside examples of the traditional Asian artform calligraphy?

6. Sports like BMX bike riding have become part of 'street' or youth culture in many parts of the world. The performer in this video is located in Busan, Korea. Write an essay about the role you see communication technologies like television, movies, the Internet and social networking sites like YouTube, MySpace and Facebook play in disseminating these practices.

Double Linework

Yokohama Linework

Experimental drawing and the camera

Shaun Gladwell has described his Linework videos as, "experimental drawings." *Space Invaders*, p. 33

In response to a question about the role of the camera in his work, Gladwell says,

"The camera assumes various positions in my works in order to reexamine the mechanics and politics of capturing. A number of my projects have approached aspects of documentary and the continuity between seeing and recording. Works such as *Linework* use lightweight handheld cameras to represent the subject's viewpoint – the performer relies on the camera viewfinder as their field of vision to then navigate through spaces at high speeds." Interview with Steven Matijcio, unpaginated.

Daniel Baumann, an art critic writing in the *Art and Australia* magazine says,

"*Double Linework*, 2000, appropriates the international system of road line marking with ease and concentration and transforms it into a global drawing." p. 575

Mark Pennings, writing in *Eyeline*, another Australian art magazine, says,

"*Double Linework* (2003) ... manipulates space rather than time. It is unusual in Gladwell's *oeuvre* for it is recorded at normal speed and gives a more grounded impression of riding on a speeding skateboard ... Gladwell wore the video camera while skateboarding. The view is directed at his feet as he traverses the lines on a roadway. This dynamic camera angle generates dizzying solipsistic effects. Roadlines are a common visual idiom of the urban landscape and direct the movement of people. From the skateboarder's perspective however these lines appear as abstract designs that scroll hypnotically beneath his feet." p. 18

KEYWORDS

Diegetic sound: Any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film's world.

Hand-held camera: The use of the camera operator's body as a camera support.

Real time: Film or video recorded at the same rate as the action that takes place.

Split screen: A film, video or television screen divided into more than one frame.

Solipsism: The philosophical idea that the self is all that exists and can be known.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Which other artists can you think of that have used non-traditional drawing methods?

2. The camera is hand-held in the *Lineworks* videos, look at the other works in the exhibition and identify other ways Shaun Gladwell has used the camera.

3. Where do you remember seeing hand-held shots on TV or in movies, what does the moving, shaky camera work usually suggest to the viewer?

4. Gladwell's *Linework* videos are generally projected onto the floor reconstructing the perspective of the artist when he videoed the images, how does this affect the experience you have of the work? What do you think the contrast would be if the work were projected on to the wall?

5. Are there other works in the exhibition that have used split screen? If so, describe how it has been used.

6. The *Lineworks* videos have been shot from the point of view of the skateboarder. What other methods could Gladwell have used to record these journeys and what impact would other approaches have had on the interpretation of the works?

Action painting and skating

In answer to a question about the relationship between skating on the surface of the streets and painting on the surface of the canvas, Shaun Gladwell said, "There are parallels. Skating is not exactly the action painting of Rosenberg (American art critic associated with abstract expressionism), but there is action and gesture. Skaters are always sampling surfaces, always trying to bargain with gravity and work out what they can get away with. Much could be said for certain strategies of painting of course." *Space Invaders*, p. 34

Blair French, exhibition curator and author of *Shaun Gladwell: Videowork*, writes about *Godspeed Verticals*,

> "The camera is static: the field of view a fixed surface, textured like an abstract canvas. Here the sense of an almost arbitrary frame closely resembles experiments in colourfield painting. The edge of the frame delineates the space of the work yet also implies its potential expansion in all directions ... bodies lying flat and sliding down across the surface of the video frame in this work effectively play with the video frame as a boundary at once material and purely pictorial ... The surface, of course, is a concrete floor and the bodies dropping through the space are lying flat-backed on skateboards. They drop into the picture, cutting across the top border in single or occasionally clustered intrusions, then slip smoothly as if internally propelled down and out across the lower border (Gladwell's fascination with the pull of gravity again) ... Sometimes figures bounce back off the lower frame of the video image ... alerting the viewer to the determining structures of the video set-up." p. 20

KEYWORDS:

Colourfield painting: Term originally used to describe the work from about 1950 of the Abstract Expressionist painters, which was characterised by large areas of a more or less flat single colour. Source: TATE Glossary, http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/

Framing: The use of edges of the video frame to select and to compose what will be visible onscreen.

Xylem and Phloem: Plant tissues that conduct water, sugars, acids and other mineral nutrients from the roots to other plant areas – in other words the tissues through which life force flows. (Blair French, *Shaun Gladwell: Videowork*, p. 30)

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Why do you think the artist used the words *Xylem* and *Phloem* in the title of the work?

2. Research the critic Harold Rosenberg and action painting. Give your point of view regarding a connection between painting and skateboarding.

3. Why do you think the artist is interested in representing the effect of gravity? Can you think of other artists that have been concerned with gravity in their work?

4. Imagine you were going to make a video using performers for a skateboard movie and had to select the wardrobe items and performer's costumes. What kinds of clothing would you need to supply for the performers?

5. Graphic arts and advertising often borrow from the visual arts. How is this artwork different from or similar to a television advertisement for clothing or fashion? If it was an advertisement, what might it be selling?

6. Write an essay about the importance of clothing in being able to identify as part of a particular group or subculture.

Urban space and skateboarding

In an artist statement on the Australian Centre for the Moving Image website: http://www.acmi.net.au/fountain.aspx, Gladwell writes,

> "My practice poetically and critically links personal experience with art historical, philosophical and cultural discourse. Recent video works engage these concerns through forms of urban expression such as skateboarding, hip-hop graffiti, BMX bike riding and break-dancing. A series of ambient structural manipulations are made to recorded performances in order to critically oppose popular representations, namely the fast and furious jump cuts of MTV montage."

And in an interview for the catalogue *Space Invaders*, he states,

> "I record the relationship to skateboarding and other related activity has to architecture and civil space, but my work is involved in bringing a kind of added psychological/emotional dimension to it as well. The project for me is to complexify the performance and its documentation." p. 34

Robert Cook, writing before the completion of *Handrails* says,

> "The new work will feature skaters trying to ride an almost impossible handrail. As skater after skater fails, they cascade to the ground, beaten by gravity and distance. But to be beaten is not really the point. The point is the leaping, the confidence, the will to do and *be* more than is possible, no matter the consequences." *Photofile*, 81, p. 54

Iain Borden, an English academic argues in *The Performative Critique of the American City*, that:

> "Skateboarding is, then, at one level an aesthetic rather than ethical practice ... Skateboarders analyze architecture not for historical, symbolic or authorial content but for how surfaces present themselves as skateable surfaces. This is what *Thrasher* skateboard magazine calls the 'skater's eye':
>
> *People who ride skateboards look at the world in a very different way. Angles, spots, lurkers and cops all dot the landscape that we all travel.*" "Skater's Eye," *Thrasher*, v.17 n.1 (January 1997), p. 71.

KEYWORDS

Civil: Of or belonging to citizens.

Direct sound: Music, noise, and speech recorded from the event at the moment of filming.

Discourse: Conversation or talk or a dissertation or treatise on an academic subject. Source: *Australian Oxford Dictionary*

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Think about the urban areas you are familiar with, where do you see people using city spaces in ways that were not intended by urban planners or architects?

2. Imagine you are making a skate video of young people at the area adjacent to St Mary's cathedral (or another urban location). Think about and make notes below about how you would go about this in terms of: camera angles, mobile or static camera, the light conditions, whether you'd use direct sound (see keywords) and/or sound effects or music, and wardrobe requirements for the performers.

3. Research other artists that have worked with use or misuse of public space. Which medium have they chosen to use to represent these activities?

4. Find one other artist that has explored risk or potentially dangerous situations.

5. Go for a walk in an urban space, tryout having a 'skaters eye,' identify the physical structures a skater would find useful: ramps, rails, footpaths, ledges, buildings etc. Draw a diagram or sketch of your movement through these spaces. Note down the ways the spaces you move through might be regulated or controlled: are there signs banning certain activities? There other less visible ways people's activities in public space are controlled, e.g. how we are taught to behave, surveillance cameras, police patrols? Analyse how these measures are in place during your walk.

Subcultures, the mainstream and commodification

In response to a question from Stephen Matijcio about the ability of art to effect social change, Gladwell says:

"In my opinion, many of the activities I draw upon continue to operate as potent, political acts despite processes of institutional co-option and commodification. I draw these activities into a series of symbolic and poetic relationships that may or may not elicit a political *reading*. A distinction exists here between the political *work* of the activity I source (or perform myself) and the political reading of my compositions. For example, a version of Capoeira, the Brazilian martial art/dance, is performed in a petrol station. In another work, a BMX bicycle rider precariously balances on one wheel whilst navigating a crowded fast food restaurant. These are open, poetic gestures that offer a meditation upon the politics of Capoeira and BMX riding in relation to these environments."

Mark Pennings, writing about *Hikaru: Fast Food Sequence* in Eyeline, an Australian Art magazine, says,

"The video shows the freestyle bike rider Hikaru Oranu *[sic]* drifting in an *[sic]* out of McDonald's and Hungry Jack's outlets in Sydney's CBD. Ostensibly, it seems to be an act of political resistance for the rider invades space that is otherwise strictly commercial, and an incompatible situation is thus set up between these high-profile branded operations and a teenage freestyling expert. But contrary to appearances, this is not a video that advocates political activism. Instead, it is as if Gladwell seeks to reconcile two disparate aspirations – one of the commercial ideal and its habitation of space, the other the search to attain the level of freestyling perfection in an awkward space. The practice of freestyle bike riding lies at the more sedate end of extreme sports culture. Like other sports, it has a set of codes and rituals that demand constant practice and discipline in reaching the highest levels of the craft … The specialist rider also requires a particular state of mind that is highly focussed on the immediate physical tasks required to complete manoeuvres. Gladwell's slow-motion framing alerts the viewer to this condition of consummate self-absorption, much like the Zen-like harmony where body and mind transcend the place or activity that sets the process in train." *Eyeline*, p. 17

Commodification: When a thing, person or idea is turned into a commodity or item that can be exchanged or bought and sold.

Co-opt: when something is adopted as one's own; to absorb an opponent or opposing group into a larger group.

Framing: The use of edges of the film to select and to compose what will be visible onscreen.

Hand-held camera: The use of the camera operator's body as a camera support.

Real time: When moving images are played at the same speed at which they were recorded

Slow-motion: the process or technique used in film-making in which images are made to move more slowly than those in their originals, due to having been photographed at a number of frames per second than normal, or being projected more slowly than normal.

Subculture: A separate social group within a larger culture, that exists outside conventional society.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. What relationship if any, is the artist drawing between fast food, consumer culture and BMX riding?

2. The fast food outlets that form the location for this work are large consumer 'brands,' How are corporate brands associated with skateboarding or other kinds of street practices like BMX biking, extreme sports etc. Think about all the products surrounding these practices, e.g. clothing, equipment, magazines, etc.

3. Shaun Gladwell is often said to be producing work from within the subcultures he represents in his videos, what would be the difference do you think if he was recording these activities as an outsider?

4. Research another video artist that explores the use of slow motion or expanded time, e.g. Douglas Gordon in *24 Hour Psycho*, 1993, see http://www.medienkunstnetz. de/works/24-hour-psycho/ for a brief introduction to the work.

5. The framing of this sequence is slightly obscured at the corners as if the camera is hidden in a bag. What reasons do you think the artist would have for hiding the camera from view?

Performance, stasis and space

In a book accompanying this exhibition, Blair French the curator of the exhibition writes,

"*In a Station of the Metro* features four members of a Tokyo breakdance crew, Taka, Yuya, Ai and Kio, individually undertaking a studied exercise in stasis and endurance in a busy metro-station concourse. One by one they take up the same central position in the concourse as hundreds upon hundreds of people pass around them, going about their daily business (the whole movement of the mass given a slightly choreographed feeling by subtle slowing of the footage). They carefully lower themselves onto the gleaming floor and adopt a pose horizontal to the ground surface. Bearing their weight on hands and lightly pressing the sides of their hooded heads on the ground as if listening for movement, they keep their legs roughly parallel to the horizontal plane in variations on a scissor pose. And here they stay, staring at the camera, for some minutes, until tiring legs begin to shake and move about and each finally has to abandon the pose, ease themselves to their feet and move off into the crowd. Gladwell films these made-for-camera performances in 16:9 widescreen format, later installing the work in double-channel format with two projections tipped on their sides, cast into the right-angle corner where walls meet."

French goes on to discuss the title of the video:

"Ezra Pound was the most celebrated of the imagist poets and Gladwell in act refers to this point of reference in borrowing the title of Pound's 1913 poem *In a Station of a Metro*:"
  "*The apparition of these faces in the crowd;*
  Petals on a wet, black bough."

KEYWORDS

Double or two-channel video: A video work with two sources of video imagery.

16:9 widescreen format: Refers to the aspect ratio, the ratio of width to height, of a widescreen picture (standard video and television formats are 4:3 format).

Aspect ratio: The relationship of the frame's width to its height.

Slow-motion: the process or technique used in film-making in which images are made to move more slowly than those in their originals, due to having been photographed at a number of frames per second than normal, or being projected more slowly than normal.

Imagism: A movement in early 20th century Anglo-American poetry that favored precision of imagery, and clear, sharp language. Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imagism

Split screen: A film, video or television screen divided into more than one frame.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. The artist has chosen to appropriate the name of an Ezra Pound poem from 1913 for his video. Stand in front of *In a Station of a Metro* and read Pound's poem on the previous page. Note down some thoughts on why you think the artist has chosen this title?

2. The mirror has been used as a device on works from the Renaissance period to the present. Find two works that use an actual or represented mirror and write down the functions the mirror serves in that context.

3. The use of a split screen is a technique that has a history in cinema, look up some examples of where it has been used in the past e.g. *Chelsea Girls* by Andy Warhol. Why do you think artists or filmmakers use this technique? How does it allow them to treat time differently?

4. Many performers in Shaun Gladwell's videos are male, many of the activities he records are from predominantly male domains, what differences do you note in this work which includes a female performer?

5. The grid, a network of vertical and horizontal lines has had an important place in art history. Painters and architects have used the grid since the Renaissance to assist in depicting linear perspective, depth and vanishing points. In the videos of *In a Station of a Metro*, the floor tiles could be said to form two joined, perspectival grids. What might this imply about how the artist intends us to think about the space within these videos?

6. The artist has said that the performances in this video relate to the Japanese artform Butoh. Research Butoh and write how the performances in *In a Station of a Metro* might relate to this practice?

Art and skateboarding

The artist Shaun Gladwell says,

"For me this was a smooth transition, to connect my fine art practice to skateboarding. I could always see, and participated in, the creative energy of skateboarding. Then, in art school, I started locating skateboarding's potential to move within and against several different genres – (self) portraiture, landscape and the contemporary practice of performance and video installation. I then began to make videos of skating with a range of critical concerns in mind. I didn't want the work to be easily collapsed into the skating subculture … my work wishes to be slightly estranged from subcultural origins. I feel this estrangement happens when the conceptual and historical references are as important as the type and quality of skateboarding being performed." *Space Invaders*, p. 32

Arts writer Mark Pennings says,

"Another work from 2000, *Kickflipper*, offers a more relaxed treatment of skateboarding in contrast to the heavily crafted *Storm Sequence*. This video shows a skater doing manoeuvres in front of the graffiti murals on Bondi's boardwalk. As there is a strong inadvertent quality to the piece, as during the performance people off the street walked into the framing shot, and even in a local canine become involved in the event. The dominant element though is the artist's use of slow motion to foreground the skateboarder's superb balancing acts and the choreographic aspects of his skills. As the skateboarder twists and turns in slow ballet-like gestures one becomes aware that Gladwell's work departs from the conventional view of skateboarding as an exercise in teenage machismo. This is the image generally conveyed by an MTV logic of fast and furious cuts and high velocity aesthetic. This trope may accurately illustrate the intense physical and dynamic nature of the sport, but Gladwell offers new aesthetic coordinates through which to view this practice, coordinates that emphasise points of personal transcendence. By swapping jump cuts, acute camera angles and flashing changes in view for the slow motion angle, the artist offers contemplation instead of exhilaration, beauty rather than speed and the spectacle is thusly decelerated and coolly stylised." Source: "Out of Place, Out of Time, Out of Mind: Shaun Gladwell's aesthetic explorations," *Eyeline*, p. 17

Framing: The use of edges of the film to select and to compose what will be visible onscreen.

Shot: One uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. Also called a *take*.

Slow-motion: The process or technique used in film-making in which images are made to move more slowly than those in their originals, due to having been photographed at a number of frames per second than normal, or being projected more slowly than normal.

Subculture: A separate social group within a larger culture, that exists outside conventional society.

Transcendence: The quality or state of exceeding or surpassing something or, the existence above and apart from the material world

Trope: The figurative use of words or images.

Video installation: Art works incorporating video, which occupy an entire gallery space into which the spectator can enter.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. How might a video self-portrait differ from a painted or photographic self-portrait? Find an example of another artist that has produced video portraits. How is their work different from or similar to Shaun Gladwell's?

2. Elsewhere, Shaun Gladwell has said he avoids using the "dominant subcultural aesthetic which is often very high energy, jump cuts, MTV-style presentation with driving soundtracks" when he records performers doing skate moves, BMX tricks etc. Why do you think he chooses not to use the standard techniques to represent this practice?

3. How does this video relate to a landscape painting?

4. The artist does not tell us where the video is shot but the setting gives us many clues. List some of these clues. How do you think someone who was not familiar with Bondi Beach interpret what they can see of this location?

5. This video has people (and animals) walking in from the off screen space. How planned do you think this video was? And what additional information do we find out abut the place or what goes on there from these people who play accidental walk-on parts in this video?

6. How does the slow-motion representation of a skateboarding performance in *Kickflipper* relate to representations of other types of physical performance, for instance of sports coverage, e.g. in the slow-motion instant replay in sport or the ways in which extreme sports are represented?

7. Think about a movie that used slow-motion. Why do you think the director choose to use that technique?

The Romantic sublime

Mark Pennings, an art critic writes,

"Gladwell began to pursue his interest in the relation between the body, space and time in *Storm Sequence* (2000). This video shows the artist working moves on his skateboard on the Bondi Beach sea front. The setting is a calculated staging of the sublime, as white-capped waves and a dark stormy sky form a backdrop to his actions. The artist uses a contemporary leisure activity as part of an examination of the nature and impact of art iconography and its aesthetic resonances. While the thematic is firmly grounded in the romantic sublime, the work is also part self-portrait, performance and video art." *Eyeline*, p. 16

Video and the art market

Quote from art collector Peter Fay,

"I came upon a Shaun painting at a Helen Lempriere Scholarship Exhibition ... I immediately recognised an extraordinary talent in this young painter ...
I was just transfixed by the beauty of this image of this skater pirouetting in slow motion, with the huge drama of the sea; the seascape behind him this incredible storm at sea. All these were elements of luck; the storm and so forth. And then with the rain falling on the lens of the camera transforming what was a video piece it becomes almost a pointillist,

almost an impressionist painting, as the blurring, still with this figure eternally circling almost like an angel or some celestial body ready to return to another void; to another planet; to another world. And taking its leave in this last gyration, which just goes on, and on, and on. It's quite mesmeric, quite simple in its dynamic, and yet the poetry and the intensity, and the sense of drama that is captured. I think it is an extraordinary video. This to me contained all the elements that I just think that great video art holds, and I just feel that in this young artist there is an extraordinary talent." Source: National Gallery of Australia website: http://www.nga.gov.au/HomeSweetHome/Default.cfm?WORKID=1&Audio=20k&ViewID=2

Video as an edition of works

Video's early roots as an experimental art form with complex technical requirements meant that it was not bought and sold as an art commodity in the same way as more traditional, two dimensional art forms such as painting. In recent years however, video has been absorbed into the art market; its reproducible nature has meant that videos are treated in a similar way to the fine art print, with works being sold as an edition (a series of identical reproductions). *Storm Sequence* was produced as an edition of 4. A Sydney Morning Herald article describes how one of these editions of *Storm Sequence* was sold for $3500 in 2003, and was later resold for $60,500. Source: www.smh.com.au/news/arts/more-aussie-artists-than-ever-to-exhibit/2007/03/06/1173166691259.html#

KEYWORD:

Slow-motion: the process or technique used in film-making in which images are made to move more slowly than those in their originals, due to having been photographed at a number of frames per second than normal, or being projected more slowly than normal.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Research the term the Sublime and the Romantic tradition in Art.

2. Research the 19th century painter David Caspar Friedrich, and in particular, his painting, *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog*, 1818. Analyse the formal, aesthetic or other relationships that might exist between the painting and *Storm Sequence*.

3. Peter Fay speaks about Shaun Gladwell as an artist with "extraordinary talent" the idea of innate talent is closely aligned with the idea of artistic genius, with its notions of originality. Do you think these ideas are defunct now that postmodern appropriation where artists 'borrow' from the work of other artists is commonplace?

4. Read Peter Fay's description *Storm Sequence* and his evaluation of Gladwell as an artist and contrast the highly descriptive style and flattering comments he offers, with writing about Gladwell's work from other types of commentators in the Kit, such as art critics and academics.

5. The Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship is managed by the NSW Ministry for the Arts. Research the scholarship at: http://www.arts.nsw.gov.au/Guidelines/Grants/2007/Helen.htm

VIDEO ART: SHAUN GLADWELL
Tangara, 2003

Art history and 'street' practices
Statement from the artist Shaun Gladwell,

"My practice poetically and critically links personal experience with art historical, philosophical and cultural discourse. Recent video works engage these concerns through forms of urban expression such as skateboarding, hip-hop graffiti, BMX bike riding and break-dancing. A series of ambient structural manipulations are made to recorded performances in order to critically oppose popular representations, namely the fast and furious jump cuts of MTV montage.

The slow-motion, framing and viewpoints of my work are composed in order to open performances to a range or readings that play within and against art historical genres and concepts such as romantic portraiture, landscape, religious allegory and the death reckoning of *vanitas* and *memento mori*."
Source: The Australian Centre for the Moving Image website: http://www.acmi.net.au/fountain.aspx

Gravity and the body
Daniel Baumann, an arts writer says,

"*Tangara*, 2003, shows a man hanging by his hands, head downwards like a bat, in a train carriage. *Pataphysical man* documents the breakdancer Daniel Esteve Pomares doing spins on his head. In both films the artist has turned the image 180 degrees, so that the performers are not on their heads anymore, but rather float from the ceiling an impossibility which triggers a conflict between seeing and knowing. In this way, both *Tangara* and *Pataphysical man* place emphasis on gravity as it is instrumental in even the body's tiniest movement." *Art and Australia*, p. 575

KEYWORDS:

Montage: A technique for combining imagery. In film and video editing, it is a way of presenting a story in a very short space of screentime or to juxtapose radically different shots and image content.

Memento mori: A painting or sculpture … designed to remind the viewer of their mortality and of the brevity and fragility of human life in the face of God and nature.
Source TATE Glossary online: http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/

Slow-motion: The process or technique used in film-making in which images are made to move more slowly than those in their originals, due to having been photographed at a number of frames per second than normal, or being projected more slowly than normal.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Shaun Gladwell frequently makes art historical references in relation to his work. Research *memento mori* (which he refers to above) find another artist that makes use of this form of imagery.

2. Go to the Video databanks reference for the Bruce Nauman work *Revolving upside down*, 1969, at: http://www.vdb.org/smackn.acgi$tapedetail?REVOLVINGU

Read the Phenomenology and performance section of the Introduction to this Kit and write about links between Gladwell's *Tangara* and Bruce Nauman's *Revolving upside down*, 1968.

3. Daniel von Sturmer is a contemporary of Shaun Gladwell's. Research the ways in which von Sturmer's work investigates gravity. How is his work different to Gladwell's in terms of presentation methods?

4. If Shaun Gladwell did choose to use 'the fast and furious jump cuts of MTV montage' how would this change the interpretation and meaning of the work?

5. The artist has chosen to use a static camera and a wide shot, what other choice of camera angle, framing or length of shot could he have made in order to record this activity? List the ways in which these changes would change the experience of the viewer.

Performer, movement, space, camera

The artist, Shaun Gladwell says,

> "In works such as *Woolloomooloo Night* (2004), I entered the logic of voyeurism and surveillance – though not entirely. The subject is aware they are performing for a camera but cannot determine exactly where the camera is, or what it will record. *Woolloomooloo Night* is an example of recording a performance at night from a distance. The performer is spot lit by the fluorescence of the petrol station, yet the fluorescent lighting also blinds the performer to their immediate surroundings and to the exact location of the camera." From an interview by Steven Matajicio, Curator, Plug in ICA, Winnipeg, Canada.

Blair French, curator of this exhibition writes in a text accompanying the show,

> "... capoeira practitioner Emma Magenta, dressed in basic training gear, paces, pirouettes, flexes and stretches her body about the fluorescent night space of a service-station forecourt. While visually interrupted by the arrival of a police car, rubbish truck and an oblivious seagull, Magenta's graceful yet always evidently powerful movements, performed without specific reference to the surveilling camera,[1] constitute a temporary yet utterly compelling occupation of space and place." *Shaun Gladwell: Video Art*, p. 9

NOTE
1. Emma Magenta was, in fact, at any given moment unaware of the specific position and movement of the camera during the shoot for *Woolloomooloo Night* due to Gladwell's use of the long shot and Magenta's enclosure within an almost blinding arena of fluorescent light.
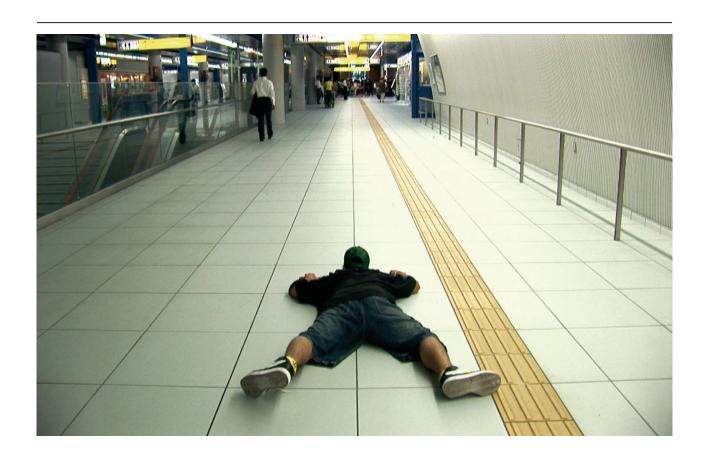

KEYWORDS:

Mise-en-scene: All the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed, that is, part of the cinematic process that take place on the set.

Surveillance: Observation of a person or group, especially one suspected of doing something illegal.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. Why do you think the artist placed the camera far enough away so that the performer was not aware of where it was? Could it be to avoid distracting the performer, or was it out of concern about being seen to video in a public space?

2. Watch the entire video and identify any edit points or changes in camera angle.

3. Imagine you are the artist choosing a petrol station as a location for a video shoot. What aspects of the mise-en-scene will you need to consider. Why would you choose this particular location, what connotations does this site bring with it?

4. Often if we are watching a video of an expert or demanding performance, whether it's krumping or a ballet performance, it is generally the particular performer that is the centrepiece of the performance, with admiration of the performance closely linked to their reputation and individual identity as a performer. In Gladwell's videos the performer is often anonymous, while the *type* of performance – BMX biking, skateboarding or capoeira – becomes the focus of he artwork. Why do you think this is?

5. This performance is taking place at a remove from you as the audience. What do you think would be the difference in your experience of Emma Magenta's performance if she were performing in person in the gallery in front of you?

Street performance and consumer culture

Blair French, curator of the exhibition writes,

"… *Yokohama Untitled*, 2005, another single-channel video work in which one by one, each of four Japanese break-dancers, Yuki, Yuya, Hajime and Taka, are pictured in slow motion moving through a specific urban setting (a metro carriage, an outdoor street arcade, a metro-station concourse and a department store). Dressed in über-chic streetwear they lope along in languid rhythms, trailed by the camera, every so often breaking into a set of spellbinding moves that lay claim to space, asserting presence and identity within otherwise everyday, almost homogenous environments". *Shaun Gladwell: Videowork*, p. 9

David Broker, a curator and writer says,

"Gladwell … put Yokohama and its environs to use for two video works of rap dancers in Chinatown and in a department store … the passersby in Gladwell's works seemed quite uninterested, perhaps embarrassed by such audacious public display." *Photofile*, p. 69

Yokohama Untitled
2005
HDV/DVD, 19:20 minutes, 16:9, stereo
Performers: Yuki, Yuya, Hajime, Taka
Videography: Gotaro Uematsu
Commissioned for the 2005 Yokohama Triennale
Courtesy the artist & Sherman Galleries, Sydney

KEYWORDS

Diegetic sound: Any voice, musical passage, or sound effect presented as originating from a source within the film's world.

Mise-en-scene: All the elements placed in front of the camera to be photographed, that is, part of the cinematic process that take place on the set.

Single channel: Video images from a single source.

Shot: One uninterrupted run of the camera to expose a series of frames. Also called a *take*.

QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

1. In this work, Gladwell has again used 'homogenous environments' such as sites of consumer activity, a retail store, and a shopping precinct. Do you think the artist is commenting in some way on consumer culture?

2. Hip Hop culture has spread to many parts of the world. Where are the performances in this video taking place? How do we know where they might be taking place, what clues are present in the video?

3. What is the difference between your experience of watching the performer on the video and that of the passengers on the train where the break dancer performs, or for the pedestrians passing the young man break dancing on the footpath? What does this suggest about the medium of video?

4. Blair French says the breakdancers "lope along in languid rhythms" and wear the latest in "uber chic". In your minds eye, replace the male performer with a female performer. What difference does this change make?

5. The collaborative group, The Kingpins are four young female Australian artists that have played with reversing the gender roles of performers like Rock or Hip Hop musicians. Research their work.