

SHAUN GLADWELL  
STEREO SEQUENCES



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# FOREWORD

## DIRECTOR'S

As Australia's leading centre for screen and digital culture, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) is committed to supporting and exhibiting the work of the world's most significant moving image makers. In recent years ACMI has presented major exhibitions by seminal practitioners such as Tim Burton, Dennis Hopper, Stanley Kubrick, Len Lye, Christian Marclay and Bill Viola.

ACMI also has a long tradition of collecting and commissioning works. We currently hold more than 650 works by major international artists – László Moholy-Nagy, Nam June Paik, Johan Grimonprez and Anthony McCall among them. The ACMI Collection also features a substantial catalogue of works by Australian artists, including Daniel Crooks, Destiny Deacon, Tracey Moffatt, Daniel von Sturmer, Lynette Wallworth and others.

Horizons: The ACMI Commissions Series continues this tradition with ACMI's most significant commission of works by a single artist to date: **Shaun Gladwell: Stereo Sequences**.

Over the last decade Shaun Gladwell has emerged as one of Australia's most exciting and acclaimed video artists and pre-eminent champion of moving image culture. His evocative work using large-scale video installations, photography and sculpture offers unique interpretations and a deeply personal vision of Australia's landscapes, myths and cultural identity. From his breakout video Storm Sequence (2000) to his installation MADDESTMAXIMVS: Planet and Stars Sequence at the 2009 Venice Biennale, Gladwell has created ambitious video and moving image installations that are poetic meditations on the nature and possibilities of the art form.

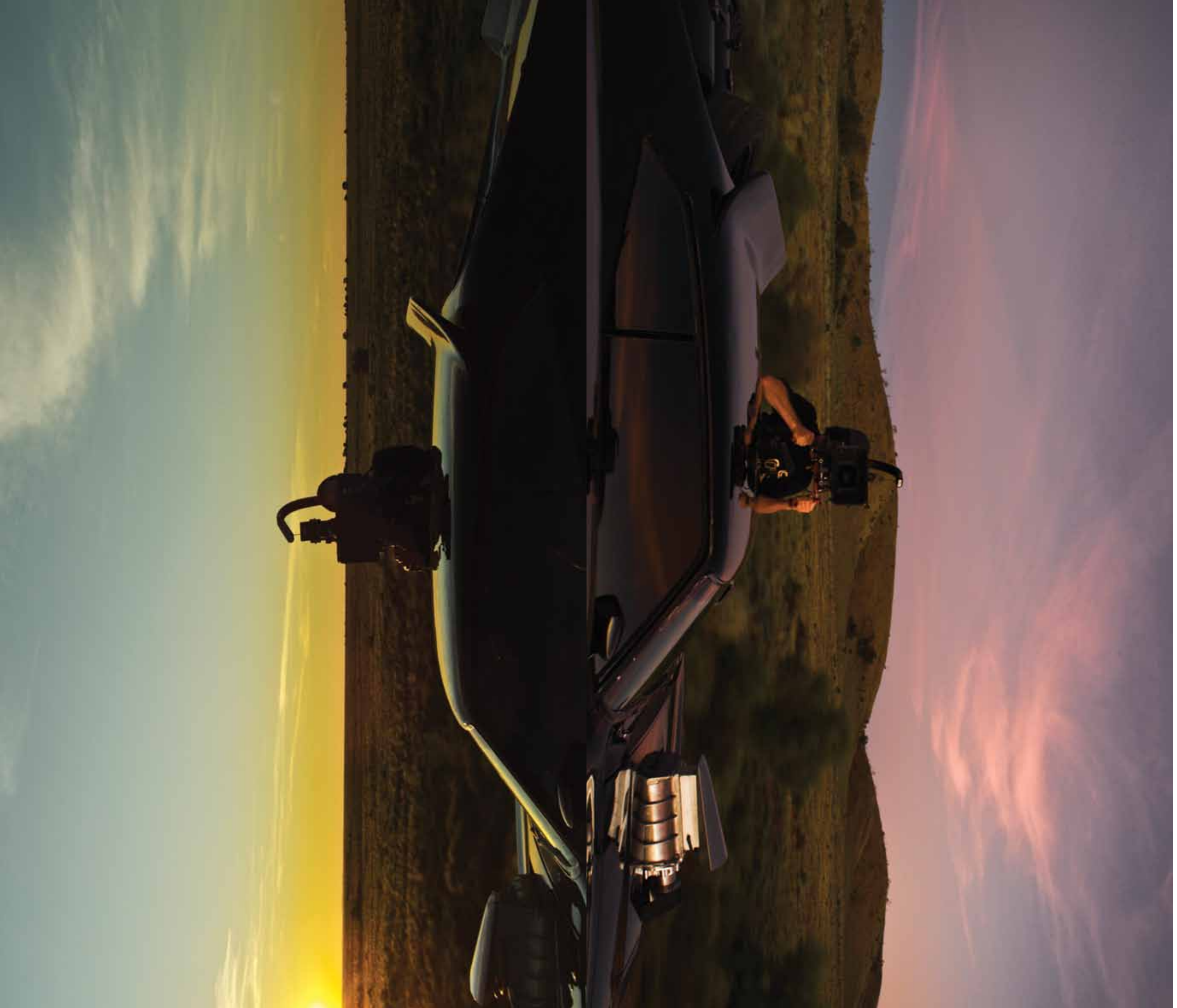
ACMI has been thrilled to work with Shaun on this exciting project. Thanks and appreciation go to Shaun and his supporters, especially Anna and Morry Schwartz, for their vision and commitment to realising this exhibition.

**Shaun Gladwell: Stereo Sequences** offers audiences a compelling opportunity to experience Shaun Gladwell's evolving artistic vision through the showcasing of his work. It presents some of the finest examples of innovative contemporary Australian art.

*Tony Sweeney*  
Director



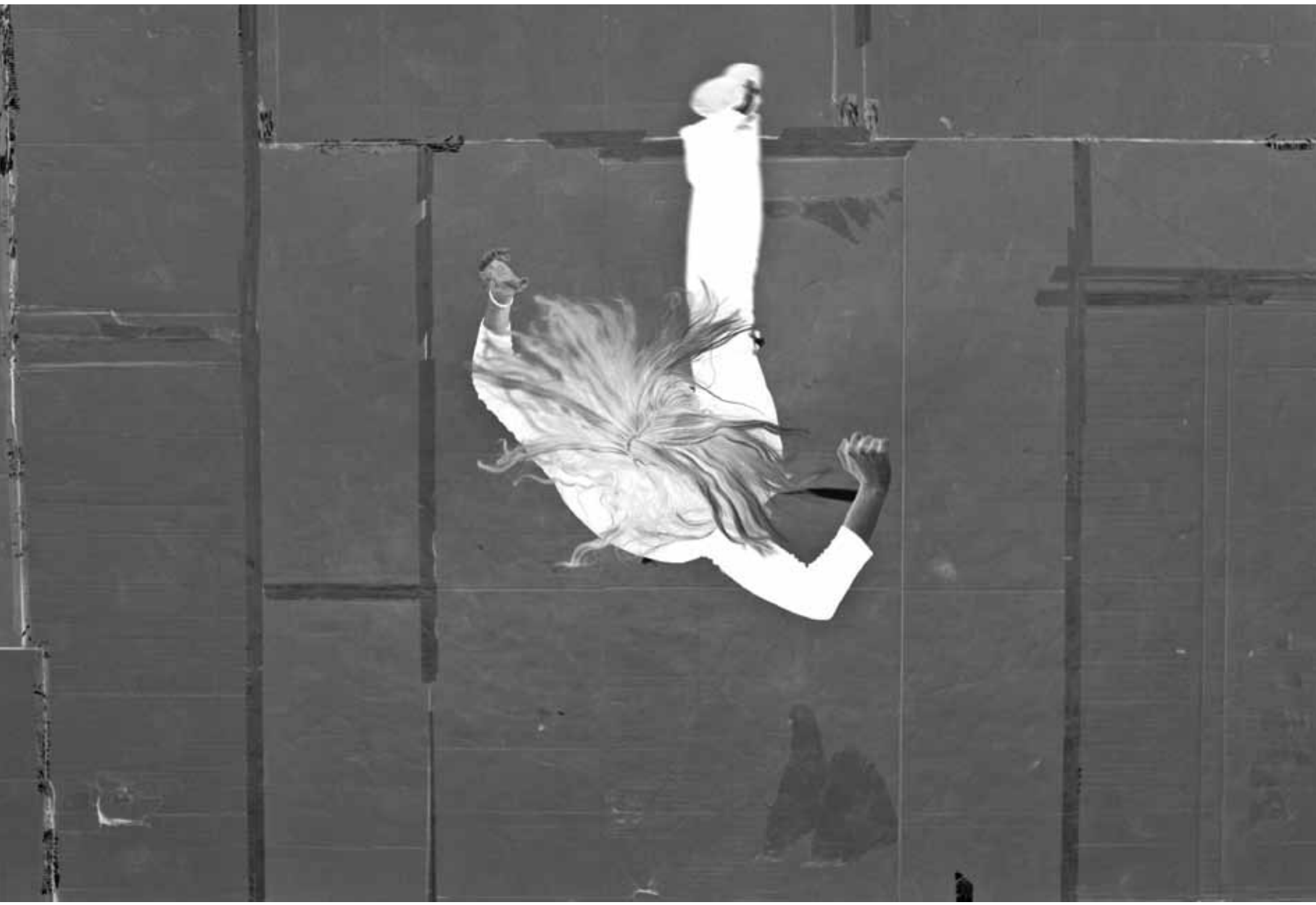










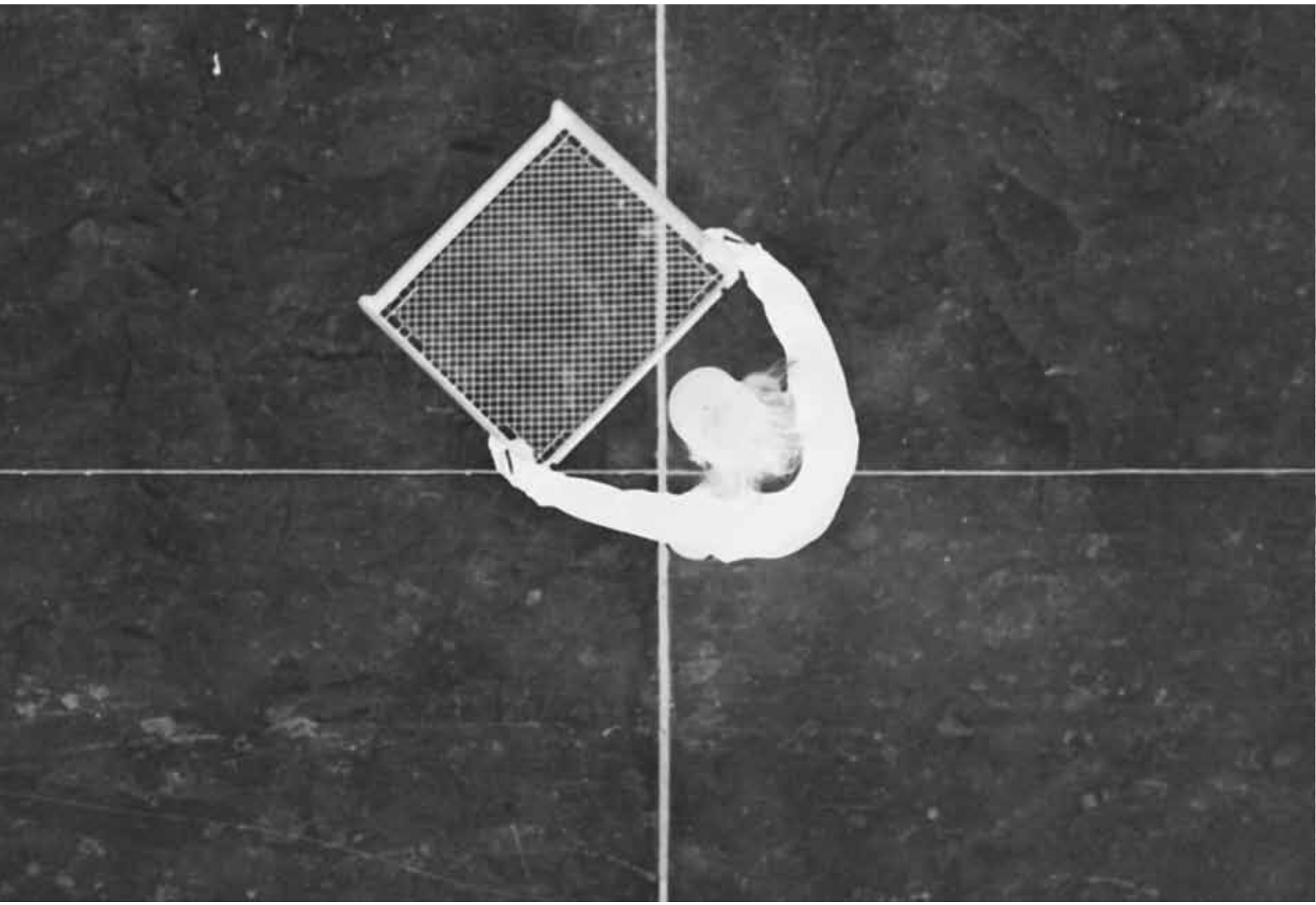




























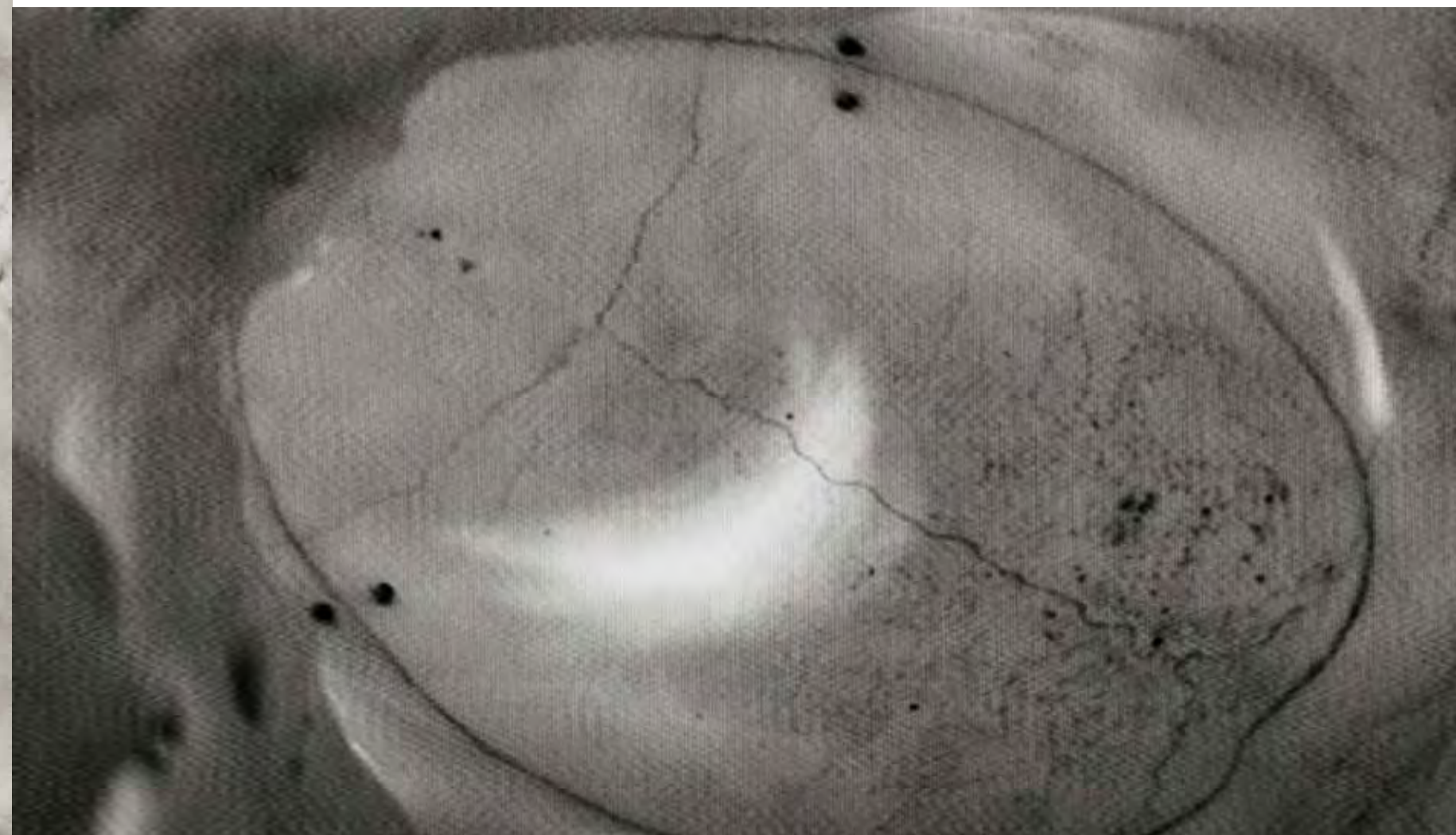








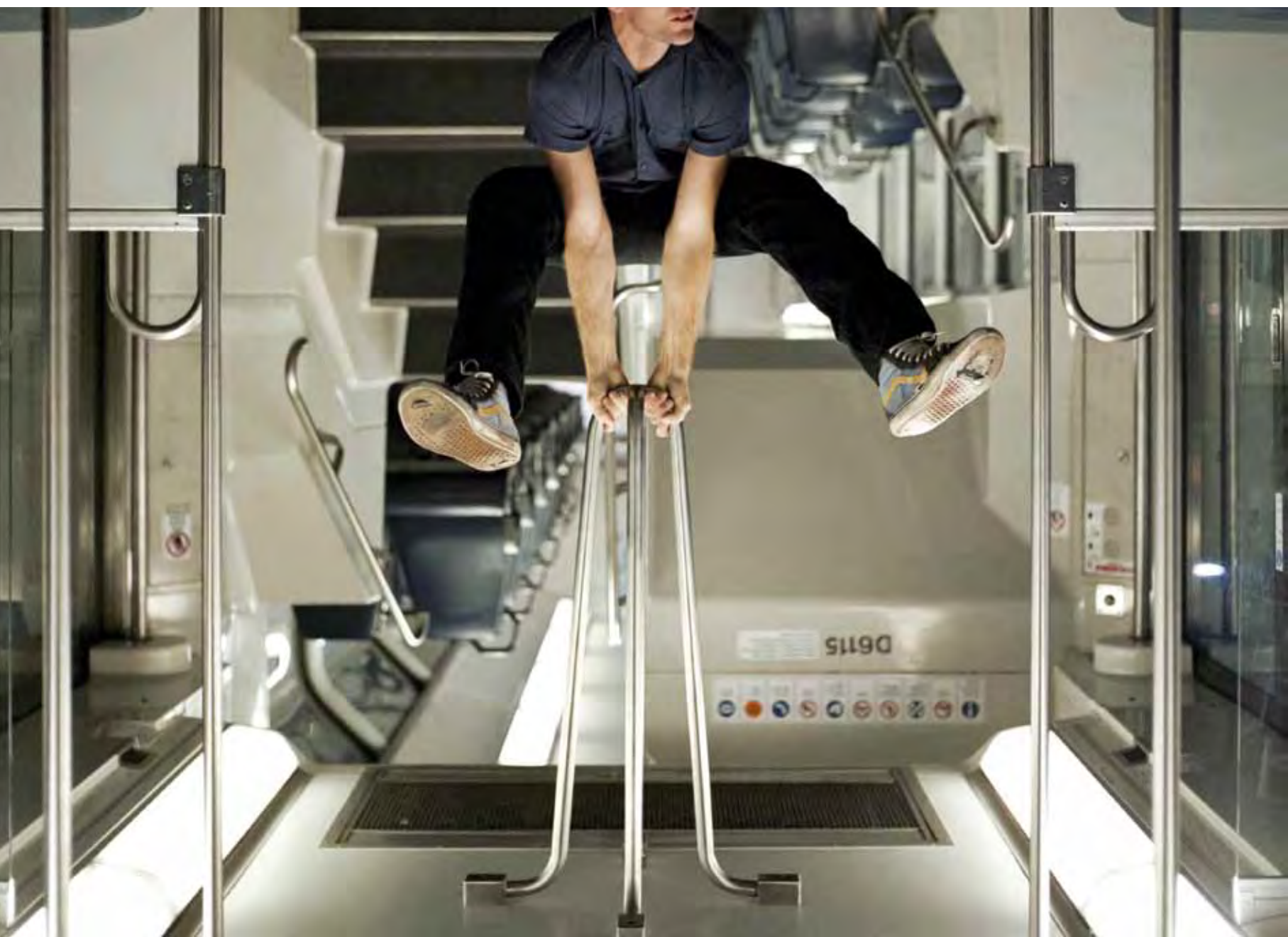














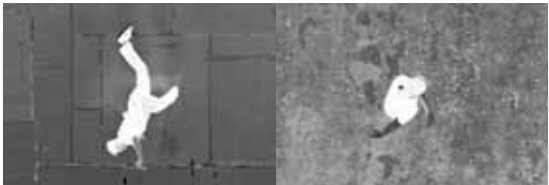
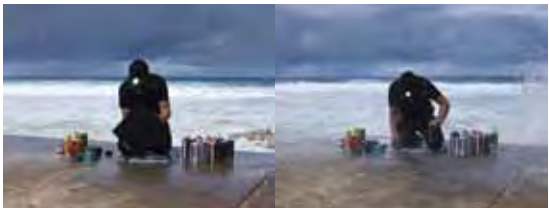
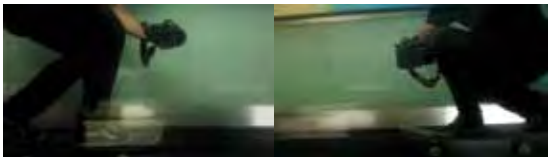
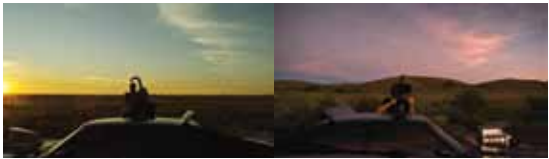












**Parallel Forces**, 2011

**Parallel 2 x EC120s (French Island)**

Synchronised dual channel HD video

16:9, Sound

Performers: Shaun Gladwell and Josh Raymond

**Parallel 2 x XBs (Silverton)**

Synchronised dual channel HD video

16:9, Sound

Performers: Shaun Gladwell and Gotaro Uematsu

Photography: Josh Raymond

Drivers: Ron Eagle and Bruce Constable

**Parallel 2 x R6s (M5)**

Synchronised dual channel HD video

16:9, Sound

Performers: Scott Gladwell and Shaun Gladwell

**Parallel 2 x 4 ABEC 5s (Domain)**

Synchronised dual channel HD video

16:9, Sound

Performers: Shaun Gladwell and Joshua Heath

Photography: Josh Raymond

**Planet & Stars Sequence: Bondi**, 2011

Dual channel HD video presented as 2 x 16 mm film loops

Performer: Shaun Gladwell

Cinematography: Gotaro Uematsu

Photography: Josh Raymond

**Centripetal Forces**, 2011

Eight channel HD video

16:9, Silent

Performers: Shaun Gladwell, Daniel Kojta, Anthony Lawang, Emma Magenta, Simon O'Brien, Kathryn Puie, Maddie Schonstein, Michelle Shimmy, Lee Wilson and Vivienne Wong

Cinematography: Gotaro Uematsu

Photography: Josh Raymond

2nd unit: Joshua Heath

Jib operator: Cinemotion, Alex Morrison

**Tangara**, 2003

Single channel video

16:9, Silent

Performer: Shaun Gladwell

Cinematography: Gotaro Uematsu

Photography: Josh Raymond

**Sagittarius/Domain + Prelude**, 2011

Synchronized dual channel HD video

16:9, Sound

Performers: Shaun Gladwell and Lee Wilson

Cinematography: Gotaro Uematsu and Joshua Heath

Photography: Josh Raymond

Sound: Oren Ambarchi

**Trials and Track**, 2011

Dual channel HD video

16:9, Sound

Performers: Simon Betteridge and Damien Gillings (Trials), Rian Arnold,

Jason Consunji, Tim Gargano, Sophie Holvast, Charles Ko Hsu (Track)

Cinematography: Gotaro Uematsu

Photography: Josh Raymond

**Endoscopic Vanitas (No Veins Version)**, 2011

Human skull, endoscopes, electronics, fog screen, lighting, sound

Electronics and fabrication: Leigh Russell

Sound: Paul Miller AKA DJ Spooky

**Rollerblade Police Unit, Louvre, Paris**, 2011

Pigment prints on archival paper

51 x 76.5 cm

**Parallel Warp Speed: Between the USS Enterprise (NCC-1701)**

**and USS Enterprise (NCC-1701-D)**, Ongoing

Pigment prints on archival paper

10 x 15 cm

**Infinite Pentimento**, 2011

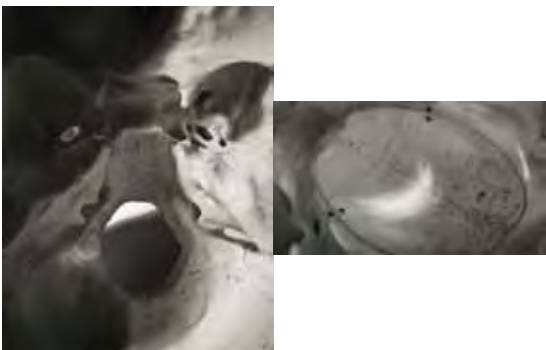
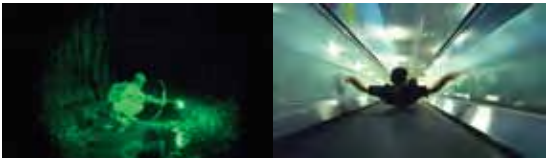
Multi-panel painting, aerosol paint on mount board

Dimensions variable

**Parallel Forces 1:18 Scale**, 2011

Polymer models, acrylic case

Dimensions variable





*At the still point of the turning world.*

*Neither flesh nor fleshless;*

*Neither from nor towards;*

*at the still point, there the dance is,*

*But neither arrest nor movement.*

*And do not call it fixity,*

*Where past and future are gathered.*

*Neither movement from nor towards,*

*Neither ascent nor decline.*

*Except for the point, the still point...*

T.S. Eliot, The Four Quartets

Since emerged on to the international art scene in 2000 with his iconic *Storm Sequence* – a meditative single channel video of the artist skateboarding free-style against the stormy Turner-esque backdrop of Bondi Beach – Shaun Gladwell has developed an international reputation for his evocative video works, painting and photographs. The formal and conceptual concerns that have occupied Gladwell in the years since are clear in this early image of the solitary, spinning figure: motion and velocity, perspective and landscape, bodies and horizons. Gladwell has pursued this set of entwined, interrelated preoccupations with a singular obsession, leading to an impressive body of work that can be described simultaneously as poetic and muscular, cinematic and painterly.

Gladwell describes his works as ‘performative landscapes’. Filming in rural and city settings in Australia, Japan, Brazil, France and Afghanistan, he uses cinematic devices such as slow-motion, still takes and long pans to capture both tightly choreographed and improvised repetitive performances by BMX riders, break dancers, graffiti artists, skateboarders, pole dancers and soldiers. Gladwell places these performers in the landscape – from the awesome natural beauty of the New South Wales coast to subterranean spaces in the modern metropolis. Playing with perspective, composition and spatial relationships, Gladwell brings the body in motion together with the built and natural environments, connecting them in ways that transcend the individual components of the composition. As in the landscape tradition that Gladwell often references, there is a sense of both the subject’s mastery over the environment and the insignificance of the individual within it. Bringing together these subcultural, natural and built components, these ‘performative landscapes’ point towards an idea of the contemporary sublime.

Gladwell’s work uniquely references a seemingly disparate set of cultural and historical coordinates – the physical language of contemporary urban sub-cultures, from hip hop, Capoeira and trials bike riding; the exhilarating pyrotechnics of the ozploitation genre; the multi-channel video works of conceptual artist Dan Graham; the philosophical and aesthetic aspirations of the classical landscape tradition; the unique point of view found in the works of 19th century German romantic landscape painter Caspar David Friedrich and of Indie filmmaker Gus Van Sant; and the anatomical and architectural proportionality of Leonardo da Vinci, Le Corbusier, and even Euclid.

#### Stereo Sequences

**Shaun Gladwell: Stereo Sequences** is a suite of seven multi-screen works commissioned by ACMI. Filmed in Australia – in the damp, fertile cave systems of the Blue Mountains, the dusty highways of Broken Hill, the lush foreshores and wetlands of Victoria’s east coast and the subterranean underpasses of inner city Sydney – they play with concepts of duality, parallels and mirroring. Stereo Sequences brings together four entirely new multi-screen works, including *Parallel Forces*, an eight channel installation, and *Centripetal Forces*, again an eight channel work, this time projected onto the gallery ceiling, and two existing works that have been revisited and expanded for this project.

Gladwell’s practice here follows a trajectory found in his early paintings and first forays into video over a decade ago that explored repetition and serial imagery. In early paintings such as *Bi-Polar Butterfly: Ice T vs Gonz* (2003) and *Bi-Polar Butterfly: Classic Scale Version* (2003) and the ongoing photographic series *Parallel Warp Speed: Between The USS Enterprise (NCC-1701) and USS Enterprise (NCC-1701-D)* that explored ideas of repetition and seriality, the single channel video *Double Linework* (2000), as well the more recent multi-channel video installation *Centred Pataphysical Suite* (2009), Gladwell experiments with parallels, recurrence and reiteration, making a comparative study of forms, movements and gestures.

Stereo Sequences, and its immediate predecessor exhibition Double Field – a suite of works commissioned by the Australian War Memorial in 2009 and filmed largely in Afghanistan in 2010 (discussed by Rex Butler in this

catalogue) – continues this investigation while also marking a significant departure. Gladwell’s ambitions in scope, scale and experimentation with the sculptural, architectural and immersive qualities of multi-channel video installation soon become clear. In Stereo Sequences and Double Field, Gladwell employs complicated configurations of screens, bodies, machines and cameras that situate the spectator within a multi-perspectival circuit of attention. Gladwell describes this as a ‘physical flight path’, shifting his notion of the parallel from a conceptual tool to a physical arrangement of points of view and screens. As Gladwell explains:

*The parallel opens up hydra-headed issues for me, and my approach to it has shifted in the past three years. The first multi-channel video project that really experimented with the notion of the parallel was Centred Pataphysical Suite, a comparative study of different forms of spinning: from street hoodlums swinging road work barricades to ballet dancers and various forms of movement that emerged from street culture. The different figures were shown on separate screens, either in a horizontal or vertical line, along a single wall, all facing in the same direction. A major shift occurred from this work to the recent project in Afghanistan and Stereo Sequences in which this idea of a comparative study has extended into an exploration of the parallel which is now literally performed in space. Within these new works the two subjects (be they machines and/or performer) are placed side by side and traverse various spaces with zero relative speed. In representing these performances, screens assume the diametric subject positions. They are representations that are opposed, yet inextricably tied to the other. I describe this shift to myself as moving from ‘the notion of parallel as a conceptual/theoretical tool’ to that of ‘a physical flight path’. The role of perspective and point of view is crucial to this shift.*

For Gladwell, this suite of works is a series of ‘open experiments’ exploring highly constructed visual and spatial paradoxes. Realised in the gallery as finely calibrated screen-based compositions, they test concepts of speed, velocity, mass and gravity, and the possibilities of perception, mediated vision and movement. We witness the stationary machine/body moving at high speed – a cycloramic view of a figure spinning so fast it has become blind; parallel machines moving at high speeds whose relative speeds remain fixed at zero.

Top left: *Storm Sequence*, 2000.  
Bottom left: *Bi-Polar Butterfly: Ice T vs Gonz*, 2003.  
Right: *Bi-Polar Butterfly: Classic Scale Version*, 2003

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SARAH TUTTON





Parallel Forces

The eight screen *Parallel Forces* is Gladwell's most ambitious exploration of the dual, mirrored image in terms of scale and composition. With four pairs of opposing screens set on the walls of the gallery like a hall of mirrors, it brings together the key elements of the classic ozploitation film – choppers, fast cars, motorcycles, daring physical feats and dramatic locations – and strips them of any cinematic logic or narrative to create a succession of experiments that play with point of view, audience perspective and the limits of speed.

On each set of screens a body/machine performs a series of tightly sequenced manoeuvres in parallel while simultaneously fixing its gaze on its opposite across the gallery corridor. In *Parallel 2 x EC 120s (French Island)*, a camera-man, rigged to a harness attached to the interior of one of two identical Euro-copters, trains his camera on the other helicopter as they both hover above the wetlands and swoop through the rugged terrain of French Island, on Victoria's south-east coast. The camera captures the impact of the choppers' movement on the landscape – the brushed grass, the swaying branches. In *Parallel 2 x XBs (Silverton)* two interceptors (the modified black Ford from George Miller's Mad Max series) flank each other on the dusty red highways of outback Broken Hill (the Mad Max series location), a cameraman perched on the window with his lens pointed at the vehicle opposite. The car wheels scar the earth with their combined speed and weight, red dust billowing in their wake. On the third set of screens, *Parallel 2 x R6s (M5)*, twin Yamaha YZs speed through Sydney's M5 underpass. On the last set, *Parallel 2 x 4 ABEC 5s (Domain)*, two skateboarders train their cameras through the transparent barrier between the two travelators under Sydney's Domain car park, again filming each other.

Caught between these opposing parallels it is impossible for the viewer to calculate the speed and velocity of these bodies and machines. Perfectly matched in their movement and progress towards an unknown entity, there is a sense of movement yet there is no definitive evidence that anything is moving at all. As Gladwell describes it: 'If I were trying to direct a narrative feature with these elements I'd want the film to be the first “ambient” action film ... *Parallel Forces* contains the fragments of a potential action film. It is a series of film sequences reflecting back on itself'. But this seems to be action that is unencumbered by any narrative framework, explored and enjoyed for its inherent qualities.

Planet & Stars Sequence: Bondi

*Planet & Stars Sequence: Bondi* is the latest in an ongoing series of performances documented in video and presented in a gallery accompanied by paintings and objects, referencing both Man Ray's air brush experiments of the early 20th century and contemporary street art. In each performance, a masked Gladwell works with aerosol paints and an assortment of everyday materials to make a series of paintings of the universe – the planets and stars in outer space – which he then quickly erases, enacting a repetitive process of creation and erasure.



Double Field/Viewfinder (Tarin Kowt) , 2010.



Centred Pataphysical Suite, 2009.

Centripetal Forces

*Centripetal Forces* is an elaboration of Gladwell's interest in the dynamics and composition of the spinning figure, first seen in the single channel *Pataphysical Man* (2005). The central image of *Pataphysical Man* is a break dancer spinning on his head with arms outstretched. This is a visual reference to da Vinci's 'Vitruvian Man' and Le Corbusier's 'Modulor', while the work's title nods to both a 1984 painting by Imants Tillers of the same name and to French writer Alfred Jarry's pataphysics: 'the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments'. Da Vinci's and Le Corbusier's perfect symmetry meets speed and perceptual instability. The spinning action sits perfectly within this mysterious juxtaposition, a movement of extreme effort and perpetual motion that fails to gain any actual progression through space. The act of spinning poses questions about point of view and vision: can the performer see everything, a perfect 360 degree cyclorama, or does the spinning create an abstracted blur of movement? Is the object still or in motion?

*Centripetal Forces* takes the original image of the spinning figure and extends it into a series of comparative studies of gesture and movement by different performers. In the centre of each screen a performer enacts a basic spinning action over and over, each dancer representing a different language or sub-culture of movement.

Gladwell further pushes this internal paradox with a shift in perspective from the original work, changing the camera viewpoint from a front-on to an aerial view. The black and white negative images, are projected on to screens suspended in the ceiling of the gallery, appearing as spinning astral bodies – a sparkling universe of whirling figures. There is a clear connection here to the *Planet & Stars Sequence* and to *Parallel Forces*. Are these bodies orbiting each other? Are they aware of their relationship to a wider planetary system? Are they stationary or are they turning on a still point?

The performers are training rather than performing; their focus is on repetition and rotation of movements. There is Emma Magenta, a capoeira dancer, whose roughly circular movements recall her performance in *Woolloomooloo Night* (2004). Her movements are more muscular and less centred than the tight, graceful, fluid pirouettes of Vivienne Wong, ballerina with the Australian Ballet. Anthony Lawang, a break dancer from Melbourne, performs a series of floor-based manoeuvres, transitioning from a top rock position to a backspin and a windmill, climaxing in a tight backspin, disrupting any sense of how his body is orientated spatially. Simon O'Brien, a world champion freestyle BMX rider, performs a series of highly technical spins in which the bike frame and his body are linked and twisted by concentric forces. In contrast to these athletic routines, Kathryn Puie spins her body on stilts. In the overhead shot foreshortening her body, we see her body constantly shifting and shuffling in order to remain upright. Gladwell himself performs on a skateboard, spinning continuously. Contemporary dancer Lee Wilson uses his body as the pivot point for a whirling bread tray that flies above and around him. Michelle Shimmy and Maddie Schonstein, professional pole dancers, perform an improvised routine together on a pole, experimenting with movements and pushing their bodies into unrehearsed positions.

Tangara

Positioned above the exit of the gallery, *Tangara* (2003) is an early single channel video work filmed in the subterranean space of an underground train named Tangara in Western Sydney. The single inverted image is the artist hanging upside down from a handrail within a train. The impression is of a figure hanging in space, invoking the weightlessness of zero gravity. *Tangara* is an important precedent in Gladwell's experimentations with internal, underground spaces and spatial/gravitational perspective and was a key starting point in his exploration of the ACMI gallery, a former underground train platform.

Sagittarius/Domain + Prelude

*Sagittarius/Domain + Prelude* sits in an enclosed room, two screens facing each other on opposite walls. In both, a lone figure tracked from behind – the camera employing a classical point of view, mimicking the work of Caspar David Friedrich – descends into a subterranean passageway. For the viewer these figures act like avatars, our perspective being theirs, one moment behind.

On the first screen, Sagittarius, a figure moves tentatively through a warren of dark, damp caves and tunnels in the Wollemi National Park carrying a bow and flaming arrow that lights the way. The figure's movements are captured on infra-red camera – a night vision system Gladwell also used in *Double Field* (2010) – the otherworldly landscape of the cave system caught in greenish tones. The footage is grainy and raw, only hinting at the richness of the ecosystem hidden deep inside the earth.

On the second screen, filmed in the underground in the Domain in inner Sydney, is a skateboarder propelling himself down a travelator (once famously the longest travelator in the world). The natural world in such abundance in the Wollemi caves is overwhelmed by the concrete and metal of this man-made tunnel. Yet there is a similarity in tone, the florescent glow of the travelator scene shedding a similar light to that in the cave sequence. The skateboarder uses his hands to propel himself down the travelator until the power of gravity takes over, assuming a fixed position, hands and legs held out to the side, to stabilise his descent.

Trials and Track

The two channel installation *Trials and Track* sets up a relationship between two opposing screens. One features footage of track riding under the Sydney Harbour Bridge (track riding is a fixed, single gear, break-less style of riding that was developed in the velodrome but made popular by couriers in New York

City in the late 1990s). The second features trials bike riding (a competitive off-road, all-terrain practice that also uses fixed gear bicycles) on a rocky ocean foreshore.

Both trials and track riders stall their bicycles, often making themselves completely still. Gladwell is attracted to the contradiction between the potential speed of these bicycles and their capacity for stasis and perfect poise – the push and pull of these opposing forces. The Track screen references Grace Cossington-Smith's painting *The Bridge in Curve* (1926), the Sydney Harbour Bridge near completion. Cossington-Smith celebrates not only the construction of the bridge as a triumph of engineering but also Australian modernism. Gladwell replicates Cossington-Smith's perspective while celebrating the ways in which the riders have reclaimed the space underneath the bridge as a space for creativity, beyond the intended functionality of the space.

Similarly, the Trials screen references Caspar David Friedrich's romantic painting *Wanderer Above the Sea of Fog* (1818) in which a man standing on a rocky outcrop looks out onto a stormy ocean. Like Friedrich's subject, the trials rider is 'wedged between two time signatures – the slow geological signature of the rocks and the furious swell of the ocean', as Gladwell describes it. As the rider reaches the top of the rocks he rests, putting his feet to the ground, and takes in the view of the ocean from a vantage point he has worked hard to achieve. Like Friedrich's wanderer, Gladwell's rider is insignificant within the landscape while striving for mastery over it.

Endoscopic Vanitas (No Veins Version)

*Endoscopic Vanitas (No Veins Version)*, a reworking of a past work, originally exhibited in 2009 at the Venice Biennale, sits in an enclosed space at the end of the exhibition. In the centre of the room a single human skull hangs suspended by a metal frame. An endoscopic camera moves inside the skull, a second explores its exterior. The images captured by the two cameras are projected onto separate screens, the first a mist screen that sits at the entrance to the room creating a permeable barrier to the cavernous space behind, the second a simple LCD screen inside the room. These images appear abstract, suggestive, lunar. Gladwell is playing with the time-honoured trope of the *momento mori*, as well as with Plato's 'allegory of the cave'.

Writing Parallel

The essays commissioned in this catalogue run parallel, as it were, to Stereo Sequences. Emily Ballou's poem takes the position of the artist as the archivist, playing with the idea of landscape and memory. Rex Butler's essay takes Gladwell's practice and contextualises it within his particular take on international contemporary art. Adrian Martin's extended meditation on Gladwell's practice and its relationship to Australian cinema locates this work within a contested tradition. In sympathy with the work, these texts spin off the central axis, literally 'performing a parallel force' in ways that elucidate and historically position Gladwell's practice, intersecting with the work when gravity and chance demand.



# Twentythree pictures of the desert

Emily Ballou

1.                   The prevailing winds brought you here  
                          in the insect drift from the Pacific;  
                          you came with wings over the long plateau  
                          along the denuded hills and cathedrals of rock  
                          over the gossan spill, wind pressing onward  
                          carrying gum leaves and soil  
                          the crushed wreckage of mountains, in its rotor coil, onward  
                          the red dust
2.       Before it was called anything else it had no name, it was just place and then it  
was called Leaping Crest by those who saw it first and saw it for a long time. No  
sounds but the wind, no sounds but the driving wind.
3.       You wonder for the cities, their car-clogged streets and how our days  
                  were spent packing useless items, or calling friends, and who  
                  would catalogue the final gestures,  
                  those first abandoned those kept longest, clutched,  
                  until the very end.
4.                   And who would be the archivist of last things.
5.       Who would make a catalogue of exhalations, the photos taken  
                  when the shutter was closed, drawers of leaves shaped like hands  
                  nomenclature of colours collected by night after the sun has fallen.  
                  Would we leave our closets full of missed human shrugs and sighs  
                  Would every empty house speak emptily of goodbyes and last traces?
6.                   Here, the road was always just a long red sigh  
                          a jagged line scraped in the dirt with a stick  
                          that would turn to mud if the clouds ever came  
                          and when they do now they fatten and taunt the claypan  
                          the saltbush the bluebush and the grasses of the slopes  
with lightening and rising thirst. They form and move and fall and disperse  
as they always have, according to their own cloud rules and physics.
7.                   The bird calls at dawn  
                          are the loudest songs  
                          (the breaking of leaf and seed in beak,  
                          the tree-shaken scramble for branches)  
                          the world will make all day.  
The only shadows are those the birds throw down  
and the long stretched stains, twice their height  
of roos straining forward, ricocheting off red earth  
in elastic band propulsion, the pogo mob  
                          the boundary riders  
                          contracting and leaping away from falling light.
8.       Will the archivist know the difference between a wave that beckons and one  
                  that departs, and also too, that takes its leave for the very last time

- does anybody have a picture of that. And where would you find it?  
                  Who will keep track of the raptures of three a.m.  
                  who will keep the marks where paws once pressed against wet concrete  
                  who will say again, let's meet for coffee at two, at that café  
                  with tables on the street, where the people pass with loaves of bread  
                  and greet each other and the glossy cars glide by in search of parking spaces.  
                  Who will keep the artefacts of the streets? The hats with brass coins in them  
the tramp's trolley with the broken wheels, the faces of lost cats pasted to poles.  
                  And all the casual glances passed between strangers, has somebody  
made a record of that? And will you drop the stylus so we can listen to the sound.
9.                   The sun is a scorched immensity  
                          it etches then sleeps  
                          the wind keeps the cool of the blue gums;  
                          how the pale light once fell  
                          with the dust of wattle flowers  
                          and left your skin warmer than childhood.  
                          You could take the loveliness of a place  
for granted; you could rub away the bark to the smooth red trunk beneath  
                          catch the clots of sticky gum on your thumbs  
                          collect the upturned curls of grey-green leaves  
                          sage smiles unleashed and crack their stems and seams  
                          for the heady fumes, the blue oil you will never smell again.  
                          It always was a country of fire. It still is  
though nobody tends the boundaries or marks it on a map when it comes  
                          and nobody knows anymore what it takes.  
                          Houses that smoulder without tears. Eucalyptus manna that still pours  
                          from a hole in the bark of the white gum, holds the colour of fire  
                          and gathers like paper snakes on the ground  
                          waiting to burn.
10.       Here are all the paper lamps, moon-shaped, that swayed from our ceilings  
                  imprinted, tin-plated, with golden light.  
                  We each had a sun in our room to remind us we were just planet  
                  that hovered and hung somewhere in vast night and for a short time.  
Here are the shapes of lit windows, and the shapes that passed within them  
                  and passing trains, each small lit square stretched  
                  into a string of light and a chi chi, chi chi  
                  shuddering over the tracks. When using the telegraph  
                  twentythree  
                  means break the line.  
                  Machines and lamps mean nothing now.  
                  They are dumb and still; they are carcass.
11.                   And here is a Polaroid of the desert from sky to floor  
                          told as shade, spoken  
                          as the tint of things that might have stayed:  
                          Pewter Grey: silver-pink inner ears  
                          of a young red kangaroo/slab of chalky lime  
                          stone/the ash-grey spots of a leopardwood tree.  
Stonewashed Denim: a lizard's pointed tongue/the veins  
                          of desert opal/the clustered petals  
                          of a Blue Pincushion.  
Watermelon: the stem of a coolabah leaf/pink  
                          throat of shingleback/Rhodonite crystals.  
Sun Yellow: flower of prickly wattle/the mouth of a Jacky dragon/pyromorphite.  
Bright Idea: iris of an Emu eye/gold sand/the stripes  
                          of a rock wallaby's tail.  
Banner Red: curled furred shavings of mulga tree bark/spessartine garnets

12.

the beak of a lorikeet.  
Hosta Leaf: sage foliage of a Desert Pea/wing of King Parrot  
the banded masses of malachite.

Did you ever paint a car those colours?  
Did you drive it cross-country and disappear? A desert twin.  
You could pass within. You could inhabit it, provisional, momentary.  
Though you would never have it. It would never be you  
or yours, they said. And told you often. You are no resident of the red places.  
Show me the dust on your hands, what colour is it?  
No, no, you are not from here. See the olive tinge to your skin  
the European traces.  
Open your mouth and speak, what sound is it?  
Your vowels are strange and twisted as ragged tree-roots  
your consonants bulge from the ground, searching a hold  
and a drink, with obvious transplantation.  
Do you ears turn, marsupially, with the wind? Do they tune in?  
Your dog was more dingo than you. Your dog was more red. She's the true citizen  
of the sun. There's no gate you can cross to get in  
to this rusted heart any longer. Your memories are fugue states  
dusty water holes where no water has been  
for a decade. Keep looking,  
keeping looking in, although you're elsewhere.
13.

And what you learned was this: there's no continental grip  
for deserters. We're in slow drift.  
Upsidedown. You're 23 skidoo. You're gone.  
\*
14.

We came to the Silver City in a dream  
then haunted the coal seam  
we are just one  
of the creatures Extremely Rare and Seldom Seen  
that sometimes flit through these parts, moving with thirst  
then descend into cooler and darker dens  
burrowing into a curve of temporal bone  
while the sun and moon come out in their turn.
15.

At night Lizard emerges  
to catch the debris the wind has left  
his body sweeps clean the plains  
the dunefields and the folded eroded slopes  
his body draws on sand, unscrolls  
an elegant story  
told in whorls, the small flowers  
of his claws, the long kick of his tail, the waves  
I have been, everywhere and nowhere, the same.
16.

Lizard leaves his signature, his graffiti  
“ /  
“  
wind erases it.
17.

The archivist of all lost things, opens the canister, unspools the black strip  
with the edges notched in sprockets. It was made of tree pulp and camphor  
so flammable it burned underwater, one frame could ignite  
entire rooms and reels, whole cinemas, a century of pictures.  
Then came the polyesters, so thick they cracked the projectors;  
afterwards, acetate which merely bubbled and melted over time.

18.

But still, you can see, beneath the mechanisms of deterioration  
the iron stain, here, under the streetlamp, the hazy, faded shape of a dancer  
here, a solitary midnight walker, here  
the soft clanging of sail boat rigs in the harbour and the black bats overhead  
they still fly,  
every night, from tree to sky, over the dark city.

You walked then  
you wanted to be upright  
you carried your own load and your life on your back  
sometimes you wanted the sun to end  
the long road to end or to slow  
or to go on, and it did all these things.
19.

The breath of the sea burns  
through the empty buildings, then blows beyond the treeless plains  
it bleaches the scarps  
the crops of lime and dolomite  
and stumbles over the ledges  
catching in caves along the gorges where kestrels still hover;  
the rivers once ran here  
left such wide soft marks, such dried out memories of water, deep claws of rocks  
where horses stumbled and stopped. Thirsting. Tasting salt. Disappearance.
20.

And you are there, not quite sky and not quite land  
like the wind, invisible, mercurial, visible  
only when the dust is heavy. You are no more  
than sand, and soon less:  
the sketch of a face after the shadow saw it.  
Flickers with some of the frames missing  
a fossil in a margin of light.  
Desert's conflagration. Trees that burn.  
These are merely instances.
21.

Faded due to image oxidation  
faded due to prolonged light exposure  
uneven dye fade  
atmospheric ozone, gelatin yellowing  
heavy stain and silver mirroring  
emulsion delamination  
and cracking  
from contact with sunlight, air and water.
22.

The archivist of lost things' most precious thing  
is a slab of footpath chalked with marks that track  
all the steps taken back and forth on a single day  
a score of human traffic.  
This is the mark that means forward motion with purpose :::  
This is the sign for shuffle along ||  
This is the mark that stands for darting through crowds when late ✓  
This is a wave ~  
This a friendly glance passed between strangers ^ ° ^ ~  
This is standing still chatting while children run around. ≈△~  
This pause a lonely stillness in the middle of the footpath {i}  
This an acceleration towards an old friend «/\»  
Chalked together, the archivist's lost square keeps an equation  
without beginning, or answer and without end.
23.

And if you could show them, how would you show them



<div>VIDEO CONCEIT</div> <div>THE</div>	<div> <p>Good video art always starts as a kind of poetic conceit. Sweeping the gallery world at the moment is New York based artist Christian Marclay’s <i>The Clock</i> (2010), a vast 24-hour epic splicing together thousands of excerpts from other films, each of which either visually or by dialogue indicates a particular time of day. This time in the video is always the actual time at which the spectator is watching the video, so that we see, say, Marty McFly’s alarm clock go off at 7 am in <i>Back to the Future</i> just as morning breaks or Gary Cooper draw his gun in <i>High Noon</i> at midday or Orson Welles get stabbed by a giant cuckoo clock in <i>The Stranger</i> at midnight, reminding us of the late hour at which we find ourselves in the gallery, still watching the video.</p> <p>We see something of the same thing in such other key video works of the last ten years as Douglas Gordon and Philippe Parreno’s <i>Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait</i> (2006), in which seventeen cameras follow for the duration of the game not the ball but the legendary football player Zinadine Zidane as he plays for Real Madrid against Villarreal. We see it also in Steve McQueen’s <i>Western Deep</i> (2002), in which for at least the first ten minutes of the video we are held in a cage with black South African miners as they descend into the depths of the earth before they begin their day’s labours (Western Deep is the world’s deepest gold mines, at some 3.9 kms underground).</p> <p>We can begin to think the difference between video and even the most experimental or uncompromising of narrative films by comparing McQueen’s video with two recent cinema releases: Rodrigo Cortes’ <i>Buried</i> (2010) and Danny Boyle’s <i>127 Hours</i> (2010). In all three we have the same cramped airlessness, the same claustrophobic spaces, the same extended period in which the characters are unable to move. But in Cortes’ and Boyle’s films, this initial set-up has to be explained or used as the basis for a further narrative. (How did the characters get into this situation? What will happen next? Will they escape?) In McQueen’s video, however, what we see is not explained, narrated or used as the basis of any wider analysis. The simple presentation of the experience of going down in the lift with the miners is enough; and any further narrative, as eventually does occur in McQueen’s film, operates merely as a prolongation of the original situation, not any kind of explanation of it.</p> </div>	<div>  <p>Gladwell’s video, <i>Double Field/Viewfinder</i> (<i>Tarin Kowt</i>) (2009–2010), comes from a period spent with the Australian forces in Afghanistan in October 2009 as part of a commission from the Australian War Memorial. In this, Gladwell is only the latest of several contemporary Australian artists who have spent time as an official war artist. Gladwell was stationed with the Australian 3rd Brigade and the 2nd Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force near the town of Tarin Kowt in Oruzgan province. It was a dangerous and fraught situation, with much of the surrounding territory being held by the Taliban, and the soldiers, when not on mission, largely confined to their base. Gladwell was there just before the recent ‘surge’ in troop numbers, sent in precisely as part of an effort to break the ongoing stalemate between the Taliban and Coalition forces.</p> <p>In <i>Double Field/Viewfinder</i> we watch on two screens – one in front of us and the other behind us – two cameras in extreme close-up moving back from one another. They are held by Gladwell and a soldier in the first of the two performances that make up the piece, and by two soldiers in the second. The two ‘soldiers’ in each part attempt to keep the other in shot by looking through the viewfinder of their camera while first walking steadily around in a circle and then making erratic movements to try to escape the gaze of the other. As we wheel around in circles, the shadows of the two soldiers cross and can be seen through the viewfinder of one or the other, and the desolate sights of the area in which Gladwell shot his video (sand, military huts, the blazing desert sun) can be seen behind each soldier as they are followed by the camera.</p> <p>What is it that Gladwell is saying in this piece? What insight is he offering into the ongoing ‘war on terrorism’ after his one month secondment with the Australian army? At first glance, <i>Double Field/Viewfinder</i> might appear to be making some pseudo-critical point that our army is conscious of its public image; that the war in Afghanistan, like all wars today, is fought in the media as much as anywhere else. Or, to reverse perspective – and with one of the cameras always behind our back – we might say that Gladwell is implying that the war puts all of us on the spot; that war questions its spectators in their core beliefs and values, just as much as these spectators might question war. Or, finally, with Gladwell and the soldier he films imitating each other’s movements, we might suggest that what Gladwell is trying to express is the limits of his ‘embedding’; that because of the limited amount of time he was able to spend with the army he was only able to see it as a reflection of his own preconceptions, just as the army for its part only let him see what it wanted him to see.</p> <p>It is not that any of these readings are wrong – they can all undoubtedly be evidenced in the work – but their critical force is deflected or led astray by the video form itself. To come back to our original insight, we might say that not only does video lend itself to a particular form but</p> </div>
<div>BUTLER</div> <div>REX</div>	<div> <p>There is nevertheless a particular economy that video imposes upon its materials. And it is here that we could begin to think an aesthetics of video art. The original conceit can be developed or elaborated but not narrated or explained. There is thus a necessary lightness of touch about video because it does not deal with anything ‘real’ (the exploration either of situation or personality). It does not quite resemble a joke because the best video art does not resolve itself in the same way (critics’ characterisation of video as a kind of aesthetic one-liner is both insulting and incorrect), but there is a certain brevity, concision and strikingness about it. It does not engage in anything as heavy-handed as an interrogation of its medium or even a reflection upon its form – there is not enough resistance between its form and content for that – but there is something like a poetic ‘figuring’ of its form, which is also to say that we can only see video’s form through the various things made in it.</p> <p>There is perhaps no video artist in Australia who brings all this out more clearly than Shaun Gladwell. Gladwell first came to attention through a series of videos featuring actions that have come to be associated with so-called extreme sports. They involve continuous, self-involved, non-competitive activities that do not reach a climax or achieve a result against an opponent, but rather employ elements of the urban infrastructure as the setting for a performance: skating, BMX bike riding, rap dancing or gymnastic feats, using such things as railway platforms and the handrails of trains. In each of the videos there is a match – in such a way that we cannot tell which came first – between the fluid, informal and unbroken actions we see on the screen and the new video technology that makes the unlit, unstaged and unedited recording of them in such a documentary style possible.</p> </div>	<div> <p>Above &amp; below <i>Double Field/Viewfinder</i> (<i>Tarin Kowt</i>), 2010.</p>  </div>



that video itself imposes a particular form. We might begin by observing the similarity between the actions carried out in the video (a duet or two-step carried out between the artist and the soldier) with the other actions depicted in Gladwell’s videos. In almost all of them we have a kind of balancing, dancing or movement from side to side: standing on a bike wheel, remaining upside down on one’s head, hanging off handrails, not falling off a skateboard. Indeed, the two related actions being carried on across a split screen in *Double Field/Viewfinder* cannot but remind us of Gladwell’s similarly titled *Double Linework* (2000), in which we see two skaters or the same skater shot twice riding down a hill while trying to keep the double line of the middle of the road beneath their wheels. In an accompanying video to *Double Field/Viewfinder*, *Double Balancing Act* (2009–2010), Gladwell even gets soldiers to carry out the kinds of actions that he had previously asked of his actors: balancing a rifle on its end with one hand or, in an especially macabre touch, asking soldiers to hop about on crutches without using their legs.

In other words, ‘overcoding’ the critical dimension of the work and rendering it part of its overall conceit, merely another level of its virtuosity and difficulty, there is a match between the ease but also the formality and discipline of the soldiers’ actions and the seemingly unedited and artless real-time recording of them by video. (As we say, Gladwell’s videos all appear unscripted and unedited, allowing the actions they record to unwind in an unbroken fashion in real time.) It is as though – the real reflection or mimicry at stake in the work – there were a secret match or affinity between the lightness and informality of the modern camcorder and the new, lightly equipped, camouflaged and highly mobile soldier and guerrilla quality of the war they are fighting. More than, or before, anything *Double Field/Viewfinder* says or means – before it is about anything (and again, Gladwell’s videos are, significantly, without dialogue and feature seemingly diegetic sound) – the video simply records a performance and, in doing so, performs itself.

If there is a beauty in Gladwell’s videos, then, it is not only that of the poise and grace of his performers (including the soldiers and the artist himself in *Double Field/Viewfinder*) but that of Gladwell’s easy embrace of the generic constraints or formal requirements of the medium of video itself. ‘I’m looking at you looking at me’, *Double Field/Viewfinder* seems to be saying, in a complex game of looking and not looking, being aware of being looked at and pretending not to be aware. It is the beauty of someone who is conscious of being looked at but who cannot turn round and acknowledge their admirer. Or, better, it is that of a champion athlete who takes great pleasure in showing off their skills but can do so only with the excuse of a game to be played. This is undoubtedly the reason why so many of the performers in Gladwell’s videos shut their eyes or otherwise inwardly concentrate, even though they know they are being looked at and even though they are doing what they are doing only to be looked at.



*Pataphysical Man*, 2005.

#### A NOTE ON *PARALLEL FORCES*

Two motorcycles ride towards each other through a city underpass. Two helicopters fly towards each other high over the Victorian coast. Two Interceptor cars – of the kind last seen in the *Mad Max* movies – drive towards each other through the Australian outback. Two skateboarders push their skateboards towards each other along an underground travelator.

These four double-screen ‘diptyches’ – formed each time by the vehicle on one screen filming the one on the other – make up Gladwell’s *Parallel Forces*. The aim is for each cameraperson to hold the other in their viewfinder for as long as possible while they perform their action, so that they do not appear to move while the back ground speeds away behind them.



subject. The effect is an uncanny kind of mirroring, as though these actions – motorcycles riding along underpasses, helicopters flying through the sky, cars driving across the outback and skateboarders rolling along a travelator – were not real and actual and possibly ending in a crash, but self-contained with no logical conclusion and taking place entirely within the frame of the screen.

Gladwell has long been fascinated by effects of symmetry or the folding-over of the image upon itself. In an early video, *Double Linework* (2000), the screen is split as two skaters attempt to keep the centre line of the road between their wheels. In *Pataphysical Man* (2005), a performer spins on his head in an image that has been inverted, so that the floor appears to hang over him. In *Approach to Mundi Mundi* from the series MADDESTMAXIMVS (2007), the driver of a car stands with his arms out on each side like a crucifix while it heads towards the horizon. And in *Reflected Double Vase* from the follow-up series *Maximus as Narcissus* (2007), the image, following the classical myth being alluded to, is reflected and inverted across an internal horizon, so that we see the helmet and the flower mounted in it twice, once in ‘reality’ and once in a puddle.

Why this emphasis on symmetry or reflexiveness in a project with so much emphasis on virtuosic athletic performance – skateboard tricks, dancing, standing on one’s head or upright on the wheel of a bike? The answer lies in a mimicry or reflection that is not immediately obvious, but is in fact the true ‘parallel’ at stake in the work. For when Gladwell shows his seemingly unedited, unscripted and unrehearsed actions, they can only be seen as mirroring the seamless, informal and improvisational nature of video itself. In other words, the actions we see in Gladwell’s videos are allegorical of the medium in which they are shot. The performances they enact are essentially that of video itself, or to put it another way what the various actions in Gladwell testify to is the performativity of the very medium recording them.

Video – at least in Gladwell – is therefore a medium that for all of its seeming openness to the world refers only to itself. What we see when we look at Gladwell’s videos, regardless whether they feature an actual camera or not, is in effect video videoing itself. The intense inner directedness or absorption of his performers – we are almost tempted to say their self-reflexivity – is ultimately that of video itself. This is why, if we could somehow put the two facing screens of each video together here, we would have an effect of reality appearing from each side of the screen to be sucked down a hole in the middle and then reappearing at the outside again. Video endlessly recycles reality, and sometimes even makes it stand up on its back wheel.

????? 200?.

*Figure/Firearm Study*, 2010.

*Double Linework*, 2000.



But because one camera shows its subject moving left to right and the other shows its subject moving right to left, the two halves of each work look like they are moving towards each other, about to crash.

Of course, they do not: the two vehicles move in parallel, not towards each other, and the video ends not with any kind of collision but only when the tape runs out or the camera loses its





Interceptor Surf Sequence, 2009.

# AN ESSAY AROUND AND ABOUT SHAUN GLADWELL

Between the *Mad Max* movies and the annals of video art made for galleries: Shaun Gladwell’s work dances in an unusual, surprising space, straddling extreme options. It is far beyond a simple game that pits High and Low arts against each other, in mutual mockery or celebration. Spectacular and minimalist at the same time, Gladwell’s ever more ambitious output challenges our conventional ideas of medium-purity and artistic intention. Looking at and experiencing his work I am giddily uncertain as to whether I am encountering cinema, installation art, avant-garde video or YouTube extravaganza. He draws from all these traditions and from them makes a new hybrid.

But in this case the artist’s gesture demands an equally new and adventurous gesture from us, his would-be describers and commentators. It is not enough simply to celebrate the mix of elements, the daring of the stance or the thrill of a novel aesthetic sensation. We need to break down, recombine and indeed reinvent the separate terms we traditionally use – the way we would talk about a *Mad Max* movie on the one hand, as separate from the way we talk about video or installation art on the other. Again, it will take more than the simple flourish of a critical dandyism to bring about such a merger.

In effect, we need not only to invest experimental gallery art with some of the sensations and attractions of popular art; we also (and equally) need to project the values and attributes we associate with experimental art into popular art – a move that meets (consciously and unconsciously) with considerable resistance on the part of most educated, cultured people.

My immediate connection with Gladwell’s work is through *Mad Max* because in 2003 I wrote a book on the three films that (so far) comprise George Miller’s famous screen series<sup>1</sup> – and when the artist’s MADDESTMAXIMVS was featured in the 2009 Venice Biennale, I was frequently asked for my take on his take on Miller. Gladwell has indeed mined the iconography of these films – the cars, the costumes, the in-motion chase scenes through barren landscapes – at various levels in his highly cinematic creations.

The association of vanguard Australian art with the energy and imagery of the *Mad Max* movies is not itself new or novel. At the time of the films’ initial circulation, in issues of *Art & Text* magazine from 1981 to 1986, artists and critical writers as diverse as Paul Taylor, Jon Stratton, Jenny Watson and Ross Gibson enthusiastically claimed the post-apocalyptic visions of the *Mad Max* series for the spirit and strategies of a burgeoning postmodern creativity in ‘Antipodean’ art.<sup>2</sup>

Gladwell’s gesture, however, clearly takes this relationship between *Mad Max* and local art to an entirely more elaborate, invested and intensified level. It is no longer a matter of post-modern metaphor – the battling Aussie artist in a landscape of globalised pop culture making a stand amidst the ruins and working with the available fragments, as in Jenny Watson’s punk-friendly vision – but a more full-blooded appropriation of the ways and means, the forms and structures, of Miller’s intricately crafted and self-consciously mythic action films.<sup>3</sup>

## ADRIAN MARTIN

One of the least kind reviews of my 2003 *Mad Max* book, courtesy of the now defunct *The Bulletin*, judged that I approached pop films such as these in an incongruous manner, with a slide rule in my hand. It was a classic journalistic reflex: the academic film analyst (although at the time I had scarcely set foot in a University for over a decade) as Mad Scientist or Nutty Professor paying close, even forensic attention to something that was intended as mere ephemeral entertainment. Misplaced intellectual labour, obviously!

On the other side of the fence, some academics were just as disturbed by the kind of attention I paid to these movies – in particular, my habit (long cultivated) of making careful, fanatically precise shot lists and then endeavouring to notate and account for the kinds of dynamic image and sound relationships taking shape from one element to the next. Richard Smith of the University of Sydney suggested:

*Martin’s reading, I think, suffers from its structuralist account of action. The structuralist urge to stop the frame, to segment scenes and then to reconstitute them anew as a critical unity is deeply*

*problematic when encountering action films ... Students get bored [with such analysis] for a very good reason – the film disappears when the frame is stopped.*<sup>4</sup>

Then as now – as ever – I remain profoundly unconvinced by any appeal

to the correct or proper way of commenting on whatever cultural object – high or low, ephemeral or lasting, spectacular or reflective. In a manifesto-like essay titled ‘In the Name of Popular Culture’, first written in 1992, I proposed that

*neither high nor low works in themselves possess depth and meaning; what can differentiate them (not once and for all, but in specific, changing situations) is a ‘history of meaning’, of meanings attributed, read-in, taught and passed on. ... So just as it is entirely possible and necessary to argue these days that some low texts are profound, it is equally possible to turn the tables on high culture’s self-definition and demonstrate that its own (even canonical) works can be seen as superficial, mad, formulaic, market-driven, glamorous.*<sup>5</sup>

This turning-tables move was performed in the hope of a widespread equalisation: that we might begin to use *all* of the aesthetic and analytic tools at our disposal at any given time – without hierarchy or discrimination or ghettoisation of these tools – to appreciate or discuss *all* of the cultural works before us (old or new). But turning the tables is not enough; it can only be a first step in the constitution of a new aesthetic system, since it risks a counter-reversion to the same old models and standards of evaluation. This, indeed, is what has largely happened over the past two decades of cultural commentary, with the highbrow journals of literary and artworld discussion further reinforcing prior cultural divisions (these days, for instance, between the ‘quality novelistic television’ heights of HBO and the ‘cult/bad movie/exploitation’ depths of so-called paracinema).

Even my editor and publishers on the *Mad Max* book were a little queasy about what they viewed as the (at times) hyper-intellectual drift of my appreciation of these films and the larger cinematic tradition in which they stood. Cut from the final draft were a set of remarks threaded through the manuscript devoted precisely to how, as I saw it, ‘popular cinema makes its rendezvous with the avant-garde’. Fortuitously, the art of Shaun Gladwell today allows me to reapproach, from a different angle, the theorisation of this crucial cultural encounter.

As part of his most recent work, Gladwell has been developing a series of what he terms *Parallel Forces* – twin-screen works that show the same or similar action, such as a car or helicopter travelling from two different perspectives/angles, often filmed at the same time, and thus including

the element of two cameras filming each other in the process. At the time of writing, I am unsure as to how the artist will ultimately decide to lay out these twin images, and on what scale, upon their initial presentation. Monitors side by side? Large video walls facing each other? Of course, we must leave open the option that Gladwell may present the material in shifting presentation formats for the duration of their international exhibition existence.

However it comes to be installed, the *Parallel Forces* series constitutes what is called, in the artworld these days, a *dispositif*: a specific arrangement or ‘set-up’ of discrete elements according to rules or principles particular to the individual artwork.<sup>6</sup> The rules, in a sense, actively generate the creation and its internal relations. Such rule-bound procedures can inform a single-object work (such as a film or video) or a multi-object work (such as an installation in several or many pieces). The rules can be flexible (open to adaptation, evolution, change from one site or occasion to another), but they must remain logical, evident, systematic. *Dispositifs* can be playful, energetic and visceral – all these qualities are consistently evident in Gladwell’s work – but they are also, at base, conceptual: you need to ‘get’ the generating idea to fully appreciate and enjoy the work, and indeed the clarity or limpidity of the idea ‘at first glance’ for a viewer or audience is what often marks the degree of success or failure of a piece in the recent *dispositif* tradition. *Dispositifs* can be a lot of fun (Gladwell’s certainly are), but they are not modern-day exemplars of romantic art as per the time-wearied code of free-flowing, expressive creativity. The inventiveness of a *dispositif* must be gauged by critic and viewer alike, differently in the initial concept and the material elaborations and modifications it undergoes ‘in the flesh’ of the presented work.



Interceptor Surf Sequence, 2009.

What are Gladwell’s parallel pieces playing with? With paradoxes of movement and stasis – since the moving objects (vehicles, bodies) are ‘tracked’ or captured by a camera that keeps them dead centre – and thus also with the fundamentally cinematic act of framing. Much of Gladwell’s art has been concerned with exploring these basic elements of an audiovisual language – think, for instance, of his pieces shot on moving trains. Within these parameters, Gladwell explores not only the conditions of audiovisual language but also its paradoxes: the inversion of up and down, for example with his muscular train riders and head-spinning break dancers, or discrepancies in the speed of activity between people in foreground and background planes.



Intentionally or not on the artist's time 'unfolds' a play of images and sounds, and 'to translate the problem of part, two particular moments or space into a question of time is a new way to render the invisible visible'.<sup>9</sup> Fargier's speculation is astute and poetic. But, from my own viewpoint today, such speculation can easily constitute a trap, and a sad end. For such discourse can too easily and too often end up bolstering the old equation that squares rarefied thoughts with High Art – thus, in the audiovisual art context, leading us straight to the bourgeois cult worship and arts festival patronage of types like Bill Viola, Matthew Barney or Peter Greenaway. How to break this purely historical link between the purist exploration of a medium's basic elements and a certain oppressive, hierarchical taste culture?

As with a master like Benning there is an abstract side to Gladwell's investigation. That much becomes immediately apparent the moment we use words (and philosophical concepts) like Time, Movement, Space and so on, to deal with the affect the work generates within us. But there is also a highly material, concrete side. This is one of the doors through which popular culture, or at least specific bits of popular cultures, enters his work: it is hardly a matter of indifference (indeed, it is the result of immense care and research) which particular *Mad Max*-style car appears in a frame, or which subcultural dance/movement/skateboarding style is featured. Sometimes we are treated to the subtly tense war of the *dispositif* that frames (the cameras that stay grimly on their preordained path or tracks, centring object movement at all costs) and the subject that resists this framing, edging or darting out at the sides, unpredictable and alive ...

Just as Gladwell's moving images offer us 'blocks of space' – of framed, circumscribed, but often furious activity – they also offer us blocks of time. On this plane, Gladwell joins the vast river of international video art since the start of the 1990s (and sometimes earlier, in famous historic precedents) that, once again, often from a static camera, captures actions in their duration: views out of domestic windows or through car windscreens, dense landscapes or suburban streetscapes, offered as barely changing slices of passing time, and arranged (in installation) on TV monitors that are variously stacked, slipped into the bottom of a bin or situated behind some other clutter – rather less a gloriously cinematic 'window on the world' than slightly animated cliché-postcards or mobile phone-style annotations/documentations of the (frequently) mundane. Gladwell's work is in part derived from this video tradition and its cool sensibility, but he reinvigorates it with a feeling for the cinematic, for spectacle and for action. Like Daniel Crooks, another contemporary and highly visible artist from the Australia–New Zealand axis, Gladwell re-energises the capacity of audiovisual media to seize space–time blocks; both artists revive certain favoured sights of early cinema such as street 'attractions' and trains pulling into stations.<sup>7</sup>

Now, it would be too easy, at this point, for a (these days) University-type like me to swiftly and cleanly assimilate the art of Shaun Gladwell to the theoretical framework offered by, for example, the books by philosopher Gilles Deleuze on *The Movement-Image* and *The Time-Image*.<sup>8</sup> Or, indeed, many high-level, high-minded commentaries, pitched at an almost metaphysical level, on the pure, stripped-back properties of the cinematic apparatus as brought forth by special, usually minimalist works of art.

Theoretician and videaste Jean-Paul Fargier, writing contemporaneously with Deleuze, in 1984, once suggested in this vein that cinema's essential concern is the mastery of space (the edges of the frame, what is in or out of the singular image at any given moment) and thus also space's brutal mastery over time, reducing it to a simple function like anticipation, whereas, he claimed, video liberates the creative role of time as that which multiplies images and takes the nervous edge off narrative space. Video

**In my *Mad Max* book I found myself insisting on the 'formalist, modernist' aspects of these popular films by George Miller. But it is not a matter, ultimately, of claiming (redeeming?) particular popular films by hauling them over to the hallowed side of avant-garde art-historical movements. This is assuredly not what Shaun Gladwell is doing when he appropriates a *Max*-style Interceptor, for instance, and places it dead centre in the imagery of his parallel *dispositif*. Popular culture scarcely needs to be saved or legitimised in this sense, and attempts to do so always betray a cringing cultural anxiety. Merely affixing labels like modernist or formalist is not strong or radical enough as an intellectual gesture to come to grips with what is happening inside popular cinema – or, indeed, inside modernist culture (taken in its broadest, transhistorical sense).**

I see what, in retrospect, compelled me to make the move of calling *Mad Max* modernist: I was trying to bring to the fore aspects of the films – powerfully material aspects, aspects bearing upon the deepest apparatus of cinema as a medium – that are crucial to the impact they have on us, but are well below (or beyond) the conventional, secondary elaborations of plot structure, mythic iconography, theatrical characterisation and literary theme. Revelatory for me in this regard was the erudite (yet completely natural and unselfconscious) enthusiasm of the French critic Alain Garel, who celebrated the way in which Miller, in the first *Mad Max* film, used

*the road's geometry, its horizontality, to maximum effect, developing a system of visual abstractions: the road's vanishing points, parallel and oblique to the exhaust fumes from cars and bikes entering and exiting the frame; the kineticism of median strips continuous and discontinuous, which the lens, placed close to the ground, devours; traces of the skid marks left by bikes after they brake on the bitumen.*<sup>10</sup>

In this way, Garel made the link between a sensationalist action movie and the earliest examples of experimental 'pure film' that explored the sheer kinetic optics of lines, circles and squares in motion (for example, Fernand Léger's *Ballet mécanique* from 1924). Garel's view was a revelation, because how totally and wonderfully 'other' a take on the film it was compared to the dour Anglo pronouncement of one local academic commentator that the first two *Mad Max* movies dutifully obeyed the 'conventions of narrative realism' and thus could 'never be defined as modernist'!<sup>11</sup>

What we need to grasp is how all artist-charged moments or carefully choreographed flashes of formal intensity on the material plane of a work. The challenge for any experimental art is to articulate these entities (think of the reference to generic chase scenes in works have, quite simply, often been denied the intricacy and intensity of Gladwell's oeuvre) in such a way that they do not cohere in the conventional formal levels – absorbed, as these levels doubtless are within many linear fashion. But still to produce and use the flesh, the life of substantial aspects of our cultural experience, by the more obvious surface attractions of movie fiction or spectacle; and thus to transcend the sketch approach of star appeal, subject, backdrop, ideology and so on. But we should be able to strip movie homage down, in a parodic or purist fashion, to do this in a natural way (as Garel did), without first feeling obliged to haul popular films over the purifying cultural divide of classical/modern, entertainment/art or any similarly cutthroat blade.

In his rumination (also from the 1980s) for a lot. Watching his parallel helicopters and imagining the kind of *dispositif* on the persistence of fiction (and fiction projection he will give them, I am returned to another magnificent moment of tional tropes of every kind) across cinema and video, Raymond Bellour makes grandeur in experimental film art: the figures-in-a-landscape filmed from a several distinctions that are crucial for us here, and they can be generalised chopper in Philippe Garrel's mystico-psychedelic *The Inner Scar* (1972) – other-beyond the question of fiction itself. To adapt his insights for our framework, erwise, a feature-length piece of arch-minimalism. In Garrel's case, it was a it can be advanced that any audiovisual work has two centres: an abstract kindly millionairess with avant-garde sympathies (and later a key figure in centre and a concrete centre. The abstract centre constitutes, in Bellour's French feminism), Sylvina Boissonnas, who underwrote the vehicle hire, rather terms, zero-degree fiction, 'a sort of minimalist drama which establishes a than the government funded or institution supported opportunities that Australian relationship between at least two elements'.<sup>12</sup> This description sometimes enjoy today. But with Garrel or Gladwell we witness nicely anticipates the rise of the *dispositif* (which Bellour has also theorised something quite different from the cool, big budget, high production value, in depth) in experimental cinema and new media art, with its situational relationships between elements (such as Gladwell's parallel screens). What needs to be stressed here is that the elements in play are not only characters, settings or fictional props (which would leave us within the traditional framework with elements of both content and form – taken on in equal measure, of mise en scène or staging) but, equally, elements of colour, shape, montage out unfortunate cultural hierarchy – in popular culture. He is far from that relations and so on. An abstract fiction (in Bellour's sense) is not so much plot desire (thank godard!) to 'tell stories' that has overtaken, with unhappy re-as intrigue, and virtually anything can be situationally intriguing. Any decent sults, artists like David Salle and Julian Schnabel; but he does want those *dispositif* sets up relations of tension, even suspense, between its unfolding flashes of immersive action, of kinetic glory, and he wants their power to last elements: where is this arrangement, this relationship of points, going? throughout their differential, situational distribution in an art gallery dis-

positif. And to succeed so well in that goal, as he does, shows the mark of an artist who honours both what Alain Garel called the 'visual abstractions' and the concrete realities derived from the movies that both he and I love.

1 Adrian Martin, *The Mad Max Movies*, Sydney, Currency Press, 2003.  
2 Adrian Martin, 'Before and After Art & Text', in Rex Butler (ed.), *What is Appropriation?*, Sydney/Brisbane, Power Publications/IMA, 1996, pp. 107–118.  
3 Adrian Martin, 'Heroes, Quests and the Meaning of Life: Mythomania', in my *Phantasms: The Dreams and Desires at the Heart of Our Popular Culture*, Melbourne, Penguin, 1994, pp. 124–130.  
4 Richard Smith, 'Criticism Without Myth?', <http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-April-2004/smithr.html>  
5 Adrian Martin, 'In the Name of Popular Culture', in John Frow and Meaghan Morris (eds), *Australian Cultural Studies*, Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1993, pp. 133–145.  
6 See Adrian Martin, 'Turn the Page: From Mise en scène to Dispositif', *Screening the Past*, no. 31, June 2011, <http://www.latrobe.edu.au/screeningthepast/index.html>  
7 See Adrian Martin, 'Tracks', in Justin Paton (ed.), Daniel Crooks: *Everywhere Instantly*, exhibition catalogue, Christchurch Art Gallery, 2008.  
8 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 1: The Movement-Image*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1986 and *Cinema 2: The Time-Image*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989.  
9 Jean-Paul Fargier, 'The Hidden Side of the Moon', in *The Luminous Image*, Amsterdam, Stedelijk Museum, 1984, pp. 36–45.  
10 Alain Garel, 'George Miller: la conquête du langage', *La Revue du cinéma*, no. 409, October 1985, p. 62 (my translation).  
11 Jon Stratton, 'What Made Mad Max Popular? The Mythology of a Conservative Fantasy', *Art & Text*, no. 9, Autumn 1983, p. 37.  
12 Raymond Bellour, 'The Limits of Fiction', in *Video by Artists 2*, Toronto, Art Metropole, 1986, pp. 49–57.  
13 See Adrian Martin, 'In and Out the Window: Fiction and Australian Avant-Garde Film', *Express Australia*, 1984, pp. 8–9.

Another of Bellour's distinctions in his 1982 essay 'The Limits of Fiction' comes in handy. He contrasts system and substance in a work, particularly those works that borrow moments, tropes, objects or memories from previous audiovisual texts (such as classic Hollywood or Art films). A work's system is its structuralist content: the inventory of standard structures, mechanisms, codes and conventions at the base of most traditional audiovisual offerings. A concern purely with system in experimental art gives rise to a familiar brand of meta-art: easy jokes at the expense of character stereotypes, cliché signs, congealed moves – the kitsch side of the vogue for quotation that was the hallmark of postmodernism in Australia, as elsewhere. The other side of the quotation wave, which has its history in leftist political art, is sober and Brechtian, disapproving of the capitalist/consumerist pleasures of popular work. But, from both sides, a reduction takes place: popular culture is sized up and flattened for a different use, camp or militant.

Engaging with the substance of popular culture within an artwork requires a more thoughtful, concerted and, dare I say, respectful effort. The process consists, in Bellour's description, of the 'materialisation, scenarisation and dramatisation of substantive entities', whether these be staged scenes,



**Shaun Gladwell** completed Associate Research at Goldsmiths College, University of London in 2001 and has since undertaken international residencies and commissions in Europe, North and South America, and the Asia Pacific Region. In 2009 Gladwell represented Australia at the Venice Biennale. Selected solo exhibitions include Interior Linework/Interceptor Intersection, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Sydney, Australia, 2010; Seven Year Linework, Spacex, Exeter, UK, 2009; MADDESTMAMXIMVS: Planet & Stars Sequence, Australian Pavilion, 53rd Venice Biennale, Italy, 2009; Shaun Gladwell, University Art Gallery, University of California, San Diego, USA, 2008; In a Station of the Metro, Artspace, Sydney, Australia, 2008; Recent Projects, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, France, 2001; and Kickflipping Flâneur, Artspace, Sydney, Australia, 2000.

Gladwell's work has been exhibited in significant group exhibitions, including 'Paradise Lost', Istanbul Museum of Art, Turkey, 2011; The '-scape' in Escape , Netwerk/ centrum voor hedendaagse kunst, Aalst, Belgium, 2011; "?" the 12th International Cairo Biennale, Egypt, 2011; Street and Studio. From Basquiat to Séripop, Kunsthalle Wien, Austria, 2010; Adaptation, Power Plant, Toronto, Canada, 2010; ABBARACADABRA, The First Mardin Biennial, Turkey, 2010; The Thrill of the Heights, OK Centre, Linz, Austria, 2009; RISING TIDE: Film and Video Works from the MCA Collection, Sydney, Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, USA, 2009; CODE SHARE: 5 continents, 10 biennales, 20 artists, Contemporary Art Centre Vilnius, Lithuania, 2009; Revolutions – Forms that Turn, 16th Biennale of Sydney, Australia, 2008; Taipei Biennial, Taipei Fine Art Museum, Taiwan, 2008; Space for Your Future, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan, 2007; Think with the senses, feel with the mind – art in the present tense, 52nd International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale, Italy, 2007; How to Live Together, 27th São Paulo Biennial, Brazil, 2006; Everywhere, Busan Biennale, South Korea, 2006; Art Circus (Jumping from the Ordinary), Yokohama 2005 Triennale of Contemporary Art, Japan, 2005; Space Invaders, Kunsthau Baselland, Switzerland, 2005; and The Mind is a Horse, Bloomberg Space, London, UK, 2001.

In 2011 Gladwell will hold major solo museum exhibitions at the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, Hartford, Connecticut, USA, and at SCHUNCK, Heerlen, The Netherlands.

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*Parallel 2 x XB*s (Silverton)  
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