ATOL: Art Therapy OnLine

Shifting Frames: Reflections on filmmaking and the unconscious in the art practice of an art therapist

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Abstract

This article looks at a series of nine video films the author made over a six-year period. The context in which they were produced is explained but while the context is important the author sees the films primarily as a coherent body of work within his art practice. Consideration is given to how the art practice of this art therapist might be framed. The aim of the article is to think about the ways in which meaning is made in the films. I make use of a critical visual methodology (Rose, 2001) and draw upon film theory to consider the impact of unconscious processes in the construction of meaning.

Keywords: digital media, the unconscious, art practice, visual methodology, film theory, psychoanalysis, art therapist.

Introduction

The idea for this article arose after a private screening of nine short films I made between 2010 and 2016. My intention is to explore them as a coherent body of work in order to think about ways in which meanings are made in film and the part played by unconscious processes in this. There is also a curatorial aspect whereby their collection and display invite different modes of audiencing, which I will also explore. I went to art school in the 1960's, which was a period of extraordinary social change. My teachers were, by and large, still operating within a modernist framework and computer technology was still in its infancy. Since that time, what constitutes art practice has been evolving alongside the technological advances in digital media. I present my thoughts about the evolution of art practice and about research as a way of contextualising my professional identity in relation to the themes of this article. I then describe the nine films and set out some ideas about the making of meaning from visual studies, film theory and psychoanalysis, in particular the part played by unconscious processes in the production and viewing of film. The objectives of film theory are defined in the 'Oxford Dictionary of Film Studies' thus:

> 'to identify basic units of meaning and processes of meaning making in cinema; to track the structures and systems underlying outward and visible forms of meaning in films; to build a framework for understanding how cinema as a distinctive screen medium engages spectators at the level of the inner world

and the unconscious and for conceptualising the psychodynamics at work in the encounter between the cinema screen and the spectator' (Kuhn and Westwell, 2012, p 181).

Today's rapidly changing technologies in the production and delivery of moving images means the objects of film theory are changing but the central concern remains the spectator/user screen interface (ibid).

The art practice of art therapists is an area of interest that is an underlying theme, one that perhaps has not received the attention it deserves in the literature to date. The most noticeable exception to this is Andrea Gilroy's Inscape article 'On occasionally being able to paint' originally published in 1989 then again in 2004 alongside a short essay revisiting the original. She explores the vagaries of art therapists maintaining an artist identity when 'other dynamic, systemic and cultural factors within the profession' seek to prohibit it (2004 p69). Rogers (2002) writes about her art practice in relation to her experiences as an art therapist and reflects on parallel process with her client group. Other authors on the subject include Moon (2002) and Mahoney (2011). Brown, Meyerowitz-Katz and Ryde (2003) develop the use of image making in supervision to better understand clinical material. More recent articles have explored ideas about 'responsive art making' or art making to help process countertransference phenomena (Fish, 2012; Havsteen-Franklin, 2014; Marshall-Tierney, 2014; Havsteen-Franklin and Camarena Altamirano; 2015, Rowe, 2017). It would appear that art making by art therapists is expanding into areas beyond that framed by the concept of an art practice with an artist identity. The issue of how to frame the art practice of this particular art therapist is something that I will return to at the end of the article.

The films can be viewed on a dedicated Vimeo channel, which can be found here: https://vimeo.com/channels/theuncproj The title of the Vimeo channel 'The Unconscious Project' refers to another frame in which the films were shown and thought about. This frame was the shared art practice sessions of the staff group on the MA Art Psychotherapy at Goldsmiths, University of London, during the same time period in which they were made. The unconscious project was the group's attempt to think about the question: 'What do we mean by the unconscious?' The

group met four times a year to share artworks made by individuals and to discuss thoughts about them. The question was also addressed through formal discussions, writings on the subject and exhibitions (further information can be found here: http://www.i-m.mx/goldmaap/theunconsciousproject/). There were many individual takes on what the concept meant to each person but no shared agreement in spite of various allegiances to psychoanalysis, which states as a fact that we have no direct access to the greater part of our own mental processes (Young, 1994).

It is not only the nature of the unconscious that is ill-defined; this is also true of the image and what we mean by meaning. All three words tend to be used as given terms. The concept of meaning in relation to visual images has been explored in art history, theory and criticism, and includes the philosophical problems of art and aesthetics along with the more recent language-centric approaches such as semiology and post-structuralism. Issues arising from these discourses are beyond the scope of this article however, and there is about as much agreement on the term as there is with the unconscious. Emily Dickinson captures this elusiveness in a poem:

> 'There's a certain Slant of light,
> Winter Afternoons –
> That oppresses like the Heft
> Of Cathedral Tunes –
>
> Heavenly Hurt, it gives us –
> We can find no scar,
> But internal difference,
> Where the Meanings are.'
>
> (extract, poem 258)

What I am concerned with is the way meanings are generated through symbolic aspects of unconscious mental activity, which we may get to know about through images, dreams, and transference phenomena, for example. My theoretical orientation draws on Melanie Klein's concept of unconscious phantasy, which Hinshelwood (1989) defines as underlying:

'every mental process and accompanying all mental activity. They are the mental representations of those somatic events in the body which comprise the instincts, and are physical sensations interpreted as relationships with objects that cause those sensations' (p 32).

They contribute to both cultural creativity and defence mechanisms. The ubiquitous nature of unconscious phantasy means that it accompanies all experiences of reality and indeed is what gives meaning to that experience. It can be differentiated from a fantasy, which may be understood as an imaginative substitute for reality.

I am unsure what frame might fit what I am presenting in this article, neither research nor art criticism seems correct but I draw on both to help understand this reflection on the process and product of my filmmaking.

Art Practice

Looking back on my art practice over the years, I can see it became marginalised as I became more preoccupied with psychotherapy and by the time I started working at Goldsmiths in 2003 it was almost non-existent. The staff group started meeting to share art practice around 2009 and I had recently revived an earlier interest in video as a medium through the purchase of one of the new generation of cheap, highly portable, high definition, digital video cameras – the Kodak Zx1 (see below). These two events kick-started my art practice back into life.

The impact of technology and how art is taught has changed what may constitute art practice, which has now reframed itself as one branch of a vital and varied visual culture that includes postmodernist art theory (Raney 2003). Rosalind Krauss, talking about sculpture, puts it thus:

> '…within the situation of postmodernism, practice is not defined in relation to a given medium – sculpture – but rather in relation to the logical operations on a set of cultural terms for which any medium – Photography, books, lines on walls, mirrors, or sculpture itself – might be used' (Krauss, 1986 p 288).

The artist Richard Wentworth extends this idea further in an interview with Karen Raney 'I think my medium probably is the ability to think about things. It's thoughtfulness' (Raney, 2003 p 214). He goes on to say that when he wants to actualise those thoughts there are a variety of mechanical means by which this can be achieved. For myself the mechanical means were not only the digital video camera but also the computer and video editing software.

The video artist Bill Viola thinks the relationship between subject and object is being reconceptualised through the use of digital media. He points out that the computer is 'the key player in the undermining of the optical image' and goes on to say:

> ' What's going on is that the basis of image-making is shifting from the visual to the conceptual. The material basis of the image is no longer founded on the behaviour of light: it is based on the behaviour of thought' (Raney, 2003 p 74/5).

Raney suggests the implication of this is that the subjective space that emerges in his work enables a connection for the viewer with what is invisible and unvisualizable. This not only challenges the traditional graphic act of making art by an embodied subject but also raises questions about the nature of 'embodied acts' and 'unconscious communication'.

Research

In her book 'Art Therapy, Research and Evidence-based Practice' (2006) Andrea Gilroy refers to a tension between the discipline and the systems in which it operates, and this includes the training of art therapists within universities. This tension has led to increased research orientation within these trainings – but at what cost? The commodification and marketization of higher education has led to a corporate style of management whereby 'branding' and 'the consumer' are prioritised over providing the kind of learning required of therapeutic trainings i.e. spaces for reflection on experience that allow increased awareness of the underlying meaning of those experiences, which then informs clinical practice. Perhaps as a result of this altered focus on the institution's image and associated status anxiety, opportunities for staff to develop practices that use subjectivity to inform professional values become increasingly unsupported. In healthcare institutions this emphasis on objective research and evidence-based practice, perhaps in an attempt to please service commissioners, has led to a denigration of the subjective experience of meanings, and produced a backlash towards purely art-based interventions such as 'arts in health' programmes.

Gilroy suggests that qualitative research has privileged text over images and visual research methods from art history such as ekphrasis[1] and various disciplines related to the study of visual culture e.g. feminist and post-colonial theory, philosophy, structuralism and semiotics (2006). The book 'Visual Methodologies' by Gillian Rose (2001) sets out a methodological framework for interpreting visual images critically. She says:

> 'there are three sites at which the meanings of an image are made: the site(s) of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site(s) where it is seen by various audiences' (p 16).

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[1] 'a literary description of or commentary on a visual work of art' (Merriam-Webster), or the conversion from one discipline (art) to another (the written word).

Furthermore, she says that each site has different aspects to their processes, which she calls modalities, these are: technological, compositional and social.

I will return to these ideas later, but now, having hopefully provided a frame of reference, however out of focus it may be, I turn attention to the films themselves.

The Films

In the private screening I referred to earlier the films were shown grouped into batches lasting around 13 minutes (see screening order and film timings below). I felt it was important they were viewed in chronological order, as this might allow the development of themes to become visible. There was opportunity for audience discussion after each batch.

The System Unconscious (2010) 13.35

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The Black Beacon (2011) 3.31
Breathe in…Breathe out (2012) 6.30
Estuary (2013) 4.34

_____
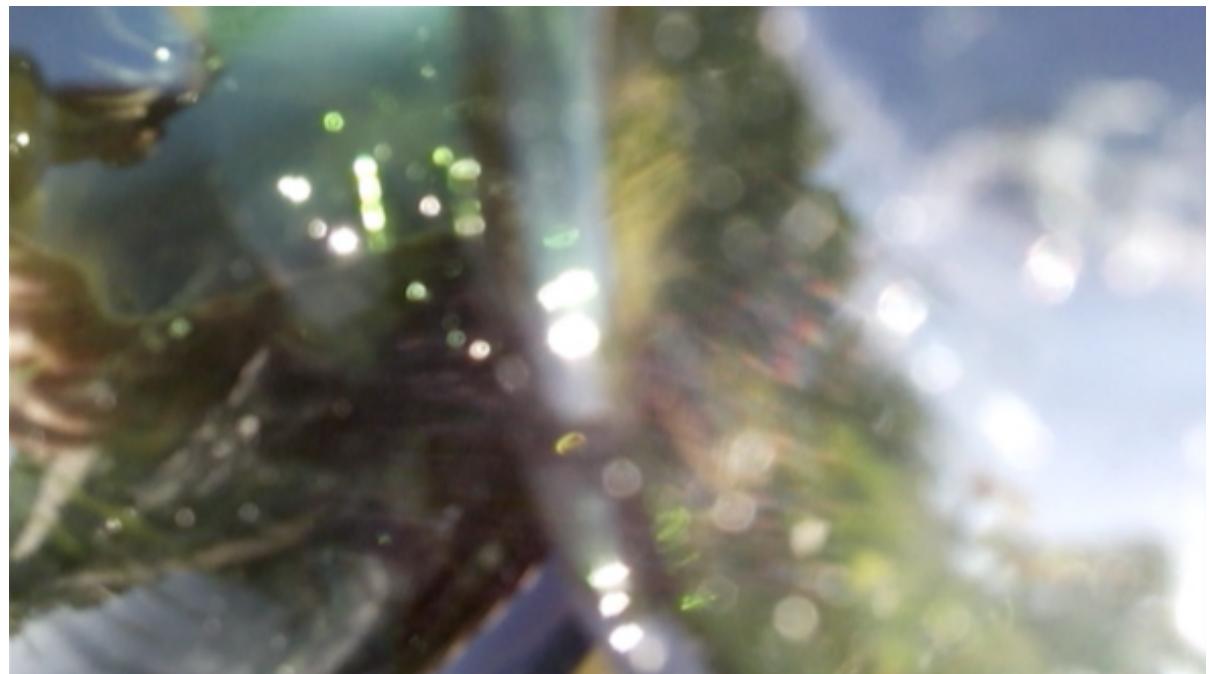
Making Space – Passing Time (2013) 10.49
The Long Way Home (2015) 5.38

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A Slow Collapse (2015) 4.31
Fire (2015) 2.55
Sanctus (2016) 6.03

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I will now present a brief description of each film by way of providing an overview before moving on to a more detailed exploration of the sites of production, image and audience.

'The System Unconscious' (2010) 13.35

This was my attempt to directly address the theme of the group's research. The imagery it contains includes: slowly moving swirling abstract shapes, symbolic representations such as a fountain of water and a tunnel, natural features such as water and the moon, depictions of underground places, dreamlike sequences, a baby. The musical soundtrack changes to evoke different moods. There is no natural sound or dialogue.
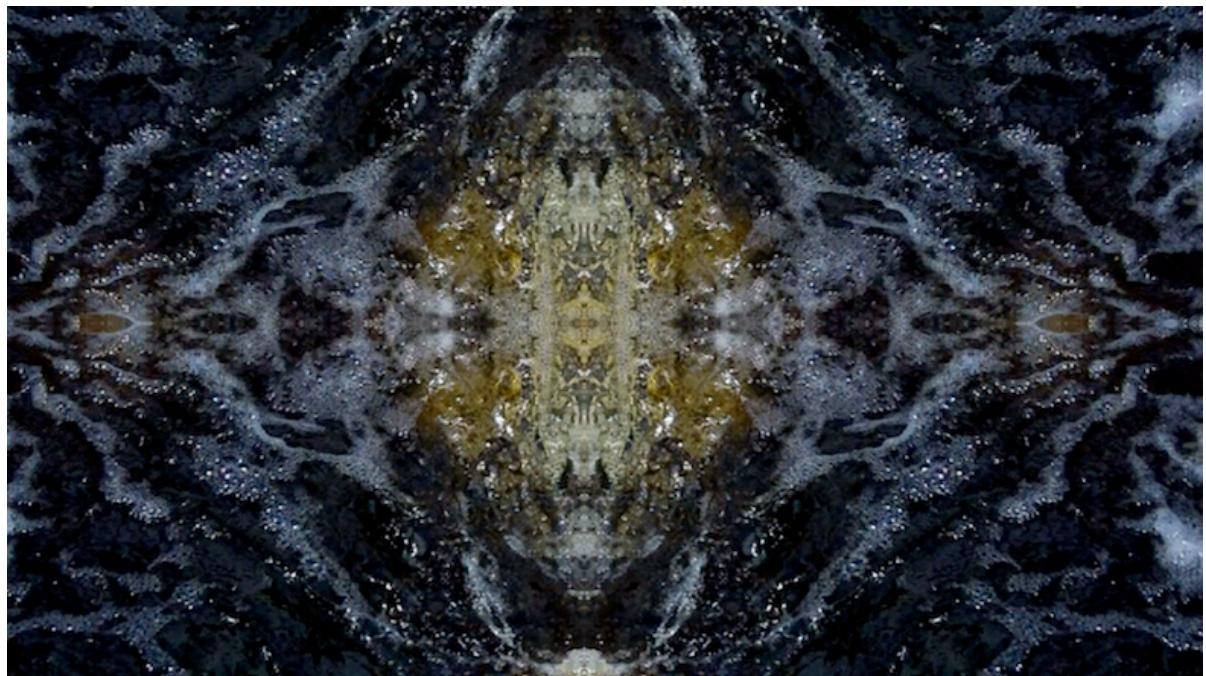
◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

'The Black Beacon' (2011) 3.31

A coastal landscape: birds…a church bell tolls. What at first appears to be beach is revealed as a mysterious site scarred by ruined technologies to the accompaniment of sacred polyphonic singing.

◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

'Breathe in…Breathe out' (2012) 6.30

A psychedelic mandala pulsates to electronic beats. This fades to glowing embers on a pebble beach, the tempo slows and finally fades to entropy (don't forget to breathe in again…).
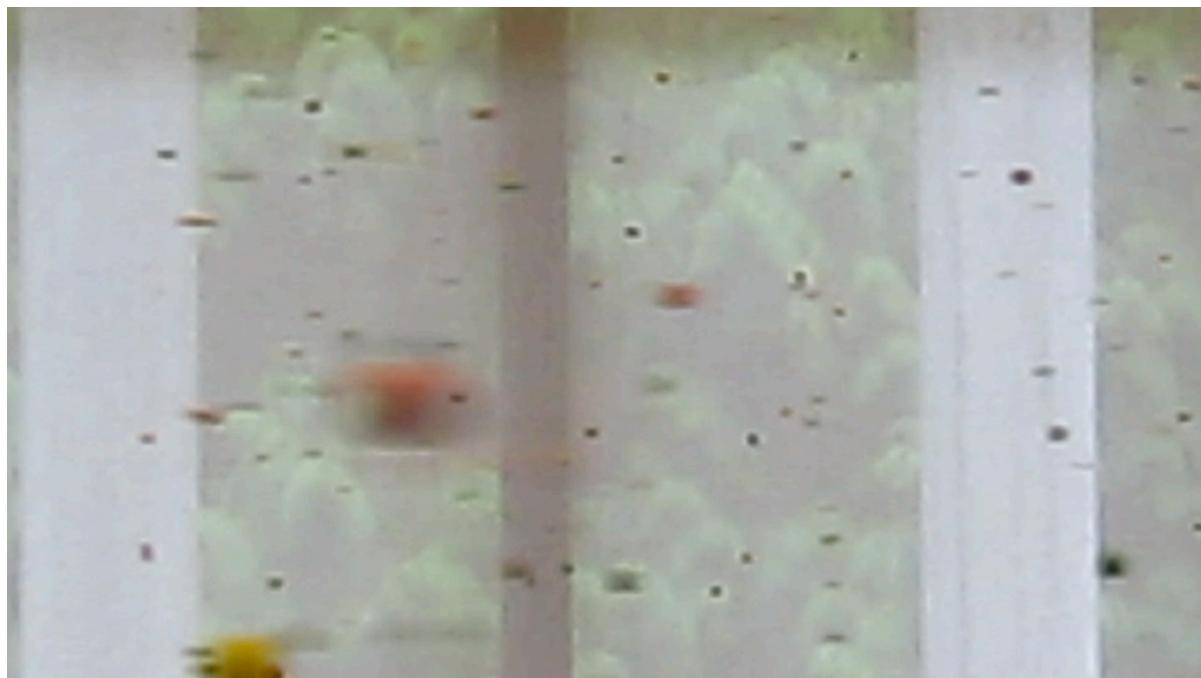
◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

'Estuary' (2013) 4.34

A daytrip on the Thames Estuary becomes a voyage of loss evoked by rusting depths, the darkness of purple green water meeting violet grey sky, cries of uncanny birds echo chords of plaintive strings.

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'Making Space – Passing Time' (2013) 10.49

What to do when work stops and time stretches to infinity and beyond. The countryside expands and contracts through horizons and doorways, paths and fields, providing connection to a rural past. The honeybee never stops working.

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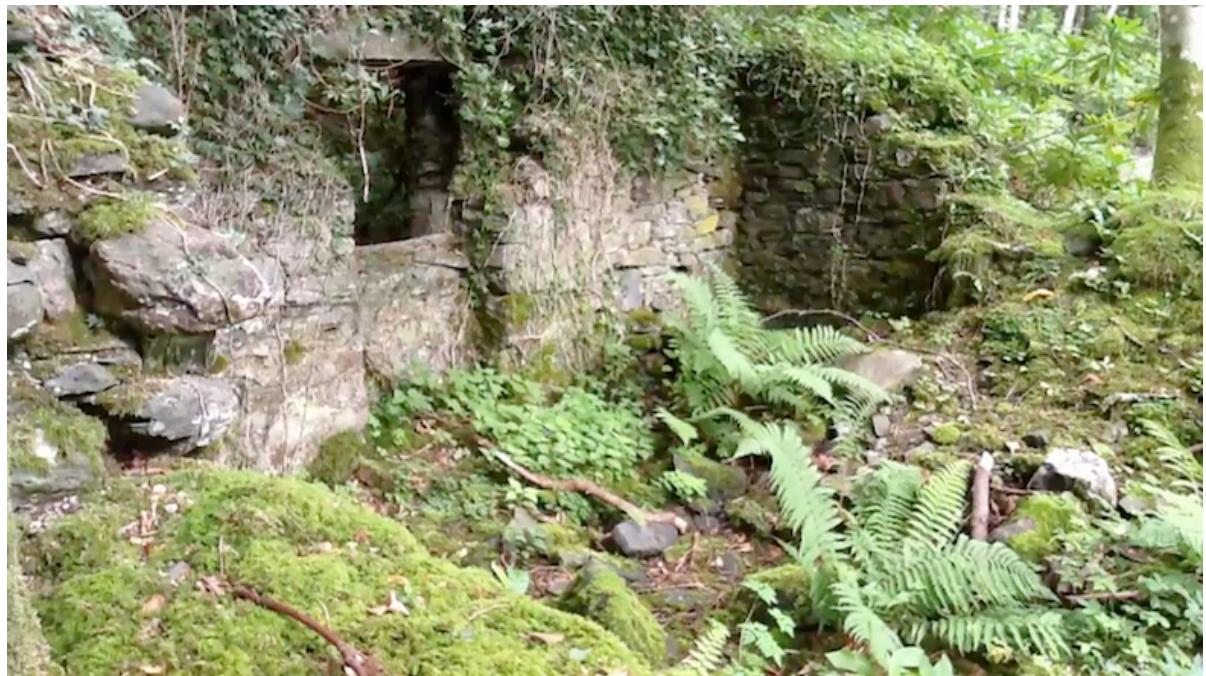**'The Long Way Home' (2015) 5.38**

In a remote archipelago a man is rowing a boat. The sound of the sea and eerie voices. Cut to hearthside roaring fire, cut to darkness punctuated by beach bonfire and the moon.
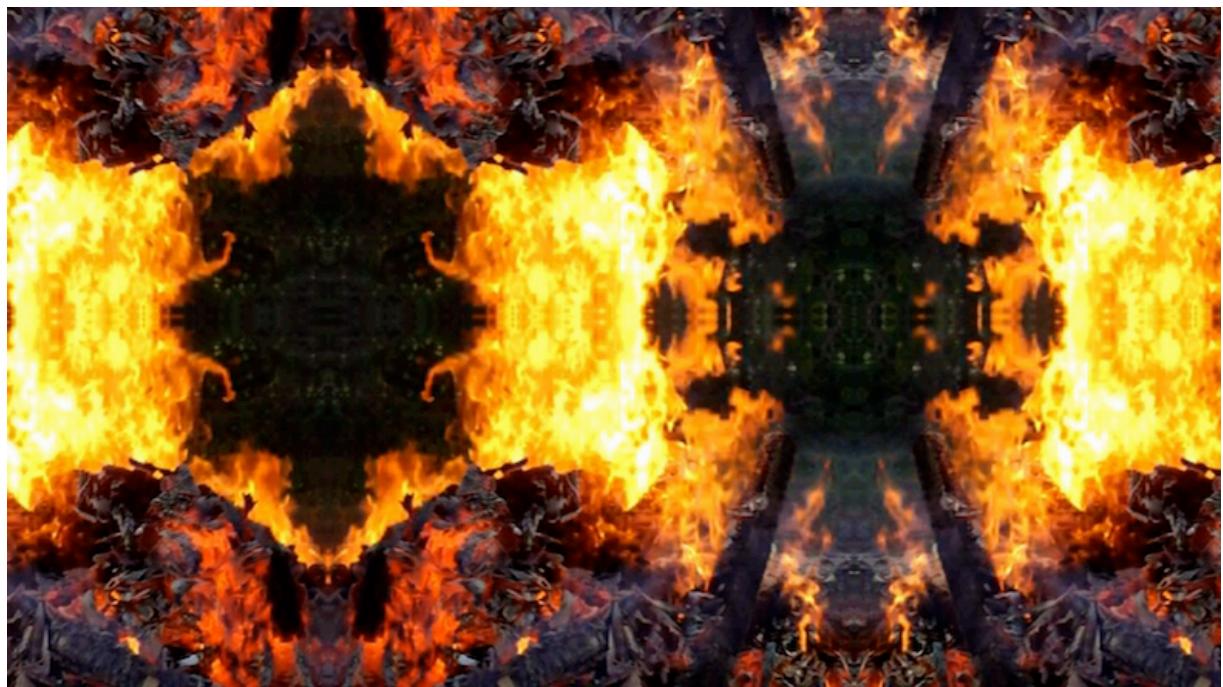
◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

'A Slow Collapse' (2015) 4.31

Agitated trees in the wind. A path, verdant ruins, a bridge. Anticipation of unknown forces. It all leads to the setting sun.

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'Fire' (2015) 2.55

A sketch rather than a finished film. The fire is distorted by special effects, the music is vaguely familiar – a distorted guitar riff. The effect is disturbing.

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'Sanctus' (2016) 6.03

The estuary is revisited. There is a big ship and a cacophony of musical cultures. We worship consumerism.

◊ ◊ ◊ ◊ ◊

The three sites at which the meanings of images are made – that is: how an image is made, what it looks like, and how it is seen (Rose, 2001) – are presented below in relation to the films. However, it will become apparent that there is often no clear boundary between the sites and their modalities with a good deal of overlap between them.

The Site of Production

The raw footage for the films was usually shot during trips taken as part of my general leisure time activities. The video camera was small enough to slip in my

pocket and only required one button to operate. Being handheld produced a degree of camera shake, which conveys a sense of subjectivity to the moving image. Often, it was whatever caught my eye that I filmed, but at other times a sequence of shots would suggest an idea that influenced what I subsequently decided to film, and in this way a sort of storyboard developed in my mind as I went along.

This was the case with 'The Black Beacon'. I knew something of what the location contained beforehand and once I was there it was simply a matter of allowing my imagination to inform where I pointed the camera. Actually, this is not quite true, as it suggests a conscious fantasy directing me, which was present, but there was also an unconscious phantasy in operation. This unconscious phantasy informed choices later on in the editing process when deciding what shots to use. One of the techniques I developed early on was to delete the live recorded sound and use music as a soundtrack to help drive the narrative in combination with the composition of the images and the editing of shots. In this film I used 'Miserere Nostri' by Thomas Tallis (*c*1505 – 1585) and I superimposed some of the text onto one clip, which contributed to a particular reading of subsequent images. I was not aware of the phantasy, of course, it was unconscious, but nevertheless I knew it was linked to a catastrophic loss and the film conveys this sense. This intentionality on the part of the filmmaker and its importance in understanding the film is an important aspect of the site of production and often referred to as Auteur theory. This term comes from French film theorists who informed the 'New Wave' directors in the 1960's and distinguishes between a filmmaker responsible for the entire conception of his films and one who merely stages scripts written by another artist. The text of the sacred motet by Tallis is usually translated as 'Have mercy on us O Lord, have mercy on us' although some give it as 'have *pity* on us'. Through my repeated viewing of the film during the editing process it became clear to me that the phantasy was not just about loss, there was an element of seeking and acknowledgement of the loss – a wish for reparation perhaps. We might think of this process of repeated viewing as a form of amplification of the image (Jung, 1969).

I used Apple's original iMovie HD editing software for all the films apart from 'Sanctus', which uses Adobe Premiere CS6. This is where the magic happens: the visual, the music, the conscious and unconscious mind, all come together to create

the film, and here I acknowledge the enormous debt I owe to all the artists whose music I have used. Ehrenzweig (1967) says that the medium, by frustrating the artist's conscious intentions, allows greater contact with unconscious parts of the personality. While video editing software can be frustrating due to its technical complexity it allows a high degree of control over the manipulation of the media used. There is a precision that appeals to my personality but there is still an interplay going on at the unconscious level and, as art therapists know well, when this is sufficiently deep can result in an embodied image (Schaverien, 2000).

The Site of the Image
What genre do my films fit into? Experimental, Music Video, Art Film? As a filmmaker my influences include films made by artists such as Derek Jarman and Bill Viola as well as what are sometimes called 'art-house films', for example Andrei Tarkovsky, Michaelangelo Antonioni and Akira Kurosawa. Art history charts the development of film being used by artists during the 1950's and 60's through the availability of affordable 16mm film followed by 8mm and Super 8mm. Andy Warhol and Jonas Meekus are good examples of artists who made experimental films during this period in the US, with Malcom Le Grice and Derek Jarman part of the UK avant-garde in the 1960's and 70's. At the same time, Sony developed the first portable video camera, which was used by Nam June Paik and Bill Viola to herald a new age of media art. Since those pioneering days the proliferation of portable computers and high definition video cameras has made filmmaking available to all and their display via the internet a global phenomena.

My films draw on the characteristics of the Artist Film genre through the utilisation of composition, colour, subject matter and visual forms that combine to create what Taylor (1957, in Rose, 2001) calls the 'expressive content' of an image, which links to the idea from art history that having an artistic eye depends upon having an aesthetic appreciation that requires a degree of visual connoisseurship.

Rose uses the term compositional interpretation to refer to this approach to describing imagery:

> 'Compositional interpretation thus offers a way of describing the content, spatial organisation, light and expressive content of a still image, and the mis-en-scene, montage, sound and narrative structure of a moving image' (2001, p 52).

Rose draws upon Monaco's discussion in his book 'How to Read a Film: Movies, Media, Multimedia' (2000) in explaining these concepts – and I shall do the same.

Mis-en-scene refers to the result of decisions about what to shoot and how to shoot it. The framing of shots has three aspects: screen ratio; whether the frame is open or closed i.e. the importance, or not, of the space beyond the frame of the scene; and screen planes i.e. how forms are distributed across the screen, in three dimensional space, and how the apparent depth is perceived. The structure of shots may comprise: shot distance e.g. long shot, close up; focus; the angle of shots e.g. whether the approach is square or oblique; point of view; pan and tilt etc.

Another term for montage is editing i.e. how the shots are put together. For example: continuity cutting in order of shots to show development of a narrative, the jump cut where two unrelated images are spliced together, cross dissolve where two images are spliced with a fade out and fade in, the rhythm of cuts determined by how long each shot is held.

In 'The Long Way Home' (2015) I came across the man rowing the boat by chance and had little option but to use a long shot initially then a mid shot when the opportunity arose. The camera movement echoes the motion of the boat upon the waves and some use is made of the digital zoom, which creates a sense of seeking to get closer. I had an association to a time when I lived on a remote island, a nostalgic moment, and knew these shots would form the basis of a film about longing. The shot of lapping waves is relatively steady and held for a long time, which allows a more meditative space for the viewer where personal associations may surface. At the end of this shot the music changes signalling a new and different sequence that leads through a cross dissolve to a hearthside and cut to a final shot of a bonfire outside at night. The music shifts from being evocative of longing to a sense of pagan community. What I choose as clips and music for

sequences is only a partly conscious process. Often, like any form of creative expression, something simply feels right in the juxtaposition and it is only on reflection over time that deeper layers of meaning reveal themselves.

'Sanctus' (2016) uses just three shots all filmed on the Thames estuary, each with its own music, to convey a journey that is both geographical and conceptual. In the first shot the camera moves in the opposite direction across the motion of the waves and the rhythm of the music increases the sense of movement. I came upon the second shot by chance and in my mind it immediately suggested a theme for a film. The third shot was one that suggested itself on aesthetic grounds on location that day along with others that were not used. All three pieces of music drive the film's conceptual narrative of globalisation and consumerism.

In my films the image cannot be separated from the sound that accompanies it. The use of music to evoke mood and feelings is a key element in the construction of meaning in my films. For example, 'Breathe in…Breathe out' consists of two main clips, one with a very fast moving image the other a very slow one. The fast one uses techno rhythms and the slow one ambient electronica. The contrast between the music complements the contrast in imagery and combines to form a meditation on the cyclic nature of life. My taste in music has become more eclectic over the years and I have developed a wide-ranging collection that is a resource to draw upon during the editing process. Since starting filmmaking I will occasionally buy something as a potential resource for a future work rather than just for listening pleasure. Music is almost, but not quite, as important an experience to me as the visual image is. Combining both in a creative process leads to a synthesis in which different aspects of my experience, conscious and unconscious, can find expression.

The fourth section contained two complete films, 'A Slow Collapse' and 'Sanctus' along with the sketch 'Fire'. 'Fire' merges sound and visual stimulation through rhythmic pulses reminiscent of pop videos and in the screening discussion this shared meaning was contrasted to some of the discordant music in 'Making space – Passing Time' for example, which tends to evoke more idiosyncratic feelings in the viewer. 'A Slow Collapse' also uses a single piece of music and here it holds the

visual content through repeated phrases of anticipation until a rising organ note signals the cut to an abstract sequence and provides a resolution.

The Site of Audiencing

The original audience was the staff group and each film was shown in the setting of the unconscious project sessions where others' work was also viewed and discussed. This took place in one of the studios used for teaching on the art psychotherapy course, using either a data projector or a smart TV display. Each film was thus viewed as part of a collective audiencing of images produced in individuals' art practice but also within the frame of exploring as a group what we mean by the unconscious. In this way there was a particular reading of the images that was thought about in that particular context.

The audience at this private screening was composed of some present and past members of the staff group, who were all art therapists, along with a writer, a psychologist and an artist. The films were screened using a data projector in a small, blacked-out room at home, creating an intimate atmosphere. It was more of a social setting among friends with no set agenda other than to view the films and voice any thoughts about them. Rose (2001) points out that the effect of a film on a viewer may change between a cinema screening and watching it on a TV or computer. This is not just about screen size but the way people watch differently in different places.

'Stoned on Art' was a phrase used after the screening and post discussion once we had moved out of the screening room and into the kitchen. There was an atmosphere of altered reality to our conversations with a lot of humour and excitement. Similar, perhaps to the heightened state sometimes felt leaving the cinema after a watching a stimulating film. We discussed questions concerning audience and artist identity. How anxieties around showing work may vary according to the context. For example, it was pointed out that presenting to a wider audience where one may not even be present involves a letting go of control over how it will be received. This was contrasted to the present setting of a carefully selected group of friends and colleagues.

'The System Unconscious' generated an interesting idea linked to the baby sequence at the end, which was that the entire film could be seen as a symbolic representation of the baby's internal world and associated states of mind. I found this idea fascinating in the way it linked the unconscious to early experiences. It was also pointed out that the rhythm of the film, combined with an absence of human forms, lulls the viewer into one's own internal world so when the first figure does appear it comes as a shock, suddenly the external world exists – the other appears.

Having presented some thoughts about the interpretation of meaning in images, I now turn to psychoanalysis in considering the part played by fantasy in the work of the spectator.

Psychoanalysis

The idea that more than one interpretation of the image is possible is, of course, well understood by art therapists. We are used to focussing on the emotional effects of images within the therapeutic relationship and considering the impact of the unconscious upon it. Psychoanalytic film criticism is concerned with subjectivity, sexuality and the unconscious (Rose, 2001). I am not concerned with issues of sexuality here – I think my films are more about existential issues – my interest is in ways subjectivity and the unconscious link to ideas about audience and fantasy. In other words, to what extent may the subjectively constituted world of meaning in my films be experienced by others?

In psychoanalysis, fantasy is linked to the idea of an internal world and may be conscious or unconscious (phantasy). In cinema, the subject is not only the audience of a fantasy as the fantasy presents a variety of positions that the subject may take up (Cowie, 1990 in Rose, 2001). In this way 'the audience may be positioned while watching a film in ways that correspond to the dynamics of their own fantasies' (Rose, 2001 p 126). Much of the pleasure in watching films lies in the subject's unconscious identification with a fantasy scenario depicted on the screen. Whether this identification takes place or not is down to a complex set of factors as suggested by De Lauretis:

'A particular fantasy scenario, regardless of its artistic, formal, or aesthetic, excellence as film representation, is not automatically accessible to every spectator; a film may work as fantasy for some spectators, but not for others…the spectator's own socio-political location and psycho-sexual configuration have much to do with whether or not a film can work for her as a scenario of desire, and as what Freud would call a 'visualisation' of the subject herself as subject of the fantasy: that is to say, whether the film can engage her spectatorial desire or, literally, whether she can see herself in it' (1995 p 64, in Rose 2001).

The aspect of time in relation to how long a shot is held is another factor. In audience discussion it has often come up that my use of long, static shots allows time for the viewer's fantasy to emerge. This also has a technological aspect related to the site of production as I found the Kodak video camera did not tolerate the use of hand held pan shots very well and this led to a habit of remaining static when filming. One of the screening participants pointed out to me that the long hand-held shots gives the viewer a sense of my body breathing and moving that evokes a body to body relationship with the viewer.

The mechanisms of displacement and condensation, terms that describe the way in which symbols are handled in the unconscious familiar from Freud's dream theory, can be assumed to operate unconsciously in my editing of the films. In this way we might also think of the film as having both a manifest and a latent content. The latent content may only reveal itself through repeated viewings leading to new insights, or audience associations such as the example above where the entire film was seen as a representation of the baby's internal world.

Loss and Solitude

The theme of loss is one that I readily acknowledge as an influence in what I am trying to convey with some of these films. Examples such as 'The Black Beacon' with its images of desolation and devastation; 'Breathe in…Breathe out' with its dying embers and skull; 'Estuary' with its evocative soundtrack by Rautavaara, all can be seen as exploring this theme (these three formed the second section of the screening). Actually, it is perhaps not so much the loss itself but the longing for a

lost object that I am interested in. The Freudian concept of desire is linked to the idea of wish fulfilment for something unattainable, for example in fantasy or dreams. Lacan extended this idea with what he calls 'the object *a*', which 'is at the same time a substitute object, the cause of desire and something intimately connected with jouissance' (Nobus, 1997 p116). Thus the only object of desire is an originally lost object (e.g. mother) with the aim of partially regaining the associated loss of juissance[2] through a substitute object. These themes of loss and desire are reflected, to some extent, in all the films.

In the third section I showed 'Making Space – Passing Time' and 'The Long Way Home'. Both stimulated a lot of associations for viewers. There were comments about the framing of landscape shots, sometimes with a central object, sometimes with an oblique angle, always conveying a connection to the elements: Earth, Air, Fire and Water, with the last of these providing a particular thread throughout all of the films. The man rowing the boat in 'The Long Way Home' is the only other human figure to appear in these films. There is an absence of human forms, which perhaps heightens the identification of the spectator with the camera's subjective viewpoint. The raw material of my films is often taken from the natural landscape and this is because of my need for solitude. This may be seen as another aspect of desire, whereby I am seeking to regain a lost relationship through communing with nature. It is also a need to get out of the city and away from the emotional demands of relating. As an art therapist I am interested in human interactions in both individual and social contexts yet I am always drawn back to a more private space, where making art engages me. This ambivalence, if we can call it such, may be widespread in our professional field.

Discussion

I will now try to develop some of the ideas presented above through an exploration of temporality in relation to film and the culture of digital media with its impact on

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[2] In the translator's note to Lacan's 'The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis (1977, p 281), Alan Sheridan points out there is no adequate translation in English of this word. Enjoyment lacks the sexual connotation of the French and Lacan states that it is *beyond* the pleasure principle.

viewing practices. As preface to this discussion, here are a couple of pertinent points from the theory and philosophy of culture presented in Walter Benjamin's seminal text 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' first published in 1936. His concepts are succinctly summarised by Helmut Schmitz (2007) who describes Benjamin's view on the experience of modernism as consisting of '…the destruction of bourgeois subjectivity in the continuous shock of urbanised space' (p 161). He goes on to say:

> 'The consequences for art and aesthetics are twofold. First, to the new forms of technological mass production correspond new forms of aesthetic production (photography, film) as well as new forms of apperception and reception…Second, Benjamin recognises that in modernity all experience of reality and thus all subject positions are increasingly mediated by technology' (p 161).

As we shall see, this remains prophetically true in today's digital culture.

The Long Take

The long take is 'A shot, either static or involving camera movement, of relatively lengthy duration' (Kuhn and Westwell, 2012, p 250). Many of the clips used in my films are between 35 and 160 seconds long (the longest is 4 minutes) and can be seen to utilise aspects of the long take in conveying meaning. In his book 'The long take: art cinema and the wondrous' Lutz Koepnick (2017) explores this concept and suggests that long takes, or durational images, tend to decelerate narrative economies, feature barren spaces and screen states of affective alienation. This has historical roots in post-war cinema, which used long takes to represent existential alienation. In my own work, I think it allows a slowing down of perception through which the viewer's subjectivity creates a hybrid narrative leading to meanings that may be both idiosyncratic and shared.

Koepnick says: 'The long take in contemporary moving image practice at once probes and recalibrates what it means to be attentive today' (2017, p 9). He is concerned with the way long takes can lead to experiences of wonder that involve affirmation and amazement, which in turn may lead to a thoughtful state of mind 'in

contrast to modernity's privileging of rational explanation and spectacular distractions' (p 14). This idea of attentive looking is central in allowing the viewer sufficient time to peruse the picture and allow things to emerge. In relation to his exploration of the wondrous, Koepnick expands this idea into various categories of viewership: contemplative viewing, reverie, absorption, pensive spectatorship, and possessive looking (p19). Contemplative viewing involves taking the time to scrutinise an image with a moving back and forth between subject and object. Absorption entails a suspension of the self-conscious act of audiencing and an increasing exclusivity of attention on the object. Reverie is a more inward looking and imaginative process. These aspects of viewing link to what Robert Hughes described as 'the long look' in art (1990, p. 15) as quoted in Andy Gilroy's 'Taking a long look at Art: Reflections on the context of production and consumption of art in Art Therapy' (2014). In her paper, through an examination of her experience of looking at the work of Piero della Francesca in situ, she explores her emotional and aesthetic response to the paintings, the significance of context and location, and the physical and sensory nature of the visual experience. She considers what these points might mean for the practice of art therapists:

> 'Finding time for a long look is problematic, plus art therapists see so much every day that our capacity to look may be inhibited by visual saturation and by the horror and pain in the images we see. I am not suggesting insensitivity, rather that (re-)turning to art historical/visual discourses and practices, alongside those that habitually inform our usual practices of looking, could be a rejuvenating process, both personally and professionally' (p 30).

This highlights how 'finding time' can be difficult in a variety of ways, from habits developed in response to the hectic pace of life in general to more specific adaptations that impact on our attentional economies. The idea of slowing things down has been around since the industrial revolution but what concerns me here is something more than that, something that strikes at the heart of what it is to be both an artist and an art therapist – the need to reflect on experience and the need for places and spaces to do so.

Culture of digital media

The culture of digital media raises issues over attention as our viewership increasingly relies on mobile devices with social media interfaces 'that reward certain forms of attentiveness at the cost of others' (Koepnick, 2017, p 8). He also says that 'Most images are now produced and circulated in the service of maximising the amount of time spent in habitual forms of individual self-management and self-regulation' (p 55).

Graham Music, a consultant child and adolescent psychotherapist, has written about the effects of stress and increased reliance on screens and technology in our present neo-liberal society, and how with its ideas of ceaseless competitiveness, gain, appropriation and self advancement, this might be linked to a decrease in ability to concentrate, regulate emotion and empathise (2014). Drawing on the work of Carr (2011) he says:

> 'Carr suggests that the skimming, scanning more superficial form of consciousness used with electronic media is leading to a change of habits which is also increasingly taken into relationships…companies like Google aim to constantly tempt us with exciting information, with the new, with what is immediately of interest, enhancing our speedy, jumping-around mental skills. Such overload of information inhibits not only working memory but also the kind of frontal lobe activity necessary for concentrating, for relating in depth to others, and indeed for empathy' (2014, p 239).

The implications of this for films that rely on sustained shot durations should be obvious. Our encounters with globalized connection and 24/7 media culture feed a desire for instant gratification and visual pleasure. Furthermore, neo-liberal ideas of competitiveness, gain and self-advancement are inherent in practices that 'maximise the amount of time spent in habitual forms of individual self-management and self-regulation' (Crary, in Koepnik 2017, p 55). The effect of these technological changes impact on contemporary viewing practices.

Viewing practices

Displaying my films as a collection for private viewing led me to think about curating and audiencing. I wonder about the different viewing experiences, for example, between an intimate social setting using projection in a blacked-out room and in isolation on a laptop streaming the films on Vimeo. The distinction between films viewed in a cinema space and films viewed in an art gallery is characterized by the terms 'Black Box' and 'White Cube' respectively. The audience in a cinema is essentially a captive one, whose attention to the screen is guaranteed whereas in a gallery space the viewer is free to roam and may not witness the whole work. This also applies to digital screen devices where viewing may be quickly abandoned if not sufficiently gratifying or fast-forwarded in the hope of finding something more stimulating. As Koepnick puts it: 'Today's many modes of viewing moving images unsettle the very understanding of spectatorship as shaped by the template of cinema's dark auditorium' (2017, p 117). However, it is not just this shift in viewing habits – from film as a static projection of moving images to a mobile screen culture – that is the problem. Rather it is the nature of the content of such culture, which denies the viewer experiences of extended time and filmic space. Consequently, there is a loss of engagement with the unconscious and diminished depth of meaning.

Conclusion

Presenting the use of digital media in my own art practice has given me an opportunity to reflect upon a particular body of work – a series of short artist films. The films in this series all have little or no overt narrative content but rely upon the expressive content of the images and the music soundtrack to convey atmospheres and moods that evoke conscious and unconscious associations in the audience. I have used some ideas from visual methodologies and film theory to think about how meanings are made and shared in film. I suggest that the use of the long take in film is analogous to the long look in art and provides opportunity to deepen meaning of the visual. Exploring the contemporary culture of social media and its impact on viewing practices has highlighted a potential loss of empathy in the viewer. Furthermore, there is evidence that social media is making us sadder, angrier, more fearful, more isolated, as well as less empathic (Lanier, 2018). How this may affect

our profession is not clear and it is a challenge the current generation of art therapists will need to think about.

Before I finish I would like to return to the question I posed in the introduction about the framing of my art practice. I find frames important because they are such a good way to conceptualise the subtle shifts in perception that often occur around them in relation to how we look at what they contain. In an earlier article (2017) I gave two quotes on the subject. First, Douglas Gill, who makes an interesting distinction between boundary and frame:

> 'Boundaries are prohibitions creating the image of guards at a perimeter that one cannot go beyond. The frame on the other hand is a contained space that also makes reference to what is outside the frame, whereas a boundary will always be at the limit' (Gill, 2017 p 9).

Second, Sally Skaife, who said: 'The boundaries that define these frames (or attempt to) are determined by the context in which the frame sits' (personal communication 2016). I repeat these as starting points in how we might think about how to frame the art practice of art therapists.

We might define three frames arising from different contexts: artist identity separate from that of art therapist, art therapist identifying as an artist in order to inform therapeutic practice, art therapist using their art practice as an integrated part of their therapeutic practice. We might. Or we might not. For myself, in a current context of no longer being defined by earning a wage, I can re-think where the frame sits in the 'is it art-life-therapy' question. Trying to distinguish between life and art, between therapy and life, between art practice and countertransference art response starts to feel unnecessary. There's something in the way it all becomes part of a whole as different aspects of experience fold into each other. For instance, we could conceive of this entire body of films as being a countertransference response to my being in the Goldsmiths staff art practice group in the context of the institutional conflicts within which it was constituted. Such a frame would certainly make some sense but would not make them any less works of art or the setting less a part of my life experience.

I remember Lacan talking in a TV interview about the phenomena of transference and love, the interviewer wanted him to distinguish between transference love and real love and he refused to discuss the issue – perhaps because he saw no reason to distinguish them. I am not suggesting that we do not need boundaries, they are essential when dealing with transference in the therapeutic relationship. I am suggesting that where we position the frame around such experiences alters the experience. I think Lacan felt vulnerable in that moment, where a dangerous exposure could be misunderstood, where the frame might shift out of context.

Presenting these films to a wider audience does feel exposing. I have to let them go, passing from their current private frame into another, more public one. Writing this article has been a way to reflect on my art practice in a way that is perhaps particular to being an art therapist. Other places that might offer such opportunities within a wider social context is an area of interest to be developed.

Acknowledgements

Biography

Chris Brown is an experienced art therapist, educator and supervisor. He currently works in private practice and freelance to organisations.

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