

Thater, Diana. "Hey—Survey This!" *Diana Thater. Keep the Faith. A Survey Exhibition.* (2004): 31-53.

## HEY – SURVEY THIS!

### ABYSS OF LIGHT, 1993

*Abyss of Light* is a three-projector video installation originally installed at 1301, Santa Monica, California, in September of 1993. *Abyss* was later shown at the Witte de With, Rotterdam, in 1994; the Deichtorhallen, Hamburg, in 1994; the Museum Fridericianum, Kassel, in 1995; and at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1998.

This work is much like all of the pieces I made between 1990 and 1995 that experiment with covering the gallery windows with tinted filters, darkening the space so that the projections are visible during the day. Here the filters, in the three secondary colors of the video band (cyan, magenta and yellow), allow someone inside the exhibition to see through to the outdoors, and also allow a viewer outside the space to look in and see the projections moving over the interior walls. Prior to this work, pieces such as *Oo Fifi Parts 1 and 2* (1992) used filters in the primary colors of the video band: red, green, and blue. The gels serve two purposes: they darken the room for the projections, while creating a complete environment where the architecture, the images, and the real spaces beyond relate to one another as the multiple altered layers of one image.

*Abyss of Light* was the first work I made using three independent images, as opposed to the color separated and then layered images of *Fifi* or *The Bad Infinite*. Each projector displays a different sequence, which are bumped up against one another instead of on top of one another. The work is divided onto three "screens", and into three acts (the traditional breakdown for a classical narrative film). In the first act, all three images synchronize to form a single red, green and blue panorama of Bryce Canyon in Utah. In the second act, the screens break away from one another into three parallel sequences. Each sequence consists of one hundred single-second recognizable images of the American West. Each projection shows the same one hundred images, but at a different speed: the blue projector plays in real time, the red projector plays at 50% of real time, and the green projector plays at 25% of real time. The work concludes with a third act in which all three images synchronize once again to form a single wrapping panorama of Death Valley in cyan, magenta, and yellow. Additionally, the work begins with a prologue of two minutes of color bars, and ends with an epilogue of two minutes of reversed color bars.

*Abyss* quotes the westerns of John Ford. The images of Monument Valley are shot from a place marked "John Ford Lookout", a sign that appears in the work. Every shot, stumbling, crooked, and sometimes poorly lit (by film standards), is my attempt to capture the West. Every image is about my inability to see the West as John Ford portrayed it: singular, monumental, and iconic. Neither a single shot, nor a single place can be made to contain so much meaning. Every shot is the shot: I can't decide which is the icon. The landscape only becomes iconic as it becomes confusion through a stack of images that rapidly flash from vista to vista. It is well worth noting that Ford himself saw the racism, lies, and mythologizing at work in the idea of the American landscape and commented on it through the most conflicted of his characters, the psychotic Ethan Edwards in *The Searchers* (1956) and Captain Kirby York in *Fort Apache* (1950), both of whom are visibly torn between mythology and the truth.

This work attempts a number of things while maintaining a relationship to both cinema and fine art. Physically on tape, the images are narrative, spatial, and sequential. In the installation, they access ideas about sculpture through their silence and their interaction with real space: the projections double and triple one another and mimic or contradict the real landscape, visible through the gallery windows. All become simultaneous. What is being shaped is time.

Film is made using one-point perspective. In addition to the three separate vanishing points of the actual videos, *Abyss* offers the vanishing point of the installation itself as it recedes or advances along the side walls, simultaneously laying out before and wrapping around the viewer. The image both envelopes and penetrates the viewer as she enters the space of the projection; interferes with the imagery and casts a shadow into the work. The image of the American West mythologizes both textually and structurally. The movie camera gives to this vast void a panoramic, eventless horizontality from which the hero emerges like an event, and into which the hero finally disappears. Born of the landscape, he both invents and reflects it. *Abyss of Light* is a western without a vanishing point and therefore, without a hero. Here, the viewer becomes the hero; creating, mirroring, and standing at the center of the ever-receding, ever-advancing cinematic landscape.

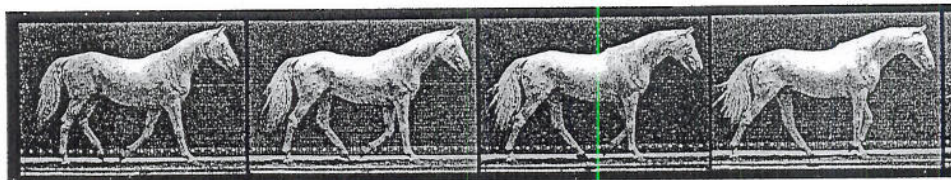
#### LATE AND SOON (OCCIDENT TROTTING), 1993

*Occident Trotting* is an installation originally exhibited at David Zwirner, New York, in 1993. The piece has since been shown at the Witte de With, Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in 1994 and at the Guggenheim Museum, Bilbao, Spain, in 2003. *Occident* initially required three-lens video projectors, but has been re-designed for this exhibition using two LCD video projectors. Whatever the number of projectors, there are always only two images. Both images take the signal from one DVD player, and are consequently always exactly the same.

*Occident* was made three months after *Abyss*. Early on, the questions the works posed were big and important. The distance between pieces, in terms of the nature of the questions being asked, seemed vast. So though *The Bad Infinite*, *Abyss* and *Occident* were all made within eight months of each other, each piece turns on the one made just before it and works within a different set of givens. Each of the three works addresses installation as an entirely new situation. *Occident* is projected from matching angles in two successive spaces, each projector casting the image onto a separate wall. The work is directional; the viewer is meant to walk through it in one direction – it is not an “all over” projection work. The second image is partially visible from the first space. From space #1, the viewer sees all of image #1 and part of image #2 playing in the next room. Thus the image and its double are viewed simultaneously.

The piece consists of four kinds of movement through complex landscapes: a forward dolly through a formal avenue of trees; a right pan along a leafy green trail in the rain; a left pan along tall beach grasses in winter; and a multi-directional, multi-level shot plunging into a mountainside landscape after a fire. After all four landscapes, the camera stops and moves backward through the entire piece, and then begins again. Though the camera moves in different ways, it is entirely handheld. The walking, jogging, and running cameraperson is obvious throughout the work. The work begins in black and white, with color slowly fading in until the image is over-saturated. As the work runs backward, the color drains out.

This work is named for the horse-in-motion photograph by Eadweard Muybridge. The idea is to discard the assumption of an object seen from a stationary, all-commanding viewer's position. In 1877, the viewer could watch, like Muybridge, the horse named *Occident* passing through individual moments in time, as





if they were solid recognizable individualities. In 1993, and now in 2004, the revolution must be to think as the subject moving through space. In cinema, this is called Point of View (POV), the moment when the camera sees from the character's perspective. Think of a classic film, such as *On the Waterfront*. At one moment we see Brando walking and in the next moment - we are Brando walking. Images are only sequential in film because film is images in sequence; in the mind the two can collapse together and become one subject in motion. A subject may be in one place in time, via the object (Occident/Brando) looking around and ahead, or the subject can collapse it all and be within the flow of the film: the landscape rushes by and nothing is stationary, least of all the "self". In the first configuration, the subject experiences the object/horse's moments as a series of isolations, independent of one another and following one another sequentially. In the second, the subject experiences the moments as a rush of continuous color and space, flowing past her even as she flows through it.

#### CHINA, 1995

*China* was originally made for the Renaissance Society at the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois and Le Creux de l'Enfer, Centre d'art contemporain de Thiers, Thiers, France. It was subsequently shown at David Zwirner, New York, in 1996; the Kunsthalle Basel, Basel, Switzerland, in 1996; the Kunstverein in Hamburg, Hamburg, Germany, in 1997; and at Sammlung Hauser und Wirth, St. Gallen, Switzerland, in 2001.

*China* makes use of all the ideas I developed from 1989 until its production in 1995. During this period, I concentrated on defining a kind of neo-structuralist installation. I wanted to use the color and dynamism of early video installation (prior to Viola and Hill), along with its parallel history in film: Structuralist film as practiced specifically by Hollis Frampton, clearly the great artist of his medium.<sup>4</sup> To bring the ideas of these two historically simultaneous practices together would answer a number of questions about video I felt had been left by the roadside: all of those questions pertaining to abstraction. The social conditions of watching, and being watched, had been examined in the works of Dan Graham; the medium smashing into itself was well choreographed by Bruce Nauman; and "television" was worked over by great artists like Dara Birnbaum. For my own work I was most influenced by performances like Mary Lucier's camera burns, and by the feedback-medium inversions made by Steina Vasulka and Nam June Paik. However, there was no reason to repeat works that could only have been made in the flurry of experimentation at the inception of a medium. Putting a big magnet on a TV was good, **very good** - but why do it more than once?

The Structuralist filmmakers worked with an art form already 70 years old. Full of content, their films did not eschew photographic images in favor of animated abstraction, nor did meaning become demonstrative. The Structuralists developed a rich practice that produced some of the most exquisite works of art in the 20th Century: Frampton's *Hapax Legomena* and *Gloria* and Michael Snow's *La Région Centrale*. Video however, never reached this sort of Modernist apex, this kind of fascinating self-realization, except with regard to its double identity as television (Pop Modernism). In its identity as art, it rapidly turned into the kind of recorded elaboration on theater that became prominent in the 80's and early 90's. Within these works (*He Weeps for Who?*), video is used only obliquely.<sup>5</sup> The idea with which I had been working, finally completely realized in *China*, was one in which the medium is fully present, openly using everything in its bag of tricks to mediate ideas without resorting to storytelling.

*China* was made in an outdoor arena, plotted with a circle of six cameras surrounding two performing wolves: Shilo, a grizzled old male, and China, a snowy-white, young female. In installation, these six images are superimposed on a gallery space, plotted with six video projectors in place of the original cameras. Instead of recording what is in front of them, the projectors now display, in a 360° panorama on the walls

of the gallery space, the image of what the cameras once saw. Whatever was inside the camera circle appears in every image: one wolf becomes six, and the two wolves become twelve. Whatever was on the outside of the camera circle remains on the outside, and so remains singular. Therefore, only a partial inversion of the shoot is constructed: both the inside and the outside of the circle appear in the continuous image wrapping around the room.

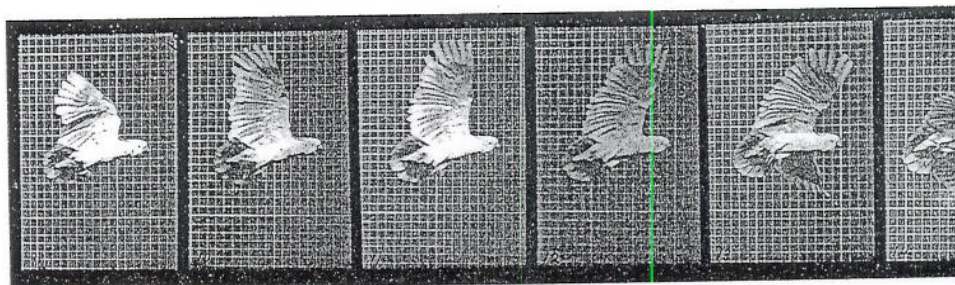
*China* is not a narrative limited to a succession of images on a tape, but instead is a story that extends into the experience of the work being made and being shown. These aspects of *China* mirror and shadow one another as the work plays itself out in time and space, and as the work encompasses the viewer in the story of its making. Here, an image is not displayed for a passive viewer, nor is an image surrounded by artified technology. Instead, the work of art is a place where a past comes together with a future that it anticipates, forming a fully intensified present amidst which the viewer uses the many offered parts to construct the work of art itself.

#### SCARLET MACAW CRAYONS AND MOLUCCAN COCKATOO MOLLY, 1995

The single projector installation *Scarlet Macaw Crayons* and the multiple, *Moluccan Cockatoo Molly* were shot in the summer of 1995. Both works were installed at Schipper & Krome, Köln, Germany in 1995; at David Zwirner, New York, in 1996; and at the Henry Art Gallery, Seattle, in 1997. In addition, three of the *Molly* editions were exhibited in the touring exhibition "Electric Mind and Recent Works", organized by the Portland Art Museum in 1996 and three were shown in the exhibition "Diana Thater: Orchids in the Land of Technology" at the Walker Art Center in 1997.

*Crayons* is a video study of a Scarlet Macaw named Crayons as she perches on a stick held by her trainer in front of a black and white gridded backdrop. Crayons was recorded by three cameras, placed to form a semi-circle around her. The video images were color separated, with one color (red, green or blue) taken from the tape shot by each camera. After recording, the three colors were collaged to make a complete image. This one image is put together from three distinct viewpoints, permitting the image and the bird to become simultaneously singular and multiple.<sup>7</sup> Because of the process, Crayons, who in reality is colored the three primary video colors (red body with green and blue wings), appears in black and white. In the installation, she is perched in the center of the video projection, perfectly registered so the image appears in black and white. However, the outer area of the image is left purposefully out of registration, allowing all the colors of the video spectrum to appear. The windows in the gallery are tinted with film gels in the primary colors of light (and Crayons): red, green and blue.

*Moluccan Cockatoo Molly* is an edition of ten unique pieces. Made using the same color separation and reconstruction process as *Crayons*, this work instead employed an all white performing bird in front of a natural background, reversing the multi-color bird with black and white background used in *Crayons*. As





with Crayons, Molly was allowed to do what she liked. Being a star and a show-off, she decided to do a song and dance for the cameras, singing in English while spinning around and around. Molly paused periodically for accolades, and the crew can be seen applauding around the edges of the image. The performance, lasting about an hour, is broken into ten segments. Each disc in the edition contains a short piece of the whole.

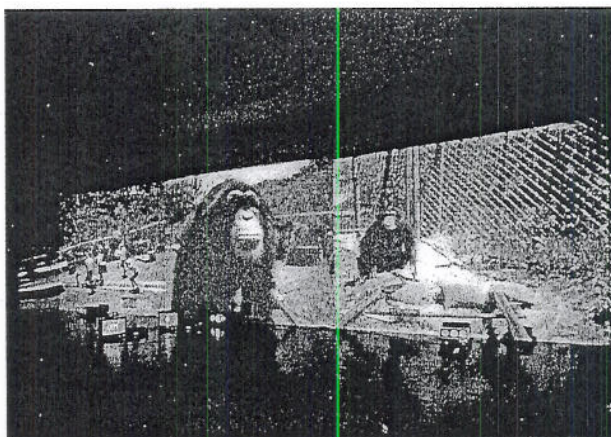
It seems a shame to separate a bird like Crayons from her magnificent coloring. However, the point is not Crayons herself as a master-stroke in coloring and plumage, but instead the installation as a group of interrelated elements, none of which is the master. The colors, the birds, the grids, the windows, and the light become one kind of space. This is not a projection of an image of a bird who just happens to be the right colors; it is a study in the exchange of body for space, absence for color, scale for size, foreground for background, and silence for sound. Like *China*, *Crayons* and *Molly* are about physically multiplying the singular. In both works, multiple cameras are employed to make one bird a group all by herself. The work of art could never be the singular projection of the producer, nor could it be the one to one identification of the viewer with a subject via empathy. Instead, it may very well be the agent of multiple points of view.

#### THE INDIVIDUAL AS A SPECIES, 1996

This is a five-monitor work made along with the large-scale installation *Electric Mind*. This smaller work has never been publicly exhibited.

I always produce multiple works from individual ideas, which usually relate to one another as theme and variation. In this piece, the theme is the original narrative screenplay *Electric Mind*, which I wrote in 1996 and published as an artist's book with Imschoot, uitgevers, Belgium. The screenplay follows the traditional three-act filmic structure and tells a complete story while the installation and monitor works are variations on that structure.

*The individual as a species* is a speculation on how close (or far) one must be to some semblance of a coherent story in order for the audience to read the work as narrative. The assumption that all time-based works are narrative is akin to thinking that all paintings are pictorial; both are shocking and conservative beliefs to hold at the beginning of the 21st Century. Painting threw abstraction in the face of representation one hundred years ago and, when in the hands of artists, moving images have engaged so-called non-narrative on every level. Unfortunately, conservative beliefs and lack of inspiration have led both painting and artists' film and video back into the warm nest of narrative and representation, which when comparing the two media, come down to the same thing.



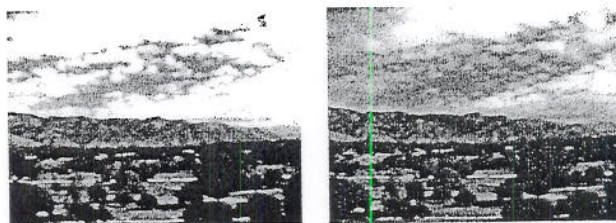
Made for the Sculpture Projects in Münster, 1997, *Broken Circle* has been installed at the Museum für Gegenwartskunst Siegen, Siegen, Germany, since 2001. Originally designed for the Buddenturm, a 12th century structure that is the only remaining tower from Münster's medieval fortification walls, *Broken Circle* may only be installed in a similar tower structure. This piece is a synchronized, six-projector installation that plays continuously on multiple levels. It stretches out vertically through space like a spring, and the viewer must be able to move up and down through the work.<sup>10</sup>

The imagery for the work consists of a herd of "wild horses" continually galloping toward and then around a set of six cameras that filmed them in 360°. The animals chosen for the shoot are professional performers who work regularly in television and in the movies. This herd of Hollywood horses is a stand-in for a herd of wild Westphalian horses. The single shot that this piece consists of can be easily recognized as one taken from a John Ford or Akira Kurosawa film: a single shot of horses galloping toward and splitting around a stationary camera. In works by these directors, the shot is usually intercut with a battle scene. Combining the Western with the Buddenturm results in a medieval Western. The parallel can be drawn by comparing the relationship of the tower and the horse (Robert Bresson's *Lancelot du Lac*): A tight, claustrophobic space (the castle or the tower) is intercut with the image and symbol of wide open spaces (the galloping horse). One may also think of Kurosawa's Samurai westerns, which are medieval in feeling, as well as in setting.

In *Broken Circle*, a single insert shot from narrative film is given the time and space of a complete and complicated story. Once this broken apart, single shot is allowed to expand into spatial and temporal depth, it becomes possible to force many different kinds of shapes out of the work. Thus, the meaning no longer rests fully with the image and the wishes it fulfills for its viewer, but is born out of a physical relationship between the projected image, the walls, and the viewer moving in and out of these projections. Here, either the three-dimensional architecture or the two-dimensional image may dominate the piece; this decision depends on where the viewer is in space, on the stairs between images, or on a landing inside of an image. The multi-colored windows reinforce this fictional space.<sup>11</sup> This is the affect that the work seeks to produce; the fictional image of the adventurous outside present in the mind of the viewer as she moves through the close, dark interior. The narrative is the exchange between two kinds of space: illusory and real (the past and the present, the shoot and the installation); and two kinds of subjects: the viewed and the viewer (real wild horses and trick horses, film crew and viewer). Overlaid on top of one another, these themes alternately negate and reinforce one another.

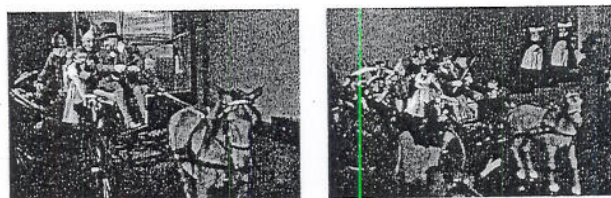


Made in 1997, *Oculus* was first shown in 2001 at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. *Oculus* uses one projector to cast an image into a round mirror that then reflects a round image onto the ceiling. *Oculus* consists of a single shot of clouds over Los Angeles, color-separated into its components. The three separate recordings were edited back together, each running at different speeds. Because the three colors lay directly on top of one another, everything stationary (the buildings and the trees) remains in black and white. When the tape begins, the clouds all align for a moment and are also in black and white. As the clouds move, at different speeds, time separates and the colors of the three tapes reveal themselves and the entire R-G-B-C-M-Y spectrum of video. Once again (as in *Molly and Crayons*), editing happens in the form of layering. An edit is not just a cut or dissolve between two consecutive scenes, it may be two or more scenes layered on top of one another. Editing is the agent of time in cinema – it is the ticking clock. Designing moving images in this way makes film time as complex as musical time. As opposed to having the image march forward to the beat of a single drum, editing re-negotiates the work orchestrally, as layered simultaneities that may move in different directions, in differing tones and with multiple depths. The work is titled *Oculus* because when projected, it acts like a hole in the ceiling that somehow is reflecting an image of the city outside. It is a false camera obscura (pinhole camera) that shows us not the present, but the altered past. Somehow, the remembered always seems to come in layers as opposed to sequences.



THE BEST SPACE IS THE DEEP SPACE, monitor edition and THE BEST ANIMALS ARE THE FLAT ANIMALS, monitor edition, 1998

*The best space is the deep space* is a multiple monitor work made in 1998 as part of a large body of work titled *The best animals are the flat animals - the best space is the deep space*. The best animals project, which took a year to complete, is composed of five different installations and three separate monitor works. Made with a series of performing animals and staged forests, the entire body of work examines conceptions of the "wild" and the "tame". The project was shown in five separate museums, all within a short period of time. No two exhibitions contained the same grouping of the works. *The best space* monitor edition consists of ten variations (an edition of ten unique pieces) and was shown at The MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles, in 1998; at the York University Art Gallery, Toronto, in 1999; at H&R Projects, Brussels, Belgium in 1999; and most recently as part of "Fast Forward: Media Works from the Goetz Collection", at ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany, in 2003.



*The best space* was staged with a performing Andalusian horse and his trainer in a darkened arena. The animal and trainer, one performing for the crew and one trying to hide in the shadows, are surrounded by a swirling mist generated by a fog machine. Only about ten seconds long, the image part of the work is an isolated gesture: the horse takes a bow. This motion is very difficult for a horse to do, as difficult as it is for a wolf to stand still. The horse is a ballerina, the Suzanne Farrell of horses, an animal gingerly making the most delicate of gestures. It's glaring in its unnaturalness and beautiful in its falsity. After all, the truly wild no longer exists, only degrees of unnaturalness imposed on nature by man. All nature and all animals are mediated.

#### DELPHINE, 1999

A preliminary version of *Delphine* was first shown at the Carnegie International, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1999. The work was then modified significantly and shown at the Secession, Vienna, Austria, in 2000 and at Galerie Hauser & Wirth, Zürich, Switzerland, in 2001.

If *China* represents a culmination of my ideas and work from 1989 to 1995, then *Delphine* is the next piece where ideas from previous bodies of work coalesce. However, I do not necessarily think this makes *China* and *Delphine* my best works. Instead, it simply means that I ask questions in individual bodies of work for a number of years; these questions slowly build into an argument, eventually becoming a complete work of art. And so *Delphine* takes into account everything I learned or experimented with since 1995, all under the umbrella of the simple question posed at the beginning of this essay: how does one make a model of what installation art does to space? This is not an architectural problem, but instead a question of viewership.

My work is made to address two intersecting conceptual realms that are impossible to verbalize, and can only be felt: the worlds of time (video) and space (architecture) and how these are effected by the construction of viewer consciousness. When working in a medium where the viewer takes narrative for granted (reinforced by current "video" exhibitions), storytelling must be destroyed, and something constructed in its place. In other words, the traditional movie-viewer must be re-built as an art-viewer. In this case, the word "models" in Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe's question must be removed from an architectural context and replaced with the word "models" in the Bressonian context. To develop this new framework of viewing, one must replace the filmic object with a subject, thereby transforming the viewer. *Delphine* engages the viewer in a POV that undermines the sequence of time, the divisions of space, and the singularity of being, via animal subjects; their experience of time, space, and self is depicted as simultaneous, continuous, and multiple. The content in the work is a model for the ideas the work proposes: dolphins are a model for thinking the fluid.

Dolphins live vertically, horizontally, and in depth, so this installation is tipped up on an angle in the shape of an ellipse twisting through the space. Placed among the dolphin projections is a vertical videowall that plays an image of the sun. Shot from a telescope in outer space, the sun image becomes another kind of "body in space" itself. In *Delphine*, there are three kinds of "bodies in space": dolphins moving through volumetric space, the sun hanging in a vacuum of black space, and then the viewer, moving through real space. Three kinds of bodies - and the three kinds of space that the human mind can picture.

As humans, we cannot float free in all visible dimensions, but it is possible to think this way. This is the first step toward transforming and opening up consciousness, a magnification of "changing viewership". I do not want consciousness to be bound by what it is, but to be open to the possibilities of what it could be.



"Imagine. Imagine that your life is spent in an environment of total physical sensation—that every one of your senses has been heightened to a level that in a human being might only be described as ecstatic—that you are able to see, to perceive, with every part of your being. Sight, hearing, taste, smell, and every inch of your surface—your skin—is a receptor, a continuous source of perfectly accurate information about the world for miles around. Imagine that you are able to carry on simultaneous conversations with two members of your species, one right next to you and the other several miles away. Listen to the language: intricate patterns of clicks, whistles, squeaks and groans; sounds subtle enough to convey complicated factual data, complex enough to deal with abstractions, what we would call ideas." Buck Henry<sup>15</sup>

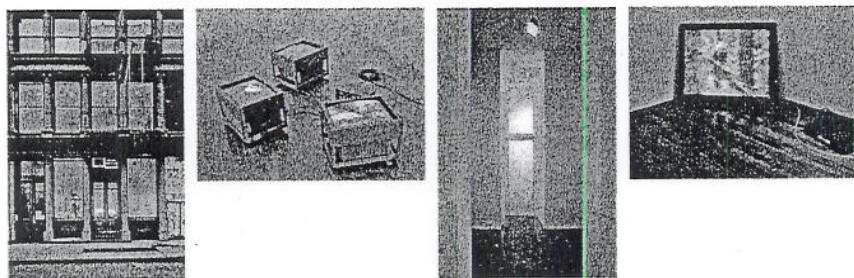
#### ORANGE ROOM (WALLFLOWERS), 2001

*Orange Room (Wallflowers)* was made in 2001, and shown at David Zwirner's Soho gallery in New York. It was shown again four months later at 1301PE, Los Angeles, and subsequently in 2002 at the Musée d'art moderne et contemporain de Strasbourg, Strasbourg, France.

Originally made with *Moonlight Blue Room* and *Moss Green Room*, the three were shown in sequential rooms at Zwirner as a group titled "The sky is unfolding under you". At 1301PE they were shown individually in a single room, each for two weeks at a time. At first the three pieces were set in space sequentially. Following this they were set sequentially in time. I first experimented with sequencing with *Oo Fifi*, *Five days in Claude Monet's Garden* (1992), shown in two parts in two different galleries in Los Angeles, Part 2 opening a few days after Part 1 closed. I also made this **time/space** and **sequential/simultaneous** play the center of the entire body of work *The best animals are the flat animals – the best space is the deep space*. This interest in real time becoming narrativized, or in space comprehended as storytelling, has persisted throughout my practice.<sup>17</sup>

My interest in technological innovation in video installation motivated the work as well. In these pieces, the use of colored lights and filtered natural light erases the video rectangle and the work takes on the shape of the objects in the image, such as the chrysanthemums in *Orange Room*. This idea began with *Knots + Surfaces*, displayed at Dia Center for the Arts, New York, in which the projected images appeared to be hexagons. The freedom afforded by this simple effect has allowed me to make a number of projects wherein a body of work is not a group of variations on the **image** of a subject (Monet's garden or a little chimp, for example), but variations that begin with **actual** volumetric space.

The next project, grouped together under the title "Transcendence is expansion and contraction at the same time", shown at Haunch of Venison, London, in 2003, used the same techniques: the erased video rectangle, upturned monitors, and oddly placed equipment, all as choreography. Once again, editing is not simply cutting linear images, but is used to literally shape time into visible trajectories and space into visible volumes.



"Transcendence" fulfilled another of my constant desires, which is to question the art world status quo as determined by the market. In a time when million dollar projects are being touted as genius because of the cost of their production and the prices they command, I used the simplest of artist's techniques, the still life (in the case of all the flower works) and the sketch (in the case of "Transcendence"). A still life or a cloud study is the least expensive, quietest thing any artist can make. It connects the work back to art, pulls it away from entertainment budgets, and reminds me of the many things that artworks can do that entertainment cannot. Artworks may be silent, they might take lots of seemingly unwarranted time, but our eyes and our minds are activated. If my first professor in Art History, Edward Sullivan at New York University (now the Dean for Humanities), saw fit to teach that to his first term students, then it's a wonder that so few art world professionals cannot manage the same thought.<sup>18</sup>

#### NO MATTER

Most historians would agree that the greatest innovation in twentieth century art is abstraction. Though concentrated in painting and sculpture, moving images have something to offer this discussion. The relationship of film or video to abstraction is categorically different from that of painting and can only expand upon the definition. In video, undifferentiated areas of color are not "abstract", they are animation. In film as well, optical printing, photograms and all methods of not making recognizable pictures do ultimately produce animation or photographs. Because both film and video are essentially photographic media, they cannot address abstraction via the image without contorting themselves to the extreme. Of course, as with all media, there is a level of abstraction that is natural to the moving image.

Film and video differ from every other art form in that they are representations of the progression of time. If one can construct time that progresses in any possible direction, including no direction at all or if one can make non-representations of narrative time then abstraction is being engaged. The instrument of abstraction in moving images is editing. In most media, to edit means to edit out, but in moving images to edit means to cut up and re-assemble, putting images together in a meaningful way, whether story-based or not. Editing produces the time signature of a work, which may lie underneath the surface, just invisible to the viewer, or it may lie right on top for all to see. When it lies on the surface, it becomes the subject of the work and so produces the meaning.

#### TRY

Nature is inherently non-narrative. It may have cycles and episodes, but it does not tell any kind of coherent story. Therefore it is not a narrative model; this is why I have looked to nature as a subject from almost the beginning. This use of the non-human world progressed until I understood that the "natural" spaces and animal subjects of the work as beings themselves are models for the kinds of spatial ideas I seek to produce. The editing techniques employed in any particular work conform to the ideas I have about the model, or how that model behaves in space, or what that model is forced to symbolize culturally. The editing is always used to make clear the constructed relationship between humans and the animal model; it is never used to obfuscate.



#### AGAIN

The actual spatial qualities of editing are not exploited in most installation practices. Rather, traditional editing (used in single screen films) is almost universally employed. Installation is **spatial** by definition, so my editing works choreographically. Images are put together in any number of ways: they follow, chase, rest on one another; they resist and carry one another; they duplicate, act in unison or take solo bows. A work may be made of a sequence which, though physically uncut, may be color separated, run backward and forward simultaneously in a single dissolved image, and then projected onto an archway and a picture window.

The tapes are completed in the editing room and the work is complete when installed. Yet it is left open on every level; the terms of its construction can be seen in the installation and decoded. Once the viewer is in it and looks around she can see literally how it is made. So though its rules may sound restricted and restricting (like Structuralism), once inside the work, the viewer finds that it folds and unfolds in a multitude of complex ways. These unfoldings are perceivable, they are not magical, nor are they a puzzle to be solved. The viewer should never think about how the work was made but only what the work means to say.

#### FAIL AGAIN

Installation is about sculpting time and space; it is not necessarily pictorial, nor is it object-based. What interests me most about installation is that it directly addresses consciousness, and that it raises questions about subjectivity. When one moves through the space of an installation and is aware of this movement, one achieves what Robert Morris calls "present-ness." One engages what Morris describes as the "I", living imageless here and now in time and space, as opposed to the "me", the self remembered in an arrested state, as if in a photograph, frozen in time.<sup>19</sup> It is this possibility of "present-ness" that installation addresses, and it is what defines it as a medium equivalent to painting or sculpture.

#### FAIL

*She knows there's no success like failure  
And that failure's no success at all.<sup>20</sup>*

#### BETTER<sup>21</sup>

Notes: 1 Friedrich Schlegel, *On the Cloud and the Book, Poetics to a Philosophy of the Future*, "Epigrams and Interludes", No. 146. 2 Henri Focillon, *The Life of Forms in Art*, New York: Zone Books, 1992, p. 138. 3 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Conversations with Claude Lévi-Strauss*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 139. 4 Cf. P. Adams Sitney, *Visionary Film: The American Avant-Garde, 1943-1978*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979, pp. 369-370. 5 Editing, for example, is rarely used in any of the video work mentioned here except as a product of random switching, whereas the Structuralist filmmakers, particularly Frampton, have complex editing systems and structures that produce meaning within the work. 6 Lewis Carroll, *The Annotated Alice, Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking Glass*, New York: Random House, 1900, p. 180. 7 I've used this process often in my work. Since a video image is made up of red, green and blue, two colors must be subtracted from the tape in the edit room. The monitor work *If I was in LA* and the installation *Oculus* (both 1997) use the technique as does the monitor work *The Holy Mountain*, made in 1994. 8 Hollis Frampton, *Circles of Confusion: Film, Photography, Video, Text, 1965-1980*, Visual Studies Workshop Press, Rochester, New York, 1983, p. 59. 9 Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, ed. by James Strachey, W.W. Norton & Company, New York, 1989. 10 Diana Thater and Barbara Engelbach, e-mail correspondence, 2001; E.E.: Broken Circle in Siegen is not a re-installation. In a comparison to Münster, a new installation. I have to you think the new installation has changed the connection between different and empty, active, movement and solid color. Image and space, which you described in the exhibition catalog of the sculpture project in Münster? D.T.: The piece is a "broken circle" in that these relationships are fractured within the work. If the work itself is also very broken apart (as it was in Münster), this is reinforced. Thus, it is broken in both form and content. But in Siegen the presentation - the installation - is more continuous in that you can look from different floors and see other images (which you could not do in Münster; there the re-connection was made through memory). The work is smoother, though still broken up; at each floor in Siegen, you can leave the work and go back into the museum, and then re-emerge back into Broken Circle at a different point. So in each installation, the work is broken in different ways. The idea, of course, is that the piece is a fractured story that the viewer can reconstruct. The towers in both Münster and Siegen make the circle stretch, with the work now spiraling out in real time. The spiral is a time-space circle, a three-dimensional circle. 11 Ibid.: E.E.: Why did you decide to use more colors than only red, green, blue, cyan, magenta and yellow for the windows in Siegen? D.T.: Broken Circle uses the tertiary colors of the video band (color wheel). These colors are those between the primary and secondary colors. This is part of the continuum I have made in all of my work; each work has more colors than the previous one. First, red-green-blue; then cyan-magenta-yellow; then yellow-cyan-green-magenta-red-blue. And then all the other possible colors - that is where Broken Circle comes in, as part of the overall trajectory. My entire body of work is a continuous unfolding of the video-light apparatus. 12 Marianne Moore, "Light is Speech", in: *Complete Poems*, New York: Penguin Books, 1981, p. 97. 13 Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, p. 9. 14 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1997, p. 14. 15 Buck Henry, *The Day of the Dolphin*, Screenplay, 1973. 16 Robert Bresson, *Notes on the Cinematographer*, Copenhagen: Green Integer, 1997, p. 31. 17 Cf. Diana Thater in conversation with Christiane Schneider, "More Stars Than There are in Heaven", in: *Transcendence is expansion and contraction at the same time*, Haunch of Venison, London, England, 2003, p. 13: "There must be some other paths through time and space that are neither sequential and relative, nor purely aesthetic and subjective. Somewhere between classical narrative and experimental filmmaking is this place where relatively and subjectivity are in the process of being formed." 18 Diana Thater and Edward Sullivan, e-mail correspondence, December, 2001; D.T.: [In your class] there was an expectation that one would bring the same thought processes to bear on a Manet or a specific painting. There was also the understanding that ignorance would not be tolerated, no one but could do this or 'you, all this etc.' Works of art were interrogated, closely looked at, and somehow eventually understood. This was the class that taught me that if I could look at a Renaissance wedding and think about it and soon understand it, then I could apply my mind to contemporary art in the same way. Like and dislike never come into the equation. It was about engagement. A scholar (who knows much) is different from a great thinker (who applies the much he knows to the world). E.S.: [For the artist] the image goes from the brain through the eye and into the world [...] [and] I believe my creativity lies in whatever skill I have in analyzing not only works of art, but the processes it takes to make them. So, I love Manet and what his blacks and grays say to me. I love Bruce Mauman's harping at me in a gallery to change the way I think. I am fascinated by the quietude of an Old Kingdom Egyptian princess who stands erect and enigmatic. Or I love ancient Japanese tea bowls, which are all about consumption, communion, and touching. I also hate some art, but I won't name names...you have to react passionately in a negative as well as a positive sense. 19 Robert Morris, "The Present Tense of Space," in: *Continuous Project Altered Daily: The Writings of Robert Morris*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993, pp. 175-207. 20 Bob Dylan, "Love Minus Zero/No Limit", in: *Bringing It All Back Home*, 1965. 21 Samuel Beckett, *Teach Your Company, Ill Seen, Ill Said, Wordward Ho: Three Novels*, New York, NY: Grove Press, 1966, p. 34.