

PEDESTRIAN SPEECH ACT: FILMED LANDSCAPE EXPLORED THROUGH STALKING

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Declaration

Submitted in fulfilment / partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Masters in Fine Art, in the Graduate Programme in Fine Arts, University of KwaZulu-Natal,
Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

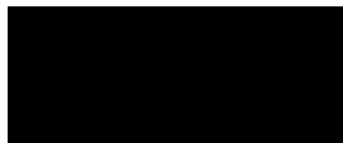
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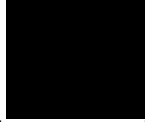


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Abstract

This study proposes that a landscape recorded by video while walking into it, or what I call *stalking* into it, enables the creation of a more profound self-reflection than a single isolated picture of the same landscape. My stalking, whose primary process is based on Debord's *subject-object* model, is derived from several fields including, but not limited to, psychogeographic fiction and psychogeographic research. Stalking is an intensely self-focused way of moving through the landscape while filming it, that draws on the unconscious walking practice of *deambulation*, and the notion of "the signifying body" in relation to hand-held camera filmmaking, which encourages a kind of sensory and bodily hyperawareness. Based on Elder's conviction that this *signifying body* can be reflected in film by catching changes in perception, movement and the body's location in the moving image, a similar hypothesis is explored through stalking movements reflected in a series of films called *Paths*.

These path films created through stalking are perceived as a kind of "in-between" space, as underexposed videos positioned between my inner space and the outer space of the woodland zone. This research project explores my stalking reflected in these paths as visual autobiographical traces, as pedestrian acts of speech, and as creating a certain experience and form of time defined within the uniquely positioned environment of the woodland zone. Furthermore this study investigates my stalking and filming actions as disrupting pictorial space, and as creating video labyrinths connecting past and present walking experiences within suburban hinterlands, furthering aiming to implicate the viewer through my simultaneous absence and presence in the image.

Key Words

Stalking, subject-object, psychogeographic, unconscious, the signifying body, hyperawareness, hand-held camera, paths, woodland zone, autobiographical, pedestrian speech act, labyrinths, suburban, hinterlands.

TABLE *of* CONTENTS

Title Page 1

Declaration 2

Acknowledgements 4

Abstract 5

Table of Contents 6

List of figures 7

Chapter 1: Introduction 9

1.1 Introduction 9

1.2 Problem Statement 13

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions 13

1.4 Research Methods / Approach to Study 14

1.5 Conclusion 17

Chapter 2: Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework 18

2.1 Introduction 18

2.2 Subject and Object 21

2.3 Paths and Landscape 23

2.4 Psychogeography 25

2.5 Landscape as Text 28

2.6 Temporality 31

2.7 Positioning My Practice 33

2.8 Conclusion 36

Chapter 3: The Paths 37

3.1 Introduction 37

3.2 Between Inner Space and Outer Space 38

3.3 How Stalking Affects the Perception of Space and Time 54

3.4 Absence and Presence 70

3.5 Paths as Labyrinths 79

3.6 Conclusion 89

Chapter 4: Conclusion 90

4.1 Introduction 90

4.2 Aims and Outcomes of this Research Project 91

4.3 Stalking and Its Effect on the Filmed Landscape Image 93

4.4 Challenges Faced During the Course of this Research 96

4.5 Conclusion 97

Bibliography 99

Primary Sources 99

Secondary Sources 99

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE 1: Chantal Akerman, <i>still from Hotel Monterey</i> , 1972.	22,77
FIGURE 2: Michael Croeser, <i>photograph of service road at the woodland zones outskirts</i> , 2021.	27
FIGURE 3: Michael Croeser, <i>photograph of the bridge entering the woodland zone</i> , 2021.	29
FIGURE 4: Michael Croeser, <i>photograph of the remnants of red brick gateposts at the woodland zone</i> , 2021.	29
FIGURES 5-6: Michael Croeser, <i>stills from the film Path VIII</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/742910997	30, 62
FIGURE 7: dounq Anwar Jahangeer, <i>still photograph of Pink Line performance</i> , Cape Town, 2011. Photograph: Francis Burger.	35
FIGURE 8: Richard Long, <i>A Line Made by Walking</i> , 1967.	35
FIGURE 9: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Third Path</i> , 2019. Digital video.	39
FIGURE 10: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path I</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/732696912	39
FIGURE 11: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path I</i> , 2021. Digital video.	41
FIGURE 12: Michael Croeser, <i>location still</i> , 2021.	41
FIGURE 13: Michael Croeser, <i>stills from Path I</i> , 2021. Digital video.	42
FIGURE 14: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path II</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/725654650	45
FIGURES 15-18: Michael Croeser, <i>stills from Path II</i> , 2021. Digital video.	46
FIGURE 19: Michael Croeser, <i>the woodland canopy</i> , 2021.	48
FIGURE 20: Michael Croeser, <i>'jump-cuts' in Path II</i> , 2021. Digital video.	50
FIGURE 21: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path III</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/736388943	52
FIGURE 22: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path IV</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/732823702	55
FIGURE 23: Stan Brakhage, <i>still from Dog Man Star</i> (1961-64).	56
FIGURE 24: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path V</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/737490106	58
FIGURE 25: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path V</i> , 2021. Digital video.	59
FIGURE 26: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path V</i> , 2021. Digital video.	60
FIGURE 27: Andrei Tarkovsky, <i>still from the film Stalker</i> (1979).	64
FIGURE 28: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path IX</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/802175196	65
FIGURE 29: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path IX</i> , 2021. Digital video.	67

FIGURE 30: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path XI</i> , 2022. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/804761561	68
FIGURE 31: dounq Anwar Jahangeer, <i>untitled photograph</i> , 2007.	69
FIGURE 32: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path VI</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/737095043	71
FIGURE 33: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path XII</i> , 2022. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/805398601	73
FIGURE 34: Stan Brakhage, <i>The Machine of Eden</i> (1970).	75
FIGURE 35: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path VII</i> , 2021. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/741845024	77
FIGURE 36: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path X</i> , 2022. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/802176221	80
FIGURE 37: Yayoi Kusama, <i>Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli’s Field</i> (1965).	81
FIGURE 38: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path X</i> , 2022. Digital video.	83
FIGURE 39: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path XIII</i> , 2022. Digital video. https://vimeo.com/807776995	84
FIGURE 40: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path XIII</i> , 2022. Digital video.	84
FIGURE 41: Michael Croeser, <i>area of the woodland zone where Path XIII was filmed</i> , 2022.	85
FIGURE 42: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path XIII</i> , 2022. Digital video.	85
FIGURE 43: Michael Croeser, <i>still from Path XIII</i> , 2022. Digital video.	87

Chapter 1:

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Stalking is arguably seminal to my current artistic process. The term *stalking* does not refer to what is deemed a criminal offence in South African law¹, instead it describes my deliberate movements within the area I term the woodland zone on the edge of my suburb in Pietermaritzburg. Not pristine woodland, it appears more a wasteland sandwiched between suburbs; overgrown by weeds, and littered by the debris of discarded consumable packaging and plastic appliances at its margins. The notion of *stalking* is appropriated in part from the fiction of Iain Sinclair (b. 1943-). Coverly's view of Sinclair is that he is no flâneur², rather he is aware of the necessary transformation the flâneur has undertaken to face the challenge of the modern city (Coverly 2012: 120). In Sinclair's *Lights Out for the Territory* (1998) he writes: "The concept of "strolling", aimless urban wandering, the *Flâneur*, had been superseded... This was walking with a thesis. With a prey... The stalker is a stroller who sweats, a stroller who knows where he is going, but not why or how" (Sinclair 1998: 75).

I believe my current digital video landscape films represent a particular kind of art making. My films are a synthesis of several media, including Psychogeographic fiction, landscape focused experimental cinema and sound art. Furthermore they use walking, or what I describe as stalking as a predominant method of gathering data. In my view Lucius Burckhardt's (1925-2003) walking practice of *Strollology* has additionally informed my stalking technique, which

¹ In South Africa **the Domestic Violence Act, 116 of 1998** (hereafter the 'Domestic Violence Act'), defines stalking, albeit it restrictively, for the civil law. It provides recourse to a person who is stalked only if he or she is in a domestic relationship with the stalker.

² French noun for a stroller, Flânerie is the act of strolling.

Burckhardt describes as: “... the science of walking, is the aesthetics of space” (Burckhardt 2015: 282). Making an analogy with Burckhardt’s practice of Strollology (Burckhardt 2015: 282), I believe my stalking enables a deeper inquiry into the aesthetics of space.

In its present condition, I view the woodland zone as in a state of inertia, as it appears to exist without progress in any particular direction. The only thing seeming to exert an influence on this zone being the seasons, as it becomes overgrown in the summer and dies back in the winter, and the illegal dumping encroaching from its perimeters (personal research journal 2022: 22). In this seemingly abandoned and neglected state I perceive the woodland zone as a contested space whose margins I am investigating through stalking. In my view, I’m exploring the margins of private and public space, primarily those of my inner space and outer space of the woodland landscape (personal research journal 2022: 22, 23).

In my view, my stalking could have its origins in childhood experiences of suburban hinterlands in Pietermaritzburg (personal research journal 2021: 9), including the surrounding tracts of railway land where we traced service roads and paths, and possibly defined our own paths, beneath the pine forested slopes dropping away from the railway line dappled in intermittent filtered light (personal research journal 2021: 10). My past experiences in the aforementioned areas would appear to determine the navigational choices I make in the present, in this woodland zone. These path choices, both past and present, seem related to what author Lesley Malone defines as ‘desire lines’, paths that people create through regular usage appearing where people repeatedly choose to walk, that usually suggest a route that is quicker or easier than the formal path (Malone 2018: 4).

My stalking method is an intensely slow, trancelike method of walking in which I film simultaneously with a hand held digital camera, enabling improvised compositions from frame to frame (personal practice journal 2021: 4). I view this stalking method, combined with the hand-held digital camera filming technique as important heuristics for gathering data in the woodland zone.

Further I perceive my stalking, enabling this trancelike state in which I film, could be viewed as a kind of somnambulism³. While not actual ‘sleep walking’, I observe the method of their

³ Sleepwalking

creation resembles an automatic writing process whereby I suppress a certain degree of conscious control making chance navigational and framing decisions in the moment, as I stalk and compose shots with my camera. The filmed woodland zone itself appears to me to be a labyrinth in which I become lost, with its intersecting paths and partially perceived suggested paths, which appear to lead nowhere and everywhere (personal practice journal 2021: 8). The methods or heuristics I have described in this paragraph seem uncannily analogous to Careri's description of *Surrealist Deambulation* (Careri 2002, 2003: 79-81), which Careri describes as follows: "Deambulation is the achievement of a state of hypnosis by walking, a disorienting loss of control. It is a medium through which to enter into contact with the unconscious part of the territory" (Careri 2002, 2003: 82-83).

In my view these path films are reflections of my psychology, or what could be termed 'internal landscape'. Based on a preliminary screening of three path films in progress, it would appear that I have used this study to explore my inner landscape through film. The feedback I have journaled of the comments made by my post graduate colleagues from this screening on Monday the 4th of April 2022, delineates the way I have used sound combined with my stalking movements appears to shape my films in a way that makes them unsettling yet simultaneously hypnotic, heightening a sense of claustrophobic self-consciousness. Additionally the consensus between my colleagues being that these films seemed more self-reflections, than films of the actual woodland environment. Indeed it would appear that my psychological state is being transferred to the video image (personal critique session journal 2022: 17-18).

The phrase *Pedestrian Speech Act* in my title appropriates Michel de Certeau's notion of the pedestrian speech act, where de Certeau describes the act of walking being to the urban system what the speech act is to language (de Certeau 2002: 97). Tilley builds on de Certeau's assertion (de Certeau 2002: 97), proposing that if writing sets speech into a text, an analogy can be made between a pedestrian speech act and its inscription on the ground as a path (Tilley 1997: 29-30). Furthermore I make an analogy with Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) notion of the transcribing of a text equated to walking through a landscape as opposed to passing over it in an airplane (Benjamin 1979: 49-50), viewing my path films made in the woodland zone as translations of texts inscribed by my stalking. Could these filmed stalked texts into the woodland be seen as visual autobiographies, subjectively distorted video translations of these paths into the woodland zone?

As stated earlier I consider this research a unique synthesis of media, which I believe could contribute to the contemporary dialogue and practice of stalking. At the start of this research the Covid pandemic called for lockdown restrictions for South African citizens. Notwithstanding the unpredictability of this pandemic, and associated restriction on South African citizens occupying public spaces, I have been able to conduct this research to date and believe this study will not be hampered by any future lockdown restrictions. The location I use is highly accessible being on the margins of my suburb, within minutes walking distance of where I live. Additionally I believe this research falls within what has been quite a creative response to Covid, with a greater emphasis on digital platforms, as I predominantly create my landscape images using the medium of digital video recording with a discreet pocket size hand held digital camcorder, which also records the sound.

1.2 Problem Statement

As outlined in my introduction, the notion of *stalking* is appropriated in part from psychogeographic fiction (Coverly 2012: 120). I have appropriated Tilley's interpretation of Michel de Certeau's pedestrian speech act (de Certeau 2002: 97), which suggests that if writing sets speech into a text, an analogy can be drawn between a pedestrian speech act and its inscription on the ground in the form of a path (Tilley 1997: 29-30). Analogous to psychogeographical research (Coverly 2012), this investigation utilizes the methods of stalking - my slow, trancelike method of walking- and filming by hand-held camera to explore the intersection of my psychology and the woodland zone. As stated above, I believe my research to be a unique synthesis of media which seeks to explore the contemporary debate and practice of stalking as an art making heuristic, forming part of a creative response to Covid with a greater emphasis on digital platforms. As discussed previously, the heuristics build on the 'somnambulist' like technique of Surrealist Deambulation (Careri 2002: 79-81), a kind of automatic writing using a combination of chance and self-consciousness to determine location, weather, navigational, framing and temporal choices, to reflect on myself so that my path films may further reflect my psychological state as visual autobiographies (Flaherty 2010: 8).

1.3 Objectives and Research Questions

The objectives for this project can be defined as:

- To investigate in what ways *stalking* informs my current filmed landscape images
- To explore how my *stalking* methods could be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary visual art context

Arising from these objectives, the following questions will be explored through this project:

- In what ways does *stalking* inform my current filmed landscape images?
- How could my *stalking* methods be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary visual art context?

1.4 Research Methods / Approach to Study

This research uses a Practice-Led Research (PLR) methodology together with a multi-method approach (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: pp.2-3). According to Gray and Malins, in PLR the research is inter-subjective, context bound and the result of personal construction Gray and Malins (2004: 21). PLR methodology is responsive, driven by the requirements of practice. Primarily qualitative and naturalistic, it acknowledges complexity and real experience; it is ‘real world research’ (Gray and Malins 2004: 21). I view my current research as qualitative and naturalistic. It draws on my subjective experience and responds to my practice in the natural and unpredictable setting of the woodland zone, conducted using a series of heuristics. These heuristics are discussed in-depth on page 15.

Subjective approaches in artistic research are implicated in and give rise to emergent methodologies (Barrett and Bolt 2007: 6). Barrett states Martin Heidegger’s “praxical knowledge” or material base of knowledge provides a philosophical framework for understanding the acquisition of knowledge as emergent (Barrett 2007: 6). According to Heidegger’s notion of praxical knowledge, ideas and theory are ultimately the result of practice rather than vice versa. Knowledge emerges through material processes, and is predicated on the tacit and alternative logic of practice ‘in time’ (Barrett and Bolt 2007: 6). I observe Heidegger’s notion is pertinent to my practice (Barrett and Bolt 2007: 6), reflections on my film making suggest paths for future literature research. Further film editing, journaling and recordings in turn lead to further literature research and still further editing and shooting, it’s a back and forth process.

The methodology of the ‘Bricoleur’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: pp.2-3), in my view, continues to be relevant to my current research. Denzin and Lincoln state that the qualitative researcher uses a multi-method approach, a set of interpretive practices that has been described as a ‘bricoleur’ –a professional ‘do-it-yourself’ researcher (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: pp.2-3). The results of the research can be seen as emergent construction, a ‘bricolage’ (Gray and Malins 2004: 74). Denzin and Lincoln describe a bricolage as: a complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creation that represents the researcher’s images, understandings, and interpretations of the world (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: pp.2-3). The notion of the bricoleur suggests that methodology derives from, and responds to, practice and context (Gray and Malins 2004: 74).

As mentioned in my motivation I consider my research a unique synthesis of several media that might contribute to the contemporary dialogue and practice of stalking. My research utilizes contemporary digital platforms and uses digital video recordings, as well as sound recordings made on location. Among other fields of research, it draws notions from Burkhardt's *Strollology* (Burkhardt 2015: 282), film criticism, Psychogeographical research and Psychogeography in fiction.

As a self-conscious researcher I view myself as both the subject and object (Flaherty 2010: 8). I draw on Debord's subject-object model, perceived as a process of temporal self-determinacy where human subjects identify themselves as the source of their own history, and consciously direct its ongoing future conduct (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398).

In my work, this *subject-object* process involves stalking while simultaneously recording video with a roaming (hand held) camera. I view these as heuristics for gathering data on site in the woodland zone. These heuristics build on Surrealist Deambulation as described by Careri (2002: 79-81), using what I have described in my motivation as a 'somnambulist' like technique resembling quasi sleepwalking, likened to a form of automatic writing whereby I let chance determine navigational and framing decisions. My roaming camera additionally enables improvised compositions and lighting from frame to frame (personal practice journal 2021: 4). Furthermore I perceive that in this 'somnambulist' state the visual takes precedence over the aural, as in a dream (personal research journal 2021: 11). I perceive that I am stalking –and recording- particular patterns of reflected light (personal research journal 2021: 13). As I record I begin to lose myself in the tiny image on my camera's LCD display as I focus on it entirely, sound becoming peripheral (personal practice journal 2021: 8). The filmed woodland zone itself appears to me to be a labyrinth in which I become lost, with its intersecting paths and partially perceived suggested paths, which appear to lead nowhere and everywhere (personal practice journal 2021: 8). In my motivation, drawing on Benjamin (1979: 49-50) and additionally Tilley (1997: 29-30) who reconfigures De Certeau's (2002: 97-98) assertion of the 'pedestrian speech act' into writing through walking in the form of a path, I perceive a *pedestrian speech act* is performed through my stalking as a form of automatic writing filmed as a self-reflection, or visual autobiography.

My current video recordings, which I also view as video paths, performed in the woodland zone continue to be created out of reflection on my journal entries. According to Gray and Malins we learn through practice and research, and reflecting on both. Practice raises questions that can be explored through research, which in turn influences practice (Gray and Malins 2004: 1). Reflection on both my recordings and journal entries determine the final film edits, while making new journal entries in the process of the editing. Further literary and theoretical sources, as well as the work of other artists are consulted. Reflection on these sources, as well as my journal writing leads to new directions in future video recordings in the woodland. Further Gray and Malins state that all types of reflection, ‘in’, ‘on’ and ‘for’ action can be accommodated in the journal, that in reflecting-in-action we may quickly brainstorm ideas, have insights, make changes and re-orientate (Gray and Malins 2004: 62). Schön posits that, “...the exchange between research and practice is immediate, and reflection-in-action is its own implementation (Schön 1983: 308–309).

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced the stalking method I use as the source of my practice-led research, positioning my practice within several disciplines and my own past experience in margin areas similar to the area I call the woodland zone, the context of my current research project based on video data I collect in this area. I have considered my current films as reflections of internal landscape, additionally delineating the origins of the projects title and viewing my films a translations of autobiographical texts made by stalking. Furthermore in this introduction, my problem statement and the research questions that guide this study have been outlined. I closed this chapter describing the research methods and processes I use for my research, relating the emergent and multi-method approach I employ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: pp.2-3) in which theory results from practice (Barrett and Bolt 2007: 6), and there is a continuous back and forth process in the research, 'reflecting in action' (Gray and Malins 2004: 62).

In the next chapter, I outline the body of literature I have compiled for this study as well as the subject and object (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) theoretical framework that I use as a lens to focus my research, and further position my stalking practice relative to this literature, theory framework and contemporary artists using similar methods. Chapter Three describes the procedure of my practice-led research in-depth, as I continuously interrogate my research questions in relation to my stalking practice, body of literature, framework of subject and object, and the artists I have chosen to position my practice. I close this chapter summarizing key insights gained through this process. In Chapter Four I conclude this dissertation with broader reflections on the project. In this chapter I additionally consider gaps in the research, and suggest possible related areas for future research.

Chapter 2:

Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

As discussed in the introduction on page 2, my current research project explores notions around paths that I create within the woodland landscape. I view these paths as ‘writing’ made by my *stalking*, translated through the medium of a digital video camera into visual autobiography. This chapter is a review of my body of literature and theoretical framework I use to conduct this research, and which is defined by my central research question, which asks: in what ways *stalking* informs my current landscape films. My literature and theoretical framework is further delineated by the sub-question: how could my *stalking* methods be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary visual arts context.

This research is conducted in the woodland zone through my stalking and video recordings, seen as reflections of my consciousness, where I perceive myself as both the subject and object. In the first section *Subject and Object* I explore Flaherty’s notion of how the reflective ‘subject and object’ relationship influences individual temporal perception (Flaherty 2010: 8), it’s connection to Debord’s subject-object model (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), and how both these notions are pertinent in my practice. Additionally I examine Margulies notion of “dyad of viewer and object” in the films of structuralist filmmaker Chantal Akerman (1950-2015) (Margulies 1996: 52), and Akerman’s interpretation of this (Koresky 2010: 4). Furthermore I view a connection between the *viewer-object dyad* (Margulies 1996: 52) and Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama’s (b. 1929) work (Applin 2012: 67). These notions all are explored in connection with the *subject-object* relationship I observe to be work in my path films. In my view, the following body of literature will also be useful in helping me to explore this notion, and other related concepts.

In the following section ***Paths and Landscape***, I investigate the *stalker* group (Careri 2002: 10-11), their relation to the Situationists and their practice of Surrealist Deambulation (Careri 2002: 79-81). I revisit Tilley's notion of walking as writing (Tilley 1997: 29-30), which draws an analogy with de Certeau's *Pedestrian Speech Act*; I also review the analogy I made between Malone's *desire lines* (Malone 2018: 4) and my path making, emphasizing the transient nature of my paths *or desire lines* preserved only as traces in my path films, whose purpose may not be path making at all. Additionally I view these ideas in relation to Finch and Norman's idiosyncratic notions around desire lines (Finch 2006: 1, Norman 2010: 131-132). Furthermore I explore Artress's notions around labyrinths and mazes (Artress 1996: 50-51), which I believe could prove useful in excavating the nature of my path making. I close this section exploring Michel de Certeau's notion of 'spatial stories' (Tilley 1997: 28-29), which I view as invaluable to my practice; and explore how Burckhardt's practice of *Strollology* (Burckhardt 2015) continues to inform my current stalking methods.

In the section ***Psychogeography***, I view Debord's definition of Psychogeography (Coverly 2012: 10) relative to my practice, and the model of *subject and object* (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398; Flaherty 2010: 8). Further I explore Coverly's belief in the importance of Psychogeographic fiction in the field's ongoing contemporary debate (Coverly 2012: 25-26), in particular the fiction of Iain Sinclair (Coverly 2012: 121) whom I had previously discussed in connection with the appropriation of Sinclair's notion of stalking (Sinclair 1998: 75), furthermore I look at Coverly's notion of 'suburban-non places' in relation to the environments in the fiction of Iain Sinclair and J.G. Ballard (Coverly 2012: 25-26), and further view the woodland zone as such an environment.

In the following ***Landscape as Text*** I expand on the association between my path films, viewed as translations of stalked texts, and Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) analogy which illustrates the profound difference between the copying of a text and the reading of a text (Benjamin 1979: 49-50). Additionally I investigate Benjamin's notions around ruins, and how my path films could be viewed as ruins (Benjamin 2019: 188).

In the section ***Temporality***, I look into cinema, sound art, and literature, observing temporal connections between 'the Zone' in *Stalker* (Skakov 2012: 144-146) and the woodland zone, additionally exploring Skakov's idea of the camera in *Stalker* being an unseen observer (Skakov

2012: 143-144) in relation to my path films. I reference Kim's article on sound artist William Basinski (Kim 2019: 1-2), where I make connections between the phenomenon *tachypsychia*, the sound recordings of Basinski and the sound of my films. Considering Chion's observations around the role night plays in the films of David Lynch (Chion 1995, 1996: 186), I relate the effects of the night in Lynch's films to the effects of underexposure in my path films. Furthermore I view Chion's observation around how altering the sound of a film, changes the perception of its images (Chion 1994: 4), considering his observation in the light of my films sound-image relationship. I close this section exploring Borges fiction, where he explores the relationship between time-space, labyrinths and landscape (Borges 2007: 37), and relate this temporal experience to my path films.

In *Positioning My Practice*, I view the work of two artists as being of primary importance in positioning my practice, the work of South African multi-disciplinary artist dOUNG Jahangeer (b.1970-), in particular Jahangeer's pink lines (Young-Jahangeer 2013: 254 – 262) and their relation to my path making; and further the filmmaking methods of late American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage's (1933-2003) films (Camper 2010: 2), and their connection with my own filmmaking technique. Additionally I view the role the somatic plays in Brakhage's filmmaking (Elder 1999: 14), and how this seems connected to the stalking methods I use in the creation of my path films, further how this physical *or somatic* aspect of the process affects cognition (Kapadocha, Sellers-Young 2021: 14). Peripherally I investigate the work of two additional artists in relation to my practice, Belgian born Mexico City based artist Francis Alÿs (b.1959-) fissuring of perspective in his walking actions (Ross 2012: 75, 76), and how this relates to the disruption of perspective and space in my path films, and in closing I view a connection between artist Richard Long's (b.1945-) *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) (Ross, 2012: 97), my transient path films, and Jahangeer and Long's similarly ephemeral actions (Young 2007: 18).

2.2 Subject and Object

In *The Textures of Time, Agency and Temporal Experience* (2010), Flaherty asserts that in Mead and Blumer's writings, self-consciousness plays a key role in our subjective experience of time. Reflecting consciousness back on oneself makes one both the subject and object, both knower and known. One can choose one's own temporal experience in a situation, not merely reacting involuntarily. Further Flaherty states, "As the object of his or her own consciousness, one can select the kind of temporal experience one prefers. Then, having identified a particular type of temporal experience as the goal, the individual arranges circumstances such that they act back on him or her with the desired effect." (Flaherty 2010: 8).

As already stated in my *Research Methods* in this paper's introduction (pg. 7), I believe the relationship between *subject and object* (Flaherty 2010: 8) is central to my current reflective filmmaking practice, as in part, I have consciously chosen the woodland environment for the temporal effect I perceive it has on me. Furthermore how this effect combined with my stalking methods reflects back on my path films themselves, viewed as translations of my walked *or stalked* 'texts'. Bunyard argues that in Debord's model, "subject-object unity is conceived as a process of temporal self-determinacy. This is a process wherein human subjects identify themselves as the source of their own history, and consciously direct its ongoing future conduct. It follows that if subject-object unity is thus conceived as process and movement in time, then every moment of that process must, presumably, be oriented towards re-establishing its conditions of existence" (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398). I believe that this subject-object model (Flaherty 2010: 8; Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) could be useful in assisting me into an inquiry of my films viewed as emerging autobiographical fragments.

Writing about the use of space in Chantal Akerman's (1950-2015) film *Hotel Monterey* (1972) (Fig. 1), Margulies observes an opposition between two kinds of space is activated as the elevator doors open (like a camera shutter), and the viewer is suddenly made conscious that they are perceiving the corridors and rooms; Margulies sees this as the point where "the dyad of viewer and object is activated, in a mirroring effect" (Margulies 1996: 43). I observe a similar mirroring effect could be at work in my current path films. Akerman further states of her conception of *Hotel Monterey* (1972): "I want people to lose themselves in the frame and at the same time to be truly confronting the space" (Koresky 2010: 4). In my view, in my path films I

view myself, and the viewer as similarly immersed in the image and confronting the space. Furthermore this kind of immersion of myself in the image, and the interchangeability of myself and the viewer in the video image, in this dyad of subject and object, would appear to have been explored prior by Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929), in whose artworks “the status of the subject, as ‘viewer’, ‘participant’ or ‘voyeur’ remains unresolved” (Applin 2012: 67).

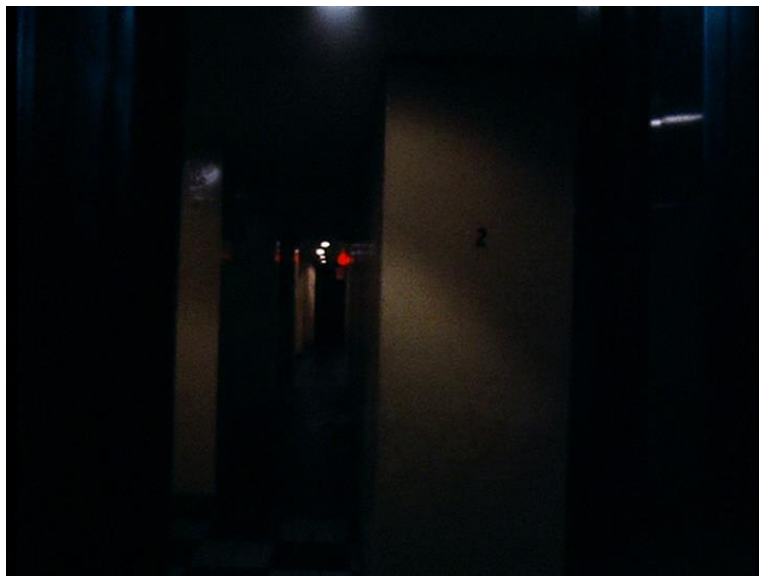


FIGURE 1: Chantal Akerman, *still from Hotel Monterey*, 1972.

2.3 Paths and Landscape

In the introduction to this research paper, I correlated my stalking practice in the woodland zone with the term *stalking* as used in the fiction of Iain Sinclair (Coverly 2012: 120). The term *Stalking* could further be connected with Francesco Careri's (b.1966) 'stalker' group, whose activities are described by Tiberghien as being rooted in the past, like Surrealism with a lineage extending back to German Romanticism (Careri 2002: 10), similarly I view my stalking activities in the woodland zone as rooted in the past, although perhaps different in that they seem to primarily reflect my own past and experience, as filmed autobiography.

Furthermore the *stalker* group has a relationship with the Dada group's walks in the French countryside (Careri 2002: 11). I believe my stalking could be explored further through analogy with *Surrealist Deambulation* (Careri 2002: 79-81). Careri explains Deambulation as hypnosis achieved by walking, as "a medium through which to enter into contact with the unconscious part of the territory" (Careri 2002: 82-83). I perceive Deambulation could be viewed as an aspect of my key theoretical framework, Debord's *subject-object* model (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), as discussed above in the section 'Subject and Object'.

Additionally in the introduction to this research paper, I stated that the 'Pedestrian Speech Act' of my title adopts Michel de Certeau's notion of the *pedestrian speech act*. de Certeau believes the pedestrian appropriates the topographical system as the speaker takes on language; just as the speech act enacts language acoustically, the pedestrian enacts a place through their use of space (de Certeau 2002: 97-98). Comparing my stalking to a form of writing, I made an analogy with Tilley's interpretation of de Certeau's *pedestrian speech act* (de Certeau 2002: 97-98), Tilley states that if writing makes speech into a material medium, which can be both read and interpreted, a pedestrian speech act could be viewed as a kind of writing on the ground, a path *or* "inscription" made by walking. (Tilley 1997:29-30). Moreover, I made an analogy between my paths and the notion of 'desire lines' (Malone 2018: 4), which Malone views as paths created by peoples regular usage, a repeated passage usually indicating a quicker route than the formal path, she adds "this can be interpreted as a design failure; the formal path was rejected because there was a better way. Or perhaps there's no path at all" (Malone 2018: 4).

Unlike the above notions around paths and desire lines (Tilley 1997: 29-30, Malone 2018: 4), I observe the aim of my *stalking* is not establishing actual paths or desire lines in the physical

landscape, as my stalking seldom retreads the same paths and any traces of my walking soon disappear. Perhaps my path films, as traces left by my *stalking*, could be considered as a kind of desire line? Furthermore the text of this research paper might be viewed as an additional path *or trace*, considering Tilley's observation (Tilley 1997: 29-30).

Norman believes that desire lines are not only left behind in the physical world when people wander through nature, but by all physical actions including research (Norman 2010: 132). Norman further states, "Look up some information electronically, and you leave behind a record not only of what was asked, but what activities immediately preceded and followed the question", Norman views these traces as powerful social signifiers, records left behind by people as they use the internet, and read magazines, books and scientific journals (Norman 2010: 132).

Furthermore I perceive these traces or desire lines in my path films as paths connecting my present involuntary stalking actions in woodland zone with my past experience, as an open ended exploration, rather than actual paths with particular geographical destinations (personal research journal 2022: 26). In his essay *Desire Lines* (2006), Finch seems to hypothesize something related, when he asks what urges us to create desire lines that depart from the formal paths in landscapes? Finch speculates further that these "unexplained, and often abortive, departures from existing paths spring from a kind of ingrained restlessness in the human race, a desire simply to see what may be there, with no specific destination or expectations" (Finch 2006: 1).

Considering some of my path films to be labyrinth like, I believe Artress's notions around labyrinths may also prove useful in evaluating my stalking and path making actions within the particular overgrown woodland zone environment, where my point of view is often obscured by undergrowth. Artress considers a labyrinth to be unicursal, and distinct from a maze, she believes the labyrinth to have one path that leads to the center and out. She states, "There are no tricks to it, no dead ends or cul-de-sacs, no intersecting paths. Mazes, on the other hand, are multicursal. They offer a choice of paths, some with many entrances and exits. Dead ends and cul-de-sacs present riddles to be solved" (Artress 1996: 50-51).

In *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Place, Paths and Monuments* (1997), Tilley states: "De Certeau (1984: Part III) has described an art of walking which is simultaneously an art of thinking and an art of practice or operating in the world. Movement through space constructs 'spatial stories', forms of narrative understanding. This involves a continuous presencing of

previous experiences in present contexts” (Tilley 1997: 28). I perceive De Certeau’s notion of, as I understand them, *spatial stories* (Tilley 1997: 28) could be useful in helping me frame how my past experience appears to influence my present path making in the woodland zone. Additionally I observe these *spatial stories* (Tilley 1997: 28), and further De Certeau’s ‘pedestrian speech act’ (De Certeau 2002: 97-98), could be regarded as aspects of Debord’s *subject-object* model (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), Bunyard describes a process of temporal self-determinacy where the subject identifies themselves as the source of their own history, consciously directing its ongoing future conduct (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398).

Additionally I perceive my path films as being a form of aesthetic intervention born out of Lucius Burckhardt’s ‘thinking through walking’ process, that he terms *strollology* (Burckhardt 2015). Furthermore I view this process as an extension of the *subject-object* relationship (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398).

2.4 Psychogeography

Debord has described *psychogeography* as “the study of the specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals” (Coverly 2012: 10); In my understanding, psychogeography, as Debord describes it, would seem fundamental to my process, as well as connected to Debord’s *subject-object* model (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), as Flaherty states that environmental conditions are consciously arranged in such a way, for their temporal effect on the individual (Flaherty 2010: 8), this concept has been explored in the previous section ‘Subject and Object’. Coverly further posits that if psychogeography is to be understood literally as the point where psychology and geography intersect, then one of its further characteristics may be finding new ways of understanding our urban environment (Coverly 2012: 10).

As stated in his book *Psychogeography* (2012), Coverly’s view is that contemporary psychogeography has not been well served by the planned approach of social theorists and geographers, he believes it to be better reflected in the re-imaginings of the modern environment by contemporary writers of fiction, particularly Iain Sinclair and J.G. Ballard’s explorations of these margin suburban areas that Coverly describes as “suburban non-places” (Coverly 2012: 25-26).

The woodland zone I observe could be a similar ‘suburban non-place’, showing no signs of being reclaimed or controlled for any defined purpose. The overgrowth of the woodland zone seems to defy chronological time, or it seems a continuum of past, present and future. This continuum only interrupted by an often overgrown road winding around its perimeter, the scattered detritus of contemporary consumer culture at its fringes (Fig. 2), and a few ephemeral trodden paths into the woodlands interior, that mostly disappear under new overgrowth as the rainy season commences. I believe Coverly’s notions around ‘suburban non-places’ (Coverly 2012: 25-26), could be explored in relation to the woodland zone.

Coverly further cites Sinclair’s *Lights Out for the Territory*, which he regards as an exploring a “hidden and lost London”. Sinclair who admits being influenced by the surrealists (particularly Aragon) states, “I liked their notion of finding strange parks at the edge of the city, of creating a walk that would allow you to enter into a fiction” (Coverly 2012: 121). I view this notion will be useful in exploring my current path films, not an objective document of the woodland zone, which I view as existing between reality and my imagination as translations of autobiographical texts.



FIGURE 2: Michael Croeser, *service road at the woodland zones outskirts*, 2021.

2.5 Landscape as Text

In the introduction to this paper I discussed how the title of my project stems from Michel de Certeau's '*Pedestrian Speech Act*', Tilley in his book *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Place, Paths and Monuments* (1997) makes an analogy between a pedestrian speech act and its inscription on the ground in the form of a path (Tilley 1997: 29-30), similarly I viewed my path films as autobiographical translations of texts written by my stalking. Furthermore, I made a correlation between my path films, perceived as translations of texts inscribed by my stalking, and Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) analogy which underscores the benefits of transcribing a text as opposed to merely reading it (Benjamin 1979: 49-50). This analogy is borrowed from the essay *Chinese Curios*, found in the collection *One-Way Street* (Benjamin 1979), in which Benjamin states a landscape is perceived differently when walking through it on foot, as opposed to how it is perceived flying over it; he makes an analogy with the difference between a text read, and one copied out. Benjamin concludes that "Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text" (Benjamin 1979: 49-50). Corresponding to Benjamin's notion, I perceive by translating my stalked texts through the medium of digital video, I'm excavating aspects of my internal landscape (personal practice journal 2021: 21).

Benjamin states in his book *Origin Of The German Trauerspiel* (2019), "In the ruin, history has passed perceptibly into the setting. Allegories are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things" (Benjamin 2019: 188). I observe something similar to Benjamin's notion in the woodland zone, as one crosses a broken concrete bridge from a bygone municipal era (Fig. 3), to enter the area. Furthermore there are the ruins of redbrick Victorian gateposts on the woodlands perimeter road (Fig. 4), and the litter of years old broken plastic appliances and consumer packaging decomposing in the sun (personal research journal 2021: 17-18), hinted at elliptically in my path films, and more directly in the film *Path VIII* (2021) (Fig. 5-6) where this detritus is actually visible. I believe this connection between the setting of my work and Benjamin's (2019: 188) view of ruins is worth exploring further, and may even be of use as allegory for my filmmaking process. In my view, based on Benjamin's (2019: 188) assertion, my current path films could be regarded as ruined video images in which my past experience is present (personal research journal 2021: 18), as visual autobiographical translations of texts written by my stalking.



FIGURE 3: Michael Croeser, *photograph of the bridge entering the woodland zone*, 2021. Digital photo.



FIGURE 4: Michael Croeser, *photograph of the remnants of red brick gateposts at the woodland zone*, 2021. Digital photo.



FIGURE 5-6: Michael Croeser, *stills from the film Path VIII*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/742910997>

2.6 Temporality

In the section *Subject and Object*, I explored Flaherty's notion of subject-object based on Debord's correspondingly named model (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), and how I consciously choose the woodland environment for its effect on my experience of time, and further how I perceive this experience of time to be reflected in my path films. In this section I cite further examples of the representation of temporal experience in cinema, sound art, and literature, and draw connections with my own temporal experience in the woodland zone, and its and the translation of that experience in my path films.

I perceive temporal relations between 'the zone' in Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Stalker* (1979), and the woodland zone in my current landscape films, which are described in more detail in *Chapter III*. In *The Cinema of Tarkovsky - Labyrinths of Space and Time* (2012), Skakov states "the spatial decrepitude of the zone has temporal implications in the way the passage of time reveals itself through the space of the zone" (Skakov 2012: 144-146), in my interpretation of Skakov's statement, I believe a useful analogy could be made with the woodland zone, for the purposes of illustrating the passage of time in my path films. In my journal, I have furthermore observed how the uncontrolled growth and decaying organic material of the woodland zone, almost primeval, added to the decomposing detritus of consumer packaging and broken plastic appliances at its perimeters seems to have an effect on the perception of time (personal research journal 2021: 17).

I believe that in addition to a temporal connection, my path films and *Stalker* (1979) are alike in that the camera becomes an unseen observer perceiving that time, Skakov observes this phenomenon in *Stalker*, he states of Tarkovsky's camera that it becomes "an invisible but omnipresent observer" that constantly approaches the characters from behind, and that the observant long take of the camera becomes an extended tracking shot stalking the characters, creating "a sense of embodiment" (Skakov 2012: 143-144). This analogy will be explored further in *Chapter III*, in my developing path films.

In Kim's article *How William Basinski's masterpiece, The Disintegration Loops, captured a world crumbling around us in slow motion*, Kim views Basinski's (b. 1958) sound as a musical portrayal of the neurological phenomenon *tachypsychia*, a temporary sense of 'slow-motion' experienced by a person in an emotionally intense event, like a car crash (Kim 2019: 1). Kim further describes one of the sections in Basinski's *The Disintegration Loops* (2001), a ten second audio segment (transferred from a disintegrating tape) of a trumpet stretched to over an hour in

length no longer bearing the instruments sonic character, instead sounding like noises heard in the world (Kim 2019: 2). In my view, my location recordings of environmental sound from the woodland zone, slowed down to become the final sound layers of my path films, are similar to Basinski's disintegrating music (Kim 2019: 2). Furthermore, I believe something like this phenomenon of *tachypsychia* (Kim 2019: 1) seems rooted in my stalking actions themselves, and it could be reflected visually, as well as aurally, in my path films.

Michel Chion observes of David Lynch's (b. 1946) films, that in night "everything converges, joins and fragments... Perhaps because its mantle of darkness erases the distinct contours of objects and reconstitutes a lost whole. Night rejoins what day disjoins" (Chion 1995, 1996: 186). I observe the underexposure I use in my path films similarly uses darkness to create an ambiguous space of convergence, explored by myself as an ongoing dialectic between inner and outer and space, the unity of subject and object I have previously described. Furthermore Chion's observations of how the muting of the sound in Bergman's *Persona* (1966), effects its images relationship to space and time (Chion 1994: 4), might be useful in exploring how editing the sound of my films might further effect the perception of their images, spatially and temporally.

In the section *Paths and Landscapes* (Pg. 25), I postulated how De Certeau's 'spatial stories' (Tilley 1997: 28) could prove useful in exploring how my past experience appears to influence my stalking and video path making in the present, within the woodland zone. Furthermore I perceive Borges notions around time, space and landscape (Borges 2007: 37), might be valuable in guiding my path films, viewed as composite video images made up of layered dimensions of experience. In Borges story *The Garden of Forking Paths*, his protagonist imagines a maze "no longer composed of octagonal kiosks and returning paths, but of rivers and provinces and kingdoms" that would comprise "the past and the future..." (Borges 2007: 37).

2.7 Positioning My Practice

To position my practice I have chosen to focus primarily on the work of South African Mauritian born multi-disciplinary artist dOUNg Jahangeer (b.1970-) and the late American avant-garde filmmaker Stan Brakhage (1933-2003). Further in my view, Belgian born Mexico City based artist Francis Alÿs (b.1959-), British artist Richard Long (b.1945) are also significant in positioning my practice. Also of importance in positioning my practice, although not discussed at length here, are filmmaker Chantal Akerman (1950-2015) (discussed in this chapter on pgs. 21-22, and later in *Chapter III* on Pgs. 76, 78-79, 94), and artist Yayoi Kusama (b. 1929) (discussed in *Chapter III* in relation to my practice on pgs. 79, 81).

In my view Jahangeer's walking practice remains useful, as it continues to inform aspects of my current stalking practice, even though the paths I make do not leave a trace, or a residue like Jahangeer's pink paths (fig. 7) or pink lines (Young-Jahangeer, 2013: 254 – 262), I perceive a virtual or psychic residue could be said to remain in the video recordings (personal practice journal 2021: 2). Furthermore although Jahangeer's walking practice and my own walking *or stalking* seem to have decidedly different intentions, Jahangeer's pink lines in the city of Cape Town were an intervention aimed at mining the political and social landscape of the people of Cape Town to make observations about class, race and culture in a post-apartheid state (Young-Jahangeer, 2013: 254), I observe a connection in that we both use our walking actions as methods of slowing ourselves, enabling a more profound exploration of our chosen working environments. In my case, exploring the woodland zone indirectly through the translation of my stalking into my path films, viewed as a form of autobiography.

In Fred Camper's essay *The Act of Seeing* (2010), he states of Brakhage's films that, "they have few or no objective facts, existing primarily in a virtual space within the viewer's imagination, and in the subjective interaction between viewer and film" (Camper 2010: 9). I believe Camper's observation could be useful in relation to my current practice, in terms of the way the viewer is implicated by the real-time POV movement (personal practice journal 2022: 18). R. Bruce Elder writing about 'the signifying body' in relation to Brakhage's filmmaking methods suggests, "Primordial awareness is preverbal. It is the awareness of the child—it is formed as a cross between the awareness that we come closest to tapping in our dreams and proprioceptive experience. A central proposition of Brakhage's film aesthetics is that film can revivify this primordial, corporeal awareness" (Elder 1999: 14). Considering Elders assertion on Brakhage's

filmmaking (Elder 1999: 14), I speculate as to whether physiological or rather somatic⁴ changes arising from my *stalking* in the woodland environment might shape my perception, and indirectly the form of my path films. Sellers-Young observes that in contemporary neuroscience, body and mind are no longer seen as opposed, and that in fact the interaction of our entire bodies with the environment is directly linked to our sensory perceptions (Kapadocha, Sellers-Young 2021: 14).

Some of the outcomes of Belgian born Mexico City artist Francis Alÿs's walking actions would seem analogous to those of my stalking activities in the woodland zone. Ross describes Alÿs's walking actions as manipulating the central ray of perspective to cause a suspension of the sense of moving forward (Ross 2012: 75). I observe a similarity between disruption of perspective and subsequent sense of suspension in Alÿs's walking actions (Ross 2012: 75) and the suspension of time caused by my stalking, in my path films, where the connection between viewpoint and vanishing point would also appear to have been erased.

Further I perceive a similarity between my path films and British artist Richard Long's photograph *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) (Fig. 8) (Ross 2012: 97). Dieter Roelstraete summarizes *A Line Made by Walking* (1967) as a: "black-and-white photograph of a line of flattened, trampled-upon grass made by repetitively walking up and down an unidentified field in the countryside just outside London, which we may presume regained its natural upright position soon after Long had left, with only a photograph as lasting evidence of his action" (Ross, 2012: 97). As in Long's photograph (Ross 2012: 97), I view my films as the only evidence of my stalking actions, as no lasting trace of my stalked paths is left behind in the woodland zone. Additionally I make a connection between Jahangeer's *Pink Lane* (2007) and the ephemeral nature of my path making. Young proposes that Jahangeer's *Pink Lane* (2007) intervention, documented on digital video, shares the ephemeral nature of Long's *A Line Made by Walking* (1967), Young states: "the grass trampled by Long would regain its original form, the commuters would trample the pink line back into the earth" (Young 2007: 18).

⁴ Of or relating to the body, especially as distinct from the mind. Anatomy of or relating to the outer wall of the body, as opposed to the viscera.



FIGURE 7: doung Anwar Jahangeer, *still photograph of Pink Line performance, Cape Town, 2011*.
Photograph: Francis Burger.



FIGURE 8: Richard Long, *A Line Made by Walking*, 1967.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have defined and explored a body of literature through journal reflections on my stalking practice, and the subject-object (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) theoretical framework I use to focus this research. Additionally I have situated my stalking methods relative this literature and framework, as well as positioning it with other contemporary artists who use similar methods.

In the next chapter *The Paths*, I explore the development of my artistic practice, through insights that have arisen in the making of my thirteen path films. Throughout this process I continuously interrogate my research questions, reflecting-in-action (Gray and Malins 2004: 62, Schön 1983: 308–309), as I journal and do further research within my body of literature including the artists I have used to position my practice, and make new video recordings and further edits to the recorded material. This process has been previously outlined in the methodology section of my introduction, on pages 6-8.

Chapter 3:

The Paths

3.1 Introduction

In *Chapter II*, I reviewed my literature and theoretical framework, breaking it down into six key areas: Subject and Object, Paths and Landscape, Psychogeography, Landscape as Text, Temporality, and Positioning my Practice. I discussed these six areas in relation to my *subject-object* (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) theoretical framework, and considered how each area might prove useful to my ongoing practice-led research.

As mentioned at the close of *Chapter II*, this chapter explores the development of my artistic practice through insights that have arisen in the making of thirteen films, *Path I - XIII*. These reflections draw extensively from journal entries around my stalking and filming practice, and further research within my body of literature, and are written constantly in relation to my theoretical framework and the artists I have chosen to position my practice.

The reflexive process in the above paragraph, likened to a ‘bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994: pp.2-3) in my introduction’s *Research Methods* (pg. 6) section is guided by Debord’s *subject-object* model (Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), as outlined on page 7. Referencing Barrett and Bolt (2007: 6) I have described my methodology as a back-and-forth process in which there is continuous reflection between my video recordings made in the woodland zone, the selected body of literature and my journal entries (*Research Methods* pgs. 6-8). Continuing on page 8 of that section, I viewed this back-and-forth process as analogous to *reflecting-in-action* (Gray and Malins 2004: 62). I perceive the insights that arose during this process have strongly influenced how my path films have developed.

In this chapter, I have encompassed these cumulative insights within the four sections: *Between Inner Space and Outer Space*, *How Stalking Affects the Perception of Space and Time*, *Absence and Presence*, and *Paths as Labyrinths*. Here I should stress that these four areas are not discrete, it appears to be the nature of the cumulative process of my practice-led research that new insights coexist with preceding insights.

3.2 Between Inner Space and Outer Space

In this opening section, I discuss my recognition that my path films appear to not follow existing paths, and I regard the film itself as a path straddling my inner space and the outer space of the woodland zone. This dialectic between inner and outer and space is further explored as an ambiguous space of convergence. Based on Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) allegory (Benjamin 1979: 50), I understand my films as a kind of transcription of an autobiographical text, and through Tilley's interpretation (Tilley 1997: 29-30) I view these films as texts inscribed into the landscape through superimposition. I begin to view my stalking and filming actions as self-reflections distinct from the actual environment in which they were performed, and influenced by my past experiences. The sleepwalk-like drift of my stalking and filming is analogous to Surrealist 'deambulation' (Careri 2002: 81-82), and also a form of automatic writing. In closing I consider how unintended bodily movements reflected in the video recordings might suggest a new heightened subjective dimension to my path films.

My use of hand-held camera in the film *Third Path* (2019) (fig. 9) influenced my current study. This 2019 film was made prior to my MA research and it traces my walking of an actual path in the same of the woodland area as that of *Path I* (2021) (fig. 10). Although there are some connections between the situation and methods used in *Third Path* (2019), and those of this study, *Path I* (2021) marks the beginning of an important shift in my thinking and which I explore in this dissertation: Namely that I no longer seem to be following an existing path (personal practice journal 2021: 6). I regard *Path I* (2021) as an early exploration of what I have begun to understand as an 'in-between' space in this MA research project. This insight emerged partly

through an analogy with Jahangeer's notion of 'in-between'. In my films the woodland zone, unmaintained municipal land in between walled off suburban areas, seems a similar unseen area of 'in-between' (Young 2007: 13). Furthermore I position my path films made in this environment as a space in between inner space and outer space. The above notions will be explored in greater depth through reflections on the film *Path III* (pg. 53).



FIGURE 9: Michael Croeser, *still from Third Path*, 2019. Digital video.

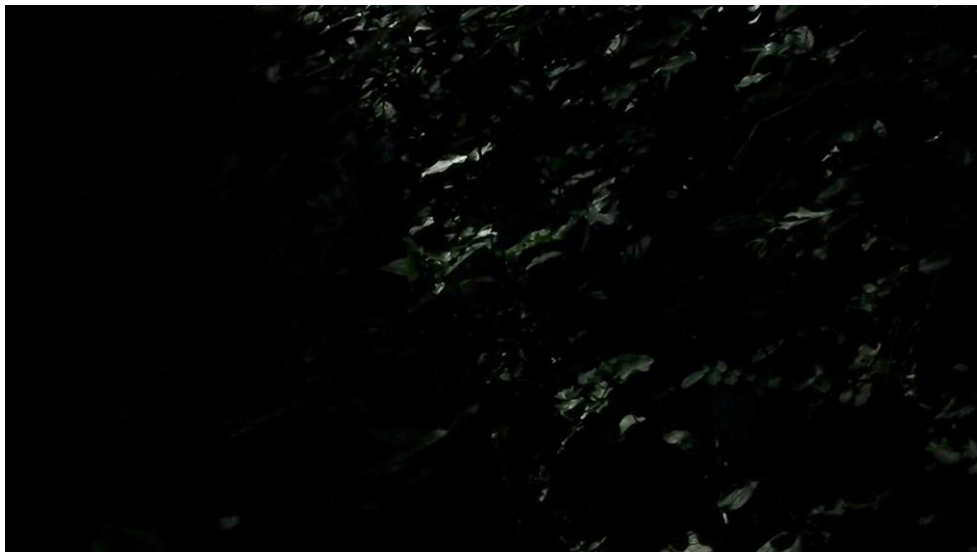


FIGURE 10: Michael Croeser, *still from Path I*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/732696912>

As stated in the above paragraph, *Path I* marks a departure from hand-held camera experiments such as *Third Path* (2019) made prior to this research, principally because I start to forge new pathways in the woodland area that do not follow an existing path (personal practice journal 2021: 6), and further no lasting trace of my stalking appears to be left behind in the woodland as a path. *Path I* begins to entertain the notion of the film becoming the path, as previously mentioned in *Chapter II* in the section *Positioning My Practice* (pg. 33). As stated, the paths I make do not leave a residue in the actual environment, as in the powder tracings of Jahangeer's (Young-Jahangeer 2013: 254 – 262) paths, however, a residue of myself remains in the video footage, a mental footprint or trace. I view this residue as a video path straddling my inner space and the outer space of the woodland, in other words the video image is both the product of my mind and the external environment filtered through my camera (personal practice journal 2021: 2).

An important aspect of this video image described in the paragraph above, is the fact that it is also formed by extreme underexposure. Here as I filmed, I used spur of the moment, idiosyncratic picture settings (personal practice journal 2021: 4). Although I experimented with underexposure prior to this MA research, I used this underexposure to create a video image positioned between inner and outer space (personal practice journal 2021: 2), see still from *Path I* (2021) (fig. 11). In *Chapter II*, in the section *Temporality* (pg. 32), I discussed that this underexposure and resulting darkness created an ambiguous space of convergence - which I explored as a dialectic between my inner and outer space. Additionally I likened the use of darkness in my path films to the use of night in David Lynch's (b. 1946) films, about which Chion posits: "the night is the heartland of Lynch's realm, the place where everything converges, joins and fragments..." (Chion 1995, 1996: 186).



FIGURE 11: Michael Croeser, *still from Path I*, 2021. Digital video.



FIGURE 12: Michael Croeser, *location still*, 2021.

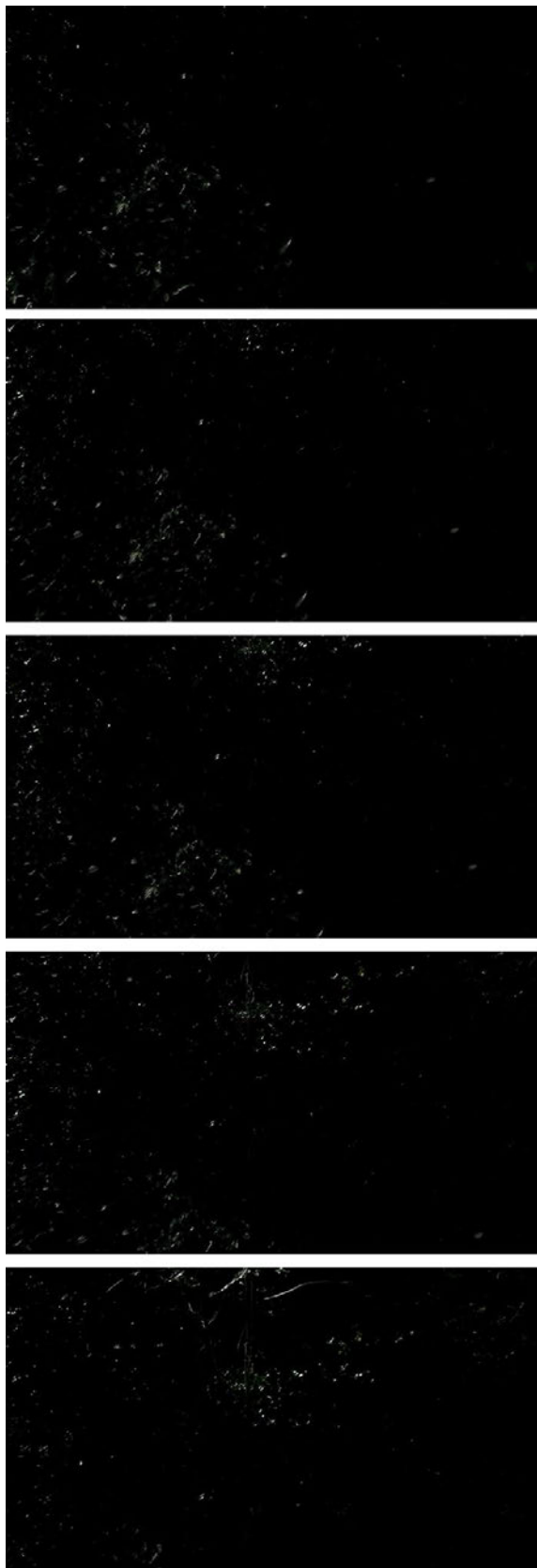


FIGURE 13: Michael Croeser, *stills from Path I*, 2021. Digital video.

In keeping with PLR, through literature research and journal entries growing out of reflections made during the editing of *Path I*, I begin to explore the idea of my films as transcriptions of an autobiographical landscape text (personal practice journal 2021: 1). Based on Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) allegory in which he views the copying of a text being like walking through a landscape as opposed to passing over it (reading it) (Benjamin 1979: 49-50), I equate my walking through and filming of the woodland landscape to 'transcribing'⁵ it. This video landscape is defined by how I choose to navigate the woodland environment (personal practice journal 2021: 3). Benjamin goes on to state that "Only the copied text thus commands the soul of him who is occupied with it, whereas the mere reader never discovers the new aspects of his inner self that are opened by the text" (Benjamin 1979: 49-50). Expanding on this analogy with Benjamin (Benjamin 1979: 49-50), I believe the process of walking through and filming this landscape enables a more profound reflection of myself *or* my inner space in the landscape image, than a single isolated still photograph of the same environment would. Juxtaposing an unfiltered still photograph of the woodland (fig. 12) with a series of video stills from *Path I* (2021) (fig. 13), I illustrate the difference between a self-reflection in a single still image and one in a filmed image.

Through an analogy with Tilley, I perceive that if walking inscribes a text as a path cutting into the landscape (Tilley 1997: 29-30), I similarly inscribe a kind of text by stalking into the landscape, translated into the path film (personal practice journal 2021: 3). This video image thus translates my stalked path into the landscape and reflects how and where I choose to walk. This additionally may be seen as an inscription *or* impression analogous to a printing process. I interpret the growing accumulations of black enabled by my manipulations of the camera exposure as myself imprinted on the image. I refer again to fig. 13 to illustrate this. The observations around how my walking and filming creates a particular kind of video landscape image have begun to explore my research question: *In what ways does stalking inform my current filmed landscape images?*

⁵ This early notion of 'transcribing' the woodland landscape will be revised as 'translating', furthermore viewing my path films as translations of autobiographical texts written by my stalking. These revisions draw on insights gained from feedback from my research proposal defense, which took place on the 26th of May 2022.

The use of the term ‘stalking’ to describe my walking practice seems only to have occurred to me as late as July 2021, while journaling reflections on *Path III* (2021) (personal practice journal 2021: 7). As discussed at length in *Chapter I* (pg. 1), the notion of *stalking* is appropriated in part from Sinclair’s psychogeographic fiction: “The stalker is a stroller who sweats, a stroller who knows where he is going, but not why or how” (Sinclair 1998: 75).

Further considering the relationship between inner and outer space, I noted of *Path II* (2021) (fig.14), “Throughout the duration of the current edit of approximately 20 minutes in length, there seems dialectic between passages of representation and extended increasingly abstract sequences made up of points and shapes of reflected light” (personal practice journal 2021: 4). This tension between my inner space and the outer space of the woodland zone may thus be seen as a convergence of the two spaces. My restrained stalking movements seemed to directly facilitate this tension between inner and outer (personal practice journal 2022: 31-33), contributing to this distinct filmed landscape image. This observation further explores the research question of how stalking informs my current filmed landscape images.

Moreover depth and perspective⁶ seem further obfuscated by my use of close-up hand-held camera filming which necessitates a greater degree of improvisation, as I compose the films frames in the viewfinder virtually automatically⁷ (personal practice journal 2021: 4), see stills from *Path II* (2021) (fig. 15-18). This apparently automatic and unpredictable ‘close to the object’ composing seems exaggerated by my stalking movements, which obscure the image to a greater degree, and contribute to the distancing of the film from the actual woodland environment. Again, these observations about how my stalking movements influence the film are a response to my primary research question.

Path II (2021) triggers memories from my childhood in similar threshold woodland areas surrounding my suburb, tracing dappled roads and paths under the dense canopy of trees. These memories have most likely influenced the present path choices I make in the woodland zone (personal research journal 2021: 10).

⁶ Disruption of perspective through my stalking will be explored further in relation to my film *Path IV* (2021) and the walking practice of Francis Alÿs (Ross 2012: 75), in the following section *How Stalking Affects the Perception of Space and Time* (pg. 54).

⁷ Done or occurring spontaneously, without conscious thought

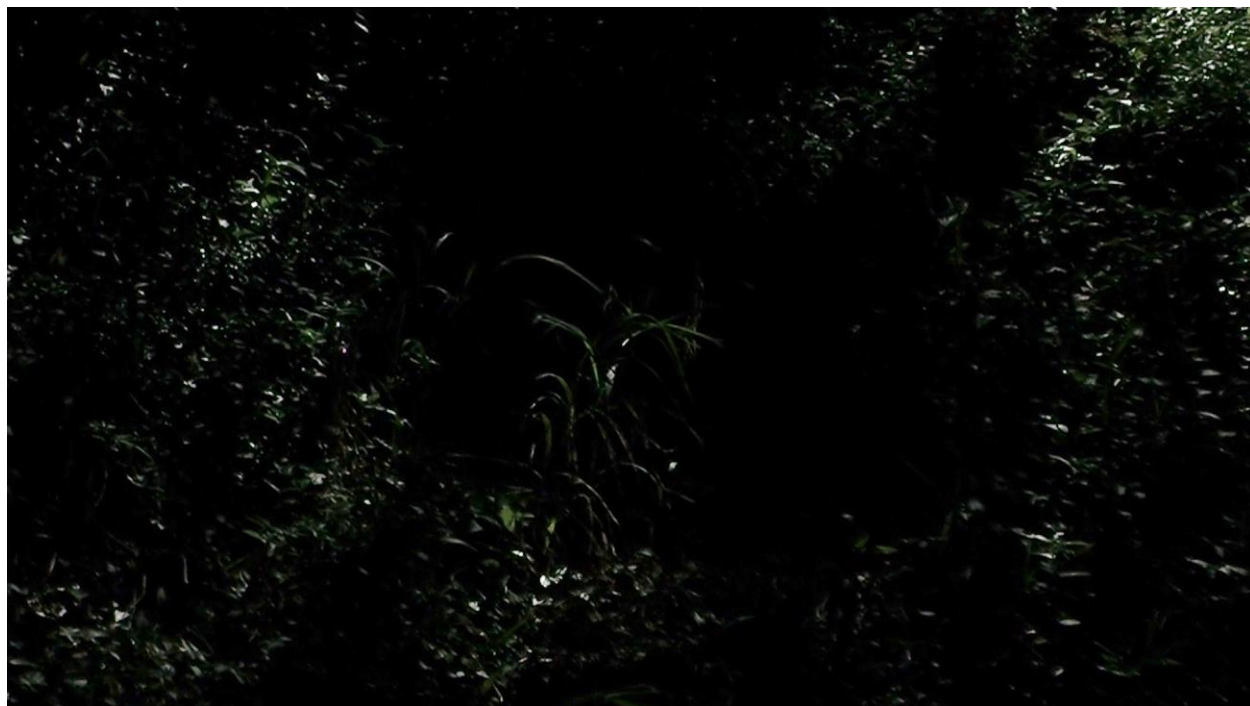


FIGURE 14: Michael Croeser, *still from Path II*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/725654650>



FIGURES 15-18: Michael Croeser, *stills from Path II*, 2021. Digital video

The analogy of my path choices - which are embedded in the childhood memories of a similar woodland area (personal research journal 2021: 10) - with Tilley's 'spatial stories' (Tilley 1997: 28) is apt: Tilley's position is that past experience is continuously felt in present contexts. I believe something like these 'spatial stories' (Tilley 1997: 28) are evident in my current path films not only in the way the unconsciously chosen canopied environments in them (see fig. 19) seem to resemble particular fringe woodland environments from my childhood (personal research journal 2021: 10), but also in how my past experience of these woodland environments, as both safe spaces and precarious spaces, still seems to exert an intuitive influence in the present. This anxiety to be reflected in my films as yet another manifestation of the tension between my inner space and the outer space of the woodland. This psychological tension between inner and outer will continue to be explored in different forms throughout this chapter, particularly as reflected in the films *Path IV*, *Path V*, *Path VI*, *Path XI* and *Path XII*. These insights would appear to resonate with Flaherty and Bunyard's assertions around *subject-object* unity (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), in that I have determined a particular experience of time, through choosing the conditions of the woodland zone, and that my delayed stalking movements further contribute to this experience of time.

As a further disruption to linear time, I edited *Path II* to a length of about ten minutes: The resulting film is an endless straight or stream with no beginning or end, a hypnotic continuum reflecting a subconscious terrain; islands of foliage enclosed by inclosing rivers of underexposure, the substance of nothing or missing information (personal practice journal 2021: 9). I observe this slow and controlled drifting camera, and the video images it records where linear time seems to be disrupted, directly reflects my movements as I'm stalking and filming simultaneously. This explores my key question of how stalking informs my current filmed landscapes.



FIGURE 19: Michael Croeser, *the woodland canopy*, 2021.

I regard the woodland zone, although in close proximity to suburban areas, as a kind of fringe isolated area of unkempt wilderness left to itself, and my wanderings in this zone to be solitary and self-reflective. In considering how my practice - and stalking – might be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary art context, this solitary aspect of my stalking is perhaps closer in spirit to Long’s walking interventions than Jahangeer’s collective actions. Young contrasts this difference in approaches thus: “Whereas Jahangeer’s practice focuses on public collaborations and interaction with the occupants of urban communities, Long’s walks take the form of introspective and solitary journeys through isolated natural spaces” (Young 2007: 16).

In *Chapter 2*, in the section *Psychogeography* (Pg. 26), I made a connection between the marginalized suburban areas in the fiction Iain Sinclair and J.G. Ballard, described by Coverly as ‘suburban non-places’ (Coverly 2012: 25-26), and the woodland zone where I make my path films. The solitary and self-reflective nature of my activities in the woodland zone described in the paragraph above, and the way this zone is isolated between suburbs, appears to mirror Coverly’s assertions on contemporary psychogeographical investigation explored through the fiction of J.G. Ballard. Coverly believes this fiction represents the essence of psychogeography, “the relationship between individual and environment”, a freedom from interacting with others enabled by the structures of the modern suburbs that separate individuals, making it possible to live anonymously, and in isolation (Coverly 2012: 118).

Based on colleagues feedback during a preview of several films (personal critique session journal 2022: 17-18), I re-edited *Path II* -and similarly the films *Path I*, *Path VII* and *Path VIII*- with the aim of reintroducing camera movement caused by my stalking. This I had initially edited out perceiving my stalking as a drift. At that point I had yet to consider the role of my bodily movement in my path films. The responses recorded at this crit session seemed to confirm that the subtle shifts in the image introduced by my stalking paradoxically push the observer out of the film and simultaneously draw them, making viewing an immersive experience (personal critique session journal 2022: 17-18). My bodily movements captured this way while filming seem to add to the subjectivity⁸ of the POV⁹ image (personal practice journal 2022: 18-19). This insight results from considering my key question, *In what ways does stalking inform my current filmed landscape images?* In subsequent edits of *Path II* I removed additional footage of recognizable vegetation with the intention of further distancing the film from the actual environment, inadvertently introducing a series of jump-cuts¹⁰ (see fig. 20), which although barely perceptible, I believe contribute positively to the temporal instability.

⁸ the quality of existing in someone's mind rather than the external world

⁹ A point of view shot (also known as POV shot, first-person shot or a subjective camera) is a short film scene that shows what a character (the subject) is looking at (represented through the camera)

¹⁰ A jump cut is a cut in film editing in which a single continuous sequential shot of a subject is broken into two parts, with a piece of footage being removed in order to render the effect of jumping forward in time



FIGURE 20: Michael Croeser, *'jump-cuts' in Path II*, 2021. Digital video.

The video clip that would be edited into *Path III* (2021) (fig. 21) was captured the same afternoon as the clips that would constitute *Path IV*. *Path III* is one continuous take, no cuts, and a continuous drift. Reflecting on my stalking as ‘Somnambulism’ I underexposed the video camera’s image to a more pronounced degree. In the final edit I decided to completely mute the sound (personal practice journal 2021: 7), severing any reference to the external woodland zone. In filming *Path III*, my stalking movements get gradually slower, I become more relaxed, meditating on the developing image in the viewfinder, reduced to crawling as I move towards the verge of stasis; my suppressed breathing too becomes slower concentrating on the developing *or degrading* video image; I’m virtually unconscious of the external environment, even sounds seem dulled (personal practice journal 2021: 7). Considering my primary research question of how stalking informs my current filmed images, I perceive the change in my stalking rhythm thus directly influences the developing filmed landscape image.

The video images degradation through underexposure in *Path III* suggests the notion of my path films as ruins, as previously hypothesized in *Chapter II* (pg. 28) through an analogy with Benjamin where he believes that through the ruin, history can be perceived in the present setting (Benjamin 2019: 188). I understand *Path III* in relation to Benjamin’s notion of a “allegorical physiognomy¹¹ of natural history” present as a ruin (Benjamin 2019: 188), in that the form of the video image in *Path III* appears to betray something about its origins, my past experience seems to have passed over into the stream of images. I furthermore begin to perceive my stalking as writing my experience into the video image, as a form of automatic writing analogous to Breton’s discovery of automatic writing in real space, a kind of wandering that becomes imprinted as a territory of the mind (Careri 2002: 79-80).

Analogous to Careri’s assertion (Careri 2002: 79-80), in *Path III* my stalking appears to have no destination. The film presents as a non-linear continuum with no beginning, middle or end, as abstract patterns of light, dark and movement becoming a kind of representation *or* translation of a mental space. As already stated I do not regard my path films as a document of the woodland zone (personal practice journal 2021: 1), but rather as visual autobiographical translations of my idiosyncratic stalked paths into the woodland zone’s landscape. By extension, I determine how the camera consumes and reshapes the raw materials of the woodland environment that I’m

¹¹ A person's facial features or expression, esp. when regarded as indicative of character or ethnic origin.

- the supposed art of judging character from facial characteristics.
- the general form or appearance of something : *the physiognomy of the landscape*.

stalking into, projecting them back into the world as reflections of my own mental images and movements. I recognize a further correlation between *deambulation* (Careri 2002: 82-83) and the sleepwalking-like nature of my stalking and the images it produces, seemingly a kind of hypnosis induced by walking in which my mind and the terrain meet, abandoning my ego to access deeper layers of the unconscious.



FIGURE 21: Michael Croeser, *still from Path III*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/736388943>

The *subject-object* (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) theoretical framework guiding my practice led-research would appear to be a version of *Deambulation*, in that the Dada group seem to have chosen their specific locations for the effect they had on the perception of space and time (Careri 2002: 81-82), which seems to echo Flaherty's assertion of the individual arranging the situation so it acts back on them with the desired temporal effect (Flaherty 2010: 8).

In my view, Jahangeer performs his interventions in spaces similar to those of the Dada artists, “uninhabited spaces, at the limits of real space” (Careri 2002: 81-82) as well. Jahangeer’s ‘pink line’ which facilitates a dialectic between different class groups in Cape Town, is painted along margin areas of the inner city, along gutters and the edges of walkways (Young-Jahangeer, 2013: 254 – 262), would appear to be at the limits of inhabited space. Additionally the woodland zone where I conduct my stalking-filming actions seems a similar uninhabited space “at the limits of real space” (Careri 2002: 81-82).

Moreover I make an analogy between the woodland zone and Jahangeer’s notion of ‘in-between’ space (Young 2007: 13), which draws on Bhabha’s conception of ‘in-between’¹² space (Bhabha 1994: 1-2). Young describes Jahangeer’s ‘in-between’ spaces as including freeways, informal settlements and parking lots (Young 2007: 13). Based on Jahangeer’s view (Young 2007: 13), I perceive the woodland zone as a derelict and inaccessible area beyond the view of the general public, to be a similarly ignored in-between space (Young 2007: 13). Furthermore, in a tangential way, I believe I explore Bhabha’s (Bhabha 1994: 1-2), and Jahangeer’s notion of in-between space (Young 2007: 13), observing my path films as another kind of in-between space, a perpetually unresolved dialectic between inner space and outer space (personal practice journal 2021: 2).

This section has explored various notions of how my films appear to exist in a space between inner and outer space, and how my stalking seems a kind of somnambulism similar to ‘deambulation’ (Careri 2002: 81-82). I interpret my stalking as being translated into visual autobiographical texts through analogies with Benjamin (Benjamin 1979: 50) and Tilley (Tilley 1997: 29-30), distinct from the actual environment, or outer space. In the following section I explore how my stalking movements seem to affect both my perception of space and time, further positioning my experience with the practice of other artists, and within theory and literature.

¹² “These in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood –singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining society itself” (Bhabha 1994: 1-2)

3.3 How Stalking Affects the Perception of Space and Time

In this section, through an analogy with artist Francis Alÿs's (b.1959-) walking actions I explore how my stalking appears to disrupt perspective and space (Ross 2012: 75), and explore a new somatic aspect in my stalking, connected to the 'the signifying body' (Elder 1999: 13) in the films of Stan Brakhage (1933-2003). I record my stalking in a video image resembling the phenomenon of Illusory Palinopsia (Bender, Feldman, Sobin 1968: 321-38), and view the disintegration of sound and image as a form of Tachypsychia (Kim 2019: 1). I further investigate my somatic experiences effect on my experience of time, also exploring my stalking as a kind of "unproductive time" (Ross 2012: 65-66), and my path filmmaking as producing a kind of "suspended, non-historical time" (Ross 2012: 66-67). I observe a binocular sandwiching effect on space and time, and a series of jump-cut edits in dialectic with my slow stalking. I discuss this paradoxical synthesis of jumping ahead in time and slowing down time in relation to 'deambulation' (Careri 2002: 79-83) as a different kind of somnambulist drift. Additionally I draw parallels between artist Richard Long's (b.1945-) photographic documentation which ignores "the real activity in the environments" (Ross 2012: 99), viewing my films as similarly disconnected. Closing this section I consider the environmental conditions of the woodlands effect on my somatic experience in relation to Brakhage's recorded film actions (Elder 1999: 14), and view my path films as chance discoveries made by stalking, analogous to artist dounge Jahangeers' (b.1970-) walking practice (Young 2007: 15). Moreover I view both Jahangeer's practice and my own as signaling tensions between private and public space (Young 2007: 13).

Considering my research question of how my stalking methods could be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary context, I position my stalking and filming method in relation to the walking actions of artist Francis Alÿs (b.1959). I believe a more profound understanding of how perspective and space have been disrupted through my stalking and filming methods in *Path IV* (2021) (fig. 22), has been made possible through an analogy with Alÿs's walking actions, that interrupt perspective, and consequently suspend a sense of moving forward (Ross 2012: 75). Despite disrupting perspective differently to Alÿs's collective walking actions (Ross 2012: 75), by disturbing perspective I might also be creating a sense of suspended time. Furthermore, analogous to Flaherty notions around subject and object (Flaherty 2010: 8), I suggest I have intentionally disrupted perspective and space, in order to achieve a particular temporal experience.

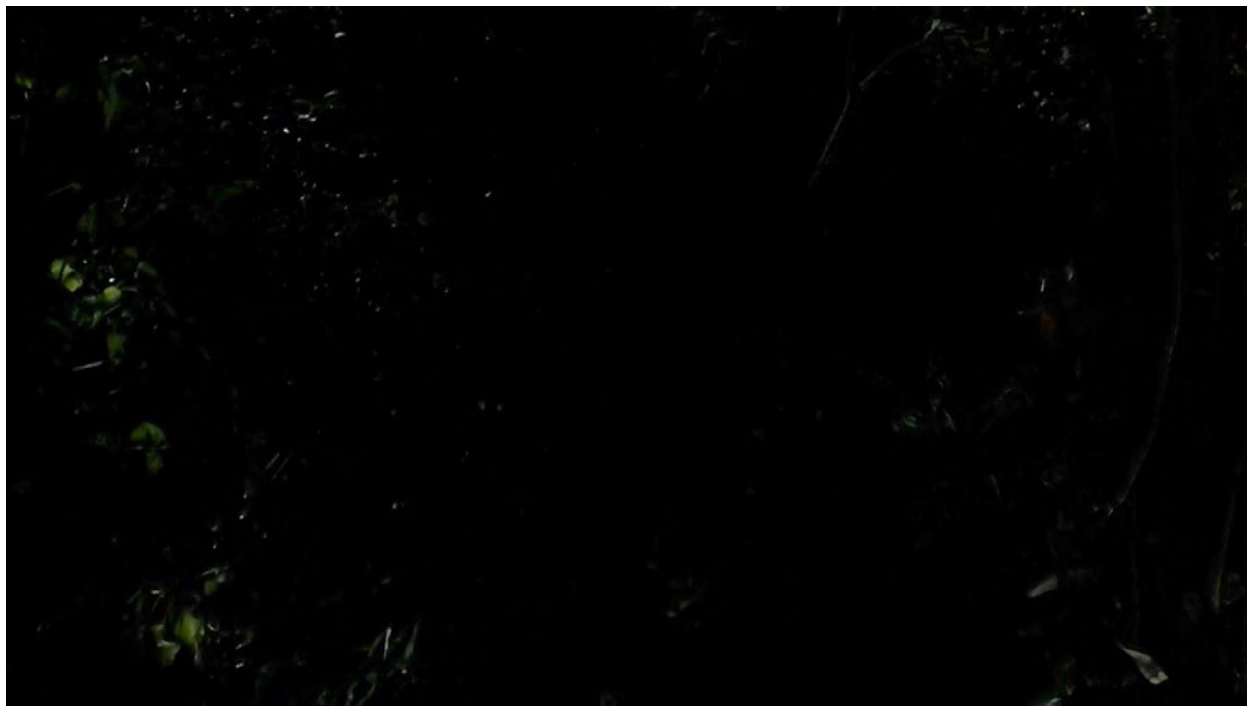


FIGURE 22: Michael Croeser, *still from Path IV*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/732823702>

In *Path IV*, I broke through walls of foliage when I was unable to find any established path. Here there seems to be a “conflict between the woodland and myself resembling a fugue¹³ state”, and that the recorded footage I reviewed seemed an investigation of a constant tension between representational and non-representational (personal practice journal 2021: 6). This points to another important development in my stalking in *Path IV* in that my movement seems to become more evident; this builds on my stalking reflected in the image that I began to explore in the previous section through *Path II* (pgs. 44, 49) and *Path III* (pg. 51). In *Path IV* stalking is translated as less drifting, as in *Path II* (personal practice journal 2021: 9), here I struggle to define a path and this becomes reflected in the video images of *Path IV*. This reflection of a different kind of stalking movement in the film seems like an important shift in my practice. This is considered in the light of my primary question of how stalking informs my current filmed landscape images.

¹³ A state or period of loss of awareness of one's identity, often coupled with flight from one's usual environment, associated with certain forms of hysteria and epilepsy.

Considering this new somatic aspect of my stalking, one in which I appear to become more conscious of my body and its movements reflected in the image, and contemplating the question of how my stalking methods could be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary visual art context, I am reminded of the intense body movement mirrored in Stan Brakhage's (1933-2003) film *Dog Man Star* (1961-64) (fig. 23), somatic movement will be explored further in the film *Path VIII* in this section (pgs. 61, 63), and in the section *Absence and Presence*, through the films *Path VI* (2021) (pgs. 71-73) and *Path XII* (2022) (pgs. 73-75). Additionally, this somatic aspect of my stalking might be connected to Elder's notion of 'the signifying body' in dance, mentioned in relation to Brakhage's film making, and regarded by Elder as converting the awareness of the location, actions and movements of the body into a stream of filmed images (Elder 1999: 13).



FIGURE 23: Stan Brakhage, *still from Dog Man Star* (1961-64).

A new edit of *Path IV* made on the 17th of April 2022, removes about six minutes of footage that I considered to reference the actual woodland environment too overtly. It occurs to me that the space of the landscape feels decomposed to a greater degree than that of the previous *Path II*, shot on the 15th of May 2021. I observe that in contrast to *Path II*'s forward trajectory, *Path IV* explores a meandering route as I stalk precariously up the hillside, breaking through undergrowth, seeming to have lost my direction (personal practice journal 2022: 22-24). This experience seems to echo Finch's understanding of *desire lines*, that sometimes following unfamiliar paths leads us into a tangles of undergrowth; we end up becoming lost, but on the rare occasion we discover a magical unanticipated place (Finch 2006: 2). I believe that my stalking in the particular environment of the woodland could also be motivated in part by the discovery of mysterious unanticipated places or spaces, although I perceive these spaces take shape within the path films themselves as chance discoveries. They are something beyond any actual space in the woodland, abstract filmic spaces growing out of the disruption of space and time produced by my stalking, becoming reflections of my inner experience.

Path V (2021) (fig. 24) further explores the effect of my stalking and filming technique on perceived space and time. The film is constructed from one continuous video recording cut and edited into further sections. In *Path V*, a gradual drift upslope pauses on a series of inert frames, giving way to a markedly sideways movement in my stalking. Image and sound, and perspective thus seem to become increasingly fragmented (personal practice journal 2022: 33).

While viewing the final edit of *Path V*, I noted halfway into its duration a marked dialectic between object (the woodland) and the subject (myself) begins. This tension seems to encourage inertia in the image, as my inner space and outer space of the woodland converge through my stalking and filming (personal practice journal 2022: 33). This journal entry reflects on my key research question concerns regarding the ways in which stalking shapes my filmed images. The vague sense of perspective initially established as I stalked and drifted upslope, at the entrance of *Path V*, collapses as my stalking and the corresponding video image moves towards stasis, and pictorial space appears to flatten out (see fig. 25). The image begins to warp and flutter inexplicably as if mirroring a type of visual hallucination. This strangely flattened inert image persists for a period of seconds, it resembles a kind of after image¹⁴, or something like an *Illusory Palinopsia*, a visual disturbance defined as the persistence or recurrence of a visual

¹⁴ An impression of a vivid image retained by the eye after the stimulus has ceased.

image after the stimulus has been removed (Bender, Feldman, Sobin 1968: 321-38). After a period of about forty seconds the pulsing inert video image, further temporally fractured by a series of jump-cuts, appears to respond to an almost imperceptible lateral stalking movement as the image pans gradually left. Perspective, image and sound appear to fragment progressively as this lateral stalking movement develops.

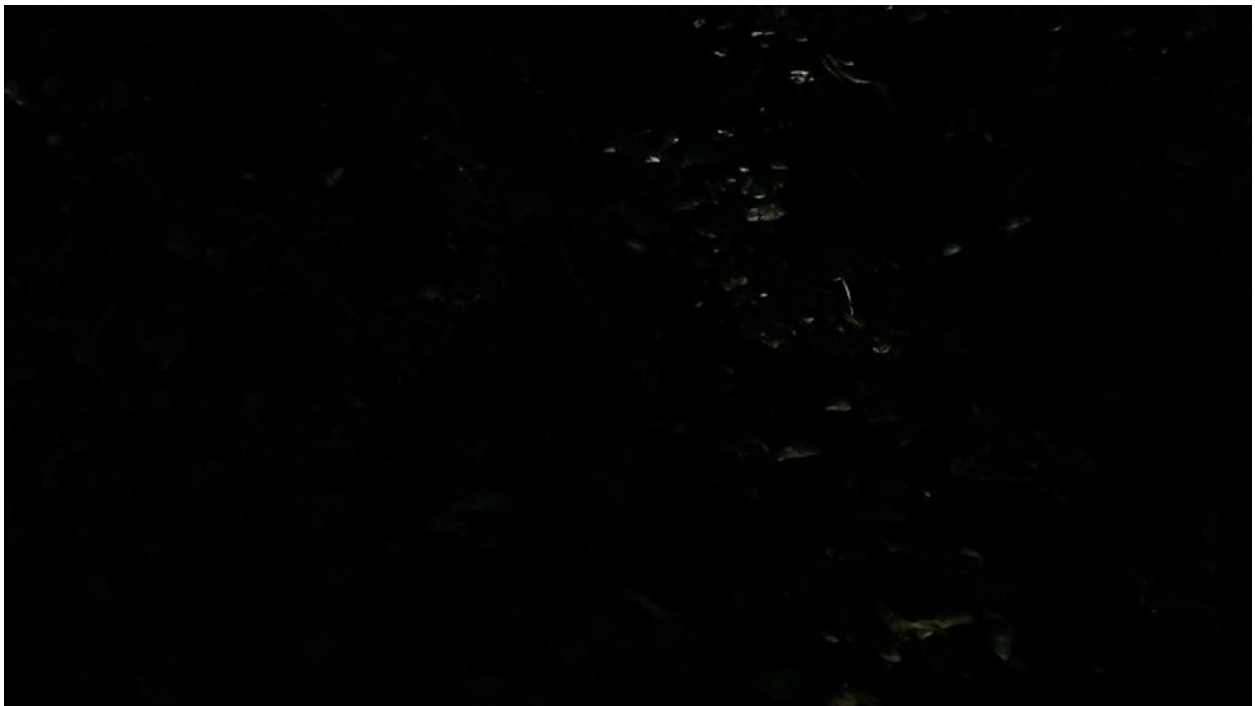


FIGURE 24: Michael Croeser, *still from Path V*, 2021. Digital video.



FIGURE 25: Michael Croeser, *still from Path V*, 2021. Digital video.

Additionally I wrote that the above lateral stalking movement seemed like a kind of Tachypsychia ¹⁵, “Everything slows down, the sound and image to be disintegrating imperceptibly in micro increments, it seems as if a kind of Tachypsychia has overwhelmed myself and consequently the film.” (personal practice journal 2022: 33). In *Chapter II* (pgs. 31-32) in the section *Temporality*, I considered Kim’s analogy between the phenomenon of Tachypsychia and William Basinski’s *The Disintegration Loops* (2001), where Kim interprets Basinski’s piece as a musical representation of the phenomenon (Kim 2019: 1).

Considering the relationship between Tachypsychia, and my stalking and video recording, I reflect on Kim’s recounting of the materialization of Basinski’s *The Disintegration Loops*, where she relates that the tape was crumbling with each pass around the head of the recorder, and the iron oxide particles of plastic tape were becoming dust, with increasing gaps of silence interrupting the music (Kim 2019: 1). In my view, my stalking similarly creates ‘gaps of silence’ (Kim 2019: 1) in the video image. I discern an expansion of the image, as visible remaining

¹⁵ A neurological condition that distorts the perception of time, usually induced by physical exertion, drug use, or a traumatic event.

details in the field of black masking the environment appear to move further away from each other. The details seem to become less and less intelligible, as the image gets closer to stasis (see fig. 26). These fissures in the image are further explored through the slowing down of the sound, in the final edits of the film. This subjectively distorted ‘magnified’ sound appears to have the paradoxical effect of further expanding the perception of space, depth and time in a video image becoming increasingly two-dimensional. Additionally I view this contributes to the subject-object dialectic. I understand this *subject-object* dialectic as twofold: as the unity of myself with the object of time (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), and further corresponding to Flaherty’s (2010: 8) assertion: “the self becomes both subject and object, both knower and known”. *Path V* seems to merge myself the observer (knower) with the woodland environment (known).

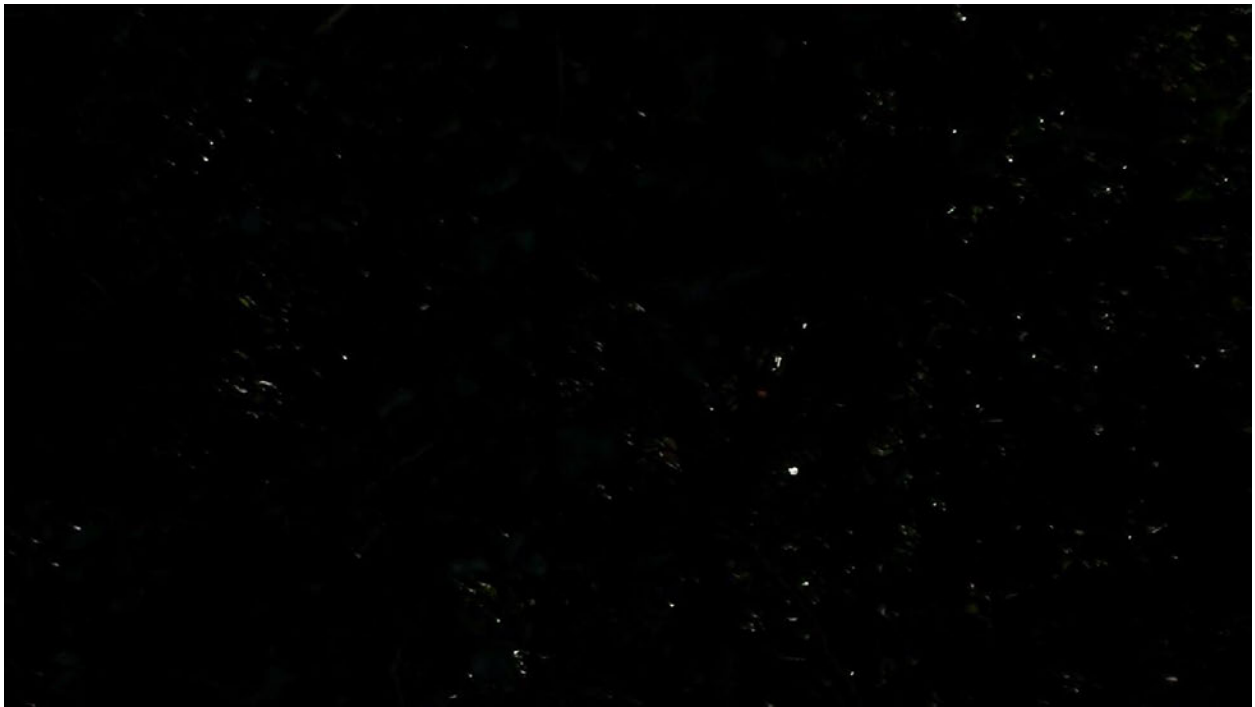


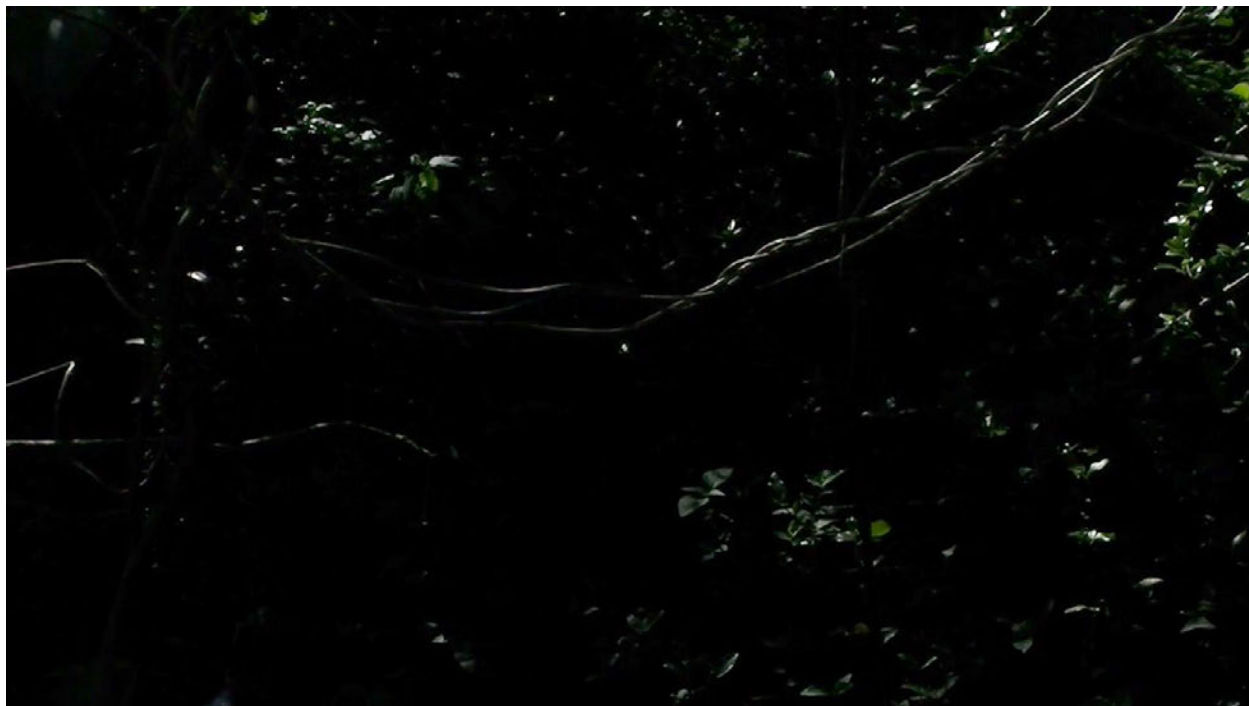
FIGURE 26: Michael Croeser, *still from Path V*, 2021. Digital video.

I reflected on *Path VIII* (2021) (fig. 5-6), that in the midafternoon I had been stalking and filming up vegetation covered slope at the woodlands edge, just beyond the red brick gateposts (personal practice journal 2022: 16). In the final edit of *Path VIII*, this gradual drift up the vine-covered embankment is fragmented by two jump-cut edits, at the twenty and thirty-second mark. These jump-cut edits seem to have the effect of shifting the film both temporally and spatially; the film steps down from the representational space of the woodlands undergrowth to a series of underexposed self-reflective images in dialectic with the former space.

This transition from an overtly representational to more abstract self-reflective video image occurs as I enter into, and attempt to stalk through the denser undergrowth. Reflecting on my central research question¹⁶, my stalking and somatic reactions to this enclosed environment seem transmuted into the particular inertia of the video image, as a reflection of my sensory perception. Gardner (1983) corroborates my experience that our perception of the world is affected by our motor activities, awareness of the position and status of our bodies controls the way we perceive the world (Kapadocha, Sellers-Young 2021: 17).

My somatic reactions, and auditory and visual experience which I believe to be stimulated by my stalking this claustrophobic passage up the hillside, are further reflected in my remodeling of the environment in the way I restricted the light entering my camera, obfuscating space, perspective and depth further. This self-consciously chosen environment, route and my resulting experience of time (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) and space reflected in the video representation, I further regard as an autobiographical video trace or *desire line* (Norman 2010: 131-132) made visible through technology.

¹⁶ In what ways does stalking inform my current filmed landscape images?



FIGURES 5-6: Michael Croeser, *stills from the film Path VIII*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/742910997>

Taking the concept of *desire lines* further, light becomes a further element in *Path VIII*. *Path VIII* remains in this inert state for its first three minutes, not moving forward in any particular direction, fixating on a few abstract details emerging from what seems like the filmic underexposure. Infinitesimal changes in my movements register in the video image as subtle agitations of the framing. At around the three minute mark of the films running time, the image seems to emerge into daylight again, as I break through the undergrowth and discover a trail of fragmented plastic, paper and metal garbage. My stalking has led into a trail of plastic, paper and aluminum detritus winding upslope, the filmed light patterns reflections off junk objects. This transition in the film to the trail of consumer detritus also marked by the muted sound, seems to shift the focus from myself (the subject) back to the woodland environment (object) (personal practice journal 2022: 16), as we now see more recognizable junk objects within the context of the woodland. This is in contrast to the first three minutes of the film described above, in which a more abstract subjective image appeared to be created through my stalking, and the camera underexposure.

In *Chapter 2*, in the section *Temporality* (Pg. 31) I noted the general decrepit state of the woodland what is its apparent effect on the perceived passage of time (personal research journal 2021: 17), further making an analogy between my temporal experience in the woodland zone and that of ‘the Zone’ in Tarkovsky’s film *Stalker* (1979) (fig. 27). The delayed temporal effect in *Path VIII*’s muted transition to the path of junk object debris, would seem analogous to Skakov’s conviction that time in *Stalker* is revealed through the decayed space of the Zone littered with manmade objects (Skakov 2012: 144-146). The delayed effect seems to result from my changing stalking movements in reaction to the environment (personal practice journal 2022: 16), as a visual translation of how the junk objects within the decaying woodland zone reflect back on myself, and my experience of time (Flaherty 2010: 8).



FIGURE 27: Andrei Tarkovsky, *still from Stalker* (1979).

Chion relates the experience of watching *Persona* (1966) without sound, where he discovered shots in a scene become a series of stills disconnected from space and time, without the original soundtrack of dripping water that connected them (Chion 1994: 4). I corroborate with Chion's insight (Chion 1994: 4), perceiving the muting of the sound (personal practice journal 2022: 16) to further affect the relationship of my films image to space and time, as the video would appear more fragmented due to the absence of the sound.

In considering how my practice is positioned within the contemporary context, Ross' discussion of Alÿs is useful. Ross cites Groys notion of 'unproductive time' in relation to the recorded walking actions of artist Francis Alÿs (Ross 2012: 65-66), and I speculate that my stalking actions might be regarded as a form of this *unproductive time*. Through analogy with Ross's assertion that time-based art's (referring to video art) main ability is to turn wasted time (unproductive time) into excessive time, as a kind of time suspended outside of chronological time in which there is no recognizable product (Ross 2012: 66-67), I view my stalking actions (with no identifiable product) are transformed from wasted time into a "suspended, non-historical time" (Ross 2012: 66-67) through video as time not simply lost to the historical narrative. In other words, by recording my ephemeral stalking actions through video, they do not simply disappear from the historical record.

When filming the footage that would become *Path IX* (2021) (fig. 28) I recorded stalking and filming a partial path at the woodlands edge, just above the overgrown boundary service road. The battery charge indication on my camera suggested a low battery; this triggered a sense of urgency in me, which appeared to be translated into my filming this section more quickly than usual (personal practice journal 2021: 12). Paradoxically this sense of urgency is not necessarily conveyed in the recorded video images which appear to play out as a languid drift over almost four minutes.



FIGURE 28: Michael Croeser, *still from Path IX*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/802175196>

In *Path IX* the lighting, framing and camera's lens combine to create an unreal sandwiching "binocular" effect, as space appears compressed in an unusual two-dimensional origami effect (personal practice journal 2022: 23). Considering how stalking influences my filmed images, the 'sandwiching' of space contributes to an experience of the compression of time. This was partially enabled by the angle of filming to the hillside terrain, which I navigated in profile. I have further exaggerated this compression with jump-cut edits, observing these to be in dialectic with my slow stalking movement. This temporal tension between edits that jump ahead in time (see fig. 29), and my stalking movement attempting to delay time, seems to contribute to a sense of unreality in the video image, as if navigating an unconscious territory outside of actual time and space perhaps akin to *deambulation* (Careri 2002: 79-83), which I began to explore in my stalking in *Path III* (pgs. 51-52). My stalking here seems more a somnambulist drift than a real-time somatic reflection (Elder 1999: 13-14), as the video seems less a reflection of my body's position and movements. Additionally the gradient of the hillside destabilising my stalking movements creates a tilted composition in the POV, enhancing a sense of weightlessness, a general disconnectedness as if I the observer are floating away from the landscape (personal practice journal 2022: 24). Furthermore I consider as the POV becomes activated, this experience of weightlessness also becomes transmitted to the viewer.



FIGURE 29: Michael Croeser, *stills from Path IX*, 2021. Digital video

In positioning my work within the contemporary interdisciplinary context, I draw a parallel with Long's (b.1945-) photographic images. *Path IX* appears disconnected from the actual environment. Ross argues that the hermetic locations in Long's photographic documentation ignore the real activity in the environments, including unexpected animal and human activity (Ross 2012: 99). In my view *Path IX*, and preceding films made in this project, similarly disregard the real activity of the environments.

Path XI's (2022) (fig. 30) pictorial space is flattened, a detached strip of vegetation floating in a void of directionless black space. The surrounding environment has been erased by underexposure, like a projected image in a dark room (personal practice journal 2022: 15). Contemplating this reflection, I am reminded of Jahangeer's photograph of an isolated botanical fragment emerging from a crack in the uniform black tarmac in the inner city of Durban (fig. 31).

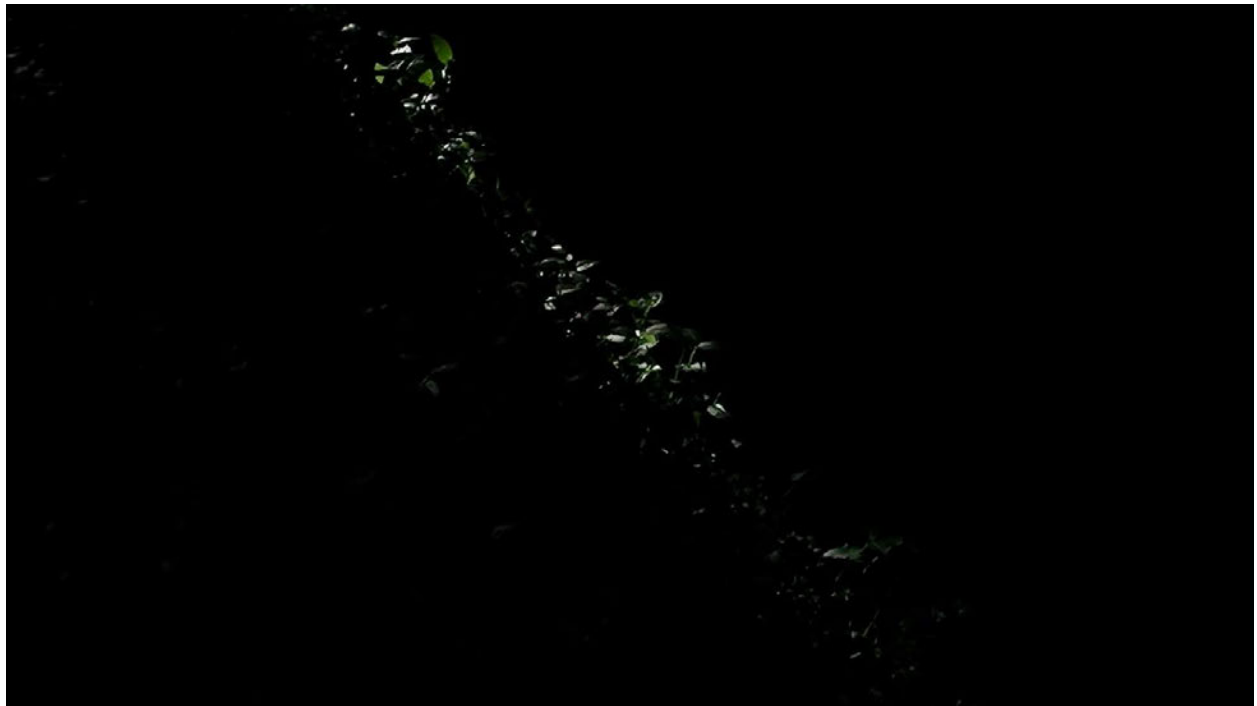


FIGURE 30: Michael Croeser, *still from Path XI*, 2022. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/804761561>



FIGURE 31: doung Anwar Jahangeer, *untitled photograph*, 2007.

Jahangeer's image (fig. 31) and my film *Path XI*, could be viewed as chance discoveries made by walking. In Young's view, perceived space engaged by walking, enables the conscious observation of things that are usually overlooked (Young 2007: 15). Both my stalking and filming methods, and Jahangeer's walking actions could be regarded as dialectic between two kinds of space. Jahangeer's photograph (fig. 31) might be viewed as symbolising a conflict between private and public space (as discussed on page 54), the minority revealing itself through the cracks, re-appropriating socially constructed space (Young 2007: 13). I view *Path XI* as an ongoing tension between inner and outer space, as discussed at length on page 44.

I further noted that this fragment of recorded time seemed a longer period, and that this temporal disruption as the expansion *or* suspension of time (personal practice journal 2022: 14-15) created by an apparent flattening of the video space, an interruption of perspective enabled by my stalking and underexposed filming technique, could again be related to the 'suspension of forwardness' in Alÿs's walking actions (Ross 2012: 75). Towards the end of *Path XI*, space, depth and perspective seem to fragment in this new ambiguous in-between space, which is macroscopic and microscopic.

Further similarities between my films and Brakhage's, viewed by Elder (1999: 14) is *Path XI's* reflection of a corporeal awareness. The effects of the environmental conditions (personal

practice journal 2022: 14) including the intermittent waning light and late afternoon air temperature which all seem to register through my senses, influencing my temporal experience and stalking movements translated through the video recording.

Examining how my stalking affects the perception of space and time, I have explored the effects of my stalking on spatial and temporal perception through analogy with related artists, literature and theory, and further how these actions become reflected in the image and sound of my path films. In the following section I further explore the somatic aspect of my stalking, particularly how my movements create an intense presence in the video image, despite my apparent absence therein.

3.4 Absence and Presence

In this section, I further investigate the following diverse aspects of stalking in my filmic practice: The somatic dimension of my stalking is explored as a self-reflection by re-introducing my stalking movements in the video footage of the film *Path VI* (2021), in relation to Elder's notion of 'the signifying body' (1999: 14) in Brakhage's filmmaking. In *Path XII* (2022) I ruminate on the idea of the film as self-reflection that mirrors both my involuntary movements, including my breathing, which becomes the film's entire soundtrack. I view my ongoing path films as creating a hyperawareness of the observer, myself behind the camera and the viewer, making an analogy with the mirroring effect of the "dyad of viewer and object" described in Chantal Akerman's (1950-2015) films (Margulies 1996: 43). I view this intense presence of myself in the film as comparable to Elder's notion of the emergence of the "subject body" in Brakhage's films (Elder 1999: 43), and consider *Path XII's* distortion of filmed space to resemble Brakhage's "flattening out of space" (Camper 2010: 44). I consider the intuitive nature of my stalking actions in relation to Akerman's filmmaking (Koresky 2010: 3), and this spontaneous process as connected to my theoretical model of *subject and object* (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) in my desire to define a certain experience of time within the film. Finally, I reflect on Alÿs suspension of forwardness (Ross 2012: 75), and this leads me to slow

down my stalking movements at the editing stage of *Path VII* (2021), as I view the final edit as a temporal experience discreet from my original recorded experience in the woodland. I explore the transitory nature of my stalking interventions in relation to Long's similarly ephemeral walking actions (Young 2007: 17-18).

Within the four-minute length of the film *Path VI* (2021) (fig. 32) there seem to be several spatial shifts, and a developing tension between myself (the subject), and the woodland (the object being filmed). The first images of *Path VI* seem an undefined filmic space beyond the woodland; this sense of a disconnected space appears reinforced by my editing of the pitch and speed of the film's sound. A sound change halfway into the film brings it back to the environment as it were. It reflects the sound of my wrestling with the foliage; my breathing also becomes evident over these sounds. As sound of my breathing, the breaking of foliage and my stalking movements translated audio visually become more pronounced, the focus seems to shift back to myself. A tension seems to grow as the screen fades to black and the sounds of my breathing and movements continue, the film appears now to be almost entirely a self-portrait (personal practice journal 2022: 31-32).

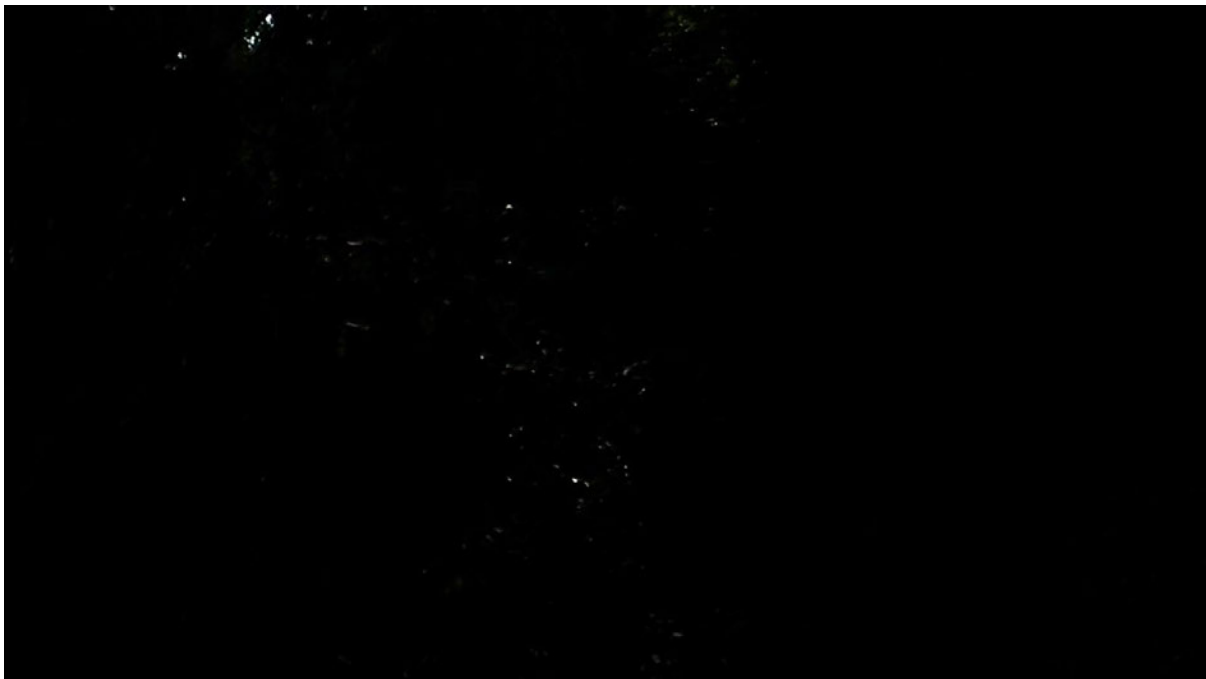


FIGURE 32: Michael Croeser, *still from Path VI*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/737095043>

Considering the above reflection (personal practice journal 2022: 31-32) in relation to my central research question, the most recent edit of *Path VI* makes no attempt to filter out stalking movements that implicate myself in the film; I have restored all my movements reflected in the image, previously cut. As outlined in the PLR methodology of my introduction (pg. 8), these kinds of last minute re-orientations are characteristic of reflecting-in-action (Gray and Malins 2004: 62).

Positioning my stalking methods within the contemporary context, I relate my methods to Brakhage's cinematography, particularly Elder's notion of the importance of 'the signifying body' in Brakhage's films (Elder 1999: 14), previously discussed in connection with the film *Path IV* on page 56. Through researching Elder's notions on Brakhage's filmmaking I have learned that my sensory perceptions, awareness of my body's position and movements, positively contribute to the subjectivity of the video image, a heightened reflection of myself, the observer (as discussed on page 66).

As mentioned in *Chapter II* in the section *Positioning my Practice* (pg. 34), I regard Richard Long's photograph *A Line Made By Walking* (1967) (fig. 8) (Ross 2012: 97) as analogous to my path films in that my films are the only lasting evidence of my stalking. Additionally a connection could be observed between my path films and Long's *A Line Made By Walking* (more marked in *Path VI* and the proceeding films) in that we are both absent yet present. Though Long himself is not physically present in the photograph, he is present through the traces of his walking preserved in the image (Ross 2012: 97), as discussed in *Chapter II* on page 34. Similarly and I am present only as the observer, felt and sensed through my stalking movements and breathing reflected or translated in the filmed image, and my editing choices. While this notion of 'absence and presence' is true to some extent of all art making in that there's always some trace of the creator, I believe it to be more explicitly expressed through the photographic image, especially the filmed image made with a moving camera where I have discovered it can reflect both its makers movements and sounds.

The effects of light, climate and general conditions of the woodland are perceived through my senses, particularly as a visual and aural stimulus, and this further influences my experience of the passage of time from moment to moment (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398). This particular psychosomatic, somatic and temporal experience is reflected in how I conceive my

images, the pace of my stalking movements and consequently the camera movements by extension as the camera moves with me translated through the resulting stream of recorded images. Furthermore my somatic experience appears to echo Elder's assertion (in relation to Brakhage's filmmaking) that perception is altered by proprioceptive¹⁷ changes, eye movements, involuntary responses to the environment, and changing light all transform what we see (Elder 1999: 14).

During initial editing of the film *Path XII* (2022) (fig. 33), I wrote that the footage was shot in an area of the woodland I had used a few weeks earlier in *Path XI*. Stalking through impenetrable undergrowth, I ask myself how this experience can contribute to the film. Jarring movements in the video image of *Path XII* caused by my stalking might deepen the notion of this film as a translation of my involuntary actions, in regard to this I have replaced the original environmental sound of the recording with a recording of only my breathing. An inversion appears to be taking place, or a complete merging of myself (the subject), and the woodland (object) being recorded (personal practice journal 2022: 25).



FIGURE 33: Michael Croeser, *still from Path XII*, 2022. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/805398601>

¹⁷ The sense of self-movement, force, and body position.

Considering the assertion above in relation to the question of how stalking informs my filmed images, my physical presence is more strongly translated in *Path XII* through more spontaneous stalking movements, and pertinently the sound of my inhalations and exhalations mirrored in the film. I perceive *Path XII* could be regarded as a culmination in the development of my path film as a somatic inquiry through stalking, this somatic aspect has been previously explored in the films *Path IV* (pgs. 54-56), *Path VI* (pgs. 71-73), *Path VIII* (pgs. 61, 63) and *Path IX* (pgs. 65-66) of this chapter. Positioning my practice, I view that my intense presence, despite my paradoxical absence in the framed space of the film, could be analogous to Elder's view of the emergence of the "subject body" in Brakhage's films, Elder hypothesizes that the subject body paradoxically emerges exactly as it becomes concealed, and becomes invisible when it is fully present (Elder 1999: 43). Based on Elder's assertion (Elder 1999: 43), I understand that Brakhage's absence from his films images as a filmed object, or an *object body*, an exception being *Dog Man Star* (1961-64) (fig. 23) where we actually see Brakhage as part of the mise-en-scene¹⁸ as a protagonist, is what enables his *subject body* to fully emerge. Despite being behind the camera, Brakhage himself seems to become merged with his images through his subjective filming choices, and his involuntary bodily movements.

Elder further describes the 'subject body' as more immediately experienced than any object, a stream of sensations stemming from rapid changes in inner experience (Elder 1999: 44). I correlate with Elder's (1999: 43-44) assertions perceiving my absence and intense physical presence in the film, is furthermore an emotional presence born out of changes in my inner experience¹⁹ in the moment, as I struggle to find a way forward.

Additionally I reflected that the forward path of my stalking seems replaced by predominantly lateral motion, produced by the tense struggle with the undergrowth, time also seemingly extended as I'm paradoxically brought closer to stasis (personal practice journal 2022: 26). Here the physiological and psychological effects of navigating this particular environment, reflected in the images of the film, seem to result in an altered temporal experience (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398). Additionally I view the trauma of this struggle (personal practice

¹⁸ The stage design and arrangement of actors in scenes for a theatre or film production

¹⁹ A person's conscious mental state, such as thoughts, feelings, sensory perceptions, imaginations, wants, actions, intentions, and memories of previous events

journal 2022: 26) could be viewed as a kind of visual Tachypsychia (Kim 2019: 1), as discussed in connection with *Path V* (pg. 59).

Writing about Brakhage's *The Machine of Eden* (1970) (fig. 34), Camper describes opening images of a loom followed by “stunningly beautiful, almost artificial landscapes. In many, a telephoto lens and rapid movement are used to flatten out the space...” (Camper 2010: 44). I perceive the predominant lateral motion of my stalking movements (personal practice journal 2022: 26) in *Path XII*, combined with the distorting effects of my video cameras particular built in lens and the underexposure of the image, all seem to contribute to flattening out of the pictorial space in a similar manner to Brakhage's film (Camper 2010: 44).



FIGURE 34: Stan Brakhage, *The Machine of Eden* (1970).

I reflected of *Path VII* (2021) (fig. 35) that the path seemed like a terminus, a last stop, as paths diverged and converged in a labyrinth of flora. Additionally I noted that my path films might be regarded as chamber²⁰ films (personal practice journal 2021: 11). This journal reflection precedes the establishing of my *subject-object* (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) theoretical framework, which would only become more consciously reflected in subsequent edits of my path films, following the feedback from a critique session in April 2022 (personal practice journal 2022: 18-19). Initially I thought of *Path VII* as an increasingly inert video image, and as an enclosed chamber (personal practice journal 2021: 11), however the context develops as I investigate notions around *subject and object* (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) more actively in relation to my stalking actions.

Seeing *Path VII* as a terminus, and considering my path films as chambers (personal practice journal 2021: 11), I consider my stalking methods within the contemporary context recalling Chantal Akerman's (1950-2015) film *Hotel Monterey* (1972) (fig. 1). Koresky observes that the viewer becomes hyperaware of their own presence within the vacant filmed spaces of the hotel, and that the film often seems like a stopping point on a path to a netherworld (a hidden or undefined place) (Koresky 2010: 3). Koresky's (2010: 3) observation has led me to the realisation that the unpeopled space of *Path VII*, and previous path films, similarly seems to make the viewer conscious of their own presence within a filmic space I have considered an undefined space, in-between my inner space and the outer space of the woodland zone (personal practice journal 2022: 31). Furthermore Margulies observes that in Akerman's films, real-time representation makes the spectator aware of their own physical presence (Margulies 1996: 52). Real-time representation in my path films would similarly appear to involve the viewer.

²⁰ An enclosed space or cavity.

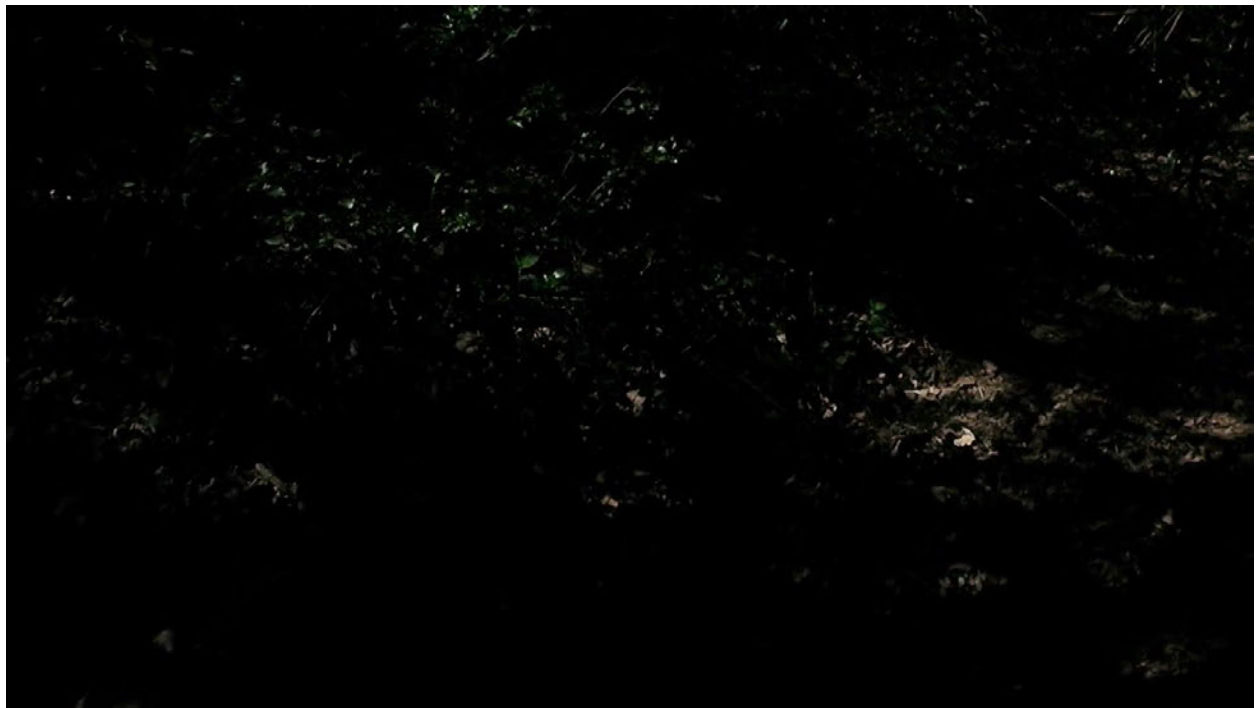


FIGURE 35: Michael Croeser, *still from Path VII*, 2021. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/741845024>

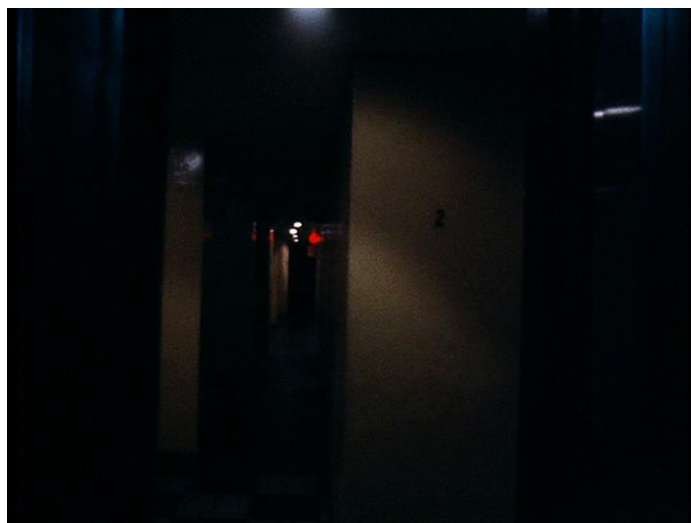


FIGURE 1: Chantal Akerman, *still from Hotel Monterey*, 1972.

As discussed previously in the section *Between Inner Space and Outer Space* (pg. 49), jump-cuts inserted in *Path VII*, *I*, *II*, and *VIII* seemed to make the films more self-conscious, contributing to a sense of my path films being the perspective of myself (the filmmaker), rather than documentaries of the actual woodland (personal practice journal 2022: 18-19). Reflecting on how stalking informs my filmed landscape images, I perceive that in *Path VII*, the jump-cut edits combined with the involuntary camera movements introduced by my stalking have the effect of triggering something similar to Margulies notion of the “dyad of viewer and object” previously explored in *Chapter II* (pg. 21). In Akerman’s *Hotel Monterey* (1972) Margulies observes that when the elevator doors open, an opposition between two kinds of space becomes apparent, the elevator and the various floors of the hotel. There is a mirroring effect, as the opening of the elevator doors makes the viewer conscious that they are the observer effectively perceiving, and creating the scene in real-time, implicating them in a relationship to the filmed object (the hotels empty corridors and rooms) (Margulies 1996: 43). I perceive this mirroring effect (Margulies 1996: 43) takes place in my film where the video image is interrupted by my stalking movements, and the viewer momentarily becomes self-conscious, as the camera point of view is activated by my stalking. In effect, I suggest that the viewer and I might thus trade places, and the viewer translates my experience as the observer. Additionally the scene in Tarkovsky’s *Stalker* (1979) (previously cited in *Chapter II*, pg. 31) where the camera is activated as an omnipresent observer through a watchful long-take as it stalks the characters (Skakov 2012: 143-144) would seem related to the above analogy.

Writing further on Akerman’s *Hotel Monterey* (1972), Koresky quotes Akerman, who states “the shots are exactly as long as I had the feeling of them inside myself” (Koresky 2010: 3). I make a connection with Akerman’s (Koresky 2010: 3) observation, not only in how I have intuitively defined the length of shots and jump-cuts in *Path VII*, but also in the way I have consciously chosen this enclosed environment for its temporal effect (Flaherty 2010: 8). Reflection on the *subject-object* model I use as a lens for my research (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) has led me to manipulate the speed of the film in editing of *Path VII*, further decelerating my stalking movements. Positioning my stalking practice, I view a continuing exploration of something like the ‘suspension of forwardness’ (Ross 2012: 75) discussed on page 54, that I had previously observed in *Path IV* in relation to Alÿs’s walking actions. My stalking movements, further slowed by digital editing, bring *Path VII* to the verge of stasis. The final extended shot of the film pans gradually to the right while seeming to move imperceptibly in reverse, as if the film

is moving backward in time. In my view, *Path VII* becomes its own discrete environment and temporal experience, beyond my initial experience in the woodland zone, as a developing self-reflective visual autobiographical translation.

This section has explored several of my path films, which explore the paradoxical notion of me being simultaneously present despite the absence of my person in the filmed landscape image. I have investigated this as a dyad of viewer and object (Margulies 1996: 43) through analogy with Akerman's film *Hotel Monterey* (1972), and viewed the ephemeral nature of my stalking actions in connection with Jahangeer and Long's actions (Young 2007: 17-18), which leave no trace in the environment. I further studied my somatic presence in the filmed image in relation to Brakhage's films, and the 'subject body' (Elder 1999: 43). In the following section *Paths as Labyrinths*, my stalking movements create what I view as immersive visual labyrinths within my films, and I view my final film *Path XIII* (2022) as a kind of symmetrical labyrinth analogous, yet in contradiction, to the practice of labyrinth walking.

3.5 Paths as Labyrinths

In this closing section, the film *Path X* (2022) explores further temporal disruption as a series of interlocking arc-like stalking movements creating a labyrinth-like video image. I view this labyrinth constructed by my stalking as a disruption of time, in which my past experience seems to permeate my present stalking activities, analogous to the notion of a labyrinth encompassing "the past and the future" (Borges 2007: 37). This immersive labyrinthine image is further investigated in relation to artist Yayoi Kusama's (b. 1929) notion of 'self-obliteration' (Applin 2012: 66). In the final film *Path XIII* (2022), I create a stalking action that is a single unbroken forward and backward movement, like a mirror reflection. I further relate *Path XIII's* unobstructed passage, and curious symmetry to that of a unicursal labyrinth (Artress 1996: 50-51).

Looking at the raw footage that would eventually make up *Path X* (2022) (fig. 36), I wrote that any real paths seem to have disappeared beneath overgrowth stimulated by the summer rainfall,

and I struggle to find a way into the woodland. The stalked path seems to continually re-invent itself. More so than previous films, the video translation of this resembles a series of interlocking arcs in opposition, a labyrinth constructed of semi-circular stalking movements (personal practice journal 2022: 13).

Meditating on the question of how stalking informs my path films, in *Path X* temporality is explored in various ways through the labyrinth-like video construction enabled by my stalking (personal practice journal 2022: 13). In my view, temporal perception is altered through a fragmentation of linear perspective analogous to Alÿs's "suspension of forwardness" (Ross 2012: 75) (previously discussed on pages 54, 69, 70 and 78) and it is further explored as a disruption of time in which my past experience, of both image making and walking these margin suburban forested areas, seems to manifest itself in my present stalking activities. Past and present experience seem to merge, translated through my stalking actions and the resulting stream of video images.

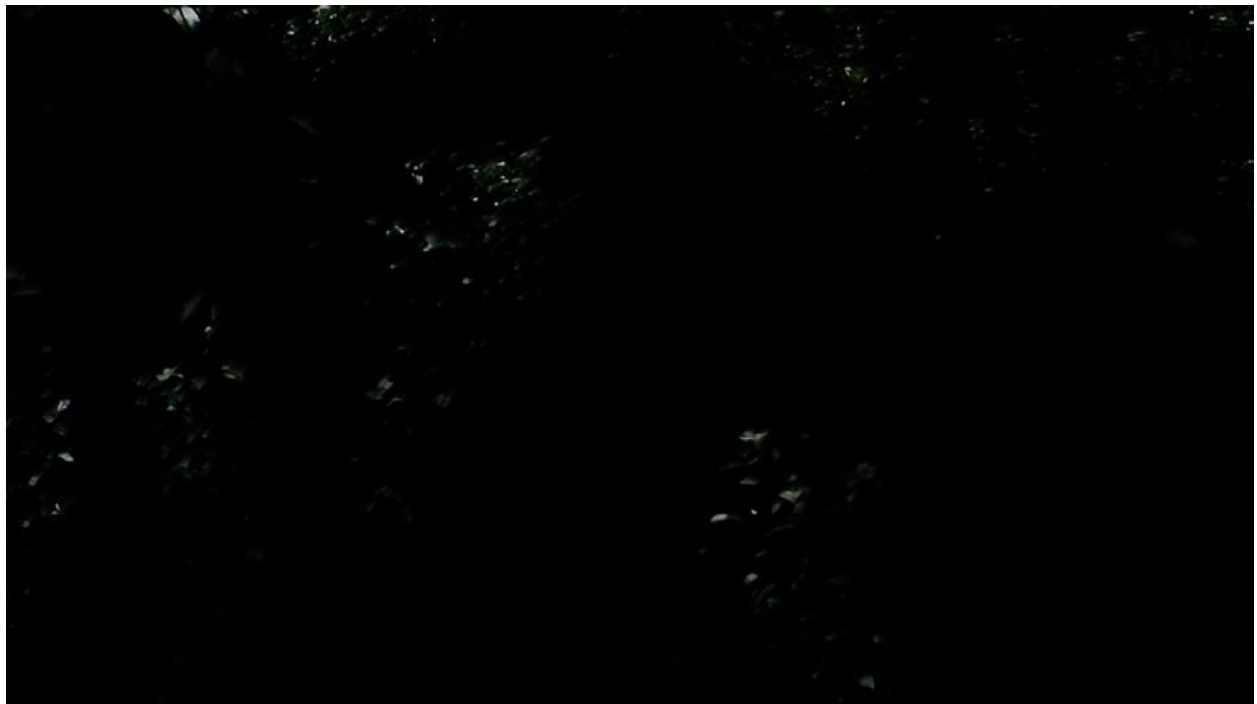


FIGURE 36: Michael Croeser, *still from Path X*, 2022. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/802176221>

In *The Garden of Forking Paths*, Borges's protagonist imagines an infinite labyrinth extending into the very land itself, composed of "rivers and provinces and kingdoms... one sinuous spreading labyrinth that would encompass the past and the future and in some way involve the stars..." (Borges 2007: 37). Drawing on Borges (2007: 37) notion, I view my path films as video labyrinths, in which past and present experiences of walking within margin suburban woodland areas seem to merge. Reflecting on the main research question, merging my experience *or* myself with the woodland environment through my path films seems moreover to have similarities with Yayoi Kusama's (b. 1929) *Infinity Mirror Series*. Describing *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field* (1965) (fig. 37), Applin states that Kusama frequently uses the phrase 'self-obliteration' in writing and public statements about her work, alluding to a state of bliss experienced in the moment of feeling lost in ones surroundings, a moment of unity in which one blends with other bodies and the surrounding environment (Applin 2012: 66). Analogous to Kusama's mirror *or* obliteration rooms, I perceive my path films as mirrors in which I become obliterated, being simultaneously present yet absent in the films.

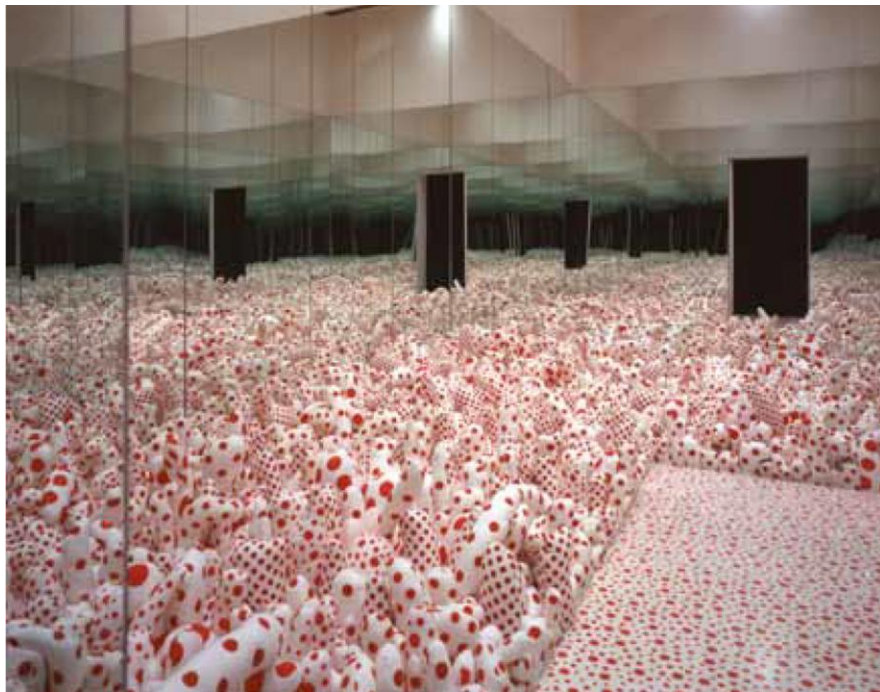


FIGURE 37: Yayoi Kusama, *Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli's Field* (1965).

My past experience defining my stalking movements in the moment seems an interpretation of subject-object unity (Flaherty 2010: 8, Barnyard 2017, 2018: 398), as my experience influences my unfolding temporal experience through the somatic process of my stalking. I further relate this process, which I perceive as largely intuitive, to Elders notion of corporeal awareness defining Brakhage's camera movement, informed by a deeper psychological insight (Elder 1999: 14).

Considering how stalking informs my filmed images, the final edit of *Path X*, constructed from two video takes, is further cut up into a series of fragmented jump-cut edits. These edits seem to translate the experience of disorientation within what I perceive to be a filmic labyrinth, made up of intersecting video takes, even more intensely. Further these stalking movements appear to flatten out in a linear trajectory as I drift towards stasis, as I meditate on a landscape composition forming in the viewfinder (personal practice journal 2022: 13), and over this floating composed landscape image (see fig. 38) which begins to materialize about two minutes and nine seconds into the film, a low rumbling sound gradually emerges in the sound field seeming to correspond to an increasing destabilization of the video image. At approximately the three minutes and thirty three seconds, there is a sudden jarring movement in the frame as the image is shaken haphazardly, laterally and vertically. This trailing section of the same-recorded take, initially edited out, was recorded inadvertently; here I'm not looking through the viewfinder, the camera is in my trailing hand recording my involuntary movements, as I anxiously struggle in a dense section of undergrowth (personal practice journal 2022: 13). This accidentally recorded footage appears to lead to new somatic insights in reflecting myself in the image through bodily movement. This has been explored in greater detail in the film *Path XII* (2022), in the section *Absence and Presence* on (pgs. 73-74) of this chapter.

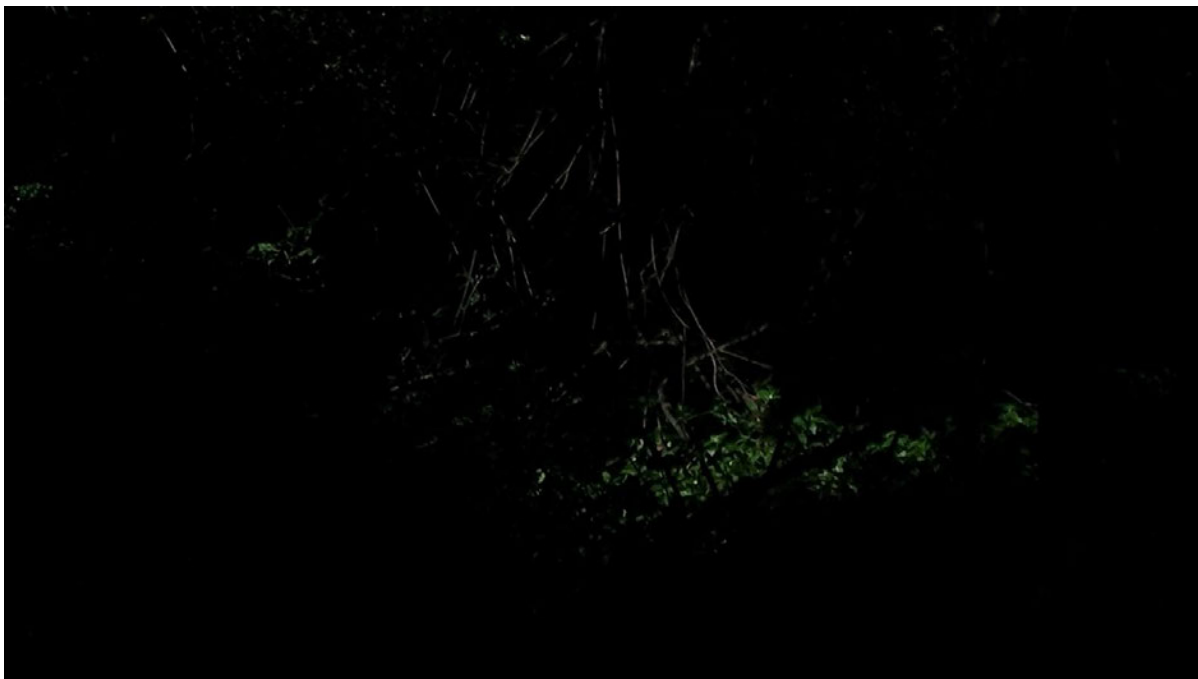


FIGURE 38: Michael Croeser, *still from Path X*, 2022. Digital video.

In *Path XIII* (2022) (fig. 39), I noted one continuous stalking movement, forward and backward, a stalking action as if reflected in a mirror (personal practice journal 2022: 27). In the underexposed images of *Path XIII*, reduced to nebulae like points of light (see fig. 40), I see echoes of the cosmic spiraling images of *Path VI* (2021) (fig. 32). Unlike *Path VI*'s unstable image made by bodily movement and jump-cuts that further fragment the image, *Path XIII* seems a continuous unbroken stalking drift. This potent sense of a disembodied drift in *Path XIII* appears simultaneously a regression to an earlier conception of stalking, as in *Path I* (2021) (fig. 10), and perhaps also a further refinement. Despite the absence of my movements reflected in the image, I observe *Path XIII* to be further removed from the environment than *Path XII*, *XI*, *X* and *IX*, in that that at no point can the woodland floor been seen (fig. 39). This further refinement and abstraction of the image through underexposure, added to the virtual absence of bodily movement seems to make *Path XIII* less grounded, as if I'm navigating a space whose dimensions are wholly obscured, or infinite. Additionally the underexposed video images produced through my stalking seem to have little in common with actual area of the woodland where it was shot (see fig. 41). The above observations explore the question of how stalking informs my filmed landscapes.



FIGURE 39: Michael Croeser, *still from Path XIII*, 2022. Digital video. <https://vimeo.com/807776995>



FIGURE 40: Michael Croeser, *still from Path XIII*, 2022. Digital video.



FIGURE 41: Michael Croeser, area of *the woodland zone where Path XIII* was filmed, 2022.

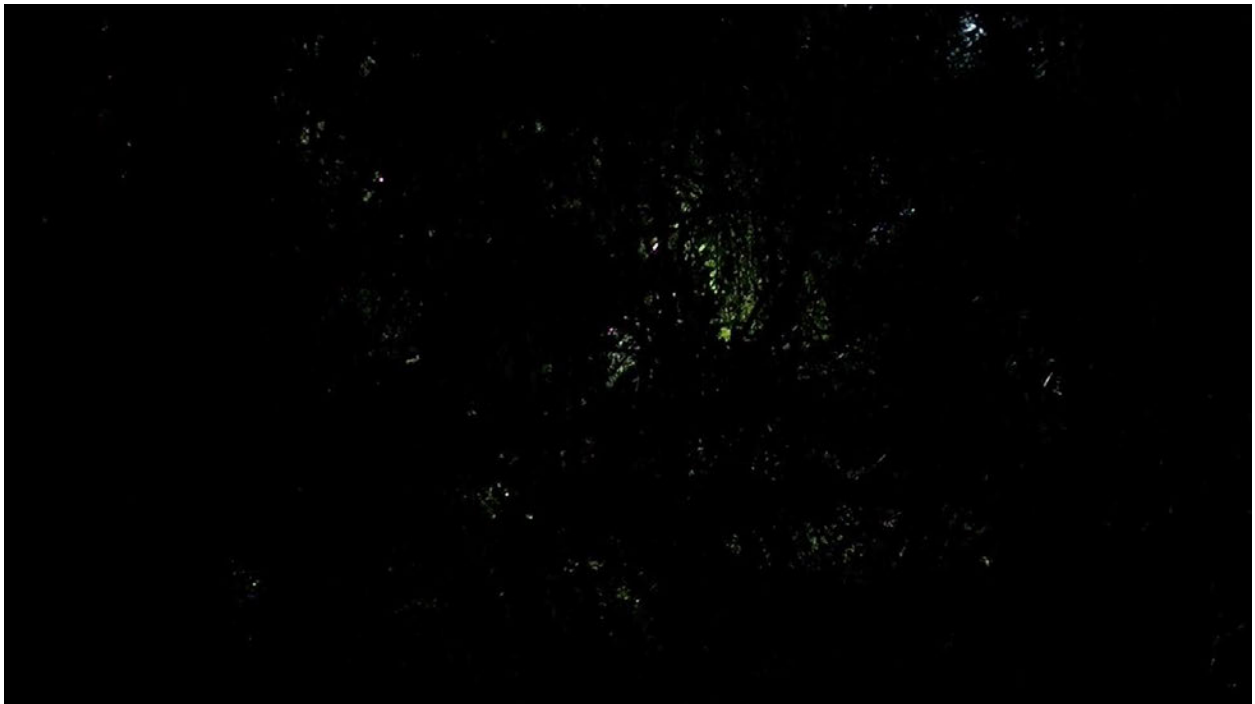


FIGURE 42: Michael Croeser, *still from Path XIII*, 2022. Digital video.

The forward and backward stalking trajectory in *Path XIII* was recorded several times, as my existing camera files indicate. Considering Flaherty's (2010: 8) subject-object relationship, I have retraced the path until I felt my temporal experience was faithfully reflected in the video recording. In the final recorded video take, the vague sense of perspective established in the opening moments seems to flatten out progressively towards the centre of the film, corresponding to the pace of my stalking. At this central point of the film the video image appears to reflect a complete suspension of forward motion. This suspended video sequence at the heart of *Path XIII*, which begins at approximately the three-minute mark and ends about sixth minutes into the film (see fig. 42) becomes an almost two-dimensional image, a strange temporal loop seeming to rotate in a fixed position. In light of my question of how my stalking methods could be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary visual art context, once again I observe in this suspension of forward motion to virtual stasis, and the flattening out of space, a relationship to Alÿs's interruptions of perspective through his walking actions (Ross 2012: 75). As I begin to stalk backward retracing the same path, perspective and depth seem to return in increments, together with a quickening sense of the passage of time.

I wrote while editing that slowing down of the footage in the editing seems to imbue the image with greater ambiguity; details drift apart as the image slides into oblivion (personal practice journal 2022: 27) (see fig. 43). While the video image of *Path XIII* might be fragmented and ambiguous, my forward and backward trajectory along the same path would appear fairly unambiguous. Perhaps this passage translated in *Path XIII*, reflects something further about my unconscious motivations. This particular path seems to reflect a desire for a kind of symmetry, as in the path of a unicursal labyrinth.



FIGURE 43: Michael Croeser, *still from Path XIII*, 2022. Digital video.

As discussed above this symmetrical path inward and outward bears some resemblance to the path of a unicursal labyrinth. Artress describes the path of a unicursal labyrinth as an unambiguous path leading to the centre of the labyrinth, and back along the same route, with no tricks, intersecting paths or dead ends (Artress 1996: 50-51). Additionally the unambiguous forward and backward trajectory of *Path XIII*, has an unintended connection with the spiritual practice of labyrinth walking (Artress 1996). Artress describes the essence of labyrinth walking: “The labyrinth does not engage our thinking minds. It invites our intuitive, pattern seeking, symbolic mind to come forth. It presents us with only one, but profound, choice. To enter a labyrinth is to choose to walk a spiritual path” (Artress 1996: 51-52). Although in contradiction to Artress’s (1996: 51-52) notion, the self-conscious nature of my stalking based practice-led research, which could be viewed as intensely focused on my ego, may have little or no spiritual intent. Artress asserts that she has witnessed people using the labyrinth to explore their ego, losing the spiritual essence, the practice of labyrinth walking then becoming entirely self-serving (Artress 1996: xiii).

Closing this chapter with *Paths as Labyrinths*, I have explored my paths films as creating labyrinth like temporal and spatial disruptions, in which my past experience seems to influence these constructions made by stalking, further analogous to Borges (2007: 37) notion of a labyrinth encompassing multiple temporal dimensions. I have also explored how this labyrinth enables a kind of ‘self-obliteration’ (Applin 2012: 66), similar in aspects to the effects of Kusama’s obliteration rooms. In my final film *Path XIII* I created a symmetrical mirror like stalking action which further explored the disintegration of pictorial space, and the suspension of time, additionally viewing the film as analogous to a labyrinth walk (Artress 1996: 50-51), but only in certain aspects.

3.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored my stalking practice through my path films viewed as visual autobiographical translations. My research questions, and the model of *subject-object* (Flaherty 2010: 8, Barnyard 2017, 2018: 398) have acted as lenses to focus this research. The form of these films is guided by an emergent methodology (Barrett and Bolt 2007: 6) and the idea of reflecting-in-action (Schön 1983: 308–309, Gray and Malins 2004: 62). I understand reflecting-in-action an immediate process involving constant journaling, further research within my body of literature including references to the artists I have used to position my practice, and ongoing adjustments to the films and/or making new video recordings in the woodland zone in response to journaling and research.

Through the four sections of this chapter, using my path films as data, I have explored these visual translations of my stalking actions variously as a somnambulist-like drifting between inner and outer space, and realized how my stalking actions affect the perception of space and time. I have investigated how stalking movement reflected in the video image seems to positively contribute to the notion of my path films as autobiographical reflections, being simultaneously absent yet very much present in the filmed image, and how this awareness of myself as being inextricably part of the films as the observer also becomes the position of the viewer. Furthermore I have viewed my stalking actions as creating filmic labyrinths out of the woodland environment, video labyrinths into which I am subsumed. In the conclusion chapter of this dissertation I summarise the key findings of this study, also looking into its limitations, and close by venturing broader interconnected areas for future research projects.

Chapter 4:

Conclusion

4.1 Introduction

At the outset, this study aimed to explore the effect of my *stalking* on filmed landscapes, recorded simultaneously with a hand-held camera. In the introduction to this dissertation I presented my objectives as primarily to investigate in what ways stalking informs my current filmed landscape images; and secondly to explore how my stalking methods could be positioned within the contemporary interdisciplinary visual art context.

This dissertation is comprised of four chapters. Chapter one outlines this study's setting, the problem statement, research questions and research methods. Chapter two considers the body of literature and theoretical framework that support this research project, additionally positioning my artistic practice. Chapter three focuses on my practice-led research and the application of the research methodology; the development of my body of path films made through stalking, in relation to my research questions, theoretical framework, literature and the four artists I have chosen to position my practice. In this concluding chapter I reflect on the findings of this study in relation my questions and research aims. In addition this chapter acts as a summary and synthesis of this study's key contributions toward a particular understanding of landscape images created using walking as an artistic practice, or rather the suspended walking-like movements I term stalking, instantaneously filmed and translated as *Paths*. Additionally in this chapter I consider the broader implications of this research project, and its challenges; furthermore I touch on possible paradigms for future research. Accompanying this research paper is a video installation of my path films, which form the practical component of this Master's Degree in Fine Art, and the basis of my practice-led research.

4.2 Aims and Outcomes of this Research Project

Through this research project I have investigated how *stalking* influences my filmed landscapes. This has been explored through the making of thirteen films, titled *Path I* to *Path XIII*, films of my actions performed and recorded within the margin area of my suburb I call the woodland zone. This research has regarded these ‘path’ films as visual translations of autobiographical texts made by stalking, ephemeral traces that only continue to exist only in the films themselves. It is my contention that despite the disappearance of my stalking’s path in the woodland, the path continues to exist in the film as a self-reflection. I believe that this virtual video path, projected on a scale of life size, is retraced and reinvented by the viewer, by proxy, through the POV activated by my stalking movements.

Using a research methodology which draws on the notions of Gray & Malins (2004: 1), my stalking practice has defined questions that have been further explored through research, and additionally in line with Gray and Malins notion of “reflecting-in-action” (2004: 62) through reflecting on the dyad of my stalking and video recording practice, I have made further journal entries which have shaped the editing of the films, and additionally informed the ongoing research within my body of literature and theory, which in turn have fed back into new stalking and video recording actions in the woodland zone. As stated in my problem statement in the introduction (pg. 5), an important component of this “reflecting-in-action” (2004: 62) process is my chosen theory framework of *subject and object* (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398) which guides this research continuously, which involves self-conscious choosing of the conditions under which I film, whose further aim is to define an idiosyncratic experience of time which is translated through my path films.

4.3 Stalking and Its Effect on the Filmed Landscape Image

There have been a number of important shifts in my thinking around my stalking practice that have emerged during the process of this practice-led research; these are reconsidered below in the paragraphs that follow.

I have explored the woodland zone as a kind of ‘in-between’ space (Young 2007: 13) through analogy with Jahangeer’s notion of in-between, and further postulated my films as a space of in-between located between my inner space and outer space. Analogous to Benjamin (1979: 49-50) I perceived my stalking and filming of the landscape as a form of translation, through which I aimed to reveal aspects of my inner self. Additionally through Tilley (1997: 29-30) I have perceived my path films as texts inscribed by my stalking, and as a kind of visual autobiography, as a printing of myself on the video image through the way I manipulate it (personal practice journal 2021: 3); further in correlation with Chion (1995, 1996: 186) I have observed the darkness in my underexposed video image as enabling a convergence of inner and outer space. Through my interpretation of Benjamin (2019: 188) I have explored this degraded video image as a kind of ruin in which my experience is present in the setting. Corresponding to Careri (2002: 79-80) I have also understood my stalking as an automatic writing which becomes a “territory of the mind”. I have interpreted my stalking actions as coloured by consciousness of my past experience in similar environments (personal research journal 2021: 10), also similar to Tilley’s writings (1997: 28), I viewed this past experience as acted out in the setting as a kind of ‘spatial story’, as a further manifestation of a tension between inner and outer space. Through Young’s (2007: 16) contrasting of the difference in approach between Jahangeer’s and Long’s practice, I have observed my solitary, self-reflective stalking actions as perhaps closer in spirit to Long’s solo walking interventions. Moreover I have likened the woodland zone to a ‘suburban non-place’ (Coverly 2012: 25-26) in psychogeographic fiction, comparing my solitary actions and the woodland zones situation to characters experiences within isolated environments in Ballard’s fiction (Coverly 2012: 118).

I have perceived a non-linear stalking, shifting trajectory constantly, to contribute to a disruption of perspective and result in a suspension of time, through analogy with Francis Alÿs’s walking actions (Ross 2012: 75) and Flaherty (2010: 8). This disruption has furthermore built on the obfuscation of depth and perspective through “close-to-the-subject” (the environment’s flora)

filming and stalking methods I had begun to explore in prior path films. In bodily movements reflected in the video image, I began to interpret a new somatic aspect in relation to Elder's 'signifying body' (1999: 13), and Brahmage's film *Dog Man Star* (1961-64) (fig. 23). I made a connection with Finch's interpretation of 'desire lines' (2006: 2), in that getting lost in the undergrowth could have been motivated by discovering an unanticipated virtual space, in the form of the film's distorted translation of my stalking in the landscape. I equated a distorted video image (fig. 24), a translation of my stalking experience, with a visual hallucination resembling an *Illusory Palinopsia*, a recurring image persisting long after the stimulus has been removed (Bender, Feldman, Sobin 1968: 321-38). I explored this disintegrating image as a temporal experience resembling Tachypsychia (personal practice journal 2022: 33), further perceiving 'gaps of silence' (Kim 2019: 1) in the video image and sound like Basinski's music. Additionally I considered this 'magnified' sound to expand space, depth and time despite the image paradoxically becoming increasingly two-dimensional. I regarded the film as a unity of myself with the experience of time (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398), and a merging of myself with the woodland environment.

Stalking up a hillside at the woodlands perimeter (personal practice journal 2022: 16) I created a series of underexposed subjective visual abstractions -self-reflective video images- which based on Gardner's (1983) notion, I believed were influenced by my stalking movements and awareness of somatic activity (Kapadocha, Sellers-Young 2021: 17) in reaction to a particular claustrophobic environment. The closing half of the film shifted back to the open, as I filmed a trail of detritus winding through the decayed surroundings (personal practice journal 2022: 16). Through an analogy with the deteriorated space of 'the Zone' in the film *Stalker* (1979) (Skakov 2012: 144-146) I perceived a spatial-temporal relationship in the film created by my stalking actions reflecting the experience of this landscape (personal practice journal 2022: 16, 17), and further by the muting of the film's sound. Drawing on Chion's observation (1994: 4) the muting of the sound seemed to further disturb the video images relationship to space and time. Viewed in relation to Alÿs's documented walking actions (Ross 2012: 65-67), I have regarded my stalking actions as a form of 'unproductive time', with no identifiable product, yet converted into 'excessive time' by video documentation, and reached the realisation that by recording my stalking it no longer simply disappears from the historical record. Furthermore, in light of Norman's (2010: 131-132) position, I regarded this video trace made visible by recording technology as another kind of *desire line*.

I have explored stalking as contributing to a telescoping of filmic space (personal practice journal 2022: 23), and a compression of time further exaggerated by jump-cut edits, that leapt ahead in time. These edits appeared in tension with my stalking movements, which seemed to suspend forwardness. Added to this sense of unreality was a sense of floating away from the landscape, as my stalking and filming to the incline began to tilt the image composition (personal practice journal 2022: 24). Again considering Careri's (2002: 79-83) view I regarded this cumulative disconnectedness to the manifesting of an unconscious territory through stalking, and additionally by analogy with Long (Ross 2012: 99) this disconnectedness seemed to extend to the films disregard for the actual human and animal activity in the environment. In *Path XI* (2022) (fig. 30) I likened the strip of vegetation illuminated by a ray of light (personal practice journal 2022: 14-15) to Jahangeer's photo of a botanical fragment emerging from a crack in the tarmac (fig. 30). Referencing Young (2007: 15) I believed both my path films and Jahangeer's image (fig. 30) to be chance discoveries made by walking. Additionally I observed both my stalking actions and Jahangeer's interventions as mutually dialectic between two kinds of space; Jahangeer's a conflict between individual and socially constructed space (Young 2007: 13), and my stalking a tension between inner and outer space (personal practice journal 2022: 31-32).

Path VI (2021) (fig. 32) explored a deeper somatic reflection, as the film seemed to echo a greater consciousness of my bodily movements, and the video became steadily distanced from the actual environment (personal practice journal 2022: 31-32). Interpreting Elder's idea of the 'signifying body' (1999: 14), being conscious of my body's position, its movements and responses to the environment, and changing light all seemed to affect how I saw and filmed. Reflecting on Young's (2007: 15-18) view I regarded my stalking actions and Long's walking activities, preserved only in the image, as equally ephemeral. Furthermore based on Ross's (2012: 97) observation, I considered both Long's photograph, and my path films contain a marked bodily presence despite our absence. Regarding my path films as enclosed chambers (personal practice journal 2021: 11), I made a correlation with Akerman's *Hotel Monterey* (1972) (fig. 1) in which the viewer becomes self-conscious within the vacant spaces, and hypothesized the unpeopled spaces of my films to have a similar effect on the viewer (personal practice journal 2022: 31). Additionally I perceived that jump-cut edits and my stalking movements interrupting the image might be like the trigger in Akerman's film, which sets up a "dyad of viewer and object" (Margulies 1996: 43). Building on the mirroring effect Margulies (1996: 43) described, my film seemed similarly implicate the viewer by these movements

triggering a real-time experience. I correlated Akerman's assertion that her shots were as long as she felt them inside herself (Koresky 2010: 3) with how I defined the length of the shots in my film, additionally in relation to the "experience of time" (Flaherty 2010: 8) I had selected through the circumstances under which I had chosen to film.

Stalking explored somatically appeared to culminate in the film *Path XII* (2022) (fig. 33), as my bodily movements, and breathing seemed mirrored in real-time (personal practice journal 2022: 25). Considering the "subject body" posited in Brakhage's films by Elder (1999: 43), I believed my presence was more intensely felt in the video precisely because of my absence. Additionally echoing Elder (1999: 44) I perceived this presence in my film as a potent psychological one, projected from changes in inner experience. Comparable to Brakhage (Camper 2010: 44), the predominant lateral motion of my stalking combined with the underexposure and distortion produced by my camera's lens, seemed to create an artificial flattened out filmic space. Furthermore I viewed this lateral stalking motion (personal practice journal 2022: 26), and its physiological and psychological effects as contributing to an altered experience of time (Flaherty 2010: 8, Bunyard 2017, 2018: 398).

Further investigating my stalking actions in the woodland zone as a labyrinth, I created a path film that translated my stalking as a maze constructed from arch-like stalking movements (personal practice journal 2022: 13). I viewed this stalking as contributing further to a "suspension of forwardness" (Ross 2012: 75) in the mode of Alÿs' actions, additionally observing this as a disturbance where my past experience in these areas seemed to influence my present actions. This merging of past and present experiences in what seemed to be a video labyrinth was further likened to Borges (2007: 37) sinuous labyrinth that merged multiple dimensions of landscape, time and space. Furthermore I understood this merging of myself with the woodland environment in my films as a form of 'self-obliteration' analogous to Kusama's (Applin 2012: 66) mirrored 'obliteration rooms', viewing my path films as a kind of obliterating mirror, simultaneously absent yet present in them. In the final film in this research project, *Path XIII* (2022) (fig. 39), I perceived my stalking as a mirror reflection, a continuous back-and-forth movement along the same trajectory (personal practice journal 2022: 27). I viewed it as an unbroken disembodied drift. Both a regression to early path film experiments in this sense of drifting, and a development in that the absence of any visible woodland ground or bodily movement in the film seemed to obscure its dimensions even further. At the midpoint of the film,

almost like the center of a labyrinth from which I would return backward and outward, I noted that further in relation to Alÿs actions (Ross 2012: 75) my stalking movements appeared to produce an uncanny flattening out of the video image which persisted as a kind of temporal loop until I retraced the path backward again. A sense of time, perspective and depth seemed to return as my movements resumed. Furthermore the symmetrical forward and backward trajectory from the center of *Path XIII* resembled a unicursal labyrinth walk (Artress 1996: 50-51), although the purpose of my stalked path appeared entirely different, in that it was intensely focused on myself with perhaps little or no spiritual intent.

4.4 Challenges Faced During the Course of this Research

A number of challenges were faced during the course of this project, some of them remain unresolved mainly due to technical resources, and I hope to overcome these in future research projects with better funding. As mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation (pg. 12), accessing the woodland zone was possible at any stage despite the pandemic lockdown restrictions. The woodland zone however was in a perpetually volatile state. As a largely deserted and ignored, unmaintained tract of semi-wilderness, it changed rapidly in appearance from month to month. The landscape could undergo rapid changes due to catastrophic illegal dumping, which also contributed to fires. The seasonal and unpredictable growth of the woodland also contributed to this constantly changing appearance. It changed significantly in appearance during the winter as it died back. In the summer rainfall months it became so overgrown that it was unrecognizable and virtually impenetrable by walking or any other method. This was all challenging given that the body of films, with a tightly defined aesthetic, was made over a period of almost two years. Basically nothing could be re-shot, as the landscape would change so significantly even in two weeks. I did not see any of this as a drawback however, as the circumstances ended up promoting a spontaneous filming methodology, namely my stalking methods that I believe -in line with the research aims- only benefitted the films themselves.

Other significant challenges had to do with the digital equipment at my disposal for recording, creation and presentation of the films, which alone represented the entire body of work. As these films were created entirely digitally, which had its own cost and time saving advantages, I was entirely dependent on what I could budget for with the funding available. My camera (a cheap Panasonic camcorder), although limited, I felt captured the subject well. The sound recordings recorded on location with the same camera were unfortunately, less than optimal, compressed mp3 format. This went largely unnoticed due to additional manipulation of these field recordings, which suited the subject of the research fine as it was about subjective obfuscation and distancing rather than objective clarity, however uncompressed lossless audio recorded separately with a standalone digital recorder would have been far better as base material. I hope to budget for such equipment in the future. A further issue was the presentation of the films. I tested them on small screens before an audience, and they simply lacked the impact. The general consensus pointed towards presenting them life-size on projectors with immersive sound, as the viewer became properly engaged with the experience at 1:1 scale. In the end, the LCD projectors I have obtained partly achieve this result. However, the black levels which play a fairly important part in the image, were not as saturated as they could have been with more expensive LED projectors, which again I hope to obtain for future installations. The films posted at www.vimeo.com/michaelcroeser show them as they were intended to be presented, if viewed on a good quality screen.

4.5 Conclusion

In closing, although this project may not have produced many conclusive findings, stemming perhaps from the ephemeral nature of the films themselves, I believe the methodology I have developed may be useful to other researchers employing walking and filming. It is my conviction that the final path films demonstrate how these methods have transformed my own landscape filmmaking practice.

Recording using this stalking video method has enabled an entirely different kind of landscape image, one that also seems a more potent self-reflection. This stalked video image also appears to be developing towards what might be construed as a visual labyrinth of some kind. In my practice I have observed an evolution from a film as a clear forward trajectory, in which the woodland zone could still be recognised, to be a meandering, and confounding abstract filmic image simultaneously becoming increasingly claustrophobic. It is claustrophobic also in the sense that the distance between myself and the film also seems to be diminishing, as I seem to be merging with it. Future research questions for me might therefore consider how these landscape films, within this woodland zone, might be interpreted as labyrinths.

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