CONTINGENT MEANINGS:
Reframing Appropriation in Contemporary Video Installation

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Abstract

This thesis, which comprises this dissertation together with accompanying creative work, addresses the implications of video and installation on the framing of contemporary appropriation-based artistic practices. This framework utilises a central concept of contingency that is distinguished from discourses of chance in order to focus on questions of meaning and the creative potential of ambiguity. My approach repositions appropriation practice away from gestures of critique and towards more nuanced strategies that extend ambiguity into practicable artistic methods. Accordingly, contingency is positioned as a network of potential from which meaning forms precarious alignments and is accelerated through contemporary conditions of digital exchange. This research identifies instances of contingency in existing video material and further accelerates this contingency through appropriation, reconfiguration and recombination. Digital video offers a vast range of material and potential configurations, presenting the contemporary practitioner with ever-increasing creative opportunities, coupled with increasing pressures of choice and gesture. The contemporary ubiquity of copying and appropriation in digital practice alters the role of these cultural strategies, detracting from their implied gestural quality and positioning the appropriation in a framework of increasingly ambiguous meaning. My approach to this contemporary condition involves positioning my own appropriation practice towards strategies that acknowledge and embrace an inherent uncertainty, and away from previous models that emphasise the importance of criticism and reference. Following this cultural positioning, contingency is presented as the potential for meaning to emerge from situations of uncertainty and the potential of unforeseen occurrences.

Within the construction of video works, my strategies of obscuring and removal of reference reduces the emphasis on the act of appropriation itself, instead emphasising the contingencies of assemblage and arrangement. I argue that digital video is an expansive network of media relationships and contingencies of circulation and exchange. Accelerating these processes produces new video works that combine pre-existing video and shape an elusive intentionality and loose association of material. The ambiguities and uncertainties of this contingency approach are given a stable expression through the installation, which differentiates my video assemblages from
the flux of their emergence through contemporary circulation. I argue that the experiential capacity of the installation then provides the conditions for meaning to be generated in the context of its encounter. While this establishes the creative potential and relevance of contingency, I also argue that contingency can present potential risks and inherent difficulties of differentiating ambiguity from meaninglessness. My approach balances these conditions through rigorous and reflexive engagement with the materiality of digital video and its installation in which contingency can emerge as meaning.

Video documentation of examined exhibition Decomposing Contingencies (2017) is available at https://vimeo.com/230541522 and available as video file.
Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated

ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used

iii. this thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

Signature:

Nicholas Hertzog, August, 2017
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Introduction

My thesis expands on the concept of contingency as a contemporary framework of appropriation for video installation. Contingency is a concept utilised by a range of fields and discourses, generally relating to the concept of chance and possibility. The contention of my thesis is that an extended study of contingency in relation to video and its display provides a constructive approach to meaning for the practitioner of contemporary appropriation. My thesis mobilises implications of potentiality towards the development of new meanings in appropriation practice through sustained ambiguity. This understanding of contingency is then used to consider contemporary implications of appropriation for the digital video practitioner, and distinguish my approach from previous artistic strategies and theoretical frameworks. Ambiguity provides a distance from other modes of appropriation that utilise methods of reference and critique to illustrate a creative position. I argue that the inherent ambiguity of contingency therefore becomes increasingly relevant in the current cultural setting of contemporaneity. This research is significant because it mobilises the cultural shifts of digital image culture towards questions of artistic meaning. As ambiguity eclipses cultural certainties, my research argues that art practice must find ways of actively navigating the inherent uncertainties of meaning that are accelerated in contemporary culture. My approach resists the rigidity of previous dominant critical structures that restrict meaning to the reception of the audience and analysis of the critic. Contingency therefore demonstrates the possibility for the interrogation of meaning to be an active tool for the practitioner, however ambiguous. Contemporary modes of distribution and circulation create a range of unique opportunities for appropriation, while threatening to overload the practitioner with a vastness of choice and the anxiety of cultural gestures in an ever-accelerating flux. In this condition, contingency offers a means to reformulate contemporary appropriation according to overwhelming ambiguities and determine what meaningful approaches this enables.

My definition of contingency synthesises the discourses of philosopher Richard Rorty and cinematic theorist Mary Ann Doane, to create a relevant application for contemporary art. Rorty extends linguistic arguments into a philosophy of meaning, while Doane charts the role of contingency in early modernity and its technologies of
representation. By synthesising these approaches, I can meaningfully expand Rorty’s arguments from philosophy while Doane’s analysis can be configured towards more contemporary situations of digital video. While other definitions of contingency emerge from the social theory of figures such as Talcott Parsons and the communication theory of Niklas Luhmann, these definitions focus on a social interaction that remains outside the scope of my research on a specific consideration of artistic meaning. Contingency also emerges in the discourse of incidental infrastructure in photography’s apparatus, however, my own considerations on the photographic and filmic will be limited to Doane’s positioning. My research also avoids a lengthy engagement with artistic theories of chance-based art modelled on the trajectories of the Surrealists and Dadaists to performance and Happenings of Fluxus artists. Rather, I will argue that while my practices involve a rejection of predetermined outcomes, I approached this through a focus on ambiguity and the contingency of meaning, rather than an emphasis on chance and the targeted de-emphasising of personal agency. To examine this consideration of agency in art history, I utilise Martha Buskirk’s account of contingency as it relates to a shifting art agency and dematerialised art object that contributes to the prominence of appropriation in late modern art.

This dissertation distinguishes my approach from the previous models of appropriation, while drawing links and associations to the creative practices that contribute to my approach. Using definitions and positions of art theorists Douglas Crimp and Benjamin Buchloh, I will articulate an earlier model of appropriation that heavily emphasises the act of appropriation and use of reference. My own practice develops approaches that eschew this model in favour of a more ambiguous approach to appropriated material and a general disregard for the primacy of reference. This investigation into artistic precedents and association relies on my analysis of digital

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4 Susan Laxton summarises the problematic use of contingency in previous photographic discourses such as Roland Barthes in her article “As Photography: Mechanicity, Contingency and Other-Determination in Gerhard Richter’s Overpainted Snapshots”, in Critical Inquiry, Summer, 2012, Vol. 38 Issue 4, P. 789
video and the particular qualities of its materiality and media networks. Rather than exhaustively examine the history of video technology and video art, my approach distinctly identifies the practices of Doug Aitken, Mike Kelley, Soda_Jerk and Thomas Ruff. These artists demonstrate a tone of appropriation that develops a more ambiguous direction than previous artistic discourses. Their practices cover a range of approaches that spans differing use of digital video, multichannel installation and, in the case of Thomas Ruff, the digital image. These practices are not singular templates for my approach, but serve to point out that my particular approach to contingency is not without precedent or comparison. My own position develops from these practices towards a contemporary framework that accelerates this emergent contingency from incidental ambiguity to intentional ambiguous meanings. Appropriation will be examined in these practices of ambiguity as it extends from my own work, therefore demonstrating the value of this contingency in artistic practice.

This dissertation is structured in four chapters, each referring to a particular video project and the implications of its research. Each of my video projects involved combining appropriated materials and original media to create heavily mediated video assemblages that each develop a particular formal language based on a metaphorical concept that was translated into formal decision-making processes. These video works were then reconfigured into a range of installations, which provided each project an experiential context in which an audience might activate a meaningful experience of the ambiguity being presented. The first three chapters of this dissertation directly relate to the conception, construction and implications of my initial three video projects, *Hellhound on My Trail* (2015), *Poor Old Horse* (2016) and *BATS* (2016). The fourth chapter investigates the installations in which these video projects were articulated, and presents the argument that while contingency successfully generated the video works, their installation represents a counterbalance of rationalisation and stability. In this sense, I will demonstrate that contingency can be configured towards the generation of work, but is necessarily balanced by a need to stabilise new meanings to some degree or else risk a meaningless non-encounter. My contingency framework is thus articulated through the generative practices of each video project and finally stabilised in the logic of installation.
Chapter 1 articulates my definition of contingency and outlines the development of my practical strategies towards the use of metaphor through my project, *Hellhound on My Trail*. The chapter begins by outlining the positioning of my research through contemporaneity. I define contemporaneity through the work of art historian Terry Smith, which is then augmented by the media theorist Christine Ross.\(^7\) The concept of *contemporaneity* in this regard does not refer to a time period, but rather to a configuration of time in which major channels of history are reconsidered through heterogeneous temporalities and resistances.\(^8\) This breakdown of cultural certainties accelerates the role of ambiguity in the contingency of meaning. The concept of *contingency* will be expanded first through the work of Doane, which aligns the cultural configurations of modernity with the contingency of the moving image. The concept of *metaphor* will then be examined as a mobilisation of contingency through Rorty’s philosophy of meaning, and will remain a theme throughout the dissertation. Synthesising these two definitions in a framework of contemporaneity and moving-image practice offers a configuration of spatio-temporal meaning that will then be examined through the Aitken’s video installation *Electric Earth* (1999). The remainder of the chapter is devoted to an evaluation of how these concerns developed into the formal language of my first video project, using the metaphor of *wandering*. Beginning with McKenzie Wark’s reconsideration of the Situationists, the outline of this first project articulates my initial strategic rejection of reference and subsequent strategies of formal arrangement.\(^9\) Finally, my *Hellhound on My Trail* video is examined through the concept of metaphor, as a function in which contingency conveys ambiguous new meanings through my practice.

Chapter 2 outlines the concept of *remediation* as an effect of digital practice, which extends the role of metaphor into a specific practice that I term *folk-contingency*, that developed through my second video project, *Poor Old Horse*. My approach to remediation is based on the work of digital media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, and develops the contingency of meaning towards a criteria of media


networks and circulation. By analysing the practice of Kelley’s Projective Reconstruction series, I argue that the concept of folk presents a mode of reuse and reconfiguration that aligns with my rejection of referential forms of appropriation. This position is further examined through the shifts in artistic agency, and linked to digital practices through the technique of sampling. This activation of digital folk-contingency is then examined through the video works of artist duo Soda_Jerk. By comparing it to other modes of appropriation I argue that sampling exercises a creative ambiguity that aligns to my concerns of my second video project Poor Old Horse, and its simultaneous appropriation of folk ritual and digital material. Considerations of cultural memory and remediation are mobilised as a technical ‘forgetting’ for each appropriated source. The layered abstractions compete with moments of recognisable imagery that are extended in the next project through an in-depth analysis of digital materiality.

Chapter 3 outlines the materiality of digital video through a discourse of noise and information that expands the media positioning of video. Video and installation are examined as practices that shift medium specificity, using art critic Rosalind Krauss’s concept of postmedium. I expand this postmedium condition using the concept of intermedia that emerges in the work of Fluxus artist Dick Higgins, media theorists Gene Youngblood and Paul Hegarty. New Media is then briefly examined through the critique of digital theorist Paul Hertz, who outlines the importance of both connection and interstice in digital situations. By arguing that exchange and circulation are built into digital video, I extend the position of critical theorist Walter Benjamin through the more contemporary considerations of artist-theorist Hito Steyerl. Steyerl’s discussion of the poor image and its circulation is then extended

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14 I am using the second version of Walter Benjamin’s “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit”, 1935, unpublished in this form until 1989, translated by Edmund Jephcott and Harry Zorn. I chose this version as it represents the most extensive version of Benjamin’s text, which appeared in many other published forms, typically shorter and less detailed. This is also the format that best represent the way Benjamin intended the work published. See the notes on P. 42 of Walter Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility: Second Version”, in The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological
through the material implications of codec. My examination of digital video accelerated the inherent contingencies of digital processes and materials through the errors and glitches that form the basis of my third project, BATS. Accelerating digital contingencies produced unpredictable results, which extended my use of metaphor and remediation into a creatively ambiguous discourse of noise and information. The BATS project examined this noise dialogue through an appropriation of post-punk materials and strategies, incorporating its sustained musical ambiguity into my work. Digital materiality is explored through the various video experiments that raised the strategy of reconfiguring my earlier projects, which is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4 investigates the role of installation as a counterpoint of stability to the contingency of generating video works. Determining the role of installation extends Krauss’s position using the work of art theorist Boris Groys, and his arguments of sovereignty and the symbolic separation from circulation that this implies. I argue that my video projects accelerated the contingency of circulation, thus necessitating a final separating factor from that circulation. I argue that the installation stabilises my contingency strategies by providing a practical agency to express ambiguity. Using Sterling Ruby’s video Cook, (2003) I extend the implications of Groys’s sovereignty towards the reconfiguration of agency and legitimacy that the installation represents. The function of the installation is then extended through Groys’s considerations of time-based art and the reflections of Ross on what she terms a temporal-turn. I then examine how the implications of time-based media impact the experience of the installation through my final installation, Decomposing Contingencies. This installation combines elements from every one of my projects into a new configuration, a new arrangement that highlights the capacity for installation to integrate and intervene in the continuing contingency processes and thus allow a context for contingency to form into an experiential meaning.

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15 Hito Steyerl, “In Defence of the Poor Image” in The Wretched of the Screen, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012)
Chapter 1: The Contingency of Metaphor

This chapter will define the concept of contingency and its parameters within my research, and present my initial strategies to incorporate it into a framework of appropriation and video practice. This framework will situate my practice within the context of *contemporaneity*, which I will argue privileges the function of contingency. As an articulation of modernity, I will argue that contemporaneity accelerates shifting functions of temporality and spatiality that provide the connections for contingency to operate. These spatio-temporal aspects articulate alternative structures of meaning and being that emerge from the contingent shifts of contemporaneity. Using concepts of metaphor, I propose that the contingency of spatio-temporal meaning can be accessed through a moving-image practice with precedents that implicate my own work, *Hellhound on My Trail*. This will position my methods of appropriation away from previous critical models of reference and towards a position that validates the use of contingency as a strategic generator of creative ambiguity.

Section 1 of this chapter focuses on the role of contingency in the configuration of contemporaneity and shifting tones of appropriation. This will begin with a brief consideration of previous models of appropriation following the work of Crimp and Buchloh. I will argue that their referential and critical models become increasingly problematised by contemporaneity as appropriation shifts into cultural ubiquity. Contemporaneity then represents a state of heightened uncertainty, as argued by Smith and extended by Ross, in which contingency becomes a strategy for articulating meaning through unavoidable ambiguities. To expand on this capacity for meaning, I synthesise the definitions of Doane and Rorty to provide a definition of contingency relevant to the contemporary practitioner. This section concludes by examining Aitken’s video work *Electric Earth*, to analyse how spatio-temporal contingencies can be considered through interconnected media and moving image to indicate a more ambiguous approach to appropriation.

Section 2 of this chapter focuses on the metaphor of *wandering* that structured my video work *Hellhound on My Trail*. This will expand McKenzie Wark’s position on the Situationists, towards a contemporary reconsideration of *dérive* and *détournement*.
that represent a targeted use of wandering and appropriation respectively, that inform the structures of my work. These concepts are also explored through Soviet filmmaker Andrei Tarkovsky’s *Stalker*, from which I appropriated both structural and audiovisual content. These developments mobilised the contingency into a practicable strategy, which I will continue to develop throughout this dissertation. This trajectory of development will begin with the necessary use of multiple source materials in order to create a sense of ambiguity in its video assemblage. This section will conclude with an examination of additional source material that aligned with the theme of wandering and my use of original footage. Thus, I argue that these combinations of material obscure individual sources and pursue a new ambiguous form through a productive mobilisation of emergent contingencies.
Section 1: Contingency of Time and Space

1.1.1 Towards a Contingent Appropriation

By expanding the concept of contingency, my project mobilises a form of appropriation that I will argue is more relevant to contemporary situations than previous modes of appropriation practice and theorising. I emphasise that this dissertation does not recount a complete history of appropriation in art practice and discourse that might begin with modernist interventions from Marcel Duchamp, practitioners of photomontage such as John Heartfield, and the collages of Kurt Schwitters.18 Those modernist artists often used appropriation to reject the language and legitimacy of the art institution, mobilised by the agitprop concerns and individual absurdity that would culminate in the later pronouncements of the Situationists. The Situationist strategy of détournement was an exercise in returning cultural agency to the individual in an age of mass cultural production and consumption, shaped by the agitprop declarations of Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman themselves.19 While I will expand on the role of the Situationists, a complete historical account of appropriation in modern art would be the subject of another thesis entirely and remains outside the scope of my research. For this reason, my focus on appropriation is based on contemporary models and practices that emerged in the late 1980s and 1990s, developing into contemporary practices, and differentiated themselves from previous modes of appropriation of the 1970s and early 1980s.

These previous modes to which I refer are what have been termed appropriation art and the ‘Pictures Generation’, following an exhibition, Pictures, curated by Crimp.20 21 In defining this earlier period of appropriation, I follow Crimp’s argument that appropriation by artists such as Robert Rauschenberg presented a moment of ‘crisis’ for the museum that challenged its legitimacy to determine art from non-art.22 I also agree with his later argument that this crisis was addressed by the institutional

18 For full account see Benjamin Buchloh, ‘Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art’ in Artforum.
21 Douglas Crimp, ‘Pictures’ in X-TRA, Fall 2005, Volume 8 No. 1
22 Crimp, ‘On the Museum’s Ruin’ P. 58
acceptance of appropriation art and the museological categorisation that ensued.\textsuperscript{23} Furthering this point, Buchloh identified a series of artists, from Daniel Buren to Marcel Broodthaers, who challenged the museum with their actions of appropriation, revealing the networks of agency and ideologies of institutional legitimacies.\textsuperscript{24} This level of acceptance from academic and art institutions was exemplified by Crimp’s curatorial focus on artists such as Sherrie Levine, and analysis of Cindy Sherman in the 1977 exhibition \textit{Pictures} and its accompanying essay, respectively. While I agree with the arguments of Buchloh and Crimp, their identification of appropriation art served as the point of departure for later artists that I am interested in, such as Aitken and Kelley. From the critical motivations of earlier appropriation artists and institutions, these later artists paved the way for art practices to interact with the increasing dissemination of other cultural material.

An often-underappreciated mobilisation of appropriation was the inclination of video artists to appropriate footage and formats in their work and set the tone for many emerging contemporary concerns.\textsuperscript{25} However, my thesis will not chart a detailed historical account of video appropriation, but will instead focus on the practices of a select few artists. The artists I refer to accelerated the heightened process of cultural exchange that continually normalised gestures of appropriation. These artists mobilised an emerging contemporaneity that align my own practice to the heightened circulation of material through digital exchange. This circulationism will be expanded on in Chapter 3, but I will emphasise here that this contemporary condition produces a new set of relations in which the referential-gesture style of appropriation becomes increasingly muted by the ubiquity of copy and exchange.

The increasingly muted gesture of appropriation positions previous referential modes as ineffective generators of contemporary meanings. The referential quality of the ‘Pictures Generation’ became increasingly constrained by its acceptance within the museum and its enforced distance from the contingency of mass cultural practices. The ensuing period therefore became one in which art historian John C. Welchman identified a continued acceleration of irony and deconstruction of previous art.

\textsuperscript{23} Crimp, ‘Appropriating Appropriation’ Pp. 134-5
\textsuperscript{24} Buchloh, ‘Allegorical Procedures: Appropriation and Montage in Contemporary Art’, in \textit{Artforum}.
movements. The influence of the museum turned to a form of institutional critique, which, as Miwon Kwon has argued, is just as collectable and alienating as any art object. Those artists who influence my argument utilise a connection to wider cultural production that rejects stifling institutional models and their defined separation from non-art media. This manifests in the rejection of reference and gesture of appropriation, in favour of a more expressive use of existing materials and their inherent contingencies in which ambiguity is favoured over critical statements. I have positioned my practice in opposition to previous referential modes of appropriation, which now necessitates a definition of contemporaneity to determine how practice might engage meaning in this condition.

1.1.2 Contemporaneity

In this section, I position contingency in a wider cultural framework of contemporaneity and its parameters of meaning and expression. This will expand contingency beyond the discourse of chance towards a more relevant framework for the production of contemporary meaning through the form of contemporaneity itself. In this sense, I argue that contemporaneity is a form of modernity in which a multitude of perspectives and presences are emphasised through a heightened cultural and technological connectivity. This technological connection accelerates previous postmodern discourses towards this sense of contemporaneity, in which the absolutes of history, temporality and progress are broken down into shifting heterogeneous experiences. Ross asserts that while contemporaneity emphasises a continual presence over a sense of historical passage, it is a heterogeneous presence of competing definitions and experiences. According to Ross, contemporaneity

“is never a given. It is a processual perspective on the contemporary… The historicities that secure contemporary history are connecting challenges, never a fait accompli.”

28 Ross, The Past is the Present, It’s the Future Too (…), P. 52
In this fractured conditioning, contingency emerges as a privileged dynamic with opportunities for approaching meaningful ambiguity. This hyper-connection and excess of perspectives replaces the contested certainties of historicity, shifting frameworks of meaning away from certainty, contested or otherwise.

According to Ross and Smith, the decline of modernism’s narrative of progressive momentum had the effect of emphasising an excessive present while saturating that present with uncertainty. This shifted the objectives of the cultural practitioner from modernist assertions and postmodern rejections towards a position in which ambiguity became a meaningful cultural practice. The artistic appropriation that Crimp and Buchloh identified as decisive critical gestures of cultural resistance became another category of aesthetic and intellectual organisation.29 This fostered continuing shifts from the earlier accepted tone of artistic appropriation, through both technical methodologies and the artistic pursuit of a more sustained sense of ambiguity. This was compounded by the accelerated use of appropriation in wider contemporary culture that rendered it increasingly ubiquitous, nebulous and thus critically imperceptible. This reconfigured appropriation away from a mode of artistic categorisation, towards a nuanced system of building new meaning or enacting a meaningful engagement through existing material. As artist Jo Clements, recalling Gilles Deleuze, emphasised:

“the artistic question for artists is no longer ‘what can we make that is new?’ but ‘how can we make do with what we have?’ To put it another way, how can we utilize and make sense of the numerous images, stimuli and resources that are ever present in our modern times?”30

Under these conditions, contemporary art production is less focused on originality and artistic progress than it is on the potential for existing materials to be reconfigured, without the need for the ideological resistance of emphatic gestures. This approach denies the possibility of an absolute newness, in favour of a relative newness: a contingent newness. The artist is no longer a singular originator of material, but a

29 Crimp, ‘Appropriating Appropriation’
collator of relations and an agent accelerating their contingencies towards a contemporary reconfiguration of meaning.

The wider connection of contingency to modernity reveals an important discourse in which change and uncertainty form new frameworks of meaning. One of the earliest and most influential historical art references to contingency was in the work of modernist poet Charles Baudelaire and his characterisation of modernity as “the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent”. 31 Benjamin argued that this discourse of contingency emphasised the cultural expression of historical change produced by the continual development of modernity. 32 Continuing this argument, Doane traces the role of contingency through the historical development of image technologies. This positions contingency as a function of modernity’s emphasis on *immanence*, the importance of the instant, which will be expanded below through Doane’s analysis.

This suggestion of immanence remains vital in my reading of contemporaneity, as those early modern implications of contingency accelerate the immanence of presence towards contemporaneity. Though this situation might tempt a suggestion of a contemporary epoch, Smith has argued that “in contemporary conditions periodisation is impossible.” 33 He compared the contemporary to the previously mentioned Baudelaire characterisation of the modern: “the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art, the other half of which is the eternal and the immutable.” 34 But Smith suggested a critical shift, in which modernity

> “can now be seen to have developed such that it ratcheted up ‘the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent’ as facts of experience and history to such a pitch that it gradually but inevitably obliterated the other half of the doublet.” 35

Smith argued that the contemporary accumulates a present, without the momentum of either historical past or future:

31 Terry Smith, *Introduction to Antinomies Of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*, P. 4
32 Walter Benjamin, ‘On the Concept of History’ translated by Dennis Redmond from *Gesammelte Schriften 1:2* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974)
33 Ibid. P. 9
34 Ibid. P. 3
35 Ibid. P. 4
“the present may become, perversely, ‘eternal.’ Not, however, in a state of wrought transfiguration, as Baudelaire had hoped, but as a kind of incessant incipience, of the kind theorised by Jacques Derrida as a venir—perpetual advent, that which is, while impossible to force or predict, always to come.”

For Smith, a discourse on contemporaneity relies on the shifting experiences of time and space that elude the logic of periodisation and radically shift perceptions of history.

Ross expanded on this argument to suggest that de-emphasising the legitimacy of history thus emphasises heterogeneity and the non-historical relations of culture. This heterogeneity is not an outright rejection of historical thinking, but its partnering with the concurrent experience of lived time. She asserts that

“Contemporaneity is a state of mind, a perspective, an awareness, and a historical condition about contemporariness that takes its full resonance as a general assertion of the requirement to contemporize both our notions of temporal passing and regime of historicity.”

Ross argued that Smith risked universalising the heterogeneity of contemporaneity, and thus the variance of experience that defines it. The range of temporal experiences, individual or as relative cultures, cannot be reduced to the theoretical homogeneity of a condition of universal difference. Rather, contemporaneity represents a continued resistance of differences that form connections as well as differentiations. Further arguing this point, political philosopher Antoni Negri argued the postmodern represented a dramatic shift from early modes of modernity towards a state of radical difference and antagonism. Developing from these paradigms, he asserts that contemporaneity accelerates this condition towards “the opening toward a spectrum of new possibilities… based on a new potential of resistance and difference.” While I agree with the pronouncements of Ross and Negri, I must make an important distinction that my thesis does not engage Ross’s considerations of

36 Ibid. P. 9
37 Ross, The Past is the Present: It’s the Future Too (…), P. 49
38 Ibid. P. 51
39 Antoni Negri, “Contemporaneity Between Modernity and Postmodernity” in Antimonies of Art and Culture, P. 25
globalisation nor Negri’s postcolonial arguments, which I consider to be outside the scope of my research. Rather, my engagement with contemporaneity aims to counter Smith’s lack of antagonistic perception, through discourses of meaning and circulation rather than globalism and postcolonialism.

The conditions of contemporaneity therefore emphasise a historical rethinking in which the operations of contingency gain continued relevance. Through an emphasis on possibility and actualisation, contingency challenges the stifling legitimacy of history, therefore earning its importance in a dialogue of contemporaneity. The contemporary itself presents a fracturing of a historical present that expresses the need for new considerations of meaning and non-meaning, and the opportunities this can provide for the agency of the artist who engages this contingency. I will expand on this position with two particular approaches to contingency, the first being Doane’s historically specific approach to the role of contingency in modernity through technologies of representation, and the second being Rorty’s historically general approach to the emergence of cultural meanings. Through their work, I argue that contingency engages a continuous negotiation between meaning and non-meaning that offers a sustained ambiguity to art production. I am arguing something of a synthesis of their distinct approaches: an agency of the moving image to produce new cultural meanings.

1.1.3 Mary Ann Doane: Modernity and Contingency

Doane is a cinematic theorist who, along with Rorty, contributes the most vital understanding of contingency to my thesis. In her text The Emergence of Cinematic Time, she argues that the emphasis on change in modernity elevates the role of contingency and partners it with rationalisation to form the forward momentum that characterises modernity’s emphasis on progressing towards the future. Doane particularly focuses on the role of temporal change as evidenced in technologies of representation, such as photography and cinema, that operate by capturing the “contingency” of the fleeting instant or sequence of instances. Doane contends that this focus on the instant and the chance occurrence tangibly demonstrates the “immanence” of determining meaning in the structure of modernity. Technologies that captured and represented this immanence demonstrated the systemic function of
contingency to provide a context of meaning within a system of continual change. Considered in fields of mathematics and logic, the contingent is that chance element that escapes rational boundaries, but may provide new raw material for those rational systems. Doane’s dialogue of change and immanence helps shift an understanding away from areas such as chance-based art and structured errancy that remain outside the scope of my research. While I am not denying this definition, or the value of chance and experimentation, my thesis argues that by synthesising other discourses, contingency can represent the possibilities of meaning in creative practice.

Doane’s focus on immanence and contingency require an understanding of those functions as they emerge in early modernity. For this task I utilise the arguments of Marxist philosopher Marshall Berman, who describes modernity as the self-aware state of culture brought about by capitalist development, that reaches ahead of that which was before it, but as a consequence remains constantly shifting and unstable. Berman took Karl Marx’s position as his starting point, that essentially modernity is a paradoxical system of anti-systemic change. This flux nonetheless forms a coherent framework as a “unity of disunity”, in which being modern “is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, “all that is solid melts into air”. In part, Berman was asserting this position against some of the more extreme declarations of postmodernist discourse, arguing that crisis points of economy and cultural meaning are very much a part of the modern fabric, rather than indicating a point beyond modernity. Modernity fuels itself on crisis, the clashing of elements considered discrete, and thus incorporates the functions of contingency that become heightened under contemporaneity.

Doane’s analysis of this uncertainty focuses on the developments of temporal and image technologies, and their synthesis in the moving image. As many concepts and experiences shifted in the radical upheaval of modernity, she argues, time became a major instrument of capitalist development and was thus the focus of continued

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42 Ibid.
43 Ibid. P. 10
rationalisation processes, in the form of measurement and standardisation. This focus on time operated on many simultaneous levels, such as the pragmatic need for continued standardisation of industrial trade and workforce, in which ambiguity nonetheless emerged. These functions characterise the modality of modernity based on an increasing focus on the smallest measurable units of time and the pursuit of instantaneity that are found in the development of photography and cinema. Here, Doane argues that technology and culture formed through the grammar and expression of modernity in which meaning

“is associated with immanence and embodiment; it is predetermined not in ideal forms but in a process of emergence and surprise… And new technologies of representation—photography in particular—are consistently allied with contingency and the ability to seize the ephemeral.”

Modes of meaning are therefore tied to developments of technology that are fostered and accelerated by the development of modernity. I will continue this discourse as it extends beyond modernist implications of history and temporality towards questions of space.

While Doane argues the importance of contingency and rationalisation in the development of modernity, Geographer Edward W. Soja contends that modernity and its discourse is a historical process that continues to be problematised by the rejection of historical narratives. Contrasting geography to history, Soja presents the importance of the conditions that form capitalist-modernity in combination with its mobilisation:

“Modernisation is not entirely the product of some determinative inner logic of capitalism, but neither is it a rootless and ineluctable idealisation of history.”

For Soja, the shifting flux that characterises modernity in turn fuels shifts in the experience of space-time and being as they are constructed and interpreted culturally.

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44 Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time (...). P. 11
45 Ibid. Pp. 5-8
46 Ibid. P. 10
He contends that the suppression of spatial discourse was directly linked to the rationalising of temporality and, like Doane, asserts that history and temporality received primacy in early modernist developments. Where Doane emphasises the role of the rationalising and measurability, Soja examines the currents of history and teleology as they form the early self-reflexivity of modernity. Taking aim at figures such as Bergson, Marx and Kant, he outlines the development of a materialist philosophy that was unable to configure the spatial, and relegated geography to the incidentally indexical. Space was simply the way things were, the setting for meaning; time was the battleground for history and future, the action of meaning.

As Doane has pointed out, spatio-temporal meaning in modernity is necessarily allied with contingency. Contingency here is more than simply the chance encounter that might emerge from the instantaneity of the photograph, but becomes the strategy by which modernity accounts for its flux and inherent contradiction, be it temporal, as argued here, or spatial, as I will argue below. While rationalisation increasingly records, measures and standardises, contingency emerges “as a form of resistance to rationalisation which is saturated with ambivalence.” 48 Contingency and rationalisation function in a reactive pairing that drives modernisation of technology and culture, through simultaneous and complementary resistance. Doane notes that “Rationalisation must entail a reduction or denial of contingency”, but goes on to point out that “modernity is also strongly associated with epistemologies that valorise the contingent, the ephemeral, chance—that which is beyond or resistant to meaning”. 49 Here, Doane suggests that rationalising is the attempt to enforce a shared meaning, whereas the contingent is that chance element that plays off the relative, the incidental, and thus resists a singular enforceable meaning.

Contingency offers a vital countermeasure to pure rationalisation, which “excludes the subject, whose collusion is crucial to the sustenance of the capitalist system.” 50 However, the vast possibility of contingency, unending shifts and variations beyond any limitation.

48 Doane, The Emergence of Cinematic Time (…), P. 11
49 Ibid. P. 10
50 Ibid. P. 11
“are also potentially threatening. Their danger resides in their alliance with meaninglessness, even nonsense. The vast continuum of a nonhierarchisable contingency can overwhelm.”51

Contingency is thus the anti-systemic reaction to rationalisation, which gains a permanent foothold in modernity, though imbued with inherent systemic risk. Contingency emerges from modernity as the productive negotiation of meaning and non-meaning that becomes heightened in contemporaneity. While Doane’s argument outlines the functions of contingency that operate through modernity, my own practice relies on the possibility for the cultural practitioner to engage these contingencies, to localise and accelerate them for creative outcomes. For this purpose, I will engage the work of Rorty and his contingent philosophy of meaning.

1.1.4 Richard Rorty: Historicities of Meaning

While Doane examines contingency in the flux of modernity, philosopher Rorty focuses his arguments for contingency on the role of knowledge and cultural meaning. He argues that although much recent philosophy rejects an absolute understanding of truth and an absolute or intrinsic sense of meaning, we do nonetheless communicate, share and find commonalities that form networks of cultural meaning. Using a linguistic approach, Rorty argues that the use of metaphor actively engages with this contingency of new meaning. Metaphor, for Rorty, operates by piecing together language in order to gesture outside those language boundaries, and thus establish a new framework of meaning. I argue that this mechanism can be adapted from Rorty’s focus on the development of knowledge frameworks, towards a creative approach to meaning and ambiguity.

Rorty utilises an epistemological mobilisation of contingency that examines the development of knowledge systems through shared meanings, new meanings and shifts in language. Following a post-structuralist legacy, Rorty argues that philosophical enquiry must operate on the idea that truth is a linguistic property and

51 Ibid.
does not inherently exist in the world. It is for this reason that Rorty expands the linguistic function of the metaphor and the role of those who construct them.

Both Doane and Rorty emphasise the role contingency takes in generating aspects of innovation out of chance encounters, as pursuit of the new and immanent. But while Doane focuses on accelerated contingency in technology, Rorty emphasises the role of cultural expression and the contingency of shared vocabularies of understanding. For Rorty, this dialogue mostly concerns philosophy, particularly the influence of philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s writing on metaphor and meaning. Rorty argues that rejecting metaphysics in philosophy is not an implicit rejection of truth or meaning, but rather an acknowledgement of the contingency of these propositions. In this sense, he employs contingency as a concept under which he places the operation of metaphor and its operator, the poet. Metaphor then operates as the introduction of the extra-textual into the language of the textual, a new linguistic formulation that articulates meanings that were previously outside the scope of the given language framework. The poet who attempts to operate this understanding of cultural metaphor is therefore “typically unable to make clear exactly what it is that he wants to do before developing the language in which he succeeds in doing it. His new vocabulary makes possible, for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose.” New vocabulary is the language of its own meaning, its own purpose.

This is the contingency of metaphor—it is the creation of a new language to form meaning that could not previously be articulated. In doing so, metaphors create new forms of expression out of the old forms. These new metaphors are then “constantly dying off into literalness, and then serving as a platform and foil for new metaphors.” Thus metaphor is a process of recycling and combining the old to create the new, suggesting an activation of an unexpected frisson through a contemporary emergence of re-engaged material. My strategies of appropriation thus aim to mobilise metaphor to engage the creative ambiguity between new meaning and non-meaning.

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52 Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, P. 5
53 Ibid. Pp. 28-9
54 Ibid. P. 13
55 Ibid. P. 17
Rorty’s definition and analysis of contingency remains vital to my project, but his works have not gone without critique. Most of these critiques apply more to the project of philosophy than my expanded usage.56 Pan Derong and Liu Lianjian, for instance, question the possibilities of formulating an absolute contingency of language and possibly undermines the project of philosophy altogether.57 Similarly, Simon Blackburn argues that Rorty’s philosophy is self-defeatingly relativist.58 The arguments become more pointed in the critical broadsides of John Searle and Thomas Nagel, who argue against Rorty’s apparent disdain for the philosophical apparatus.59 Importantly, it is not my position to argue for the philosophical relevance of Rorty, and the philosophical arguments against Rorty have little consequence to his role in my dissertation. On the contrary, the critique that Rorty does not situate himself firmly within the borders and conventions of philosophy is what makes his discourse applicable to my own.60 In particular, Rorty utilises metaphor as a function that is culturally determined without removing the individual agency of its instigator.

Both Doane and Rorty examine the role of contingency in cultural discourse and production. For Doane, this is expressed in the modes of technological production, particularly the involvement of time in the development of the archive and moving image. Rorty, however, engages the epistemic role of contingency in conceptual frameworks and knowledge developments. Through these theorists, I am linking the metaphoricity of contingency to modernity’s emphasis on change and shifting reference for systems of meaning. Rorty’s analysis emphasises the agency of communication in the formulation of cultural meanings throughout historical shifts. Importantly, Rorty emphasises the shifts in frames of reference as a generalised historical contingency: new frames of reference emerge from the needs and opportunities of their particular settings. In contrast, Doane emphasises the heightened role of contingency through the use of image technologies throughout modernity. In doing so, she emphasises the particular historical contingency of modernity, then

58 Malachowski, Richard Rorty, Pp. 42-4
60 In this way Rorty might conform to what Boris Groys calls the anti-philosopher, as he labels Rorty’s influencers, Jacques Derrida and Fredreich Nietzsche. See Boris Groys, Introduction to Antiphilosophy, translated by David Fernbach, (London; New York: Verso, 2012)
accelerated in contemporaneity. Synthesising these approaches provides a working definition of contingency that the practitioner can use to address the concerns of contemporaneity. I will now utilise this definition of contingency to expand on the spatio-temporal experience of contemporaneity and strategies for its engagement through moving-image practice.

1.1.5 That’s the Only Now I Get

This section will outline how the ambiguities of contemporaneity shift the modern experience of space and time and how this can be considered through a moving-image practice in the work of Aitken’s *Electric Earth*. As I have outlined above, Doane, Ross and Smith examine the role of temporal reconfiguration through varying iterations of modernity and its impact on conceptualising progress and history. However, the shift towards contemporaneity is not just a temporal exercise. As Soja suggests in regard to modernity, the divide between space and time is an enforced separation of interrelated concepts that becomes increasingly untenable and unproductive as these grand historical narratives recede into contemporary heterogeneity. As Ross points out, through the development and reconsideration of space, historicity can be broken down into a field of differently qualified experiences. The spatialising of history contributes to the field of contemporaneity, where the components of time and space are considered as diverse, sometimes overlapping concepts that impact a range of shared dynamics and experiences. Temporality and spatiality emerge intertwined in the ambiguities of contemporaneity.

This shifting of temporality begins with what spatial theorist Ernest Hess-Lüttich describes as a *spatial-turn* of theory, expanding on the earlier work of Soja. As Hess-Lüttich describes it, the importance of space emerges through the 1960s until it aligns with the postmodern discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. A reconfiguration of spatial theory reveals a shift in the ontologies of space towards and within theoretical discourses. Writing from 2005, Hess-Lüttich takes a historical account of the

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61 Doane, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (…), P. 11
62 Ross *The Past is the Present, It’s the Future Too* (…), P. 105
64 Ibid. P. 3
65 Ibid. Pp. 1-11
argument of this spatial-turn, including Soja’s text and an earlier lecture by philosopher Michel Foucault, to align the critical focus on space with critical theorist Fredric Jameson’s notion of the postmodern. Hess-Lüttich qualifies and examines the historical precedent of the aligning of space with the postmodern. Soja previously argued that such shifts characterise modernity as “a continuous process of societal restructuring that is periodically accelerated to produce a significant recomposition of space-time-being in their concrete forms”. In defence of his argument against the dominance of historical time, Soja asserts that his definition

“does not deny the extraordinary power and importance of historiography as a mode of emancipatory insight, but identifies historicism with the creation of a critical silence, an implicit subordination of space to time…”

Space here is not the denial of temporality, but its necessary counterpart in an emergence of simultaneity that characterises contemporaneity. The linking of temporal concerns with spatiality is therefore inherently vital to the configuration of contemporaneity, its experience and structures of meaning.

Image redacted for copyright reasons.

Figure 1. Doug Aitken, Electric Earth, 1999. Video installation with eight channels of video (colour, sound), eight projections, four room architectural environment, installation dimensions variable. Still from 00:15 of 15:01 minute single channel video, available from http://www.ubu.com/film/aitken_electricearth.html.

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66 Soja, Postmodern Geographies (…), P. 27
67 Ibid. P. 15
At this point, the question arises: how does this contemporary spatio-temporal configuration impact the role of practice, specifically through moving-image works such as Aitken’s *Electric Earth*? A reading of Doane provides an understanding of temporal contingency and its relationship to the moving image, while space requires further analysis. Aitken’s work was configured as a video installation as part of the Venice Biennale in 1999. The work consists of eight channels of video showing a series of connected videos in three rooms.\(^68\) The videos consist of a related series of sequences involving a particular transient and automated atmosphere.\(^69\) The allusion to the “*electric earth*” is seen in automated machines, and the bodily automation that seems to be attempted by the protagonist. His wanderings through his surroundings are far from a masterful overcoming of the landscape; rather, he is caught in the landscape, a figure trying to lose itself in the impulses of his surroundings. While space emerges in depictions of deserted areas and in the installation setup, the implications of an ambiguously intertwined spatio-temporality emerge on closer reading of the video itself.

\[\text{Image redacted for copyright reasons.}\]

**Figure 2.** Doug Aitken, *Electric Earth*, 1999. Video installation with eight channels of video (colour, sound), eight projections, four room architectural environment, installation dimensions

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\(^{68}\) Supporting text by Doug Aitken, on [www.ubu.com/film/aitken_electricearth.html](http://www.ubu.com/film/aitken_electricearth.html) accessed 7/9/2015

\(^{69}\) In this urban between-space, what Marc Augé describe as non-place, a lone protagonist interacts with his neutral surroundings and the automated and electric elements that characterise these spaces. See Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, (London; New York: Verso, 1995).

While this work was initially displayed as an installation, it is also accessible as a single channel video work. Rapid cuts and repeated sequences are introduced by the protagonist’s voiceover, emphasising his initial role as subject before he begins the dancerly recession into his surroundings. Initially there is static on the television screen that bathes the room in a dull flickering light and we see the protagonist lying on the bed. The flickering is reflected in the close-ups of his eye, half open, like some catatonic state between sleeping and waking, and the television static continues to roll.

“A lot of times I move so fast that I become what’s around me. It’s like food for me. I, like, absorb that energy, absorb the information. It’s like I eat it.”

The voiceover plays over visuals of the door, the lamp, the light from the elevator, the figure, the airport. A rhythm develops: the lights, the satellite dishes, the cameras, the figure. “That’s the only now I get.” Moving, repeating, following, tracing, flickering, dancing. “That’s the only now I get.” Streets, walkways, ramps, runways, carparks. Always somewhere in between: between human and machine; being and doing; subject and environment. “That’s the only now I get.” The between-scape deepens into dusk on the landscape, the low lighting eventually falling into night, where the protagonist is only visible through the artificial light he interacts with. His surroundings ultimately invade completely and he is overcome by sensorial and dancerly convulsions. A becoming.

Aitken’s approach to video editing involves a focus on repetition and sequence that exploits the tension of approaching simultaneity in the moving image. His reconfigurations and repetitions of short sequences emphasises a questioning of sequence from within the linearity that the moving image is restricted. Simultaneity is thus denied, as one image must follow the other in order to fulfil its function. This problem of simultaneity characterises the internal tension of a connected experience of space and time. Aitken’s approach recalls Jorge Louis Borges’ short story “The

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70 This is how I experienced the work, from UBU web: www.ubu.com/film/aitken_electricearth.html
Aleph” and its spatial analysis by Soja. Borges’ story describes the Aleph as “The only place on earth where all places are—seen from every angle, each standing clear, without any confusion of blending.” According to Soja’s analysis, this mythical experience reflects the functions of time and space through its sheer impossibility:

“It is difficult to grasp persuasively in a temporal narrative for it generates too many conflicting images, confounding historicisation, always seeming to stretch laterally instead of unfolding sequentially. At the same time, its spatiality challenges orthodox analysis and interpretation, for it too seems limitless and constantly in motion, never still enough to encompass, too filled with ‘other spaces’ to be informatively described.”

Radically spatial, there is no position for a linear sense of time, for sequentiality, and thus Borges’ narrator is left lacking. He realises the insufficiency of the linear sequence when confronted with the radically spatial.

Here we reach the productive tension of Aitken’s arrangement and its relationship to the Aleph. While Borges’ narrator speaks of the problematic conveyance of his experience, he nonetheless recounts that experience through language, in all its insufficiency. Similarly, while Aitken’s protagonist emphasises his radical absorption into his environment, the viewer is left to observe and consider this absorption through its traces of imagery and edited structure. The point here is not to resolve the tension between temporal and spatial terms, but to explore the expressive possibilities of their ambiguous relationship. The format of the moving-image work, both from single channel viewing and multichannel installation, engages the contingency of this pulsing present through its reconsideration of the linearity of flow. The idea of circulating imagery is not addressed through direct appropriation of material, but rather in the sensation of movement and exchange that is the functioning purpose of networked electrical devices and in the anonymously ubiquitous locations of car parks, airports and hotel rooms.

73 Soja, Postmodern Geographies (…), P. 222
Aitken’s work engages the tension between the shifting spatio-temporal experiences and their depiction in the language of circulation. Both of these aspects relate to the emergence of heightened circulation and contemporaneity, and therefore express the ambiguity and creative potential of this tension. The video fractures the possibility of narrative into an editing of pseudo-simultaneity as it relates to the heightened conditions of circulated information and audiovisual material. Aitken relates this understanding of simultaneity to coding or DNA, as information packets, rather than sequencing of language, or seriality:

“In making it, I specifically experimented with treating each element, no matter how small, as if it were as important as every other element, and I tried to give every detail equal weight in the overall narrative.”

The audio narration is compounded by the display of the television and images of revolving satellites, hardware that defines the exchange of information. While Aitken


avoids an overtly narrative structure, the formatting of *Electric Earth* seems to fuse several elements with its subject matter. There is a reference to the narrative structure of cinema or television structure, with the use of a figure and edited movement, though it also engages the language of documentary, with the observed figure and documentation of environments. The work also references elements of the music video, with the use of third-person point-of-view movement combined with certain dance elements and musical movements through the soundtrack. This hybrid approach is exacerbated by the editing technique, which takes care to borrow from each of these styles rather than one in particular. Aitken’s work emphasises a contingency of visual language, ambiguously borrowed from the entertainment industries, to produce new meanings that related to an experience of the contemporary. Aiken utilises the languages of the moving image to construct an expression of the contemporary, the only now we get.
Section 2: Contingency as Wandering

1.2.1 Poetic Contingency

This section will apply the ideas of contingency from the previous section towards a practical framework for developing video appropriation works. Through my analysis of Doane and Rorty, I have argued that contingency can be utilised by the practitioner through metaphor, thus proposing new meanings that align with the ambiguity inherent in contemporaneity. This section develops this contingency of metaphor towards a practical strategy of appropriating and reconfiguring existing materials into new work. The sources mentioned in this section have offered a dual contribution to my initial video project *Hellhound on My Trail*. Firstly, they provided audio and/or visual components to be added to my own video assemblage. Secondly, sources with a complex metaphorical component were reconfigured into a formal guide from which a new metaphorical capacity of the work will emerge. I have used an initial source to generate a formal and aesthetic direction to guide the collection of further sources and new footage that has structured new metaphorical meaning in my work.

*Image redacted for copyright reasons.*

**Figure 4.** Andrei Tarkovsky, dir., *Stalker*, 1978. Still from 00:56:42 of 02:35:27 hour film, written by Arkadi Strugatsky and Boris Strugatsky, released by Mosfilm studios.

My initial video work, *Hellhound on My Trail*, involved an investigation into the spatio-temporal impact of contemporaneity and how this might be considered through
a video depiction of the concept of *wandering*. This served as a metaphorical proposition for the work, as a balance of meaning and non-meaning that emerged from my initial appropriation of the Tarkovsky film *Stalker*. Produced in Russia in 1978, *Stalker* presented a cinematic consideration of wandering depicting three men travelling through a mysterious area known as ‘the Zone’. Wandering emerges as a narrative device in the film, through meandering and unpredictable movement that nonetheless forms a coherent action of unforeseen potential. The filmic techniques also utilise a sense of wandering through Tarkovsky’s slow panning shots and historically literary and metaphysical references. As theorist Robert Bird points out, this commitment to the metaphysical and his repudiation of theory-laden mediation has sometimes characterised Tarkovsky’s work as reactionary.\(^{75}\)\(^{76}\) However, his cinematic configurations were less reactionary than an expression of the ‘real’ and the ‘mystery’ within the bounds of medium and mediation. His philosophical concerns with reality were not just explored through his narrative content, but questioned through the mediation of cinema and its metaphorical potential.

A highly poetic contingency of meaning and medium emerges through Tarkovsky’s work, emphasised by his cinematic innovations and mystical approach to narrative content. For Bird, Tarkovsky’s approach offers contemporary artistic relevance by merging narrative reality with the technical levels of the apparatus and representation:

> “It was this discovery of the real – of the material, the corporeal – within the very medium of representation that makes Tarkovsky of abiding interest for a fair number of contemporary artists.”\(^{77}\)

Thus Tarkovsky’s seemingly reactionary approach disguises emergent new meanings, developing a sense of contemporaneity that quietly reconfigures the modernist history of cinema.\(^{78}\) Though Tarkovsky seeks to “recoup the real”, his complex examples of textuality and mediation are “imprinted within the apparatus.”\(^{79}\) Bird charts an affinity,

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\(^{76}\) Ibid. P. 2

\(^{77}\) Ibid. P. 7

\(^{78}\) Ibid. P. 2

\(^{79}\) Ibid. P. 13

Ibid.
rather than an influence, to film essayists like Chris Maker and video artists such as Douglas Gordon, while musicologist Tobias Pontara analyses Tarkovsky’s musical references as a rupture of the cinema as modernist device. 80 81 Both Bird and Pontara emphasise Tarkovsky’s use of extra-textual components, such as footage of pre-war Estonian coins or Romantic-era music, present formal devices embedded in networks of reference. By analysing these networks of mediation and by engaging the metaphors in Tarkovsky’s work, I was able to apply Rorty’s approach towards the contingency of moving-image work. This demonstrates my argument that metaphor can be expanded from its basis in written language and knowledge towards forms of communication, including the moving image and the audiovisual.

Tarkovsky’s approach extends the inherent contingency of cinema towards the metaphorical capacity of the moving image. Metaphor, as mentioned earlier, is a key function in Rorty’s positioning of contingency and the agency it affords cultural practitioners. His approach to metaphor synthesises the cultural impetus of Nietzsche with the linguistic approach of philosopher Donald Davidson, who argues that there is no hidden linguistic meaning within the metaphor—it is in fact overly literal. 82 Counter to other linguistic theories of metaphor, Davidson argues that this literal quality gestures outside the scope of its language, which he likens to breaking off a conversation to point at something, slap the interlocutor, or kiss them. 83 It is in this sense, Rorty argues, that the metaphor gestures outside the language towards a particular discourse to indicate something that cannot be encapsulated in that discourse, in the same way a slap cannot be said with words. What appears in Stalker as the extra-textual motif is then a cinematic functioning of metaphor in the sense of Rorty and Davidson. By utilising a motif such as the appearance of Estonian coins or Romantic-era music, this sense of textual symbolism utilises a productive ambiguity.

The heavy mystical allusions and the setting of the film remain ambiguous, a gesture that extends beyond a typical sense of narrative cinematic meaning. Metaphor then encapsulates the usage of frameworks and gestures that are necessarily rooted in their narrative cinematic framework, but gesture to something that cannot be encapsulated

80 Bird, “Tarkovsky and Contemporary Art: Medium and Mediation”, P. 37
83 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, Solidarity, P. 18
within that immersive cinematic experience. Contingency, therefore, becomes a structural tool for extending frameworks beyond their boundaries with the function of metaphor. However, once outside an established framework, meaning is much less assured and its resonation with an audience or interlocutor becomes ever more unpredictable.

I aim to take Rorty’s ideas on language and the construction of meaning, and focus them towards artistic agency and exchange. This utilises the agency that Rorty suggests is afforded to the figure of the “poet”, who operates metaphor. In this sense, I am drawn to works that exercise some metaphorical function that I find relevant to my practice, in this case Tarkovsky’s ambiguous integration of cinematic technique with the narrative search for meaning. This involves a divergent narrative with unexplained incidental quirks, compounded by the cinematic use of slow pans and extended shots, which alter the typical timing and pace of cinematic shots. Tarkovsky creates an interesting cinematic metaphor, but one that will no longer operate as a new metaphor, as these techniques and approaches now sit well within an understanding of conventional cinematic practice. In this sense, the theme of wandering, which emerges from my attention to space and time, and follows through the content of Stalker, takes on a metaphorical role, to push meaning towards a truly ambiguous territory. My
appropriation would therefore seek to consider how formal “wandering” might be achieved and how I would approach the productive ground of ambiguity that would produce my own new metaphors.

1.2.2 Cinematic Ruins, Ruins of Cinema

The techniques and consideration of cinematic time employed by Tarkovsky became a starting point for my own practical investigations and experiments. By identifying Tarkovsky’s own cinematic metaphors, I was reminded of Rorty’s prognosis that the metaphorical eventually falls into literalness as its gestural quality fades. It is therefore not enough to identify the metaphors of source materials, but rather to use them as “foils” that Rorty argues hold the potential for new metaphors to be formed. My use of digital video aims to produce a metaphor of reference and time, to gesture towards new meaning beyond the framework of Tarkovsky’s Stalker.

I was initially drawn to Tarkovsky’s work because of its poetic layers of mediation that develop narrative through the cinematic inflections of unusual technique and structure. While Tarkovsky’s approach to duration and cinematics resonated with my approach, I was particularly struck by his approach to reference. There is a certain literary quality and stylistic quotation at work in Stalker, through the quotes of notable Russian poets, allusions to biblical passages, and the staging of the literary-like dialogue of the Stalker’s wife. This, combined with the extra-textual gestures of iconic items and Romantic-era music, reveals a nuanced approach to reference, a level of poetic appropriation often shadowed by his strong mystical content and temporal approaches.

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85 Rorty, Contingency, Irony, Solidarity, P. 18
Initially I appropriated audiovisual material from the film and subjected it to multiple digital editing processes, involving shifts in duration and layering. I was particularly interested in the role of layering visuals using “keying” techniques that remove certain visual values from a layer to expose another layer beneath. Through the use of chroma-key and luma-key functions, I created digital collages of material from *Stalker* that broke down the cinematic linearity, shifting the narrative elements into atmospheric ambience. While these videos were important experiments, they were not particularly successful videos in and of themselves. There was a uniformity of durational shift, slowing imagery with a singular soundtrack, leaving the form far too homogenised, without a point beyond that ambience emerging. Furthermore, while somewhat distorted and interesting visuals were present, the recognisable components of source material prevented the leap to more ambiguous territories of meaning.

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87 This is most notably seen in the chroma-key technique or green-screen, in which the green background becomes removed and renders the figure/objects in front able to be superimposed onto other existing footage as a layer beneath.
By subjecting sequences of appropriated video to combination and rearrangement, the contingency of this material emerged and shaped the possibility for metaphor to also emerge. These experiments revealed that my work required more than a visual exploration of appealing content; it necessitated a formal direction to be determined from the interaction and combination of materials. Tarkovsky’s formal approach declares an attachment to the real, with *Stalker* performing an investigation of mediation that extends beyond the poetic content of its wandering figures. Borrowing Tarkovsky’s forms too heavily and recognisably would stifle my new work, which should be formed by a subtler poetic appropriation. The contingency inherent in the concept of wandering, first emerging from *Stalker*, would then offer a motif for both the collection of appropriated material and a strategy for its formal arrangements. This appropriation of metaphor involved a structural investigation into the role of wandering in the film, but also necessitated a wider understanding of wandering itself. To this end, I turned to the discourse of the Situationists, who argue for a radical activation of both wandering and appropriation, through the concepts of *dérive* and *détournement*. 

*Figure 7.* Nickk Hertzog, *Stalker Experiment #5*, 2014. Still from 37:33 of 37:40 minute digital video with audio.
1.2.3 Situationists and Expanded Wandering

The appropriation and reconfiguration of material from *Stalker* involved analysing the considerations of space and time through a concept of wandering, which I will expand on in this section though a discussion of the Situationists. While I began this chapter by differentiating my approach from certain earlier modes of appropriation, I will now argue that the work of the Situationists retains a useful consideration of cultural reconfiguration for contemporary practice. To begin this argument I will examine the practice of *dérive*, a deliberate deprivileging of established patterns of movement in urban surroundings to explore the potential contingency of “situations”. I will outline the potential for Situationist structures of experience to contribute to my practical strategies, while avoiding their radical rejection of political codes and structures. I argue that cultural codes and structures are already increasingly in flux, thus delegitimising the relevance of gestures of rejection in frameworks of contemporaneity. As such, I seek to engage their more generative strategies, thus “recuperating” their approach and applying it to my contingent appropriation framework.

In his text *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International*, Wark expands on lesser-known Situationist concepts to argue for a greater depth and potential application of the Situationist project. Wark argues that artist and founding Situationist Asger Jorn presents a more generalised approach to the *dérive*, in the densely geometric lexicon of Situology that argues for a structure of congruent moments. Jorn’s radical reconfiguring of geometry argues for movement as a prefiguring of measurement, and thus an experiential and personalised approach to questions of space and time. In this sense, he is arguing the same spatial agency as the *dérive*, but, as Wark points out, “One need not wander the streets forever. The *dérive*, raised to the level of the concept, can now be practiced in almost any time-space whatsoever.”

Importantly, this is situated in the radical agency of the present that the Situationists were advocating, and thus “Situology is not interested in the view from the outside…

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88 Indeed, cultural theorist Jean Baudrillard even goes so far as to declare their aims of dismantling alienation fulfilled, for better or worse. See *Impossible Exchange*, (London, New York: Verso Books, 2001)
89 McKenzie Wark, *50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International* P. 16
90 Ibid. P. 18
it is more interested in the internal experience of the transformation.”\footnote{Ibid. P. 18} This reinforces the Situationists’ emphasis on the radical act rather than a reliance on the radical result, rendering their techniques adaptable through critical reconfiguration.

The Situationists anticipated this reconfiguration through their concept of \textit{recuperation}, which I utilise to contextualise the relevance of their techniques to my expanded concept of wandering. Wark argues for the constructive potential of recuperation, which is often interpreted as a wholly negative co-opting and de-radicalising process.\footnote{See ‘Faces of Recuperation’ section of \textit{Situationist International} #1, June 1969. Accessed via http://www.cddc.vt.edu/sionline/si/faces.html on 14/3/2016.} His argument is that Situationist concepts must be adapted if they are to remain relevant; effective understanding must adapt the original work. Situationist literature often positions recuperation as the de-radicalising that occurs with mainstream absorption of previously radical ideas and positions. Wark argues that while the Situationist project began as a counter-cultural force it has since been adapted into major cultural canons. Contemporary recuperation, then, might act as a form of appropriation that re-radicalises what has been de-radicalised by institutionalisation.\footnote{McKenzie Wark, \textit{50 Years of Recuperation of the Situationist International}} For Wark, recuperation has a necessary function in the information culture economy, as the radical cannot enter the institutions of the academic, the artistic or the political while retaining its anti-institutional quality.\footnote{Ibid. P. 10} Counter-culture is absorbed by culture, but to include Situationist theory as a radical branch of cultural or art theory misunderstands the agency of their approach, including the distain they had for the cultural industry and academia. For Debord, art was an impediment to its own goals, and its potential would only shift with the revolutionary dissolution of traditional models of artistic production. My argument replaces radical rejection with the pursuit of new meaning, recuperating Situationist approaches to my contingency framework.

The task in studying the Situationists is not to leave their work for fear of destroying it, but to recuperate their project as a whole, thus creatively reframing, redeploying and mutating their work into new relevant and radical strains. Wark set the task of thoroughly examining the complexity of Situationist discourse and activity so as to
approach their radical shifting agency, rather than imitate or replicate their content. The concept of *recuperation* offers a mode for engaging Situationist theory and remobilising their strategies towards the contingencies of my contemporary concerns. I was initially drawn to the framework of *dérive* for its obvious links to wandering movement that emerged in my work appropriating *Stalker* material. If one “need not wander the streets”, as Wark suggests, then the concept of *dérive* offers a strategic positioning of wandering as a means to avoid constrictive frameworks. This adds a necessity and an urgency to keep away from established structures, be it reference or critique, and instead achieve a singular purpose with each mobilised wandering. This structure of appropriation elevates instinctual choices and personal contingencies, and insists that meaning will emerge from the rigour of process. But there is also the question of the direct intervention into cultural exchange that emerges from the Situationist strategy of détournement, which I will now investigate.

### 1.2.4 Alienated, Appropriated, Détourned

Continuing this recuperation of Situationist strategies, I will now focus on their mode of appropriation: *détournement*. This strategy will be outlined as the reconfiguring and radicalising of material appropriated from capitalist culture in order to function as agitprop material against it. While détournement offers a crucial position in the history of appropriation, my research will determine the possibility of depoliticising certain elements of these strategies. My early video experiments revealed the need for a rigorous formal logic that would distance source material from its origins. I therefore sought to exploit channels of circulation and modes of technology towards an ambiguous emergence of new meaning, rather than agitprop radicalisation.

Détournement was a concept developed by Situationists Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman, for the reuse and combination of existing material.\(^5\) This was part of the Situationist program of radical politics through everyday life, and therefore involved a co-opting of media exposure and consumerism reconfigured towards personal agency. The action of détournement brings agency to an otherwise passive consumer

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of information, allowing them to make a curatorial decision and reframe the knowledge that the information generates:

“For example in a metagraph [poem-collage] relating to the Spanish Civil War the phrase with the most distinctly revolutionary sense is a fragment from a lipstick ad: ‘Pretty lips are red’.”96

Détournement relies on a specific understanding of reference in order to create the disjuncture that so interests the Situationists, as “the main force of a détournement is directly related to the conscious or vague recollection of the original contexts of the elements.”97 This idea of appropriation would be influential in developing the practices of appropriation art in the 1970s and 1980s and its surrounding academic discourse.98 However, rather than reading détournement as a simple precursor to the ubiquity of appropriation art, it is important to consider the perception that détournement might be considered as an artistic gesture of anti-art. As Debord would later argue, détournement is only anti-art to the extent that it is against an ideological establishment that refuses to acknowledge the importance of cultural agency:

“‘Détournement’ is not an enemy of art. The enemies of art are those who have not wanted to take into account the positive lessons of the ‘degeneration of art’.”99

This aligns with the Situationists’ reconfiguration of cultural language in their perceived failure of revolutionary modernist movements. In particular, the Situationists followed and deconstructed the trajectory of the Surrealists, injecting their own radicalism in the face of what they perceived to be the co-opted pacification of surrealism’s potential.

Debord’s “degeneration of art” is an argument for instigating contingency through appropriation. For Debord, the technology of image reproduction and cinema offered a means to repurpose and appropriate existing materials. I argue that the Situationists

96 Ibid. P. 35
97 Ibid.
98 As seen in the writing of Douglas Crimp and Benjamin Buchloh described above.
engage the contingencies of technological production towards radical political meanings. This use of material proposes a meaning shifted from the concept of inherently static artwork or information, as détournement offers an exercise in the influence of context on framing knowledge and the perception of reality. Be it the interaction of work and context, fragmented works with other fragments, or even work and its title, the Situationists draw the attention to the contingency of meaning in cultural production. For the Situationists, the creation of new meaning is achieved through the rupture of the established conventions of existing meaning.  

100 Détournement is thus the active rejection of any intrinsic cultural truth of an object or information through an acceleration of its relative and relational contingency.

Importantly, the Situationists’ writing on détournement intrinsically links the agency of their strategy to communication technologies. They understand the need for new languages of cultural expression that tap into the modes of information dissemination.  

101 In particular, the increasing power to determine titles and contexts reveals an intrinsic shift of the increasing abstraction and growing communication that shapes and is shaped by the coming of the information age. The growing interaction of meaning is increasingly determined by the technologies of transmission, in which the Situationist approach supplies an invaluable mobilisation towards the agency of the cultural practitioner. What remains relevant to my research is that such a practice takes advantage of the mediation that technology already enforces, and highlights the lineage of accelerating media contingencies as a mode of cultural expression. This feeds back into my video project through a continued collection of sources and approaches that enhance the particular meanings emerging from my own wandering metaphor.

1.2.5 Wandering Fables

Following my investigation of the Situationists, I decided to combine aspects of existing work with my own newly shot footage. This section reconfigures the Situationist approach of détournement towards techniques of restaging and re-

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100 Ibid. P. 36
101 Thus, they mention radio, newspaper and cinema, but they also have continued references to an abstracted idea of cultural objects and history. The proposed alteration of films and symphonies, in title and/or display understands an increasingly commodified status of these objects in circulation.
enacting existing works and source materials. I deliberately compounded this process by adding a previously existing artwork as another source material to my initial video project, rather than a work of film, television or other video sequence. Using existing artwork is by no means a new approach, and at first glance recalls the focus of Crimp and Buchloh that I have sought to distance myself from. The important differentiation here is both the tone of work that I have appropriated and the process of its inclusion in my work. The work I have utilised is Peter Fischli and David Weiss’s art film Der Rechte Weg (1987), which depicts their Rat and Bear alter egos in a pseudo-cinematic context of alpine wandering. Whereas Stalker provides a metaphorical consideration of meaning from a cinematic perspective, Der Rechte Weg offers a kind of allegory of creativity, and a more explicitly playful questioning of purpose through creativity and storytelling. As Jörg Heiser argues in his text All of a Sudden, the use of narrative is not an exercise in critical irony, but rather, “when Fischli/Weiss tell a story, they do so as a way of making fun of storytelling itself.”\(^{102}\) For Heiser, the textual problems of narrative are not cynically deconstructed as in appropriation art, but subtly mocked in a ham-fisted approach that plays in form as an alternative to a more obvious critique.

I initially included Fischli and Weiss’s material by appropriating digital footage of their video into my assemblages of Stalker material. This would fall into a problematic dynamic that was either too recognisable or so abstracted and distorted that it removed the aesthetic coherence of the work. This removal of references culminated in my first confirmation exhibition, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4. In trying to distinguish my work from the tradition of weighty critical decision-making in appropriated artwork, I used increasing levels of audiovisual abstraction and distortion to simultaneously disguise sources and my own intentions. This approach created work that was difficult to grasp, both intellectually and aesthetically, falling prey to Doane’s warning of the meaninglessness that contingency risks. To counter these problems, I created a single channel video work that could form the basis of future installation outcomes. This work would be less focused on distancing itself from source material

than it was on pursuing thorough, yet non-critical, lightness of association between materials and decisions.


Using the metaphor of wandering and an expanded consideration of Situationist strategies, I reconsidered the inclusion of the material of *Stalker* and *Der Rechte Weg* through sequences of re-enactment. These sequences would be combined with moments of abstraction from my earlier experiments with appropriated sources in order to form a single video assemblage. The collection and combination of this new footage would serve to further remove the references from the appropriated source material, pushing my video further towards the ambiguous territory of new meaning. This approach eschewed appropriation as a central conceptual basis for the creation of works, following its increasing normalisation throughout culture, media and technology. The connection and contingencies of different media formats helped establish a creative-conceptual strategy for producing work that provided an alternative to the reference-quotation style of appropriation and its necessary recognition. The first steps toward the working process was an understanding of a
process of continued feedback and translation that combined *Stalker, Der Rechte Weg* and my own footage into an acceleration of contingent content, process and mediation:

1. There would need to be some level of obscurity to the source material if ambiguity was going to function in my own works. This did not necessarily mean choosing obscure cultural materials, but more generally subjecting these works to technical processes of alteration and distortion through various digital editing processes and reconfigurations that removed the role of recognition and reference.

2. The works I was drawn to were all performing a metaphorical leap outside of their given structures. I could not follow these same metaphorical tangents, as once they fade into literalness they become established structures. My own engagement with these materials had to invest them with new metaphorical properties that would be generated through combinations and contingencies of materials and structures.

3. Generating new metaphorical approaches necessarily involved replacing critically-aimed appropriation with layers of arbitrary choices. The weight of meaning would not be particularly determined by initial choices and combinations of materials, but by the formal languages and critical concerns that emerged through continued combination and alteration.

4. The works I was making would need to cycle these source materials through a continuing process of combination, mediation and alteration until they generated a coherent formal logic. This would necessitate both the continued reconfiguration of appropriated material and the influx of newly generated video footage that would be collected in response to the emerging formal concerns. This feedback loop would intensify until it could bring these distinct elements together in a newly meaningful assemblage.
1.2.6 Processes in Motion

With these factors identified, the new work around *Stalker* combined elements of Fischli and Weiss’s *Der Rechte Weg* towards new creative possibilities. These materials were combined due to a shared motif of “wandering”, and to determine whether connecting materials with such a superficial association would leave more room for a new work to develop. My own newly shot, added footage depicted a wandering figure that traversed the decrepit, overgrown landscape of an abandoned urban ruin. The figure itself was costumed with a large red dog’s head while remaining in ordinary clothing, pointing out the half-hearted nature of the costume, à la *Rat and Bear*. Thus, the cycling of my formal process would engage the contingencies of the restaging setup, including the comparatively differing locations and the unintentional injection of my locality into circulated materials.

The successes of this method of generating video works would involve refining the four-point framework identified above into a strategy for mobilising new work. Breaking down those concepts into a practical approach, I determined the following stages:

1. **Identification**: Identify a source with a rich metaphorical function and combine with other source materials that it shares either metaphorical or superficial traits with.

2. **Reinterpretation**: Reinterpret the structure of one or all of the source material as a means to collect new footage and start an initial arrangement for the new video to emerge.

3. **Recombination and Obscuring**: Combine elements of the original source material with the new footage arrangement, expanding the metaphorical ideas emerging, and obscuring the reference and discernibility of the sources.

4. **Addition and Feedback**: Once the video has established a structure of its own, continue the addition of any further source materials that now relate to the framework of this new video.
With my sources identified, I continued with the first step and analysed the process of wandering as metaphor and possible structure. Using wandering as a motif, I then shot a reinterpretation of sequences of *Stalker* using the character of the Red Dog. I had broken down the film of *Stalker* into a series of key moments in narrative and cinematography, and had replicated these shots with my collected footage. The result was a roughly 15-minute video that had a scaled-down version of the flow and occurrences of *Stalker* as a linear sequence. I then reintroduced the source material into this new video, in both an audiovisual and a metaphorical capacity. Certain visual passages were woven into the work, in such a way that they were not particularly recognisably appropriated. Following the metaphor of “wandering”, I increasingly combined elements of footage in the video using overlay and keying functions, which created strange temporal flows and confused senses of spatiality.

![Figure 9](image1.png)

**Figure 9.** Nickk Hertzog, *Hellhound on My Trail*, 2015. Still from 10:23 of 14:25 minute digital with sound.

What emerged from this process was a single video distinct from its sources despite the appropriation of their structure and audiovisual materials. There was a tension between the recognisable and the unrecognisable appropriation, following Tarkovsky’s own appropriations and “extra-textual references”. The fourth step of

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this process was the addition of further materials and the continued feedback of material for the generation of video works. Once I continued the visual developments, I added more sound elements that reconfigured Tarkovsky’s use of music as cultural symbolism and utilised Robert Johnson’s 1937 song “Hellhound on My Trail”. This musical lament recalls the classic blues figure with which Johnson himself is strongly associated—itinerant, destitute, wandering. It was then structured through the work in varying levels of distortion and legibility, now subjected to a kind of wandering of recognition and fidelity. The song also offered a title for the work, as first an obvious reference to the red dog character, and secondly as a cue to the structural and metaphorical ambiguity of the work.

Furthermore, as I developed my other video projects, I continued revisiting Hellhound on My Trail, and introduced relevant elements into the generation of new versions and new video. Elements explored in other projects, such as digital image breakdown and noise, were continually woven into the project. Thus, I began what I will outline in the next chapter as a folk-contingency process, which utilises that four-step process to generate and develop video works. This can be continually revisited to create a densely layered work that builds aesthetic meaning through this cycling. Importantly, there is a further step to this process that I will refer to in Chapter 4, which involves the intervention in this continued cycling through the installation process.

By aligning contingency with contemporaneity, this chapter has outlined a strategy of appropriation that engages the creative potential of new meaning and the relevance of ambiguity in this process. My focus on appropriation distances itself from previous models by acknowledging that the relevance of critical intention and referential quotation recede in the uncertainty of contemporaneity. In these conditions a more nuanced approach to meaning is called for, and I have argued that contingency provides this mechanism. My specific definition of contingency synthesised Doane and Rorty’s definitions in order to examine the spatio-temporality of meaning and exchange in contemporaneity, and how this might engage a moving-image practice. My initial video project, Hellhound on My Trail, appropriated from Tarkovsky’s Stalker and from Fischli and Weiss’s Der Rechte Weg using an expanded metaphor of wandering. By recuperating Situationist concepts of dérive and détournement into my practice, I developed a strategy of restaging work and collecting new footage in order
to further distance my assemblage from its source materials. This provided a working practice for developing video work, which accelerated contingencies towards an ambiguous position of new meaning and prepared them for the metaphorical display of installation discussed below. The next chapter expands on this working method during the development of my second video project, *Poor Old Horse*, which involved a closer look into the interconnected media landscape in which my practice operates, using the media theory of remediation to expand on my own practice into what I term *folk-contingency*. 
Chapter 2: The Contingency of Remediation

While the previous chapter establishes the role of contingency in the production of meaning and ambiguity, this chapter will extend this argument toward an examination of the channels of technological transference and digital exchange that position digital video as a system of cultural contingencies. Following the concept of remediation, as articulated by Bolter and Grusin, I will argue that digital video presents a cultural situation in which the exchange, copy and technological repositioning of material is continually normalised. This resituates the gesture of appropriation from an explicit critical or counter-cultural strategy to a muted and nuanced expressive tool in creative production. This digital connection and availability recalls the concept of folk, which presents a mode of diverting cultural materials into alternative networks of reconfigured meaning. I will examine the implication of folk in the practice of Kelley, while the strategies of my second video project, Poor Old Horse, will be discussed using the term folk-contingency.

Section 1 will elaborate on my practical framework for video production, in which my creative contingency process is considered in a wider cultural setting. This will begin by positioning the contingency of meaning articulated in the previous chapter towards the functions of technical media and the concept of remediation. I will then discuss my strategy of folk-contingency, in which cultural networks and materials are diverted towards the creative personal cycles of the practitioner. I argue that this concept of folk presents a personal agency that allows my contingency process to access and exploit instances of remediation inherent to digital processes. The dialogue of agency from the previous chapter will then be expanded through my second project, Poor Old Horse, and is further examined through the practice of Kelley. Kelley’s Projective Reconstruction series will be examined through the dialogues of art historians Buskirk and Welchman, who argue that Kelley’s practice represents a wider tonal shift in the artistic deployment of appropriation. My own contribution to this dialogue is presented as a consideration of a folk-contingency practice that expands on practices such as Kelley’s by accelerating their capacity to remediate existing materials. This distinction provides my practice with a context with which to creatively accelerate contingencies of remediation towards a relevant strategy of digital appropriation.
Section 2 expands on the function of digital modes of appropriation and their implications for a practice of folk-contingency. The role of sampling, and its relationship to other forms of appropriation, will be analysed through the materiality of nostalgia in Soda_Jerk’s video *The Was*. By comparing sampling to the strategy of *collage*, I will argue that digital appropriation reveals a productive tension that exists between cultural memory and the potential for forgetting. Accordingly, I will argue that this places remediation in an ambiguous position, which ensures the proliferation and extended memory of cultural materials while simultaneously altering materiality and increasing the capacity to be appropriated and reconfigured. These implications for the play of memory and forgetting will then be further explored in relation to my video project *Poor Old Horse*, which continued developing strategies that combined existing material with my own new footage. This contingency of translation and transference was accelerated through my appropriation of a folk ritual that fosters creative ambiguity and expands the folk-contingency process. Memory and forgetting are thus examined as interrelated facets in the media dialogue of folk-contingency.
Section 1: Folk Memory and Contingency

2.1.1 Folk as Method

The previous chapter concluded with the emergence of a practical method, and it is my position here to expand that method into a discourse of contemporary media relations. Those initial steps of Identification, Reinterpretation, Recombination and Obscuring, and Addition and Feedback articulated an internal creative logic, but also relied on an interconnected media field of exchange and transfer. In this section I will examine this interconnection through strategic and creative acceleration, while transferring dialogues of metaphor into the context of digital media, using the concept of remediation. This concept, as outlined by Bolter and Grusin, positions the digital as a set of processes that accelerate media relationships through its representation of other media forms, thus allowing my video practice to appropriate previously non-digital materials. Remediation therefore produces channels of technological reinterpretation that allows the digital practitioner considerable access to pre-existing materials and their capacity to be adapted and reconfigured.

I argue that this accelerated access and remediation mobilises a contemporary iteration of folk; a process of adapting media channels to processes of cultural reuse. This mobilisation of folk utilises the contingency of remediation, which informs my own strategies of appropriation and acceleration. Situating the strategy of my practice within a context of media exchange demonstrates a process of folk-contingency, which explores the ambiguities of remediation as a site for creative video production. In this chapter I will articulate how this folk-contingency employed the inherent metaphorical capacity of remediation to generate my video project Poor Old Horse. In this sense, folk-contingency approaches new meaning through the ambiguities of digital video’s media situation and expands Rorty’s arguments of metaphor towards the agency of the practitioner in a contemporary cultural framework.

I argue that expanding Rorty’s metaphorical implications through the concept of remediation positions my folk-contingency process as a strategy of meaning in digital practice. I will argue how a close reading of remediation aligns with their metaphorical concerns, but I must first acknowledge the role of language as a mode of agency. This
emerged from my previous synthesis of Rorty and Doane that expanded on their approaches to the contingency of meaning. I will now continue expanding my provisional definition by considering how the agency of metaphor and meaning extends from Rorty’s focus on the work of Davidson. Both Rorty and Davidson establish their dialogues of metaphor through the concept of language, which I will now expand towards an artistic framework. Following this approach, art historian Buskirk has argued that language provides the agency for art practice to expand from object-based practices towards a contingent approach, on which my own practice is based.

Metaphor offers a gestural quality within language. By expanding on Buskirk’s argument, I contend that this gesture-within-language can be found in the acceleration of contingency in certain art practices. Buskirk specifically argues that contingency emerged and accelerated as twentieth-century art increasingly dematerialised, shifting a newly developing agency onto the practitioner. In this condition of reconfigured artistic authorship, she argued that language structures offer a gestural quality that redefined agency. Language asserts authorship as it is “implied in the connection to the enunciative statement ‘this is art’ that Thierry de Duve has posited as a condition for the readymade.” This gestural capacity of language offers an application of metaphor that continuously shapes and reshapes accepted meaning for art. For Buskirk, the readymade marks the emergence of an abstracted art process that repositions previous material-authorship models towards a network of contingent artistic relations. Importantly, the appropriation that characterises the readymade is aligned with the agency of cultural gesture and the condition of contingency that extends the knowledge–language approach of Rorty towards the artistic, through Buskirk’s conception of a network of contingent mediations.

While Buskirk’s text continues to be a useful analysis of authorship and materiality, its focus remains on conceptual, installation and performance art, and stops short of video practice or the digital. The heightened connection of these technologies and media formats that my practice utilises shifts my focus from Buskirk’s mediations, and

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105 Buskirk, The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art, P. 26
towards the concept of remediation. Bolter and Grusin argue that despite levels of medium specificity and technological separation, we are continually faced with “the representation of one medium in another”\textsuperscript{106} that is “a defining characteristic of the new digital media.”\textsuperscript{107} They address the paradigms of digital representation and “New Media” through a “constrained and hybrid” agency, in which agency is located “in the interaction of formal, material, and economic logics that slip into and out of the grasp of individuals and social groups.”\textsuperscript{108}

Through Bolter and Grusin, remediation therefore extends the linguistically bound metaphor towards the practical consideration of digital video art and its production. Remediated content is appropriated from one medium to be expressed in another, such as a digital version of the cinematic film \textit{Stalker}. This content remains conceptually or aesthetically comparable to its previous media form, but is nonetheless materially altered into a new technical framework of meaning. Remediation is thus a reconfiguration of material and meaning that positions medium as an active agency with continuing implications.

Metaphor deliberately frames the mobilisation of contingency while remediation frames the contingency inherent in medium exchange itself. Remediation has extended my creative strategy of folk-contingency towards the contingencies of translation, reuse and memory in my second video project \textit{Poor Old Horse}. This project combined the reuse inherent to folk processes with the implied rearticulation of remediation. The folk relationship of material was accelerated through the contingencies of my creative practice and the resulting folk-contingency engaged the condition of \textit{mediatisation} that Jameson articulates:

\begin{quote}
“It is because we have had to learn that culture today is a matter of media that we have finally begun to get it through our heads that culture was always that, and that the older forms or genres, or indeed the older spiritual exercises and meditations, thoughts and expressions, were also in their very different ways media products. The intervention of the machine, the mechanisation of culture, and the mediation of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
culture by the Consciousness Industry are now everywhere the case, and perhaps it might be interesting to explore the possibility that they were always the case throughout human history, and within even the radical difference of older, precapitalist modes of production.”

In this sense Bolter and Grusin, through their framing of Jameson, imply the mediation inherent to contemporaneity itself: that all interpretations of the past are mediated through our contemporary technical iterations of historical artefacts, archives and material. Media and mediation multiply the connections of material and thus contribute to this heightened mediatised present.

My second video work, Poor Old Horse, uses the transference and reinterpretation of historical folk ritual to accelerate the implications of remediation into a theme of memory and debt. This began by extending Bolter and Grusin’s reading of Jameson towards an investigation of mediatisation in the “older, precapitalist modes of production” implied by the oral history of a folk ritual and its accompanying song. The project accelerates the organic mediations implied by folk-history into dense layers of association and recombination so that a rich and sustained ambiguity might emerge. Firsthand source material was inaccessible due to the ephemeral and immaterial nature of this ritual, known as “Burying the Dead Horse”, which would necessitate my collection of audiovisual material through heavily mediated associations and affinity of content. In this way, creative choices shaped the project through an expanded field of remediation that positions my second project away from the singular medium concerns of cinematic meaning of my first project, Hellhound on My Trail. I will now expand on the development of this video and how my folk-contingency process mobilised an agency of loose creative associations into a distinct formal logic of memory and mediation.

2.1.2 Your Horse Must Die: Memory and Debt

By positioning my working process in a surrounding media discourse, I had established a strategy of folk-contingency that would generate my second project. My

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109 Fredric Jameson as quoted in Remediation: Understanding New Media, Pp. 56-7
110 Ibid.
attention to folk emerged from the concept of remediation and its processes of appropriation and mediation that might extend artistic discourse. The shifting agency this implied led me to focus on the dematerialised form of a folk ritual itself, and the particular contingency that might emerge from its appropriation. I had heard of a particular folk ritual of “Burying the Dead Horse” from a performance by social-historian and musicologist Danny Spooner.\textsuperscript{111} The ritual itself was a practice among sailors in the 1800s that involved the ritual burning of a horse effigy to symbolise the debt the sailors had to work off for the first thirty days of their voyage.\textsuperscript{112} I was drawn to the idea of a folk ritual because of the circulation and mediation that folk traditions imply, and how this might test the capabilities of my established practical framework. I was struck by the implied imagery of such a ritual, which held a complex dialogue of bondage and debt, particularly the reifying or embodying of debt that held structural parallels to my own appropriation of existing materials. The financial ties of servitude for those sailors then related to the critical bondages and intellectual debts that are associated with reference and existing cultural material within my research.

This second project of mine would therefore be assembled around the concept of memory and debt, in much the same way the previous material had been structured around wandering. These concepts first emerged as thematic concerns within the source material itself, but were then utilised as organising strategies to gather and arrange material. This process was further mediated by the challenging lack of original audiovisual material from which to begin. Building on those steps from Chapter 1, the \textit{Poor Old Horse} project developed as follows:

1. **Identification:** Identifying a folk ritual of memory and debt, and using these metaphorical concerns as formal organisation. The audiovisual sources were chosen through general aesthetic affinities to the content of the ritual, cinematic sequences of water and horses.

2. **Reinterpretation:** Shooting new footage to reinterpret the visual materials of

\textsuperscript{111} This particular performance was part of the \textit{Shanty’s by the Wharf} session of Port Fairy Folk Festival led by musician and oral historian Danny Spooner on 7th of March 2015.

\textsuperscript{112} It was said that the sailors were issued an advance before the voyage began, for the purpose of providing for families and purchasing new gear. It was this advance that they then had to pay off with 30 days of work before they began earning any pay.
sailing, water and horses I had collected. These were shot in the creeks and rivers of my own location, and thus injected a strange urban locality into the project.

3. **Recombination and Obscuring:** Combining the appropriated material with my own footage to create slow assemblages of overlaid footage. By continuing to utilise keying editing processes, a heavy layered assemblage could form that blurred its individual components.

4. **Addition and Feedback:** Rather than adding more sources at this point, several different arrangements of assemblage were made to represent the various stages of the folk ritual itself. This range of video processes ensured expansion of the possible arrangements for later installation.

By following these steps with an added emphasis on folk-contingency, the development of the work *Poor Old Horse* expanded my established strategy by focusing on the relationship between artistic agency and technological mediation. Media entered the dialogue of my creative processes through the consideration of exchange and remediation: the ambiguous division between remembering and forgetting cultural material. This process relied on a framework of contemporary production that is not without precedent or affinity. For my project this would necessarily involve the collection of vast amounts of material, which was then arranged and assembled into a precarious balance of aesthetic coherence and creative ambiguity. In particular, my research around this project expanded on Kelley’s approach to mobilise the contingencies of a heavily mediated engagement with folk and memory in wider cultural settings.

2.1.3 **Mike Kelley: Appropriating Folk Practice**

To determine how to engage a precarious methodology of ambiguous folk-contingency I examined the precedent to this approach in the works of Kelley, particularly his *Projective Reconstructive* series and the installation *Day is Done*. Kelley’s practice informed my own approach by adopting remediation as a practical methodology in which artwork is continually reconfigured and reworked, from wider
cultural exchange into intensively personal creative cycles. Kelley’s practice utilises an understanding of folk that engages a nuanced and layered use of appropriation, with less definable aims and a greater engagement with ambiguity. It is for this reason that Kelley exemplified a strong precedent for my strategy of folk-contingency, in which the agency of personal creative cycles combines ambiguously with the cycles of existing cultural material.

Kelley’s practices utilise a range of media and arrangements of material, which would develop a focus on folk art into a creative strategy for his own continued production. Describing the ambiguity of his video installation Day is Done (2005), which was part of the larger Projective Reconstructive series, Kelley states:

“Details are provided by material taken from my own biography, intermixed with recollections of popular films, cartoons, and literature. Personal and mass-cultural experiences are treated as equally true; I’m postulating the equivalence of art and memory.”

As a description of Kelley’s later work, it gives particular insight into the trajectory and strategy of his practice. Kelley initially came to prominence with his collected stuffed animals, as an attempt at formalising American folk forms. The feedback from this work were labels of “kitsch” and “camp”, which he rejected due to the implied “goofiness” of camp and the fact that he had “a meaner sense of humour”. Other reactions aligned his work with repressed abuse that these childhood materials implied in the culture of the time. Kelley responded to these readings of “camp” and “abuse”, by appropriating their implications into his follow-up work, The Educational Complex (1995). In this series, Kelley constructed models of every institution he attended from high school onwards, including areas and rooms he did not remember. Utilising the same pop psychology that determined him to have been abused, Kelley proposed the formal conceit that any rooms he couldn’t remember were the sites of trauma and abuse that he had repressed. From the excessive models of torture and

113 Mike Kelley, ‘Day is Done’, artist statement in Day is Done, (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2007) P. 461
115 Ibid. P. 147
116 Kelley, ‘Day is Done’, P. 461
abuse of *The Educational Complex*, Kelley then shifted towards the shared nature of his experiences by collecting high school yearbook photographs. These collected materials served as a means to “reconstruct” fictional events of these “repressed memories” and conflate them with other high school experiences.\(^{117}\)

The development of Kelley’s series *Projective Reconstruction* (2000–2005) demonstrates the most effective mobilisation of his folk-contingency approach. The series consists of a number of videos and video installations that appropriate certain high school rituals documented in yearbook photographs. The first project, *A Domestic Scene, Projective Reconstruction #1* (2000), is a 30-minute production set in the style of an early television drama, based off a single yearbook photograph that Kelley collected.\(^{118}\) The following #2–32 are contained in the *Day is Done* multichannel video installation.\(^{119}\) Feeding off external receptions of his work and his own internal conceptual processes, Kelley’s formal developmental process creates rigorous depth through initially tangential associations. Having arrived at his source material by evaluating the direction and reaction of his previous body of work, Kelley identifies and expands on the themes of *memory* and *repression* that emerged. For Kelley, the yearbook photographs were sources that presented the strange and carnivalesque occurrences of American high schools, to which he assigned a discourse of memory and trauma that followed *The Educational Complex*. From his solely personal experiences, real and imagined, Kelley moved towards the *shared* nature of these “traumatic” experiences, appropriating victim culture and accelerating its trajectories. By conflating “personal recollections and the narratives of mass media”, he did not seek to wholly remove sources from their contexts, but to force a clashing of contexts.\(^{120}\) Kelley has developed the concepts of trauma and abuse into a metaphor for his own production, accelerating its associations and implications into a creative strategy.

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\(^{117}\) Ibid. Pp. 461-4  
\(^{118}\) Ibid. P. 462  
\(^{119}\) Ibid.  
\(^{120}\) Kelley, ‘Day is Done’, P. 461
While Kelley’s particular focus on memory differs vastly from my own, analysing these works demonstrates the relevance of Kelley’s strategy for combining a personal agency with the contingencies of media and remediation. The ritualised performances of his videos are of less interest to my practice than Kelley’s general working method and his exercises in formal methodology. Kelley’s work occupies an important position in considering the development of contemporary tones of appropriation, in which less critical and more rigorous formal approaches position the agency of the appropriator as a kind of negotiation for ambiguity. Kelley’s *Day is Done* installation produces a sustained ambiguity between the role of source materials of folk production, mass culture and subculture and the agency of the appropriator to accelerate, layer and rework this material through practical manipulation of mediation and remediation.

By examining Kelley’s installations, I argue that a rich formal quality can be achieved through a sustained mobilisation of remediation. His appropriation of carnivalesque high school activities, musicals and the complex mechanism of victim-culture is more than simply a copying or re-presenting of these materials, but rather a remediation of them. Each formal aspect has their own media context (the yearbook, musical theatre and tabloid news hysteria, etc.) which Kelley reconfigures using his own formal
processes. In this sense, Kelley shows an earlier model of a folk-contingency process, as he appropriates from source materials into a concentrated system of reconfiguration, from which strange new meaning occurs. His high school focus involves the remediation of the carnivalesque that appears in school activities, musicals, dress-up days, and other rituals that starkly contrast to education or team exercises that Kelley labels as indoctrinating strategies.121 Kelley’s focus on memory also remediates the news industry’s sensationalist adoption of psychology in the use of “repressed memories” that featured heavily in the 1980s and 1990s.122 Kelley’s appropriation of these subjects utilises a network of remediation already in place, and accelerates these processes into intensive demonstration of folk-contingency and the expanded agency this implicates.

2.1.4 Contingency of Agency: John C. Welchman

Through the writing of Welchman, I will now contextualise Kelley’s practice in my earlier discussion of artistic agency and appropriation shifts. As I have stated above, Kelley utilises a cultural form of remediation, in which rituals and artefacts continually rewrite their previous sources. He then intentionally accelerates these differences and distortions through the projection of his own agency into these channels. This process can be seen developing from his early work of appropriated stuffed animals, which recontextualised the strategies of folk art towards a kind of avant-garde formalist approach. As Welchman argues, “One of the fullest reassessments of appropriation at the end of the 1980s arrived with Kelley’s rehabilitation of craft objects.”123 The formal approach that Kelley engaged in was the emergence of a complex remediation rather than a critical commentary through appropriation. For this reason, Kelley stood out from his peers, and his interest in folk-art remains vital to the framing of my own practice.

121 Kelley, ‘Day is Done’, P. 462
122 Ibid. Pp. 464-5
Kelley’s works were set apart from much of his contemporaries by means of his rigorous remediations that wove form through culture and back again. As Welchman further contends,

“This to-and-fro referential exchange is not only plural and mobile, it is also unbuffered: Kelley releases the effects of his pieces to collide and collude together, delivering something of the shock of their appearance and reformulation in a manner altogether different from the restraint and formal order of most New York appropriation and its critical predicate of ‘unitary deconstruction’.”¹²⁴

Welchman here alludes to the meanings that emerge from Kelley’s more ambiguous approach to non-art cultural systems and modes of production. Though Kelley engages and formalises American folk art as inspiration and source material, his approach is not sympathetic or celebratory.¹²⁵ Rather, Kelly appropriates formal logics outside the art system in order to restage them. The gallery setting is not a means to reflect on these appropriated sources and approaches, but rather, as Welchman contends,

¹²⁴ Ibid. P. 47
¹²⁵ Kelley goes so far as to say that he hates folk art; that it is “…the art of satisfied slaves.” in Kelley, Welchman, ‘On Folk Art’ in Minor Histories: Statements, Conversations, Proposals, P. 146
“The decay and resurrection of Kelley’s folk cosmologies are always embodied, not rationalised; performed not taken, experienced not proven, and projected rather than encoded.”

Kelley’s methodology effectively side-steps the issue of critical distance that had been synonymous with appropriation in art. In place of a recognisable gesture of appropriation, Kelley weaves appropriation techniques through a cultural navigation of shared signs and experiences.

It is also important to consider that while Kelley utilises recognisable craft forms, his understanding of folk art is complex and ambiguous. Speaking of the possible impact of folk art on contemporary art, he asserts that there is “a profound connection between contemporary art and folk art.” While folk art used to concern itself with what were considered outmoded formats, Kelley identifies the younger artists of his time as divorced from the concept of material tradition. Therefore, “any contemporary definition of folk art would have to dispense with the ‘historical’ associations connected with the term.” He identifies that nostalgic energy is being directed to more contemporary forms of production, such as graffiti, music fan production and craft. This is the energy of folk appropriation as Kelley saw it in younger generations, who would develop this folk approach into the conditions of contemporaneity. This feeds into the art of appropriation, accepted as it is by the art establishment that “artists ‘own’ images through their appropriation of them.” Here, Kelley alludes to the idea of appropriating imagery as the new folk art, the accepted and widely performed cultural presentation and values: “In essence, the mass culture of today is the folk art of tomorrow.” Folk-contingency is therefore a contemporary exercise, in which the agency of the artist remediates and accelerates the material of the past.

The agency of folk-contingency offers a strategic appropriation of existing material and its channels of exchange. Welchman argues that this reshapes appropriation

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126 Welchman, *Art after Appropriation* (…), P. 45
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
practices, as evident in the practices of Kelley, who demonstrates that the concept of folk offered a nuanced engagement with existing networks of media and cultural exchange. This demonstration fed into my practice through the use of folk-contingency, which mobilised the agency of formal reconfiguration over the critical gesture of appropriation. My video project, Poor Old Horse, utilises folk-contingency to engage with circulation and exchange in order to alter multiple portions of digital video into heavily layered assemblages. I will now extend this dialogue towards the technique of sampling as a form of digital appropriation that shaped the development of this video project.
Section 2: Appropriating as Forgetting

2.2.1 Soda_Jerk and Digital Folk Art

While the previous section demonstrates how folk-contingency utilises a remediating network of media, this section will demonstrate the role of *sampling* in mobilising this video strategy. The process of folk-contingency will be positioned through the digital implications of my practice, specifically my *Poor Old Horse* project and how this compares to the appropriation practices of video duo Soda_Jerk. By comparing my strategies to their work *The Was* (2016), I simultaneously demonstrate the importance of sampling to wider digital folk practices, while differentiating their approach from my own. The ambiguity of my practice emerges in the formal quality of a heavily layered work and the pursuit of exacerbated remediation that accelerates the inherent contingencies of the sampling process.

The folk concerns of the previous chapter are applied to the specific contingencies of digital agency. As discussed in the previous chapter, Kelley’s appropriation of folk art reveals a complexity beyond a kitschy celebration. The increased technological production and dissemination of images and video media then heightens the conditions for folk art to participate and intervene in the economy of digital exchange. Compared to previous non-digital processes, digital materials increase accessibility and capacity for manipulation through the constant remediation that this digital circulation accelerates. This offers the contemporary artist an unprecedented agency of access and alteration that can pose the often debilitating problems of excessive choice, rationale and framing that my formal strategies confront.

By utilising the continued feedback of formal logic that digital processes offer, acts of appropriation become normalised, and shift from the subversive critical commentary of Crimp’s *Pictures* generation, towards more ambiguous territory. This earlier prevalent mode of appropriation sought a critical position for resistance or commentary, but what emerged in practices like Kelley’s was the rejection of a critical distance and an embrace of a more nuanced positioning. Welchman argues that artists like Kelley were able to “add to the art of citation a refreshed ironic distance, layered
fields of reference, and a wave of theoretically deflated sampling.”

Kelley and his contemporaries were part of a repositioning of appropriation in art culture, responding to heightened technological processes of remediation and mediatisation. Practicalities of technology were met with a cultural affinity towards the expressive potential that surfaced in areas as diverse as hip-hop sampling and Scratch Video. These actions demonstrated remediation being explored as a strategy of expressive creative qualities.

These technological and cultural shifts reveal an increasing deployment of contingency as a mode of shifting authorial engagement, aligning with Buskirk’s arguments. She outlined the correlation between the dematerialising of the art-object and the reconfigured artistic agency that accelerates the expressive capacity of connections. This shift is not without its problems, as she states:

“The freedom to draw from multiple sources can also be seen as a form of pressure, however, since under these circumstances no artist can escape the obligation of having to make a series of self-conscious decisions about issues that include format, medium, context, content, appearance, duration, and relationship to precedents, with each read as a conscious choice and no decision that can be taken as assumed or given.”

 Appropriation creates pressures of choice that digital availability accelerates towards a potentially unwieldy contingency. As Doane warned, excessive contingency can overwhelm, and threatens the ability to rationalise the vast amounts of material into cultural meaning. With the pressure of digital connectivity increasing exponentially, navigational strategies become increasingly vital to the work of the digital artist.

Video art duo Soda_Jerk offer a mode of navigation by focusing on the media histories that produce these contemporary modes of practice and interlaced frameworks of exchange. Their video series Astro Black (2007–15) utilises histories of futurism and hip-hop identity as narratives of culture that become accessible material for folk assemblages. This series combines distinct sources from hip-hop and DJ music

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131 Welchman, *Art After Appropriation* (…), P. 40
133 Buskirk, *The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art*, P. 12
cultures with science fiction and Afrofuturism, and while their combining disparate sources acts as a kind of détournement, Soda_Jerk also exploit the existing crossover, such as the Afrofuturist Jazz musician Sun Ra. Historical narratives are appropriated, reconfigured and combined in order to accelerate the existing ambiguities of those competing narratives through playful assemblage and alternative positions. Thus, their videos depict Kraut-rock band Kraftwerk grafted into the sci-fi setting that their music references; or Sun Ra’s cosmic armageddon manifests itself through Public Enemy’s political message, transmitted by aliens. While Astro Black appropriates these artists and their content, this recombination of historical narratives does not undermine the importance or seriousness of its content, but accelerates the ambiguity of cultural legacy towards a new mythology. By utilising largely intact and discernible samples, Soda_Jerk signal an intention to reconfigure media histories as a storytelling mode of contemporary mythology, mobilising a digital form of folk art.

Figure 12. Soda_Jerk, Armageddon in Effect, 2008. Still from 00:21 of 6:35 minute digital video with sound.

Soda_Jerk’s engagement with digital folk accelerates the inherent ambiguities of remediation to reveal a range of expression that distinguishes their practice from my own. By investigating their video The Was, I argue that Soda_Jerk use this ambiguity to mobilise an expanded concept of nostalgia and its continually transformative properties. The Was is a 13 minute 40 second video work, distributed and viewed online, that depicts a range of sampled cinematic and animated material as a
collaboration with the musical assemblages of *The Avalanches*. Soda_Jerk assembled and combined the video material, generally based on the language of conventional cinema, from which it expands or diverts affectively. As Clements argues, this kind of realism affords a cultural readability, for “without any points of reference the work would be meaningless to all”. This idea of meaninglessness represents overwhelming contingency, pushing content and form of sources beyond connection to each other and to the recognition of the viewer. Soda_Jerk allow the viewer to recognise the language of the imagery, allowing them to perform novel subversions and deviations. *The Was* generally combines several appropriated sequences in a single frame or scene in which scale, direction and placement are all adapted so that combinations of disparate characters appear in the general representative logic of their new backdrop. Soda_Jerk then use this technique to perform unexpected combinations, such as a zebra standing beside the skinheads of *This is England* (2006), or undo the realistic cinematic convention with the inclusion of the obviously unreal, such as the characters in the cartoon *Beavis and Butthead* walking through a typical cinematic ghetto sequence.


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134 Clements, “Time Out…” P. 247
The overwhelming sensation that accompanies *The Was* is a celebratory nostalgia. Soda_Jerk intentionally utilise material that is recognisable as classic cinema, such as the cult gang film *The Warriors* (1979), or more recent nostalgic projects, such as the representation of 1970s skate culture in *Lords of Dogtown* (2005). The euphoria of recognition, and the novelty of the sheer number of references and ingenuity of their combinations, create a sequence that remixes these cinematic fragments into a compelling assemblage. *The Was* holds a seductive novelty to its technical achievements. As digital theorist Hertz reminds us, critique is not the only means to utilise or analyse culture. As he states,

“Though it does not per se engage cultural critique, appropriation can reveal information patterns and culturally promoted lexicons, peeling back the media layers, disconnecting and reconnecting the lexia, even when its intentions are only to play with images.”

The layers of Soda_Jerk’s work creatively contrasts our desires for novelty and newness with the pileup of cultural images and our fixation on times past. By following

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135 Hertz, “Recombinant Media Chaos: The Image After New Media”, P. 53
the contingencies of sampling, Soda_Jerk thus reveals a tenor of appropriation that
engages the folk nature of reuse while utilising remediation to playfully reconfigure
media paradigms. In contrast, my own approach sought more ambiguously accelerated
remediation that removed materials and traces from their origins. Where Soda_Jerk
reveals the alterable fluidity of a media-inscribed present, my Poor Old Horse project
pursues an enforced forgetting of sources to generate ambiguous new meanings in this
present. These are different mobilisations of digital practice that reveal the expressive
depth to the inherent remediation of sampling. In this sense, I share their focus of
cultural media memory, but through an approach that focuses less on the
reconfiguration of memory than the productive ambiguity that includes forgetting.

My process of folk-contingency differs from Soda_Jerk’s reconfigured media
narratives as I was seeking to replace any residual media narrative of my source
material with an ambiguous new formal meaning. My Poor Old Horse project
expanded the steps that were established in the Hellhound on My Trail project by
accelerating the collection, combination and reworking of video components into a
new video assemblage. As I have stated above, this began with the folk ritual of
‘Burying the Dead Horse’, which offered no audiovisual material in and of itself, and
thus necessitated further collection of material to begin assembling its form. This
began with the fairly arbitrary identification of several sources that featured imagery
of water and horses, recalling Kelley’s formal strategies of association that undermines
heavy-handed critical approaches. As in my previous project, I combined these
appropriated materials with my own new footage in order to blur origins and accelerate
the ambiguity of their combination. Combining these materials removed their traceable
origins, and thus performed a certain “forgetting” that extended questions of memory
into the formal arrangement of my project. Simultaneously, these forms were excised
from larger pieces, altered from other formats and media representations, still retaining
certain audiovisual values from those origins. In this sense, my Poor Old Horse project
would establish a dialogue of memory in media and remediation terms that relied on
the process of digital sampling and the particular contingencies that emerge from this
process. I will now expand on the role of sampling as a strategy for engaging digital
material and its relationships to other forms of cultural media.
2.2.2 Sampling vs. Collage

I have discussed above how the practices of Kelley and Soda_Jerk represent the implications of folk strategies in past and contemporary forms, respectively. I will now outline how sampling presents a strategy that shifts cultural agency from other practices such as collage, towards a more ambiguous cultural framework. Kelley’s pronouncement that “the mass culture of today is the folk art of tomorrow” becomes increasingly pertinent when considered through Soda_Jerk’s strategic engagement with the contingency of vast digital access. By playing with the languages of media forms, Soda_Jerk access the contingency of media narratives as one particular method for dealing with such vastness. Thus, the new folk-art to which Kelley refers emerges in the copied, ripped, transferred and remediated material that becomes the tools and content for the new digital folk artists. The found objects of the thrift store are replaced by digitally coded and distributed media. My project Poor Old Horse accelerates these implications of remediation to establish a formal approach to the ambiguous relationship between cultural memory and forgetting.

Digital practice allows the combination of multiple materials in order to obscure individual sources. What emerged from my project was an extremely diverse combination of materials owing to the lack of audiovisual contribution from the guiding source of the folk ritual. In this sense, the assemblage that formed was a heavily layered negotiation of material, without a single source overly determining a general audiovisual dynamic. This emerged in the slow abstract assemblages from which moments of clearer representation could emerge and recede, in order to give a sense of coherence and demonstrate the potential to mobilise the contingent over the critical. This play of sound and images emphasises remediation of material, in contrast with an appropriation strategy such as collage that emphasises the taking of material. In this regard, critic Joshua Clover has argued,

“The viewer’s leap to an imagined taking, from the actual facts of placement, is the basic interpretive act regarding collage.”

136 Kelley, Welchman, ‘On Folk Art’ in Minor Histories: Statements, Conversations, Proposals, P. 148
Recalling the Situationists’ pronouncements of art, Clover determines a crisis of contemporary acts of collage through the “eclipse of the political” that represent the blunting of collage’s radical implementation.\textsuperscript{138} Clover continues, “If we are to resolve the ambiguities currently haunting us, all passageways lead to ‘to take’.”\textsuperscript{139} If collage resolves ambiguities, then sampling revels in them. Thus sampling offers a useful technique of alteration and abstraction that imparts a formal mobilising of creative ambiguity.

Less ambiguous forms of appropriation emphasise the gesture of their reuse or reconfiguration by limiting the potential for contingency to emerge. For Soda_Jerk, the use of appropriated material involves less emphasis on collage’s \textit{cut}, in favour of the possible integrations and interactions of formerly distinct technological languages and media items. By recycling and accelerating the remediation of their source materials, Soda_Jerk operate a celebratory display of the ambiguities of history and accessibility that characterises the contemporary media environment. Clover acknowledges certain potentials of the more general form recycling as a means to provide a “powerful counter narrative to the dream of pure invention”, but also emphasises that the use of devalued or credited objects and images “secures the rights of the original even as it proposes to challenge them”.\textsuperscript{140} For Clover, the more specific recycling of collage performs a vital questioning of authorship, ownership, legality and commerce. Through these facets, originality is called into question.

In contrast, the practice of sampling reveals the heightened condition of media circulation \textit{already} questioning the original, through the ubiquity of the copy. Artists like Soda_Jerk take appropriation as a given rather than a radical statement. The material is there to be used, and in the absence of the radical implications of taking, I argue that the artist should exploit the potential of media ambiguities. Collage emphasises the artistic agency to take and remediate, whereas sampling acknowledges that remediation is already inherent to contemporary media, regardless of artistic agency.

\textsuperscript{138} Ibid
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid
\textsuperscript{140} Ibid. P. 88
The ambiguity of sampling is not a rejection of the subversive potential of cultural reuse, but the pursuit of a point beyond limiting critical impasses of the former avant-gardes and counter-cultures. As Hertz points out,

“Yes, subversion of the original function of an image and ironically reinvesting it with new meaning is practically de rigueur, but this practice of détournement emerges as much from remix culture and fan culture as it does from critical theory.”

According to cultural theorist Marcus Boon, this characterises sampling as “the practice of taking (or appropriating) ‘samples’ of pre-existing materials and recombining them in ways that produce something new”. This was originally performed with pre-digital methods, notably by minimalist composers of the 1960s, and later popularised by the hip-hop movement. Digital sampling takes “a series of ‘samples’ of the object, each of which consists of a digital code that describes a part of the object (a discrete area of an image, or a fraction of a second of a sound)”.

While montage disrupts the linear flow of a single cinematic sequence and collage disrupts the unified implications of originality, the coded algorithmic sequence of digital sampling differs from these approaches by accelerating the ambiguity of remediation into “a mathematical object”. Sampling therefore enacts an ambiguous renewal and disruption of remediation through its algorithmic appropriations.

The unique mathematical capacities of digital sampling recall the function of contingency as the capacity to actualise one eventuality out of limitless potential. A digital sample itself is taken in the form of a piece of code that describes a given part of a digital object, a visual component, audio component or some protocol relating to these outputs. According to Boon this means:

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141 Hertz, “Recombinant Media Chaos: The Image After New Media” P. 53
144 Boon, “Digital Mana: …” in Cutting Across Media (…), Pp. 31-32
145 Ibid. P. 32
“This series of samples can be stored and reconstituted as a sequence of samples that approximate the original object. Or as data that can be manipulated to transform the digital copy of the original into something else, or as an element to be mixed in a variety of ways with other samples, which while not from a technical point of view ‘infinite’, come close to being ‘beyond measure’.”

Boon’s reconfigured understanding of the infinite therefore suggests a digital alternative to Smith’s assertion that Baudelaire’s “contingent, transitory, fugitive” have lost their couplet of “the infinite”. Boon asserts that through digital appropriation the infinite emerges in the mythological immanence of digital folk cultures, which, I argue, transforms Baudelaire’s transcendent sublime. Boon continues,

“There is no separate or ideal infinite. The infinite is not captured in form; it transits through form. If it is an event—if it is what happens—finite form can be equivalent to an infinite opening.”

The contemporary absence of an ideal infinite, thus channels a relative infinite through the forms of “the contingent, the transitory, the fugitive” as evidenced in the digital. The digital infinite recalls the possibility of contingency, tempered by each continual emergence and connection.

Soda_Jerk mobilised this range of material and possible arrangement into works that accelerate the ambiguous cultural position of memory and nostalgia. They demonstrate the contingencies of cultural memory that emerge in media, while playing with the expectations of that media. Through their manipulability, digital processes have the capacity to position cultural material for remembering or forgetting. Soda_Jerk plays with the contemporary implications of the reference, while my own work seeks a more ambiguous state of forgetting by obscuring the function of reference. These distinct processes are both made possible through the capabilities of digital materiality, which will be explored further in Chapter 3. I will conclude this chapter by discussing my strategies of forgetting through the hypermediacy that continued the development of my Poor Old Horse project.

146 Ibid.
147 Ibid. P. 35
2.2.3 Your Horse Must Die: Cultural Forgetting

Whereas Soda_Jerk reveals a complex intertwining of media history and memory, my project aims for a more ambiguous territory that links memory with the forgetting of forms that remediation implies. The role of remediation allows material transfers that replicate other formats—a remembering of content. But it also enacts an intentional forgetting, in which the material qualities of the original media are lost and supplanted for its new format. This ambiguous relationship between remembering and forgetting places a value on the process of remediation as a means for deprivileging reference in my approach through accelerated media contingencies.

This acceleration of contingencies utilises the heavy layering of digital samples in order to continue obscuring both source materials and to downplay a readable intentionality to the work. It was important that the videos were not received as intellectual exercises and instead projected an ambiguous sensory immediacy. The complex layers of Poor Old Horse removes the traceable origins of any single sequence through extensive use of the keying function that was an important part of the Hellhound on My Trail video. But where the keying had kept levels of detail discernible in the first video work, I was now aiming to create more expressively abstracted motifs. This project on the metaphor of memory and debt aimed to process the various source materials to the point where the resulting assemblage would “forget” its cultural and audiovisual components in favour of its newly synthesised form.

The mechanism for engaging the memory of video and structuring sources to “forget” their material references relies on the materiality of video itself. To understand what digital video editing actually means, it is important to recognise that if video holds any sense of fidelity or indexicality, then editing is always a calculated loss of original information. This means that whatever information is subjected to editing loses original information in favour of selective digital algorithms that produce desired effects for editing purposes. These can be as simple as changing the length of a video duration, or as complicated as multi-layered chroma-keying. While the fidelity and indexicality to the original material diminishes, the editing process creates new
measures of information through its algorithmic processes, performing any number of operations to endlessly repeated iterations of the same original video piece.\footnote{Marcus Boon, “Digital Mana…” in Cutting Across Media (…), P. 35} Video editing, then, represents an ambiguously complex practice of loss to the idea of the original material, of remembering and forgetting its index.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure15.jpg}
\caption{Figure 15. Nickk Hertzog, \textit{Poor Old Horse}, 2016. Still from 01:01 of 13:41 minute digital video with sound.}
\end{figure}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure16.jpg}
\caption{Figure 16. Nickk Hertzog, \textit{Poor Old Horse}, 2016. Still from 10:47 of 13:41 minute digital video with sound.}
\end{figure}
Remediation continually rewrites the singular media object through a network of relations that have the capacity to quietly enhance cultural memory and exchangeability or reveal the complexity of these layers of mediation, through the concept of hypermediacy. There are levels of remediation implicit in the interaction with other mediums that form an essential component of video’s own media status. For something that was released as a film to reach an editable form for my own usage, it must involve some level of conversion, or ripping. This action of ripping is the remediation of material into a digitally distributable format. This involves several techniques that may use digital technology to take video material from DVDs or legitimate online formats, and create usable and exchangeable video files that may then enter the informal economy of information of digital exchange. These conditions are what Bolter and Grusin observe as digital medium being “more aggressive in its remediation” than other media. They argue:

“It [digital media] can try to refashion the older medium or media entirely, while still marking the presence of the older media and therefore maintaining a sense of multiplicity or hypermediacy.”

This sense of hypermediacy refers to the idea that the digital not only mediates, but makes its mediation explicitly part of the function of its nature. Not only does cinematic film get remediated into a digital video file, but it is still understood as a mediated version that refers to the cinematic object. Hypermediacy is the recognition of remediation, according to Bolter and Grusin, that especially characterises the digital.

Video compounds the implications of the digital through its own conditions of remediation, characterised by Hegarty as intermedia, which I will expand on in Chapter 4. Thus, video has a complex relationship to other technological formats, and the cultural content that those formats produce. I have outlined a mobilisation of this

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149 This exchange will be covered in more detail in Chapter 3 in regards to Hito Steyerl’s ‘In Defense of the Poor Image’
151 Ibid. Pp. 33-4
network of formats through the folk-contingency of generating the *Poor Old Horse* video. The installation of this project will be discussed in Chapter 4, as a means to evaluate the rationalising of this contingency, towards an expression of its new meaning. By establishing the concept of remediation and its strategic deployment through acts of sampling I have demonstrated the opportunity for contingency to involve a wider network of media in the creation of new work, and the configuration of its meaning. The removal of reference follows the functions of contemporary media, accelerating its contingencies through the reconfigured agency of the folk-contingency practitioner.

This chapter has extended the dialogues of contingency towards media networks by expanding the linguistic approaches of Rorty towards the technical approaches of Bolter and Grusin. I have argued that the concept of metaphor can be expanded to the functions of media through remediation, which expands my practical approach towards my strategy of folk-contingency. My own approach to folk-contingency was then compared to the earlier example of Kelley and his installation *Day is Done*. Following the discourses of Buskirk and Welchman, I situated Kelley’s practice in a pivotal moment for art history, in which tones of appropriation shifted and gave way to an ever-increasing ambivalence that I argue relates to the techno-cultural emergence of contemporaneity. Kelley demonstrated that a continuous reworking of material can form a rich framework for dealing with cultural material and arranging it into a relevant artistic strategy.

By examining the practice of video artists Soda_Jerk, I determined how sampling plays with reference to reconfigure considerations of media histories and trajectories. I then argued that this aspect of sampling can be pushed towards a less referential approach, through the mathematical qualities of the digital algorithm. This returns the concept of contingency to the digital sample through the possibilities of limitless alterations and the constraints of singular actualisations. My *Poor Old Horse* project extended the strategies outlined in Chapter 1 into the remediation of sources and the contingencies of modes of memory and forgetting in cultural media. Remediation therefore extended the role of metaphor and built the ambiguity of memory and forgetting into the formal emergence of my video work. The arguments of remediation established in this chapter
will now be extended into a dialogue on the contingency of digital materiality and its role in determining meaning in digital video.
Chapter 3: The Contingency of Digital Materiality

Where the previous chapter dealt with the immaterial aspects of artistic agency and questions of remediation, this chapter extends the contingency dialogue and methodology towards the material concerns of digital video. In this chapter, my previous dialogue of folk-contingency is aligned to the contingency of postmedium conditions and the material implications of those networks. This opens up my strategic processes to a material focus that will ground concerns of agency and circulation in the form and structure of digital video itself.

Section 1 will examine the expansion of medium specificity and circulation that form the materiality of the digital. My analysis will involve both the shifted agency implicated in Krauss’s pronouncement of the postmedium condition and the development and dissemination of video art. I will then examine the more expansive notion of intermedia, looking first at its Fluxus roots from Higgins, and secondly at the theories of Youngblood and their subsequent application in video art. These reconfigurations of medium specificity will be demonstrated as contributing toward the practical ecology of contemporary video that resists reductive categorisation and static medium boundaries such as New Media. The permeable reconfiguration of medium emphasises the functions of its distribution, exchange and standardisation that will be analysed through concepts of codec and compression. I will argue that exchange and circulation are built into digital materiality, firstly through Benjamin’s analysis of pre-digital reproduction and exchange, and secondly through Steyerl’s contemporary analysis of digital exchange and its creative contingencies.

Section 2 will examine the role of data bending and digital alteration techniques that accelerate the contingency of digital processes by interrupting certain functions. I will begin by investigating how the JPEG series (2003–2004) by artist Ruff enacts Steyerl’s ideas of poor image in order to interrogate the visual forms and global implications of compressed digital materiality. I will then argue that this demonstrates an intentional repurposing of digital functions, and in doing so offers an encounter with the contingencies of typically hidden digital processes. Discussing my third video project, BATS (2016), then extends my frameworks of meaning and metaphor towards
the contingencies of noise in forming digital materiality and emphasising video’s audiovisual character. I will demonstrate that in order to interrogate the possibilities of digital video, it is necessary to engage a greater dialogue with the audio facet of video materiality and its interaction with visuality. I argue that through this materiality of digital video, its audiovisual framework and inherent mechanics of noise expand my contingency process and accelerate towards the ambiguous territory of new digital meanings.

\[\textsuperscript{152}\text{Hegarty, Rumour and Radiation, Pp. 9-10}\]
Section 1: Video Contingencies and Circulation

3.1.1 Postmedium, Intermedia and New Media

From its inception, video has always been connected to a variety of media forms, while continually shifting its own technological apparatus. It has therefore offered artists a means to actively resist medium specificity and operate in more ambiguous boundaries of artistic production. It is not my intention to provide a detailed historical overview of the development of video, as my research is particularly focused on digital video rather than its analogue predecessor. What is vital to my argument is the positioning of video as a connection of technological and media configurations that reshapes an understanding of meaning and the agency of the practitioner who utilises it. Krauss refers to this reconfiguration as the postmedium condition and emphasises the reconfiguration of artistic agency this entails. I will outline Krauss’s argument, which will then be developed towards Hegarty’s framing of intermedia and its history of advocating an interconnected medium approach over medium-specific arguments. By synthesising these approaches, I qualify digital video as a network of medium contingencies in which limiting categorisations such as New Media fail to encompass vital functions of hybridity and interstice.

Postmedium was Krauss’s term for the shifting of modernist medium specificity towards an agency-based approach that includes video and installation, and consequently marks an important transitional point as the lineage of contemporary practice. Postmedium, Krauss argued, reconfigures the concept of medium specificity that defined the modernist avant-garde. Her tone, as has been noted by many, is not expressly positive about this shift. She famously criticised video for its inherent “narcissism”, referring very specifically to certain closed-circuit installations and video-performance exercises of the 1970s. But, as Hegarty notes, her diagnosis of narcissism can be understood outside of the negative projections to which it was often associated. He argues that narcissism might be better understood as

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153 For such an overview see Yvonne Spielmann’s text Video: The Reflexive Medium.
154 Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition, Pp. 20-1
155 Hegarty, Rumour and Radiation (...), P. 10
156 Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea (...), Pp. 20-1
157 Hegarty, Rumour and Radiation, P. 7
purposiveness, revealing a medium structure that is agency-determined in place of apparatus-determined. This differentiates video from the modernist understanding of medium specificity, which determines each medium to be separate and the task of the artist to understand those specific inherent qualities of their medium. The purposive postmedium quality of video allows the artist to build a video language that freely remediates from other technologies, materials and media forms. In this sense, video does not altogether escape the logic of medium, but rather contributes towards a reconfigured condition of agency and media contingencies.

Using Krauss’s conception of the postmedium condition, I will now integrate Hegarty’s emphasis on the concept of intermedia in the development of video. Intermedia expands Krauss’s position by pointing to the role of non-art-based framing devices that impact on the modes of art production and reception. Initially coined and developed by Fluxus artist Higgins, intermedia was responding to the need for new modes of artistic communication that exceeds any individually separated medium. As Hegarty has noted, the importance of this understanding of intermedia is that it is “a type of medium that crossed between media rather than combine them into a new, resolved medium”. Higgins emphasises an artistic determination and agency that encompasses the concept of medium to adapt and hybridise it, rather than being subordinated to its system of designations or imposing new superstructural media boundaries.

Following Higgins, media theorist Youngblood outlines the role of intermedia as a form of moving-image work in his now classic text Expanded Cinema. Youngblood discusses installation-like environments in which meaning is “communicated not by coding ideas into abstract literary language, but by creating an emotionally real experience through the use of audio-visual technology”. Importantly, Youngblood diverts from the radical Fluxus positioning of the artwork towards a language of medium and media experience. While Youngblood’s work has application beyond its optimistic techno-futurism, his experiential emphasis fails to adequately engage the

159 Hegarty, Rumour and Radiation (...), P. 7
160 Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea (...), P. 6
161 Dick Higgins, “Intermedia” in décollage
162 Hegarty, Rumour and Radiation (...), P. 10
163 Youngblood, Expanded Cinema, P. 348
implications of production. I agree here with Hegarty’s position that neither articulation of intermedia is wholly sufficient in their own right.\textsuperscript{164} Higgins’ call for a new framework contains very little technical outlines of how an intermedia practice might actually manifest. Conversely, Youngblood’s approach to intermedia removes something of the agency of the cultural practitioner by positioning intermedia as a sensorial hybridity between technologies and platforms. To reconcile these positions, I argue that Krauss’s concept of postmedium demonstrates how the agency of the practitioner contributes and accelerates the deterioration of medium specificity, and displays the artistic functions of intermedia.

In this context, examining the insufficiencies of previous designations like New Media provides important lessons in engaging the contingent hybridity of contemporary media formations. By effectively positioning a setting for digital video discourse outside the logic of medium specificity, intermedia provides a framework for the medium concerns of digital video that encompasses its hybrid forms and continuous remediation. In contrast, Hertz argues that the artistic category of New Media presents a stability that undermines the inherent gaps and differences that form digital media and its practices. Hertz’s critique begins with the acknowledgement of a highly connected field of media and technology, in which New Media struggles to differentiate itself or define its borders. As Hertz contends,

> “Media contain other media: the strands split and join others in an ancestral web too densely twined to analyze by means of genealogical trees. Mutants and hybrids proliferate and compete. Incest is rampant. Obsolescence reaps the laggards.”\textsuperscript{165}

Hertz continues this point, recalling the analysis of IBM researcher David Foulger, emphasising the role of the interstice in the development of any landscape of hybridity. As much as mediums and technologies form connections of affinity and pathways of remediation, there are always a multitude of gaps and separations between different media and technologies, and their implications. Hertz argues that categorisation such as New Media can only include or exclude material, and thus fails to address the hybridisation of linkage and interstice that is fundamental to the digital ecosystem. By

\textsuperscript{164} Hegarty, \textit{Rumour and Radiation} (…), P. 19  
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid. P. 50
mobilising intermedia as a framework for digital practice, I acknowledge that digital video is contingent on interrelated connections and gaps. My practice therefore exploits the contingencies of this hybrid form to pursue the creative potential of connections and inherent slippages in digital processes. This hybridity of form and interrelation is built into the very materiality of digital processes that lead to my discussion of codecs and compression in digital video.

3.1.2 Digital Materiality: Codec and Compression

Emphasising the interconnection and materiality of digital video relies on an understanding of its technical processes of codec and compression. My synthesis of postmedium and intermedia emphasises digital video as a portion of media ecosystem in which interconnection forges both relationships and noticeable interstices. In this ecosystem, digital video is the functioning of processes of technology and coding that aims to provide a time-based representation through audiovisual material. Key to these processes is the codec, which might be thought of as the general rules and conditions by which a digital media is determined. Compression is one of the most important of these rules, as it translates the sheer contingency of audiovisual capture into a rationalised form, increasing its capacity for handling and transfer, while retaining the information considered valuable to conveying its representational quality. In this sense, codec and compression appear as systems that rationalise the vast contingency of digital processes, through both internal relationships and external representations. I will first outline these processes as they relate to digital video, and then examine how these processes offer room for contingency through interruption, over-rationalisation and an analysis of noise.

The examination of codec and compression will extend my earlier discussion of sampling towards the specific processes that contribute to the materiality of digital video. As I have discussed in the previous chapter, the sample is a segment of digital information that can be reconstituted into some portion of the original. The materiality of digital video is connected to a wider context of appropriation by collecting, combining and reconfiguring these isolated fragments of image, sound or time sequence. The digital sample is thus separated from other analogue forms of sample through its algorithmic mechanics that, at the most basic level, is encoded in a
mathematical language of 0s and 1s, known as binary.\textsuperscript{166} This binary system is itself used to build further structures and languages that form the operating systems and programs that create, edit and/or store the audiovisual materials, interpreted through monitors and speakers. In this sense, digital information is constructed with layers of language code before it reaches users in a distinguishable form of information or representation. Sampling digital material, in whole or in part, therefore involves the constant interaction of these layers. Altering a sample changes its coded structure, as code is the basis by which various layers of the digital are interpreted into an audiovisual format, be it for viewing or editing. In essence, code is digital materiality, even when it doesn’t directly appear as such.

The function of the codec is to organise layers of digitally coded information into viewable and editable media. “Codec” stands for coder-decoder, and is the mechanism by which streams of data are encoded for digital storage or decoded for digital playback, pursuing shared accessibility and functionality.\textsuperscript{167} The process of compression then operates within the logic of codec to reduce the otherwise large and unwieldy raw audiovisual material. In video files this operation is specifically referred to as transform compression, and operates with other processes, such as motion estimation, which digital theorist Adrian MacKenzie argues are the salient points for video codecs that are otherwise “monstrously complex”.\textsuperscript{168} Why should we bother with understanding codecs if they are so “monstrously complex” and these operations are so deliberately hidden? By making determined choices in regards to data streams, codecs “deeply influence the very texture, flow and materiality of sounds and images”.\textsuperscript{169} They express a set of perceptual rules and determinations that connect the materiality of digital video to the potential of human experience. I follow MacKenzie’s assertion that this impacts both the shaping of a contemporary media economy and the materiality of audiovisual experience.

My adaption of the concept of intermedia extends MacKenzie’s position by suggesting that digital materiality integrates perceptual experience and image economy into a

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
network of contingencies. A digital video cannot be considered as experiential phenomena in isolation; it must be considered in its various states of translation, remediation and transference. The format of the digital video is determined by the audiovisual standardising of established file types and codecs, which are all facets of a wider framework that I refer to as circulation. These digital decisions reveal the materially hybrid nature of transference and connectivity operating through the interstices and breaks from which contingency emerges. For each action of translation or remediation, the passage through hardware and software determines an extent of material that cannot be retained in its current state if it is to continue its circulation. This links the inherent and unintended loss and transformation of data to the intentional loss of data through the operation of compression.

Examining the functions that determine codecs and compression reveals an inherent contingency to digital processes that link perceptual experience to the requirements of information circulation. On a perceptual level, codecs utilise any number of compression methods to retain the information that is deemed useful to visual or sonic recognition, but, as MacKenzie points out, “the processes and parameters at work in codecs are quite counterintuitive. Originating in problems of audiovisual perception, codecs actually lie quite a long way away from commonsense understandings of perception”. 170 Contingency thus emerges in order to pursue representational strategies that operate with considerable difference to our own modes of perception. This presents an opportunity for the digital practitioner to engage the contingency of digital materiality, as “codecs catalyze new relations between people, things, spaces, and times in events and forms”. 171 Through a logic of shared playability and exchangeable file sizes, these processes operate as shared standards, bringing circulation into the very materiality of each digital file, despite their vast range in form, function and tangled genealogies. Codecs offer the potential for sharing material with repeatable viewing results on another computer against the possible failure to convey and communicate digital information. The codec and compression are therefore modes of rationalising the contingency of digital exchange. While Doane warns that contingency always threatens to re-emerge, the codec and its functions rationalise the materiality of digital video into meaningful exchange and accelerated circulation. I

170 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
argue that this heightened sense of circulation begins with mechanical reproduction, an argument that is echoed throughout media discourse. This sense of circulationism becomes the means by which intermedia operates as an expansive media economy, which in turn offers particular potential for contingency to emerge and be engaged with through digital media connection.

3.1.3 Circulation: Walter Benjamin to Hito Steyerl

I have previously argued that exchange and circulation are built into the material structures of digital media, and I will position this materiality in a discourse of heightened media circulation that begins with Benjamin. His text Art and Its Mechanical Reproducibility (1935) formulates a consideration of circulated material that remains relevant in many ways, which I will outline here, while other areas must be supplanted and augmented by contemporary media discourses, as I will discuss below in relation to Steyerl.172 Benjamin’s basic assertion is that the mechanical reproduction challenges the primacy of a singular art object, with its context of time and place and specific history, sacrificing what he calls its cult value in order to gain exhibition value.173 Exhibition value initially emancipated art away from symbolic functions, such as religion, towards its own cultural sphere of distinct object works, prized for its value in an economy of cultural exchange. Through mechanical developments, the artwork was then challenged by reproductions that functioned without the sense of originality of the artwork, which Benjamin terms aura. This exhibition value allowed the reproduction to be shared, copied and multiplied in its circulation, whereas a single original work could not, as object history and context are not transferable or duplicable in this sense. Rather than attribute this solely to technology, Benjamin suggests it is a multifaceted shift that encompasses technological developments, political agency and the continued realisation of mass classes and cultures. In particular, Benjamin highlights film’s capabilities, as well as its limitations, such as the necessity of film to distract its audience, in what Miriam Hansen argues is less a lament and more an acknowledgement of ambiguity.174

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173 Ibid. P. 25
While Benjamin’s text requires certain reconsiderations when applied to contemporary situations, his focus on agency remains relevant in my own mobilisation of production. It is important to consider that Benjamin is attempting to diagnose the important distinctions for the art and media of his time so that it might better affect political consciousness.175 While I am not looking to engage Benjamin’s Marxist politics, I am engaging his image politics and considerations of agency. Benjamin emphasises the role of technology in the emergence of exchange that diminishes the role of aura, while also asserting the need for cultural producers to capitalise on these conditions. In particular, Benjamin is interested in montage and shock as a means to combat distraction through the agency of critical cultural engagement.176 The importance of Benjamin’s account highlights certain insufficiencies for its contemporary application towards increasingly complex and accelerated conditions of circulation. William Brown and Meetali Kutty, paraphrasing W.J.T. Mitchell, argue that Benjamin’s writing was responding to the problems of his time, particularly the role of technology in assisting or resisting dangerous mobilisations of concepts of history and progress. In contrast, they contend that

“We now live in an era in which technology is ubiquitous, wars are ongoing and invisible, and yet nothing seems to happen or change—that is to say, it is not an ‘age’ defined by societal shifts, as per Benjamin’s, but a ‘static’ period in which nothing much seems to shift at all.”177

Benjamin’s argument is thus attached to his questions on history and progress. His critical account of the notion of progress focuses on qualifying Jetztzeit, a now-time, in place of a historical Neuzeit, new-time.178 As Brown and Kutty argue, Benjamin’s analysis continues to inform contemporary discourse through its insistence on play as a means to participate and exercise agency.179 In this sense, Benjamin outlines the need for expanded participation of the masses, which then populate the networks of circulation. The digital in particular offers an understanding of media and play that

176 Ibid. P. 39
177 Brown and Kutty, “Datamoshing and the Emergence of Digital Complexity From Digital Chaos” P. 166
178 Ross, The Past is the Present; it’s the Future is Too (…), P. 160
179 Brown and Kutty, “Datamoshing and the Emergence of Digital Complexity From Digital Chaos” P. 166
might conform to Benjamin’s ideas of agency, even if the political impetus of that agency is more fractured and ambiguous than Benjamin’s class-consciousness ideals.

Benjamin’s text continues to be relevant through linking modes of cultural exchange and shifting agencies, but his work becomes insufficient in considering the contemporary iterations of those exchanges. I have argued in previous chapters that agency has been reconfigured through artistic and technological change, from the emergence of video as an electronic medium, to the current ubiquity of the digital. Benjamin rightly identifies the potential agency that heightened circulation offers cultural producers, as well as the potential agency that it removes through pacification and over-saturation. But Benjamin’s Marxist-historical process emphasises the overtly political, in both diagnosis and remedy. I would argue that Benjamin’s work remains relevant today through its critical mobilisation of cultural agency, rather than its attempts at political mobilisation. Towards these implications, I will now discuss Steyerl and her work regarding lo-fi capture and lossy-compression of the poor image.

I have outlined above how MacKenzie argues that codec links our own perceptual implications to digital modes of exchange. Artist-theorist Steyerl expands this position, asserting that the perceptual and media impacts of the codec reveal the constant material impact of varying forms of transference. Benjamin addresses the implications of previously new modes of material reproduction, whereas Steyerl addresses the new forms of materiality that emerge from the contemporary ubiquity of reproduction and copy. Digital channels produce and exchange copies en masse, and material originality becomes increasingly marginalised, obscured and irrelevant. What remains relevant in this discourse of circulation is the shifting of agency that circulation continually accelerates, though where those agencies emerge is varied. In certain circumstances, the cultural producer gains an opportunity of access and dissemination, while in other circumstances works become anonymous, unattributed or stolen, beyond the grasp of the author. Alternative economies recycle materials in a range of ways, creating copies, alterations and materiality that diverges from what original producers may have intended.
Steyerl addresses this question of agency through the concept of the *poor image*, which utilises modes of circulation to find an agency of exchange.\textsuperscript{180} Her text *In Defense of the Poor Image* reads almost as a contemporary revision of Benjamin’s *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. She determines a value and agency to the materiality of electronic content that is generally considered inferior to their higher-fidelity origins. She discusses the ripped and/or the highly compressed file, which has a degraded quality either because of its illicit obtaining, such as the bootleg movie, or a low-resolution file, which has been resized or highly compressed. Though they are often considered of low quality, Steyerl contends that their fidelity losses speak to an enhanced agency of hyper-circulation.\textsuperscript{181} Steyerl’s essay points towards the specifics of an intermedia practice by arguing that these approaches circumvent what are generally more established or legitimate modes of distribution. Bootlegging or altering a file reveals alternative, more accessible or faster economies of distribution that operate through the interstices of paid-distribution models. These modes of remediation and circulation are in conflict or opposition to the other established modes of distribution and are thus often illegal or illicit. When modes of distribution are deemed to be costly, unwieldy or generally separated from those that wish to obtain and/or distribute them, these figures negotiate through the interstices of distribution and thus form alternative economies of distribution. Agency utilises not just the connections, but also the potential for, and space between, connections.

These illicit strategies of capture and distribution that Steyerl identifies are not operations intrinsic to the function of video as a medium, but are rather a loose group of strategies that accelerate an agency of distribution. Real-time bootlegging is a vastly different operation to over-compressing an existing video file. While both result in a poor-quality fidelity, the reasons for this differ vastly. By recording a moving image, the bootleg adds another layer of mediation that alters the perceived quality of the original. This capture is generally illegal and thus taken from poorly concealed vantage points that can distort the perspective of the screen. The over-compressed file, however, digitally alters resolution and detail, sacrificing audiovisual quality to a noticeable level. The rip is yet another operation that borrows from both these approaches, while remaining distinct. Ripping operates as a digital form of the bootleg,

\textsuperscript{180} Steyerl, “In Defense of the Poor Image” in *The Wretched of the Screen*, Pp. 31-45
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid. P. 35
removing a file from an embedded format, typically YouTube or another legitimate streaming network. The video is not captured optically via camera, but algorithmically through particular digital processes. The rip corresponds to the notion of the hyper-compressed poor image, as the sources for streaming typically utilise lower file sizes and higher compression rates. This reveals a complex network that crosses different technological platforms while sharing a framework of agency. While the exact rationale and technological approach may differ, Steyerl notes the importance of their shared agency, which sacrifices traditional media qualities in favour of greater distribution potential.

It is important to emphasise that Steyerl was presenting the case not only for the agency of those producing and distributing these files, but the agency of the files themselves. A file optimised for circulation has been removed from its network of originality and lowered in quality, thus introducing a contingency of distribution that emerges in the materiality of these files. Digital files can be copied to retain identical information, and minor alterations can often go unnoticed in the final playable file—but the highly altered files that Steyerl discusses are of a recognisably poor quality. These material changes reintroduce a contingency that emerges alongside the aims of distribution, and can threaten the recognition of the content. For Benjamin, the important function of the mechanically reproduced image is the simultaneous visual fidelity and the distancing from the original. Benjamin argues that even a technically perfect reproduction is denied originality through its lack of a contextual “here and now". In Benjamin’s scenario, increased mechanical reproduction then diminishes the essential aura of originality. But in Steyerl’s text, something of the reverse is described, through the floating copies that permeate digital space. Originality is so removed from most contexts of distribution that, as Brown and Kutty emphasise, we are rarely given access to any form of the original. Poor copies introduce an aura of contingency and the possibility of new material meanings emerging from this copying.

Poor copies therefore accelerate the materiality of exchange inherent in the conditions of digital video. Ripping and compression reconfigure the agency of digital works through their exchange and distribution, accelerating exchangeability and altering

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183 Brown and Kutty, “Datamoshing and the Emergence of Digital Complexity From Digital Chaos” P. 167
materiality. Importantly, there is still the question of originality, as film and media theorist Peter Krapp points out when pondering,

“How much image can be omitted before an image is no longer an image? How much music can be compressed in lossy sampling before it ceases to be music?”

But the important distinction between modes of compressed distribution and Benjamin’s focus on photography and cinema is that compression forms its questions around information retention and loss, whereas Benjamin’s aura is historical and contextual. Steyerl emphasises the potential agency of the poor image both through conscious distribution of cultural agents and through structural revelations that emerge via compression. In my third video project, BATS (2016), I therefore used poor images as source materials to engage that digital contingency.

To reiterate my above points, I am not arguing that one needs an expansive understanding of code in order to establish a video practice and interpret its implications. On the contrary, the role of code is often to minimise its materiality traces and to keep its structures hidden behind programs and operating systems. These layers of language and programming exist to rationalise the overwhelming contingency of digital algorithmic materiality into manageable systems and subsystems of rules and functions. To argue that these programs are blocking some inherent digital quality would be like arguing for an absolute contingency in which the vastness of information becomes swallowed up by meaninglessness. Rather, I am arguing that there is an operation of contingency already at work in the digital, glimpsed through certain moments of ingenuity or breakdown. I am also arguing that while one does not need an encyclopaedic knowledge of coding, there are opportunities for engaging potential contingencies that arise through investigation and interrogation of digital structures. In this sense, my third video project investigates the structure of video by probing and exacerbating these potential contingencies, and pushing them, not to breaking point, but to a bending point. The introduction of contingency relies on these systems in order to exploit their potential for new meaning, which I will first examine through the over-rationalising strategies of artist Thomas Ruff.

Section 2: The Materiality of Noise and Interruption

3.2.1 The Hypercompression of Thomas Ruff

In this section, I will explore the potential for digital contingency to emerge through the acceleration of the material contingencies of those digital processes previously outlined. This will begin with an investigation of Ruff’s digital photo series *JPEG* (2003–4), which explores the implications of digital images by accelerating their processes of compression and exchange. Ruff’s practice in this series displays a means to accelerate the contingency of the digital image, which I extend into my own practices of digital video. I then examine noise and information as functions of my practice, and the connection they draw between the contingency of digital materiality and processes of meaning. Ruff’s series provides an important example of accelerating digital processes, and reveals the inherent ambiguity of these processes by which an over-rationalisation of material introduces a new set of contingencies that materialise through noise.

*Figure 17.* Thomas Ruff, *jpeg ny02*, 2004. Chromogenic print, 269 x 364 cm.

*Image redacted for copyright reasons.*
Having outlined the function of compression in the previous section, I will examine how Ruff exacerbates this process as a creative negotiation with digital materiality. Ruff’s JPEG series accelerates the functions of digital images to express the tenuous line of abstraction and recognition that takes place in digital representation and compression. The compression format of JPEG image files reduces the total information of the image, to render it easier to store and transfer. The JPEG removes material deemed unimportant to discerning image content and imprints this ideological process on the materiality of the image. Ruff’s series engages the ubiquity of this popular digital format by collecting vast series of similar images from internet circulation and accentuating the material effects of their compression. The images of iconic and recognisable visual content, such as explosions, cityscapes or forest landscapes, were amassed into various offline databases from which the artist enacted his accelerated compression and digital interrogation.

The JPEG codec is generally applied so as to retain the most signal from a digital image while drastically reducing file size. By accentuating this, Ruff draws attention to the ambiguous relationship between signal and noise. The function of JPEG works by reducing certain levels of colour and light values that are deemed to be unimportant details, followed by a reorganisation of the altered values into blocks of compression that form distinct tiles of the JPEG format. As such, JPEG utilises modes of perception in order to structure the passage of digital information, thus eliminating and retaining information based on a logic of communication found in levels of information theory. This theoretical understanding determines that we interpret information as signal and/or noise, separating the relevant from the irrelevant, given a certain predetermined communication objective. Krapp contends that signal and noise are not binary opposites, and I further this contention by arguing that Ruff’s images demonstrate the creative possibilities that emerge from Claude Shannon’s contention that noise and signal have no structural difference. This shared materiality does not render noise and signal analogous as opposites, but rather

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185 For a more detailed look on this JPEG process and possible interventions in that process see Rosa Menkman’s text Glitch moment-um Networked Notebook, (Amsterdam: Insitute of Network Cultures, 2011) Pp. 22-5
187 Hertz, quoting Claude Shannon who founded the mathematical field of information theory: “Noise is both the material from which information is constructed, as well as being the matter which information resists.” in “Recombinant Media Chaos: The Image After New Media” P. 52
confirms their shared structure within the concept of message. As Abraham Moles, another information theorist, contends,

“The only difference we can logically establish between them hinges on the concept of intent on the part of the transmitter. A noise is a signal that the sender does not want to transmit.”

Compression, therefore, attempts to determine what constitutes the signal in a digital work and remove as much noise as possible, where signal is the content of the image and noise is its total digital material. Ruff’s work accelerates this process to reveal the problem of separating noise and signal due to their shared materiality.

The acceleration of digital functions operates as a means to reveal their processes and demonstrate the role they play in shaping digital information. As digital theorist Adrian MacKenzie points out, the digital impact on image infrastructure is generally only noticed through “errors and artistic creations” that emerge through remnants of processes that remain or interfere with the seamlessness of digital function. Ruff deliberately engages these interfering remnants by first reducing the image size of a given file and then enlarging the result, thus making visible what are termed the artefacts of digital compression. As MacKenzie argues, “Ruff takes advantage of this digital artefact. He forces the complex process of compression to become visible as its normally undesirable side effect: pixilation.”

The hidden functions of digital materiality are revealed through the “tableaux display we could call an aesthetics of ‘hyperjpegness’” that MacKenzie argues “turns a compression artefact into a cultural artefact”. The achievement of Ruff’s work was not only revealing the functions of the codec in the digital image, but also suggesting a value to this disruption of processes in order to reveal them. His acceleration of digital functions reveal the creative potential of contingency to produce noise through a process of over-rationalisation. From this approach, I will now examine more explicit

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188 Peter Krapp, *Noise Channels* (...), P. xiv
189 Ibid. P. 55
191 Ibid. P. 85
192 Ibid. P. 81
approaches to digital materiality that express contingency through the interruption of digital processes, known as glitch.

3.2.2 Glitch

While accelerating processes reveals certain digital functions, the contingencies of digital materiality also offer potentially revelatory interruptions, which I will examine here through the concept of glitch. As demonstrated by Ruff’s JPEG series, an excess of digital rationalisation reveals the pictorial ideology behind the generally hidden functions of the JPEG. While Ruff examines the generally undesirable effect of pixilation, there is wider access to digital error when moving beyond accelerating functions towards their purposeful disruption through the emergence of glitches. Approaching the glitch in digital video opens a complex dialogue on agency and materiality, and their exploitation in my third video project, BATS.

My focus on digital materiality is the result of focusing my creative practices towards the materiality of digital video and its impact on my framework for contingency. The particular potential of glitch, however, emerged quite accidentally when a version of one of my earlier videos suffered an encoding error that added a layer of noise to the visuals. For reasons I was unable to determine, the video departed from the sequence I prescribed in the editing program, instead falling into chunks of noisy pixellation, with recognisable images emerging from digital abstraction. The chance occurrence of this glitch presented a departure from functional digital processes to reveal the contingency of meaning in digital materiality. When a value is miscalculated, information corrupted or some connection missed, familiar digital operations are no longer carried out as intended. The glitch represents that particular balancing of contingency and rationalisation in which chance occurrence shifts established or intended meanings, without descending into the complete meaninglessness of a fully broken file or process.

The distinctly unpredictable audiovisual material produced by this glitch reveals the expressive potential and formal range that might emerge from altering and interrupting
digital processes. Rather than a simple failure of rationalisation, glitch can be “potentially revelatory”. Hertz argues that by:

“Interrupting the flow, it [the glitch] reveals the instability of the flow and the underlying system. It reveals the condition of materiality in information systems, the gradient of entropy, and the ineluctable chorus of noise. In this sense, glitch operates as a sign of opacity, of the limits on knowledge and the unforeseeable future.”

Hertz’s charge of opacity corresponds with Bolter and Grusin’s contention that the technology of media can reveal its material quality as much as it can be seamlessly hidden. Bolter and Grusin argue that while there is continual desire to be immersed in media, the digital represents our conflicting impulse to have this immersion revealed. Hertz’s contention therefore positions glitch as a further acceleration of the hypermedia impulse, as digital materiality emerges from processes of representation and alteration.

*Figure 18.* Nickk Hertzog, *Horse Glitch*, 2016. Glitched version of *Poor Old Horse*, 2016. Still from 10:47 of 13:41 minute digital video with sound.

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193 Hertz, “Recombinant Media Chaos: The Image After New Media” P. 56
194 Ibid. P. 56
This struggle between immersion and revelation is a source of historic media tension that complicates the purposeful deployment of glitch. Krapp argues that the glitches align with Debord’s arguments of *Spectacle*:

“Our obsession with revelations, with uncovering secrecy everywhere, is part of the society of the spectacle, and he [Debord] criticizes it as a distraction from the ways secrecy actually permeates our media society.”

Importantly, Debord’s argument that media immersion encourages distraction and political anaesthetising pre-dates the functions of digital media and its accelerated circulation in the contemporary cultural landscape. Digital ubiquity shifted the spectacle-oriented audience into a culture that facilitates production as much as it enforced consumption. But, as Krapp has argued, while increasing digital ubiquity does not enforce passive reception, the development of its boundaries and functions are “threatening to turn the user of a tool into a mere consumer of anachronisms”. I agree with Krapp’s argument that glitch interrupts the discrete operations of the digital and “betrays the simulation”, while holding similar reservations about its revelatory potential. Rather than revealing an intrinsic meaning to digital processes, I argue that glitch presents a new meaningful arrangement of those processes.

Unexpected audiovisual effects produced by glitch provide an effective means for potential error to be reconsidered as the creative emergence of contingency. Iman Moradi made the important argument that glitch cannot be expressly engaged, but is only ever a chance occurrence. Simulating or provoking glitches becomes another intentional digital function that he terms the *glitch-alike*. Experimenting with these glitch-alikes has expanded my video making into the process of *databending*, which focuses on digital processes, pathways and languages in order to combine, redirect or reinterpret material in generally unintended ways. By establishing processes for consistently and purposefully creating glitches and readable errors, my investigation into digital materiality uses the structural properties of noise and its cultural  

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196 Krapp, *Noise Channels* (…), P. xvii
198 Krapp, *Noise Channels* (…) P. 6
199 Ibid. P. 67
200 Rosa Menkman quoting Iman Moradi in *Glitch Moment(um)*, Pp. 35-6
implications to extend my arguments for the contingency of meaning into a strategy for digital video production.

3.2.3 Noise: Meaning and Metaphor

In this section, I will relate my discussions of digital processes and materiality to the frameworks of meaning outlined in the first chapter, extending my discussion of contingency towards the metaphorical capacity of digital materiality. By observing, accelerating and interrupting the functions of digital video, I will argue that signal and noise offer a dynamic of meaning in the information channels of digital video, thus expanding the linguistic arguments of Rorty and Davidson towards the metaphorical capacities of digital materiality. This synthesises the discourse of signal and noise within digital concerns to the more expansive positioning of a cultural strategy for making artwork through video and its installation.

The role of metaphor in my research has been explained as the gestural mechanism by which new boundaries of meaning are produced from within a given framework. As Rorty argues, these gestures create different criteria for meaning than the context from which they emerge, and in this sense, new meaning can appear to be meaning-less from the vantage of its original framework. Both Rorty and Davidson refer to noise as a sign of non-interpretation, but also as potential misinterpretation. Davidson makes the point that all meaningful sounds, like words, are materially noise and only gain meaning when a certain interpretation criteria is imposed upon them.²⁰¹ This interpretation reveals a contingency of communicated meanings, which find structure in the noise-signal considerations of the information aesthetics outlined above. In some cases, the distinction between digital noise and signal involves a spectrum of recognition, such as the over-pixilation of Ruff’s work. In other cases, audiovisual data can be manipulated through different digital functions, such as audio material being interpreted through visual functions.

Identifying the channels of contingency in digital video material has allowed me to structure my strategies of acceleration into the formal processes of my third video

²⁰¹ Rorty, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity. P. 17-8
project, BATS. Glitch and other databending processes offered a means to alter digital functions, highlighting and accelerating Doane’s arguments on the functional role of contingency. While opening up new possibilities, contingency must be rationalised to some extent or risk falling outside the scope of any meaning or function. Databending processes address this balance by aiming to create material that is altered or distorted from its intact form, but partially discernible or playable. The delicate process of bending a file involves the right type and quantity of alteration, otherwise the file is broken and becomes unreadable, and no audiovisual material emerges. In this sense, bending is the introduction of contingency, while reading or playing the file represents its rationalisation. This particular balance also works in the processes of over-rationalisation, such as Ruff’s acceleration of the functions of compression. Where compression determines noise as an extraneous material to discerning content, Ruff demonstrates that noise emerges again through the acceleration of digital rationalisation. These processes of altering digital pathways through databending, or following them too closely through hypercompression, reveal that noise is an inescapable material component of digital materiality.

In developing BATS, I collected techniques and approaches to glitching and databending that would then be utilised on an assemblage of video material. These techniques involved strategies of misinterpretation and deliberate mischanneling of functions and technical approaches to digital materiality. This approach relied on an interconnected materiality of digital noise and signal that simultaneously incorporated the intentional distinctions of the signal sender and interpretation of the receiver. This dynamic of communication was then exploited between programs that interact to create the playable media functions inherent in digital video. By making programs interpret material they were not designed for, unexpected results were yielded. An audio editing program, for instance, will generally only utilise the audio element of a video sequence. But by using certain manual functions I imported uncompressed video files, known as RAW files, which an audio program would interpret as a sound file, and allow me to edit and eventually recover the altered file as a video. This audio editing program would not follow the same conventions as its video counterparts. The non-essential material of a video file is often misinterpreted as vital material in these sound programs, and thus unpredictable portions of code were selected and altered.
The editing process attempted to read a different language from the material of the video, and thus a kind of creative mistranslation took place.

This balance of rationalisation and contingency emphasises the agency of the operator of the databending process, much as the metaphor emphasises the agency of Rorty’s poet. As Krapp contends, “In glitch, the signal/noise dialectic in human–computer interaction emphasizes more than ever a balance between error and control; both are needed for performance.”

Glitch and databending operate as a functional alteration, in which some playable form must be retained or salvaged. These processes are a precarious operation, where the practitioner balances the acceleration of contingency with its rational playable function. By audio-editing a RAW video, I established a competing equivalence and dissonance between the audio and the visual materials. While video is an audiovisual medium, levels of playback and editing involve distinguishing these properties. The audio program may interpret visual material as noise, but the interlaced audiovisual material of digital video leaves room for this interpretation to be creatively exploited, producing videos with a range of distinct formal qualities.

As digital video frays and bends, it reveals something about its structure. Each instance of bending reveals something different, intrinsic to that video in either its audiovisual values of content or its arrangement of rules in codec and file type. While the previous two projects had utilised the cultural constructions of moving image and the implications of remediation, this third project engaged the structures of digital materiality and focused on meanings that can emerge from otherwise obscured digital processes. While the audio editing of a RAW video enacted a purposeful mistranslation, other data-bending processes involved more direct interventions into the structure of code itself. In contrast to this approach, typical video editing processes involve an approximation of still images and timeline dynamics, which can generally be played back to achieve a particular audiovisual result. This expands on the mediated property already inherent in digital video through the ability to play, fast-forward, rewind or pause that is offered to the user, as well as its capacity to be stored,

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202 Krapp, Noise Channels: (…) P. 74
transferred or shared. Video reveals certain artifices of its representation, but generally hides the complexity of its digital materiality. Typical video editing gives a representation of portions of code, broken down or grouped together into another set of functional allegories, designed for the conceptual simplicity of creating linear video arrangements. But video material can be altered outside of dedicated editing programs, through direct intervention into code itself.

Directly altering the code of a video file involves accessing its material through what is known as a HEX-editor. The video file is viewed as a vast collection of letters and numbers that are represented as audiovisual sequence when interpreted by a media program. While I do not possess knowledge of how to interpret this code, by following general conditions, reordering the segments or replacing certain values, I produced fairly random audiovisual results. This would reorder portions of audio or visual material or replace the representational portions with their newly assigned visual directions. The size of the coding sequence made this a laborious task, and I therefore used a purpose-built program, called “byebyte”, which automates this removal of value and swapping of sequences. The input-parameters of this program determine how much material can be removed and how close in image space and linear sequence these losses would be. This determined the kind of loss and the amount, but not exactly what content material would be removed.

When I subjected my videos to this procedure it became apparent that the reordering and removal of values created alterations and compensations that fractured the seamless linearity of the video. Portions of material would remain or appear early to fill gaps, or random approximations of colour and shape would automatically attempt to repair the distortions. Different file types and codecs would therefore produce differing results according to their specific inner functions. The specific materialities inherent in different videos and their formats was thus rendered into distinct visual effects through the internal bending of the video content, the most culturally distinct being datamoshing. 203 Importantly, these processes displayed the overlapping contingencies of the audio, the visual and the temporal in digital video, and the creative capacity to reconfigure the form of video through its coded materiality. The non-

203 For a technical account of datamoshing as a function of AVI files see Brown and Kutty, “Datamoshing and the Emergence of Digital Complexity From Digital Chaos” P. 168
linearity of code can threaten to erupt and distort the linearity of video function and representation, and a contemporary materiality emerges in the alteration of digital playback itself.\textsuperscript{204} I will now examine how these various techniques were enacted through my third video project \textit{BATS}, and its metaphorical inspiration in the musical genre of post-punk.

3.2.4 Post-Punk Agency

Using the techniques developed above, this third project, titled \textit{BATS}, was distinct from the first two projects for its focus on redressing the imbalance of sound and vision in the audiovisual format of video. The aim of this engagement was not to break down the structures inherent in digital media as such, but rather to bend them so they might be exploited for unexpected outcomes. The structure of video is an undifferentiated material, be it digital code or physical tape, that is then determined as visual material or audio material in its output display.\textsuperscript{205} Sound is always present in video, with silence representing a conscious artistic choice. This emphasis on the practitioner’s agency remains an important point throughout the history of video, as its development spans different technologies and incorporates other existing media forms. Importantly, from its origins video allowed the \textit{playback} for which devices were built, featuring the option to rewind or fast-forward material.\textsuperscript{206} This history determines two important defining features of video: firstly, that the separation of audio and visuals is not inherent to its medium, but more a feature of its decoding and display; secondly, that video is strongly linked to the agency of its decision-makers, in its shooting, its copying and its alterable display.

Following the strategies of my earlier projects, I based this project first around a singular source material, from which I would translate metaphorical implications into strategy for video assemblage. To continue testing the range of my process, I decided to deviate from the single channel 10–15 minute videos of the previous projects, and utilise the short length of The Birthday Party song “Release the Bats” as my original source material and formal guide. By following the rhythms and structures of the two-

\textsuperscript{204} Krapp, \textit{Noise Channels (…)}P. 77
\textsuperscript{205} Hegarty, \textit{Rumour and Radiation}, Pp. 9-10
\textsuperscript{206} Yvonne Spielmann, “Video: From Technology to Medium” in \textit{Art Journal}, Fall 2006; 65, 3. P. 57
minutes-and-thirty-five-second song, the videos were given a much more rapid feel than previous videos. By closely following an audio work such as this song, I aimed to counter the fact that the previous projects had generally treated sound as a secondary response to the formal concerns of the visual structures. This structural capacity of rhythm was therefore an important distinction in BATS, which augmented an approach to the audiovisual capacity of digital video materiality.

In identifying potential source materials, I was drawn to the idea of post-punk as a formal structure of music, which had aimed for greater stability and range of expression than the reductive and intentionally simplified approaches of its punk progenitor. Post-punk musicians saw punk’s initial iconoclastic simplification and elevated individual agency lead to a limiting musical range, a reduced formal influence and an over-emphasis on amateurism. Post-punk then aimed to extend the punk’s brief and specific breakdown by questioning what languages and expressions might emerge from a more continuous and experimental breakdown. Utilising the strong beat and repeated imagery of The Birthday Party song, I tested whether a contingent framework of appropriation could address a different kind of formal outcome: shorter, sharper and disruptive of a stabilised ambience.

The post-punk concern with structure would also offer a different example of the metaphorical expanding of accepted frameworks. Post-punk music was not just radically experimental but often focused on how to sustain this interrogative approach, aligning it with my concerns of agency. This level of reflexivity meant that post-punk was a means to experiment with material frameworks, and explore the meanings that emerged from these frameworks through a dialogue of noise and recognition. Post-punk music engaged with noise, discomfort and the contingency of the unfamiliar, while still maintaining enough structure and coherence to form a continued meaningful conveyance. Following this contingency of noise and meaning, I utilised formal constraints, such as shortened duration and multiple experiments around video works to provide a ranged experimentation of forms, temporalities and textures. The BATS project, while engaging the structure of the song and its post-punk background, also

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207 Simon Reynolds articulates this trajectory in the artistic experimentation that typified 1970s experimental music, from prog to post-punk, in which punk itself becomes the anomalous outlier. See Rip it up and Start Again, Pp. xx-xxi
engaged the implications of the multiplicity of its animal namesake, depicted as a flock or swarm. This swarming multiplicity offered a sense of wild networking that would theme my original footage and the snippets of post-punk footage that would make up my other video experiments for this project.

![Figure 19](image)

**Figure 19.** Nickk Hertzog, *BATS experiment #1*. Still from 1:21 of 2:35 minute digital video with sound.

The videos use the sustained breakdown of post-punk as a metaphorical proposition that removes the meanings of its structure and components, and uses databending and noise to suggests new meanings. Following the post-punk source materials, I obtained several lo-fi rips and bootlegs of post-punk footage and films, poor images whose quality related to the availability of these sources and the possibilities of the lo-fi. Like its punk predecessor, post-punk was often less concerned with fidelity than it was with content. While punk tended to flaunt this position with blatant amateurism, musical simplicity and low production values, post-punk often sought to find either creative solutions to these problems or else explore the complex expression of low fidelity. Following this approach, I sourced videos relating to post-punk, including various experimental films and DIY projects that involved The Birthday Party, which were less readily available than other more mainstream pieces of documentary and cinema. Thus, the rips were typically excerpts and/or trailers that have survived in digital

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208 Ibid.
circulation where the intact videos did not, combined with more accessible videos of post-punk Melbourne.

Figure 20. Nickk Hertzog, BATS experiment #2. Still from 0:22 of 2:35 minute digital video with sound.

One of these poor image rips was Richard Lowenstein’s 1986 Australian cult film *Dogs in Space*. The film focuses on one of Melbourne’s post-punk enclaves, the “little-band” scene of Melbourne’s inner suburbs.\footnote{For documentation of this scene see Richard Lowenstein’s 2009 documentary *We’re Living on Dog Food*.} The copy I obtained was a low-resolution digital video and had embedded Japanese subtitles, graphically imposed and unable to be removed from the video. The resulting rip therefore already contained a visible graphic reference to its circulation, even more recognisable than its low-resolution streaming-ready format. Combining this material with the various smaller clips and rips I had obtained was enough material to create a single work that was a template for various experimentations, using glitch and databending techniques. However, the smaller duration of the work and its even smaller appropriated samples presented formal difficulties not encountered in my other projects. These small clips could not sustain slowing, or other certain forms of editing, because of their low quality and rapid timing, without quickly revealing jarring frame changes. To overcome this, I used the structure of the song itself, including its time signatures, rhythms and
lyrically sequenced repetitions. This positioned these previous insufficiencies into a rapidly structured short video sequence which was then reminiscent of music videos and a particular DIY 1980s aesthetic. The original audio was then removed from the track in order to continue to form its own structural framework, to be eventually replaced by sonified video sequences of audio noise.

3.2.5 BITE: Composing Digital Noise

While subjecting the template video to these varying experiments, I began work on another video, entitled BITE (2016). While still part of the larger BATS project, this video would depart from the initial stream of experiments that focused on assembling disparate video sources into the video assemblage discussed above. In contrast, BITE tested the processes of glitch and databending on a largely homogenous assemblage of my own footage for the same length of two minutes and thirty-five seconds. Following the associations with the original source “Release the Bats”, I decided that I would take footage of the bats in Melbourne’s inner suburbs. At dusk, these bats stream from Richmond to the inner-northern suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood, and are a familiar sight in Melbourne. The territory of these bats coincides with many locations particularly relevant to Melbourne’s post-punk history, including Richmond, Collingwood and St Kilda. These associations were interesting starting points to shoot footage of these bats. I then overlaid several of these sequences to create a video with a heightened multitude of bats flying from a variety of orientations and directions. This BITE work was then subjected to several datamoshing and glitching techniques to create a work that revealed certain noisy structures of video materiality.

To create the final version of BITE, I constructed a visually noisy version of my original overlaid bat footage by subjecting it to certain audio functions using the RAW video to audio editing process described above. I performed an audio technique of “noise removal” on the video, which created a brightly coloured, jarring visual. This “noisy” version was then used to interrupt the original video at certain points, determined by whenever the lyric “Bite!” was featured in the song. The song itself was not used in the video, but those repeated lyric intervals provided a structure that was still sparse and somewhat unpredictable. To continue the integration of digital material processes, the work was then subjected to a process of datamoshing, in which those
few noisy frames would emerge as sudden explosions of colour, but would recede as the motion of the original footage re-emerged. In this sense, the bats seemed to carve through the colourful noise, returning the original imagery in their wake, though revealing its highly mediated structure in doing so. The resulting BITE video provided a counterpoint to the other videos of BATS, and provided the framework for further experimentation of these videos and the chance to apply these glitching and databending techniques to my previous projects, to then better situate them in the logic of installation.

![Figure 21. Nickk Hertzog, BITE. Still from 02:37 of 10:18 minute digital video with sound.](image)

This chapter has located exchange and circulation within the material contingencies of digital video. The material conditions of digital video are therefore consistently revealed through its formats and protocols, codecs and compression formats that imprint circulation and exchange into the materiality of its content. The hidden structures and ideological decisions that structure digital formats and circulation are then revealed through accelerating these conditions or bending them through glitches. Thus the application of databending reveals the noise hidden by digital functionality, just as Ruff’s over-compression reveals the noise inherent in accelerating that same functional materiality. Noise is inescapable, and forms material for contingency to emerge into content.
Negotiating signal and noise was approached through a practical engagement with the structural implications of appropriating post-punk methodologies. My third project, *BATS*, investigated this balancing of contingency and rationalisation that translated post-punk musical concerns into practical video strategies. These multiple videos demonstrate a range of interventions and accelerations of contingencies that expand the potential frameworks of meaning inherent in digital materiality. This approach also prepared the videos for a more effective deployment in the installations that would ground their digital materiality in the context of presence and experience. The next chapter will investigate how the installation presents a context in which the inherent circulation of digital materiality is given a degree of separation, through the decision-making space of the cultural practitioner.
Chapter 4: Installation and the Rationalising of Contingency

While the previous chapters have argued for an expanded practice of contingency, this chapter offers something of a counterpoint by demonstrating that this working process also relies on the balance of rationalisation exercised by the installation. Having established the role of exchange in digital materiality I will now outline the role of the installation in providing a degree of separation from this circulation. By providing presence and context to the videos it contains, the installation offers the necessary space for generating meaning and establishes an experiential present to activate the metaphorical potential of my work. My installations therefore serve as a means to articulate a particular stage of my shifting video processes, and provide points of evaluation that will be explored throughout this chapter. I will argue that installation functions as a means to conclude tangents of video generation by articulating those shifting projects into singular experiences of work, balancing the contingency of my generative practice with the rationalisation of its expression.

Section 1 of this chapter begins with the analysis of Boris Groys, who I argue extends Krauss’s conception of the postmedium condition. Following Groys, I investigate the capacity of the installation to symbolically separate from cultural circulation, thus providing a sovereign space for the artist’s decisions. I then expand upon this notion of sovereignty through an examination of Sterling Ruby’s video *Cook* (2003), which aligns a creative agency of appropriation to the concept of sovereignty. The role of this sovereignty is then examined through my earlier installations, and their potential to establish metaphorical possibilities with the viewer. This evaluation focuses on my unsuccessful early confirmation exhibition, *Rote Hund* (2015), by analysing the overwhelming meaninglessness that unrationalled contingency can generate.

Section 2 continues to analyse and evaluate various installation iterations of my video projects. The role of the installation is expanded through a dialogue on the specific presence of time-based media and the agency this creates for an audience. I argue that this reflects the condition of contemporaneity outlined in Chapter 1, as an expression of heterogeneous presences. Installation is also examined as a means of integrating my different projects into newly combined forms. This integration synthesises the contingency of continued video generation with the stabilising articulation of
installation. The dynamic interaction between contingency and rationalisation culminates in an analysis of my final exhibition *Decomposing Contingencies* (2017). This will serve to analyse my strategic approach and investigate the potential meanings that develop in this final mobilisation.
Section 1: Installation and Sovereignty

4.1.1 Circulation and the Postmedium Condition

While the previous chapter outlines considerations of the postmedium condition and intermediality in relation to video, this chapter expands those considerations towards the role of installation. Accordingly, I investigate Krauss’s analysis of installation and its challenge to medium specificity, using Groys’s theories on the role of installation in an age of circulation. Installation is therefore presented as a provisional counterpoint to the circulation of material that enables my contingency process to generate video material. In this section I outline the concept of sovereignty in considering the role of agency in the space and context of the installation. This positions installation as a strategic presence that gives meaning to its accumulated and remediated materials by separating them from cultural flux. Sovereignty therefore establishes installation as a formal context in which my video projects can generate the potential for metaphor and new meaning, with enough separation to be evaluated through the aims of my practice.

By expanding Krauss’s earlier established analysis of a postmedium condition, I argue that artistic agency materialises in the sovereignty of the installation. By installing otherwise circulating material, the installation emphasises the agency of the artist’s choices and decisions, as specific actions in the contingency of cultural circulation. In tracing the emergence and prominence of installation, Krauss asserts her own logic of postmedium on the development of both installation art and video practice. As outlined in the previous chapter, she argues that the practices of video and installation came to replace the logic of medium specificity with a kind of material generality and enhanced intentionality.²¹⁰ Krauss’s assessment of this practice is that it problematises the separation of art from other spheres of culture and capital exchange.²¹¹ While there is a certain tone of distrust in her attention to the “fashion” of video and installation, Krauss nonetheless identifies the prominence of decision-making departing from the modernist logic of medium specificity.²¹²

²¹⁰ Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea, P. 10
²¹¹ Hegarty, Rumour Radiation, P. 56
²¹² Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea, P. 45
While I agree with Krauss’s analysis of a postmedium condition, my strategies of video and installation demonstrate an approach that expands the role of postmedium, rather than attempting to limit or revise it. Through her analysis, Krauss argues that the sheer heterogeneity of video and installation make them both unassimilable into modernist medium logics, a position with which I agree.\textsuperscript{213} She extends this argument to champion artists who shun installation as a logical endpoint, and who instead “embraced the idea of differential specificity, which is to say the medium as such, which they understand they will now have to reinvent or rearticulate”.\textsuperscript{214} Here I disagree with Krauss, as the installation provides my practice with a vital concluding function, in which the generative creative production of video projects is then pushed towards the display and articulation of those projects. It might even be said that Krauss overlooks the property of the medium, which is installation’s capacity to presents a stillness that Groys argues “installs everything that usually circulates in our civilisation: objects, texts, films etc.”\textsuperscript{215} This presents a specific context and present in which those materials are given the framework to express a potential set of meanings, experienced through a space of artistic sovereignty. Applying Groys’s contemporary analysis as an extension of Krauss’s theories of postmedium provides a reconfiguration of installation that recognises its particular formal qualities and valuable cultural contribution.

The installation provides a strategy for confronting heightened circulation and establishing meaning from cultural flux. Groys’s arguments expand the role of installation as it aligns to increasing acceleration of circulation and heightened contemporary conditions of exchange. In agreement with Krauss’s diagnosis, Groys defines the shift towards installation as “the end of the modernist claim of autonomy and sovereignty”.\textsuperscript{216} This shift also heightens the prominence of what was previously considered immaterial and, as Buskirk contends, shifts the legitimacy of artistic production from the art object towards the materialising of artistic agency.\textsuperscript{217} The wider context of media and technology are also implicated, as networks of exchange and circulation begin to accelerate. Recalling Jameson, Krauss argues that the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid. P. 31
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid. P. 56
\textsuperscript{215} Groys, “The Politics of Installation” in \textit{Going Public}, P. 55
\textsuperscript{216} Ibid. P. 58
\textsuperscript{217} Buskirk, \textit{The Contingent Object of Contemporary Art}, P.16
\end{flushright}
postmodern saturation of imagery that shifts lived experience into an aesthetic experience produces the necessity of the installation. This saturation reframes all facets of experience as aesthetic, “thereby rendering anything that could be called a properly aesthetic sphere… obsolete”. This leads Krauss to decry “the international fashion of installation and intermedia work” for “this leeching of the aesthetic out into the social field in general”. But, as Groys argues, the installation space has a specific sovereign claim for its aesthetic realm, whereas the general flux of circulation does not:

“By taking aesthetic responsibility in a very explicit way for the design of the installation space, the artist reveals the hidden sovereign dimension of the contemporary democratic order that politics, for the most part, tries to conceal.”

Being a declared aesthetic space, the installation is therefore afforded a degree of separation and symbolic sovereignty through the agency of the artist. According to Groys, the installation performs two vital functions. Firstly, it distinguishes itself from exchange and circulation by providing “a symbolic privatization of the public space of an exhibition”. Secondly, it characterises this space as the sovereign agency of its producer, the artist. Groys argues that these two functions operate a reversal of Benjamin’s concept of the loss of aura, as outlined in the previous chapter.

This reversal of aura highlights the installation’s capacity to generate contextual meaning. Benjamin was concerned with the implications of the reproduction, a copy, in which the context of the original would be lost. The uniqueness of the single object, its history and context, could not be copied in the same way visual material could be. I argue that Groys repositions Benjamin’s concept of aura by arguing that it re-emerges through installation by placing circulated material and copies “within a fixed, stable, closed context of the topologically well-defined ‘here and now.’” Here, Groys implies that even a technically faithful and structurally identical copy takes on a sense of originality when it is entered into the installation. I argue that this also applies to

218 Krauss, A Voyage on the North Sea, P. 56
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
221 Groys, “The Politics of Installation” in Going Public, P. 69
222 Ibid. P. 52
223 Ibid. P. 65
my layered, less obvious appropriation and reconfiguration. By denying the primacy of an original and drawing our attention to the ubiquity of transference and copy, the installation reveals that “copies becomes an everyday cultural convention, as was previously the case with the status of the original”.\textsuperscript{224} The agency of choosing this material and the emergence of a contextual presence forge an aura into the material composition of video’s emergence in installation.

The installation provides an engagement with the materiality of space and its role in establishing a contextual present of artistic decisions. This focus on artistic decision-making can seem to suggest that the function of the installation somehow relies on a dematerialisation that enhances agency. But Groys argues that, “On the contrary, the installation is material par excellence, since it is spatial.”\textsuperscript{225} Space then becomes the vehicle for the artist to assert their sovereignty, to create a particular contextual present in which to materialise their choices. This recalls my earlier investigations into the role of space in the configuration of contemporaneity, suggesting that the installation provides a demarcated present through its spatial parameters. I will expand on this interconnected logic of spatio-temporal reconfiguration below in relation to time-based media and its installation. At this point, the established dialogue on installation will now be directed towards the quality of the sovereignty it generates, and how that relates to my particular practice of appropriation through contingency.

4.1.2 Cooker, Chemist, Manufacturer, Distributor

The sovereignty of installation demonstrates the potential agency of the artist in an age of mass circulation and information overload. This raises the question of my own agency, particularly the implications of sovereignty when exercised in strategies of appropriation and how these implications materialise in the installation. By examining Ruby’s video \textit{Cook}, I articulate a position for the cultural producer who engages in reconfiguration and the potential of new meanings. I argue that agency becomes the means for the artist to accelerate the contingency of circulation towards the stability of a new expression. In this sense, Ruby’s video offers a metaphor of reconfigured meaning and the rich creative potential that links transgression and circulation.

\textsuperscript{224} Ibid. P. 66
\textsuperscript{225} Ibid. P. 55
Ruby’s video provides a potential commentary on how the sovereign agency impacts cultural reconfiguration and appropriation. The video presents a short montage of haphazard home drug lab caravans in motel parking lots and basements, with a repeated voiceover spoken in distorted audio. This voice immediately recalls the distortion techniques used to disguise the identity of the speaker. At once anonymous and implicitly guilty, this voice of illicit confession and declaration repeats the phrase: “I’m a chemist, I’m a cooker, I’m a manufacturer and a distributor. I’ll do whatever the fuck I want in the privacy of my own home.”

Part manifesto, part mantra, the voiceover aggressively frames these home drug labs as sites of transgressive ingenuity and aggressive sovereignty. The footage itself appears appropriated and closely resembles the footage of seizures, typically of crime reporting or released police footage. These snapshots of anonymous, custom-rigged material speak less of the police bust than of the haphazard makeshift systems that form these drug labs. Assemblages of household materials and repurposed chemicals form alternative currencies and distribution networks, and Ruby’s titular narrator thus exercises a radical agency to repurpose existing and available materials into narcotic compounds. The drug manufacturing that Ruby depicts challenges legal commerce boundaries by creating and distributing illicit material through alternative networks, which opportunistically reconfigures benign materials into a desirable new form. *Cook* presents a vision of the appropriation artist as an agent of reconfiguration that embraces their own sovereignty and accelerates the contingencies of their material.

The agency of Ruby’s *Cook* offers a dynamic view of property, legitimacy and the claim to sovereignty that produces new material meanings. As I have argued in the previous chapter, the condition of circulation is built into the materiality of digital video and accelerated through mass exchange and communal accessibility. This inherently challenges the potency of the gesture of appropriation, as exchange and copy are normalised into ubiquity evident in the materiality of digital video itself. As the distinction between cultural producers and consumers is continually blurred, the trajectory of appropriation presents a reconfiguration towards a normalising of networks of communal cultural ownership. Lewis Hyde refers to communally accessible properties as *commons* and asserts that a reflexive idea of property should
be understood as “a right of action”, in that property is never a static objectified “thing” as much as it is a set of relations.226

Figure 22. Sterling Ruby, *Cook*. Still from 0:22 of 1:00 minute digital video with sound.

The accelerated circulation of digital material can then be considered perhaps less as individual pieces of video property, but rather as a continually shifting set of relations to rights and access, the connections and interstices that characterise digital video as intermedia. In regards to the role of commons and sovereignty, David Joselit further points out:

“every form of property involves rights of action as well as limits on action. If one owns a house in the United States, for instance, one has the right to live or host a party there, but not to synthesize crystal meth or other illegal drugs in the basement.”227

Ruby’s *Cook* rejects the sovereignty of narcotics laws, preferring to assert their own radically individualistic sovereignty. This creates a separated space in which to act, in both the creation of narcotics and the networks of alternative distribution they form.

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227 Ibid.
In this sense claims of legitimacy, originality, ownership, authorship and proper usage form a contingent network of relations that determines the boundaries of property, be it a basement or a new video work. At this point I will extend this discussion of the radical potential of agency and sovereignty towards the problems of its execution that have helped hone my installation practice.

4.1.3 Failed Metaphor and Rationalisation

This section will outline the initial installation of my confirmation exhibition and how its various problems demonstrated the potential difficulties of contingency as a practicable method. The risk and precariousness hinted in Ruby’s video emerged as real formal and creative problems in my confirmation exhibition, which was the first full-scale installation of work, displaying multiple videos that would eventually form the Hellhound on My Trail project. Through my own evaluations and the feedback of my assessment panel, I concluded the work to have failed in providing a balanced ambiguity, instead sliding towards an ungraspable sense of meaninglessness. This installation provided a form of reflection and evaluation that would shape the installations developed afterwards. It also indicated the role of the installation framework to balance the contingency of the video projects, and convey a stability from which meaning might emerge.

This initial confirmation exhibition, Rote Hund (2015), was named in reference to my red dog character that appeared in the work, and for the German-language source material of Fichli and Weiss. It consisted of two videos with sound and one video without, all projected onto surfaces that were part of freestanding ad-hoc constructions, assembled from found PVC piping, blue tarpaulin and various sheets and cloth. The videos were experiments produced while I was making the initial video, Hellhound on My Trail, that were subjected to increasing abstraction and distortion. Before I had settled on the single channel work that would later represent this project, these various experiments used digital editing practices, such as keying, overlaying and retiming, to create distorted abstracted works. Obscuring sources was an early aim for my contingency processs, and thus I aimed for the material to become culturally untethered and therefore a more ambiguous building block for new meanings. I was
aiming to take cultural content and accelerate its material contingencies, to reduce the prominence of its recognisable form and expand the possibilities of its materiality.

![Figure 22. Nickk Hertzog, Confirmation Exhibition, 2015. Detail of installation, three multichannel videos, with single sound channel, found materials, tarpaulin, PVC, projector screens.](image)

My emphasis on accelerated contingency would result in a level of aesthetic incoherence that would reveal the need for elements of rationalisation to stabilise tangents of contingency. With the focus on creating distance between sources and their material, I was drawn to incredibly heavy digital editing techniques in order to overwork the material so much that the possibility of recognition was neutralised. The flow and temporality of these works was slowed down to encourage a contemplative state, but the obscurity of the visuals and the difficulty of the sound work over-emphasised the highly abstracted quality of the work. I felt the work failed to generate the poetic, elusive sense of meaning I had aimed for. My views were compounded by the academic panel that assessed the work, who also had difficulty engaging an intentionality to the work. My aim had been to produce a new meaning from existing materials, departing from their sources for a productively elusive quality. I had aimed for this aesthetic ambiguity to produce a sense of intrigue that would facilitate engagement with the work. This failed to emerge, as the ambiguity of the installation was stifled by the over-determination of abstraction and distortion.
The *Rote Hund* installation revealed the practical risks of an untethered approach to contingency. By focusing on aesthetically distancing the video works from their sources it was my overall aim to create a more affective installation experience, one that would discourage the impulse to intellectually “read” the connections of sources to analyse the content. To achieve this aim, I removed the signs of appropriation and recognisable sequences through those distortion processes and combinations. By following the material contingencies as remediated moving-image works and digital video material, I aimed to suppress the rationalisation that maintained the previous coherence of the source materials. Doane warned of the inherent risk of contingency, as I have previously outlined, pointing out that a productive engagement with contingency involves its eventual rationalisation to retain stability. The videos were removed from their sources, but became so abstracted from visual languages that what was intended as a cultural weightlessness became a heaviness of obscurity. The intentionality of the work had been deliberately set up to undermine readable critical decision making, but in doing so the decision-space of the installation rebuffed engagement rather than encouraging it.
The difficulties of this project drew my attention to the role of the installation space in rationalising these contingency projects. A greater consideration of the role of the installation and its rationalising capabilities offered the chance for a more sustained approach towards configurations of meaning. *Rote Hund* indicated that the installation could offer a useful concluding point to the generative contingencies of the video projects themselves. The contingencies and creative cycles of creating the video works continually developed, and were increasingly at risk of slipping into meaningless unless they were stabilised and assessed in the coherence of installation. These installations would reveal aesthetic issues and practical concerns that could be used to update and develop the videos that featured. I have discussed the role of agency in my practice and how the installation represents a spatial context that positions itself using a sovereign privatisation. At this point I would like to examine another dimension of the sovereignty of the installation, by analysing its capacity to engage temporality and thus contemporaneity.
Section 2: Temporal Sovereignty

4.2.1 Time and Debt

Through the context of contemporaneity, I will argue that temporality emerges in the experience of the installation and is heightened through the use of time-based media in my practice. In this section I will argue that the installation offers a present that extends the previous dialogue of sovereign space towards the implications of time-based media and the shared temporalities they present to the viewer. In this sense, the temporality of installation is inherent to the balance of speed and circulation with the enforced stillness and fixity of its components. By installing otherwise circulating cultural material, the installation already offers a consideration of temporality and presence that corresponds to the overwhelming availability of hyper-circulated materials made available through this condition of contemporaneity. In this sense, my appropriation strategy aimed to collect material and limit the scope of choices into a manageable range of possibilities. The role of the installation in this configuration is to demarcate a symbolic space of presence and context, elements lacking in the weightless circulation of material. But this symbolic space nonetheless relies on this weightless circulation to procure and alter its content.

The installation creates an ephemeral moment within the contemporary framework that corresponds to conditions of hyper-circulation. Each of my installations aims to create a metaphorical space that arranges its material to generate the possibility of new meaning. This desire for stillness in the condition of cultural speed produces the legitimacy of the installation, a space of presence that slows the dissemination into the experience of a given present. Ross argues that this temporal-turn is manifest in the experiments of time-based media and suggests a reconsideration of temporality as it emerges in contemporaneity.\footnote{Importantly, while I follow the engagement with temporality and contemporaneity explored in her text \textit{The Past is the Present} (...), I do not engage her more specific engagements with the history of video-art in articles such as ‘The Temporalities of Video: Extendedness Revisited’ in \textit{Art Journal}, Vol. 65, No. 3 (Fall, 2006), Pp. 82-99. In this text she argues that contemporary video installation is most effective when it engages a sense of temporality that aligns to earlier modes of analogue exploration. This remains outside the scope of my current focus on the impact of the contemporary temporality of installation and circulation, though it may offer a useful historical comparison for future research.} In the heterogeneous fracture of contemporaneity, the installation therefore gives my practice the means to construct a sovereign and
ephemeral present, in which a given metaphor can be proposed. The overwhelming present of contemporaneity and circulation offers the possibility for a new meaning to materialise through the context of its installation.

Contemporaneity emerges as a vital component to the installation of time-based media and its reconfiguration of temporal contingencies. Groys contends in the article ‘Comrades of Time’ that the experience of contemporaneity constantly removes us from notions of both a stable future and past:

“This today, we are stuck in the present as it reproduces itself without leading to any future. We simply lose our time, without being able to invest it securely, to accumulate it, whether utopically or heterotopically.”

Contemporaneity spills into an excess of present that refuses to be organised into a historical past or future. Groys argues that this continued present might represent a more positive excess of time that enables the examining of our own sense of being in ways that were resisted by dominant modes of teleological discourse and experience. He further contends that time-based art exemplifies this excess of time, by focusing on exercises in temporality that enact unproductive propositions. For Groys, “This is precisely the moment when time-based art can help time, to collaborate, become a comrade of time—because time-based art is, in fact, art-based time.” Groys points out that such considerations of time are negatively perceived as “unproductive, wasted, meaningless”, which excludes it from historical narratives and thus threatens it constantly with erasure. The reconfiguration of time-based art into art-based time therefore mobilises omissions of the “unproductive” towards a more productive engagement with the contingency of temporality.

I argue that this art-based time that the video installation exemplifies is really a hybrid of two distinct temporal operations at work. Firstly, the installation operates a positively framed present, distinct from more historical considerations of time. Secondly, the use of time-based media emphasises the materiality of a non-productive

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229 Groys, “Comrades of Time” P. 4
230 Ibid.
231 Ibid. Pp. 6-7
temporality. The hybridity of these two factors is emphasised by the fact that video time only really emphasises an experiential present when placed in the context of installation, as opposed to digital modes of circulation in which it is storable, alterable, and endlessly rewatchable at the agency of the user. The sovereignty of the installation thus emerges from its hybridising of spatial separation from circulation and the temporal separation of non-productive time. This imposed sovereign order of installation is then supported by claims of legitimacy from art structures and institutions. Just as Ruby’s cook will do “whatever the fuck I want in the privacy of my own home”, I am arguing that the installation establishes this agency for the artist to present their own temporalities through the agency of the institution that gives space to the agency of individual artists. Video installation does not find space outside the logic of circulation or contemporaneity, but rather builds a set of rules within these logics, a challenge that is still supported by this system, and therefore symbolic in its separation.

Groys’s symbolic separation of the installation represents the artist’s agency, but he also makes the point that the audience engages the installation with their own agency. For Groys, the ubiquity of cultural production means that audiences are used to exercising their own cultural agency in production. This general shift in cultural agency changes the nature of their reception to artworks and cultural material, and makes them a kind of active engager rather than a passive receiver of material. Groys follows Debord’s argument that society operates via massive cultural spectacle, but the spread of circulation means that, “If contemporary society is, therefore, still a society of spectacle, then it seems to be a spectacle without spectators.” Here, circulation is a kind of continued meeting of audience and material that undermines any classical notion of contemplation in favour of “a repetitive gesture that cannot and does not lead to any result—to any conclusive and well-founded aesthetic judgment, for example”. In this sense, the audience does not have room to form conclusive reflections and judgements because they are actively creating the situation for the installation’s separation. Having outlined the role of temporality and time-based art and art-based time, I will now expand on the strategies for mobilising the contingency of temporality through my continued installations.

232 Ibid. Pp. 9-10
233 Ibid. P. 10
4.2.2 Contemporaneity: Installing the Fractured Present

As I have outlined above, my initial confirmation installation demonstrated the tangible risk of contingency and the role of the installation in stabilising the contingencies of my approach. From these initial installation difficulties, I used my second project, *Poor Old Horse*, to establish the formal qualities that enabled the installation to act as an intervening or concluding process to the continual development of video works. This approach utilised the contextual present created by the installation to create a level of coherence between the disparate works and time-sequences of the videos it contained. As Groys points out, this stabilising of time-based media differentiates the installation of video from a media item operated by its viewer, subject to their choices and agency. The installation of these videos hybridises the decision-making of artistic agency with the agency of the audience, who create their own spatial and temporal experience of the work. The installation of the *Poor Old Horse* work aimed to engage and accelerate this hybrid agency through multiple projections that would share layers of material and establish spatial connections and visual links. This expanded the role of temporality through the repetition of imagery that engaged the potential of synchronicity and desynchronicity, to articulate the productive ambiguity my process aimed for. By utilising multiple video works, my installations recalled a hybrid of temporal connections and differences that spoke to the fractured and heterogeneous nature of contemporaneity.

The practical mobilisation of video synchronicity dynamics recalls my initial focus on the importance of contemporaneity. Ross spoke to the heterogeneous nature of contemporaneity, arguing that the dialogues of Smith and Groys were insufficient in their acknowledgement of the ambiguous hybrid state of connections and challenges that characterise the contingencies of contemporary temporalities.²³⁴ A tendency to categorise then fails to encompass the varying qualities of difference and connection between temporal experiences, which renders contemporaneity a heterogeneous condition rather than a discrete category of universal difference. Ross continues this position in assessing Groys’s analysis of unproductive time, arguing that Groys sets

²³⁴ Ross, *The Past is the Present* (...) P. 51
this artistic operation outside of history as a “denial of situatedness… that these artists are trying to counter”.\textsuperscript{235} These artists were not working outside of the logic of historicity, but were rather trying to “invent a new form of historicity in which unproductive time is not simply lost”.\textsuperscript{236} Ross argues more generally for the relevance of temporal \textit{perspective} in the consideration of contemporaneity that need not necessarily engage social history and futility in the manner of Francis Alýs’s \textit{When Faith Moves Mountains}.\textsuperscript{237} My own use of multichannel installation thus activates the agency of the viewer to travel the installation and experience a particular perspective of temporal meanings.

![Figure 24. Nickk Hertzog, Voidspace Setup, 2016. Detail of three channel video installation with sound, featuring found milk crates and Perspex screens.](image)

The \textit{Poor Old Horse} project was articulated in several variations, each designed to exemplify differing approaches to memory, repetition and synchronicity between works. The installation that I refer to as the \textit{Blackspace} setup adapted this project into a longer sequence of videos that played out over the three projections. This installation was an important success in determining the useful technical means for displaying my videos. The particular mechanics of the projection provided an interesting conveyance for the videos, which were edited and arranged in a spatial sequence that heightened their emerging aesthetic qualities. The screens were treated with a white powder on

\textsuperscript{235} Ibid. P. 69
\textsuperscript{236} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid. P. 63
one side in order to hold the image on the clear Perspex, while lending a rough gestural quality that enhanced the tactility of the projected imagery. The videos shown on these screens were of several arrangements of the single channel Poor Old Horse work, in three different configurations that utilised the same visual materials in different sequences, and were then cycled through the projectors in a random looping sequence. A viewer might see material cycling through that they recognise from another screen, or they might have seen an altered version of that same footage from a different sequence, or all three might be completely different. The differing length orders of video sequence ensured that the videos were not playing the same material, and if they were it would almost certainly be at different points. Sequencing therefore offered the viewer an engagement with a temporal fracturing of synchronicity and passage of video material, the potential fracturing of poetic sequence.

Figure 25. Nickk Hertzog, Blacksace Setup, 2016. Detail of three channel video installation with sound, featuring found milk crates and Perspex screens.

The temporal-turn that Ross describes involves the artistic focus on this heterogeneity, be it through alternative historicities, or in the consideration of fracturing the moving image and the experience of a fractured present. The Blacksace setup reconfigured a single channel video work into an exercise in temporal disjuncture, thus exploring the temporal contingencies available to the installation of time-based media. The themes of the Poor Old Horse project, described in Chapter 2, were further developed through this installation process, which utilised alignments and disjuncture of multiple altered versions of my single video work. The gaps and tension then became an embodied, or articulated, sentiment in which the creative acceleration of remediation and the
technological memory was given room to expand into an articulated present of video installation experience. I will now expand on the processes that combined and reconfigured my different projects into single installation assemblages that continued accelerating the creative possibilities of ambiguity.

4.2.3 Intervention and Integration

From installing each singular project, I gradually moved towards layers of integration that ensured a continued introduction of contingency into the rationalising process of installation. After the initial difficulties with the first project, the installation became the means by which I could determine if the project had coalesced into a satisfactory form. Installation functioned as a point in which meaning was floated, in the sense of providing ground for the metaphor while offering a vantage point to assess my video material outside of its generative process. The first two projects involved creating a single channel work that exemplified the project, then dissecting or altering it to create several videos for multichannel installation. The third video project, BATS, expanded on this process by developing multiple videos that presented a framework in which to begin drawing the other projects together. Each project was already subjected to the continued introduction of new material and interaction, most notably through the digital material interrogations that originated in BATS and were then introduced into my previous projects. Thus, the projects were continually combined using a close attention to the expressive qualities of the contingencies of their creative affinities. This would coalesce in the installation Out There (2016), shown at Rubicon ARI in Melbourne, that tested this stage of integration for the final exhibition Decomposing Contingencies (2017).

Establishing the installation Out There involved extracting and arranging my own material from different projects into a new installation form. Aligning these varying components also necessitated a guiding rationale and creative motif to ground the installation in conceptual cohesion. Following the digital disruptions and accelerated function of my BATS project, I reworked previous video material to include the effects of glitching and other data-bending processes that created technical and visual links between the material. I decided that the theme of the exhibition would centre around the concept of ruins in order to encapsulate the process of ruination that I had
performed on this material, as well as the footage of urban ruins that were to be shared in the different projects. By combining an expanded notion of ruin in digital corruption with more symbolic imagery of ruin, I was able to synthesise material from all three projects into a new arrangement of material. The resulting exhibition would weave these two threads together, to create a graspable creative coherence while still keeping a distance from references and readable critical intentionality.

![Figure 26. Nickk Hertzog, Out There, 2016. Multichannel video installation with sound, projections on Perspex screens.](image)

The theme of ruin provided the means to form arrangements of video from the previous projects, with particular attention to combining the concept of urban ruin with the ruin of the digital image. In this sense, I aimed to establish a material link between the structure of digital video and the content of their representation. The installation consisted of four videos arranged throughout the space, in various positions and orientations to facilitate the flow of audience movement and the vantage points of comparison between the individual videos playing. The video installation utilised a single sound component that played from one video, but combined sound from several of the other videos. In this sense, it was a more thematic use of sound that provided a background from which it could depart to engage in diegetic sequences before

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238 A more extensive and historical approach to ruination can be found in Ross’ investigations into Tacita Dean, in *The Past is the Present* (…), P. 196
returning to general ambience. The sound component established links between the various videos while remaining an understated component encouraging cohesion within the installation, while extending subtle diegetic links to visual sequences.

The material focus for Out There was pared back in order to emphasise the videos and their relationships to each other. The installation utilised the Perspex screens that had been used for the Horse setup. They were hung from the ceiling in order to create a greater sense of space, encouraging movement and viewer circulation. Paring back the materiality of my installation ensured the prominence of the videos themselves and framed the material choices through the intentionality of artistic decision-making. An overload of materials, such as in my initial confirmation exhibition, would lead to a sense of confusion and meaninglessness in the context of the installation. By taking ownership of the materiality of my installation setup, I emphasised the formal concerns that would allow for a more meaningful engagement to occur. In this sense, the role of the material supports and structures was to emphasise video links while remaining understated, thus signalling their agency, reuse, and the contingency of their placements and configuration. The Rubicon show, Out There, emphasised the creative possibilities of creating a video installation that utilised the work I had produced over the course of the PhD, and integrated that material into a new, distinct meaningful rearrangement. I would continue to accelerate this integration in my final larger-scale exhibition, Decomposing Contingencies.

4.2.4 Decomposing Contingencies

The role of the final exhibition, Decomposing Contingencies (2017), was to continue to integrate the three projects after the success of the Rubicon show. Importantly, the Rubicon show used the theme of ruins in order to create a coherent method for collecting videos and a rationale that positioned the works in an affective framework. However, the theme meant there were segments of video that were excluded, which created a certain homogenised quality between the videos. While this worked for the show Out There, for the final exhibition I decided to utilise a structure that would encompass more videos and a greater formal coherence, with select points of difference and dissonance.
Effectively, *Out There* had utilised a stable theme as organising principle, while the final exhibition reintroduced a degree of contingency into my strategic arrangement. Using the term *contingencies* in the title was a signal to my research, but was prefaced with the term *decomposing*, for two reasons. Firstly, as an association with “composing”, and the role of music and sound in the consideration of source material, from the supporting considerations of the song ‘Hellhound on My Trail’ by Robert Johnson, to following the folk songs of ‘Poor Old Horse’ and the critical positioning of ‘Release the Bats’ and its post-punk concerns with materiality and sustained breakdown. Secondly, I was interested in “decomposing” as the process of degeneration, in which the whole becomes reduced to parts and altered from its original form. The term usefully encompasses both the decomposed reduction of reference and distortion balanced by the compositional arrangement of material. This hybridity set the installation up as a project of precarious balance that would attempt to generate a productive ambiguity through the contingencies of a range of videos.

The exhibition included an extensive range of material to form moments of comparison that explored the depths and differences to this contingency, and its targeted acceleration. A range of textures and video qualities were therefore utilised in both content and hardware. In this sense, *Decomposing Contingencies* acted as a kind of contingent survey of my PhD works that generated an alignment of meaningful formal qualities. To achieve this arrangement, the videos were continually reworked under the consideration of their interaction with each other. While several videos were used in their intact form, other videos, such as *Hellhound on My Trail*, were split into components that were subjected to further distortions that aimed to generate coherence between other heavily pixelated works. The formal quality that became most important in arranging the videos was the tension between digital abstraction and its more representational possibilities. As the use of repeated recognisable phrases was vital in tying these works together, visual material around the red dog figure therefore permeated many of the works, in both recognisable forms and more abstract ones. The arrangement also made a point of including certain representational sequences, while other videos displayed those same passages through a series of distortions. Levels of connection were discernible, to varying degrees, projecting a sense of interconnection and elusive coherence between the videos. This aimed to generate a particular mode
of ambiguity, based on the precarious balance of digital abstraction and representation that pervaded the work.

In considering the arrangement of the final installation, I aimed to promote a level of connection between the works that sustained them individually while integrating the whole installation space. The videos were projected and screened in a variety of heights and orientations in order to facilitate a sense of passage, in which multiple viewpoints encouraged movement. This was further emphasised through the different durations of video loops, which ensured that while multiple videos were visible from most vantage points, the different video timelines produced a unique combination that would almost certainly never repeat during any exhibition cycle. The audience was therefore charged with a spatial and temporal contingency of their own experience, which was heightened with the increasing number of videos placed in a space and the greater the disparities between their durations. What emerged through this process was a contingent experience within the installation space itself, with various connections of imagery as well as disconnections, precarious representation balanced by abstraction.

The installation offered a microcosm for the working practice that had generated these video works, demonstrating a level of combination and association between visual sequences, subtly enhanced by the dynamic of the sound. The comparison between the visual materials generated a contingency of association, while the sound aimed to create an underlying coherence that kept the visual comparisons from creating too much separation between works. The main two spaces of the gallery each had their own surround sound system, which played different tracks. The first track was drawn from the more ambient sequences of my first two video projects, which would hopefully signal the intention for the videos to be experienced in a collective ambience rather than individual works to be watched to completion and intellectually dissected. Like the audio of the Out There show, this ambient track occasionally gave way to discernible sounds like running water, and the real-life ambience of open spaces. These portions occasionally seemed diegetic to the running water featured in two of the videos, but it also corresponded to certain static-like distortions in the other videos, or the melting quality of the dog video that stood at the opening to the space. The audience would move through the space to this first track, and as they approached the second
room the other audio track would be more discernible. This second track utilised a more halting and sparse background of atmospheric audio that had more silences and gaps, while still maintaining a general ambience. This general ambience was interrupted by sequences of flickering distortion that corresponded to the more distorted set of videos in the second space—with the flickering appearing to drift in and out of alignment with the visual distortions. The sound provided coherence to the piece and thus suggested an underlying tone to the audience through its affective ambience, and moments of emergent and receding diegetic relations.

The video components in Decomposing Contingencies were arranged in order to facilitate this flow and negotiate the conditions of the gallery space to establish the installation. The first video work encountered when entering the space was the Acid Dog video, created for the Rubicon show, as one of my initial attempts at digital glitching to distort earlier works. The video was rear-projected onto an old television screen, which captured some of the image with my dust treatment, while also spilling through vibrant colours. It aimed to draw people into the space, while highlighting an emphasis on distortion and recognition through its cycles of the installation. This set the condition for experiencing the installation as an affective negotiation between recognisable sounds and imagery, and the distortion available to digital materiality. As the viewer continued into the installation, the next video saw the initial dog figure moving through spaces, emerging and disappearing in various video cycles, merging through levels of digital distortion. In the corner of the first room, three video projections operated as engagements with each other and a formal negotiation of the nearby staircase that dominated the gallery features of that corner. Entering this first space involved an initial encounter with a video that rapidly oscillated between glitch-distortion and recognisable imagery. The following videos in the space continued this dynamic with lesser intensity, displaying generally more recognisable qualities and representational content before the audience moved towards the landing or second room.

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239 The videos themselves were each a component of the single work that was the installation, though I will dissect them individually for clarity.
The second room utilised far more jarring levels of visual glitch in order to reveal the abstract qualities of digital video material, in contrast to the first room. The most visible video in this room was a high projection that presented a completely datamoshed version of my original Poor Old Horse video, in which jarring pixilation and distortion fell into varying levels of alignment with imagery sequences in the other projections. The other component to this room was an arrangement of two CRT televisions surrounded by ten monitors, arranged into a low rectangular form. The two televisions each played a vibrantly coloured and pixelated version of several sequences from earlier projects, while the monitors were placed flat around the televisions, playing another video simultaneously on each screen. This video was based on the experiments from the BATS project, and featured the fast-moving pace of the original clip, with an additional layer of shuffling glitch-like distortion. Both the projection and the video sculpture utilised halting levels of rapid glitching that were enhanced by periodically aligning to the distorted flickering audio of the second space.
Figure 28. Nickk Hertzog, *Decomposing Contingencies*, 2017. Room 1 detail of multichannel video installation with two sound channels, Perspex screens, CRT and LCD monitors, found screens.

Figure 29. Nickk Hertzog, *Decomposing Contingencies*, 2017. Room 2 detail of multichannel video installation with two sound channels, Perspex screens, CRT and LCD monitors, found screens.
On the landing, another arrangement of monitors displayed the swirling *BITE* video that emerged from the *BATS* project. A range of second-hand and older generation monitors were arranged below a larger flatscreen LCD, all showing the same synchronised video. The type and positioning of the monitors provided a range of interpretations of the size, shape and colour of the identical video sequence. This work created a certain break between the two-room dynamic, while getting equal sound from both rooms. It also encouraged the viewer to move up the stairs in order to view the piece, therefore gaining yet another vantage point to view the other videos of the installation. In particular, the floor projection of the first room was even more visible when viewed from the staircase, and the passages of water and slow skylines became more illusory with the increased distance. The floor screen used the metal frame extracted from the television screen of the first projection, in order to provide an outline inside which a treatment of white dust, much like the other Perspex screens, picked up the projected image. The dust was spread in a gestural fashion and sat unevenly on the floor, as it did on the screens. Both the floor projection and the Perspex screen above it utilised videos in which the content fades into a white background. This white projection would turn the attention from the video content to the uneven quality of the surface, and encourage a hypermediated awareness of the screen.
The overall arrangement of the installation was designed to hint at an ambiguous meaning, or an amorphous poetic quality. The point of my research had been to explore the idea that each application of this method could produce a particular kind of ambiguity and contingency of meaning. The particular contingent meaning of this installation focused on the levels of recognition and digital distortion between the videos. This comparison of multiple videos encouraged a sense of movement throughout the installation, and this distortion and arrangement demonstrated a vibrancy of pictorial generation and affective association. The sense of movement and repeated imagery recalled a certain kind of disintegrated narrative that helped the work present itself as a kind of ephemeral poem. Rather than a narrative in the conventional linear sense, repeated images, such as the dog figure, suggested a nebulously poetic narrative of form in the video arrangements. The contingency of these videos operated with connection and dissonance, creating spatio-temporal links and interstices that enforced both the connection and space needed to form a poetic sense of new meaning.

This chapter has argued that video installation establishes a spatio-temporal context that symbolically separates the sovereignty of the artist from the cultural fluctuation and the ubiquity of circulation. This symbolic separation also emerges in the agency of the audience, who activate their own specific experience of the installation, which is heightened by the inclusion of time-based media. In terms of my own contingency framework, installation provided the means to engage a rationalising function that stabilised the generative contingencies of my various video projects. The role of my contingency framework was to generate video material that could be installed to propose new individual meanings through their particular formal arrangements. By evaluating more installations throughout the project, I was able to determine that my contingency method relied on the installation to rationalise the possibilities of my generative process. This rationalisation was a method of intervening in the processes of contingency, rather than negating the contingency, and would therefore translate the generation of videos into the realm of affective meaning, in which ambiguity became the cohesive factor in balancing the potential of meaning and its risks of meaninglessness.
Conclusion

This dissertation has argued that contingency offers a strategic reconfiguration of appropriation in the context of contemporary digital video and its installation. In isolating my approach from the implications of more conspicuously critical appropriation art of the late 1970s and 1980s—which, as described in Crimp and Buchloh’s writing at the time, used artistic legitimacy as a means to project critical positioning and commentary—I instead pursue an ambiguous sense of meaning that I argue is more relevant to contemporary cultural configurations. My focus on ambiguity structured my research into frameworks of meaning and their potential mobilisation in the practice of video and its installation. Contingency emerged as the creative pursuit of the inherent ambiguities of meaning, with the possibility of further acceleration in an artistic context. Contingency provided an approach that acknowledged the precedents of artistic appropriation while simultaneously distinguishing the implications of digital materiality on contemporary cultural strategies. The significance of this approach was that it shifted questions of meaning from previously rigidified critical codes towards a contemporary configuration of constructing perceptual experience. The divergent and speculative aspects of contemporary meaning have gained increasing relevance in contemporary cultural configurations and so have been prioritised in the practice of my artistic research. By synthesising discourses of linguistics with an expanded investigation of contemporaneity, contingency has been positioned as increasingly relevant in the cultural network that situates my practice. In this sense, appropriation has been positioned away from definitive gestures and towards a nuanced process of metaphor, through which contingency operated in the materiality of digital video and the agency of installation.

By synthesising the work of Doane and Rorty I defined an expanded concept of contingency that moved beyond a discourse of chance and errancy towards a discourse of contemporary meaning. I have argued that contingency becomes increasingly relevant in the condition of contemporaneity in which I situate my practice and surrounding cultural mechanisms. Doane’s approach to technology and meaning positions contingency as a driving force of new cultural meanings that inherently runs the risk of shifting into meaninglessness. She identifies the capacity of rationalisation
that tempers the functions of contingency into a sense of productive output and meaning. This sense of rationalisation would remain a small process in my video generation, while becoming a vital principle in the role of my installation process in stabilising my video projects.

To address the implications of agency in my approach, I have mobilised Rorty’s concept of the metaphor, in which new meaning is expressed through cultural practitioners and revealed as culturally contingent. The agency implications of metaphor framed my own creative decisions and further established the role of the installation as a space of artistic decision-making. This dialogue on metaphor established my approach to identifying potential source material and establishing a practical framework through the existing structures of the work. I extended this concept of metaphor from Rorty’s linguistic frameworks towards the metaphorical capacities of media interaction and the informational capacities of digital materiality. Rorty offered a structure to pursue meaning with its inherent ambiguities, which I have applied towards technologies of digital exchange and the materiality of video.

My focus is positioned in the techno-cultural conditions of contemporaneity, in which I argue that contingency becomes heightened by circulation and can be further accelerated to produce new meanings for art production. The arguments of Smith and Ross characterise contemporaneity as an extended sense of present, and contend that this contributes to an uncertainty of meaning and shifting spatio-temporal conceptualising. Contemporaneity therefore heightens the occurrence and relevance of contingency and its particular production of meaning in a cultural framework. The implications of contemporaneity framed my approach towards considerations of time and space that occurred in the moving-image work of video and the present of the installation. Contemporaneity thus established a consideration of how meaning situates itself within surrounding frameworks of interlaced cultural concerns.

By establishing a definition of contingency within a framework of contemporaneity, I approached the practical framework of appropriation that developed over the course of my research. This was demonstrated through my initial project, *Hellhound on My Trail*, and the thematic approach of wandering, which displayed the importance of organising principles and how these can be utilised into further development, such as
sources of appropriation and the collection of new footage. My investigation of wandering included an analysis of the Situationists’ processes of dérive and détournement, and how these can be reconfigured towards contemporary practice through their own concept of recuperation. From this initial project, I established a strategy that structured my use of contingency into distinct processes of the following: identification; reinterpretation; recombination and obscuring; addition and feedback.

From this initial project, I extended my process into a dialogue of media networks and the contingency of these relationships. Digital video was positioned through its relationship with other media formats and its heightened capacities of interaction and remediation. This process of remediation was characterised by Bolter and Grusin as the ambiguous capacity of digital representation to adapt non-digital material, simultaneously preserving it while materially altering it. Using this concept of remediation, I positioned digital video as a network of contingent relations with a heightened capacity for appropriation. This capacity of remediation established digital video as an interconnected media framework that would be explored further in the application of intermedia and the interrogation of digital materiality.

By establishing and expanding on the interconnected nature of video, my practical processes were considered in a wider framework of media relationships. I have examined this system of relationships by reworking channels of video exchange and circulation in the practice, which I have termed folk-contingency. The concept of folk provided a means to consider the organic interaction, exchange and cultural reconfiguration that, I argue, is increasingly relevant to appropriation strategies in contemporary media situations. I examined the artistic precedent of Mike Kelley’s *Projective Reconstruction* series and his own affinity towards the concept of folk. By aligning Kelley’s appropriation practice with my own, I determined that a folk-contingency process links the concept of reuse with the heightened agency of the cultural producer. Like Kelley, I focused the formal decisions of this approach on a mixture of associated affinities and intensive cycles of personal mediation. This established the practical applications of appropriation that were considered in a wider medium discourse.
By mobilising this folk-contingency approach towards the specific properties of digital sampling, I established the framework of my second project, Poor Old Horse. By analysing the capacities and implications of digital sampling, I established the particular properties and productive ambiguity that separates it from other appropriation techniques. I examined this position through the work of Soda_Jerk, whose sampling reconfigured media histories into ambiguous presentations of cultural memory. Furthering this investigation into cultural memory, my second video project used metaphorical propositions of memory and debt to layer samples of video sequence into abstracted components from which representation emerged and receded. Folk was used as a literal prompt, by appropriating a folk ritual, therefore extending the range and capabilities of my contingent approach.

My assessment of digital video media expanded into the artistic frameworks of the postmedium condition and intermedia that connected medium shifts with an expanded sense of contemporary agency. By synthesising Krauss and Hegarty’s arguments, I contended that an expanded concept of intermedia encompasses the artistic shifts of postmedium conditions, and positions video as a situation of relations that encompasses both connections and vital interstices. This system of media relations was extended by examining the implications of circulation that emerge in Benjamin’s focus on mechanical reproduction, and its echoing and transformation in Steyerl’s focus on electronic distribution and contemporary agency. I synthesised a dialogue on media exchange with artistic considerations of media frameworks in order to qualify the connected nature of digital video to which remediation and appropriation allude.

The contingencies of exchange were then considered through implications of digital video by analysing its materiality. Through the concepts of codec and compression, I argued that circulation and exchange are built into the very materiality of digital video itself. This material investigation revealed the inherent contingency of digital processes that, I argued, are available to accelerate and exploit towards creative outcomes. I continued this investigation by examining the practice of Thomas Ruff, whose over-compressed and pixelated images reveal a process of acceleration, and also considered the implications of noise and meaning on the level of digital materiality.
My own investigations into noise and digital materiality involved experimenting with processes of glitch and databending, to produce my third project, BATS. I characterised digital video as an interconnected medium of information, in which noise and signal create a dynamic on which digital functions are contingent. I tested this definition through the disruption of digital processes with glitches and their intentional activation through databending, which revealed the contingencies of digital materiality. My project BATS produced multiple videos that used post-punk as an organising principle around which to create a sustained engagement with material breakdowns. This also aimed to take advantage of the structure of digital video, in which the audio and visual are materially linked. In this sense, dialogues on metaphor and meaning were adapted towards the implications of noise and information in digital meaning. The acceleration and disruption of these processes demonstrated that the contingencies of digital materiality could be utilised to reveal the ambiguity of digital meaning and pursue it for creative aims.

Having established my method of video generation I then outlined the role of installation in providing a space of meaning, separate from the flux of my practice and the flux of wider circulation and exchange. Installation offered a contextual present that aligned with the notion of contemporaneity, while providing a space that represents the symbolic sovereignty of the artist’s agency and decisions. The installation therefore balanced the contingent circulation that formed the video works with its own emphasis on rationalised fixity. The presence of each installation then provided a means to conclude portions of my video projects, providing an experiential deployment for the audience to experience the work, and for me to evaluate and assess each particular iteration. My more experimental iterations provided a scope to assess their successes, and pinpoint the failures and problems that occurred in such arrangements as my confirmation exhibition Rote Hund. The installation mobilised a sense of agency that responded to my practice of video appropriation, while simultaneously offering moments of intervention and conclusion to those processes.

I extended the focus on agency towards the implications of the audience’s encounter with the time-based capacity of video installation. By supplementing Krauss’s discussion of video and installation with the work of Groys, I analysed the impact of time-based media within the presence of the installation experience. While installation
conveys the symbolic sovereignty of the artist, the audience then exercises their own particular agency within that context. The use of video within this context expanded on the audience’s inherent experiential capacity, as they construct a particular experience of time that negotiated their viewing decisions with the set playing functions of the temporal media. This analysis of temporal experience further demonstrates the relevance of contemporaneity as a collection of heterogeneous experiences and relative meanings. The experience of installation was therefore characterised as the clearest proposal of metaphor from my practice, in which the contingency of experience builds a potential new meaning.

As I have articulated throughout this thesis, I have been pursuing a quality of ambiguity that is inherent to the contingency of meaning, which then structured the integration of my projects into my final installations. Through the installation Out There, I investigated the capacity for my previous projects to interact in a single installation space and further the pursuit of a coherent yet ambiguous meaning. The installation utilised a thematic concern of ruin, which negotiated my footage of urban ruins with the concept of ruin and deteriorated representation within digital materiality. Based on the successes of this installation, I then extended this process into my final exhibition, Decomposing Contingencies. To encapsulate a wider range of material and pursue a more ambiguous meaning, I utilised a loose formal arrangement that relied on a tension that emerged from the combination of collected works themselves. I based the installation around a creative negotiation of representation and abstraction that permeated the content of the videos and the quality of their display. Loose formal strategies emerged through the contingency of the video components and their interaction within this setting. The installation proposed a productive engagement with uncertainty, in which the gesture of appropriation was subordinated to the accelerated contingencies of my digital video practice.

This dissertation has outlined the proposal for a framework of contemporary practice that mobilised video installation towards the pursuit of ambiguous new meaning. Contingency offered a productively demanding negotiation that expanded the strategy of metaphor towards a reconfigured practice of appropriation. This framework was contextualised within the broader context of contemporaneity, in which circulation and uncertainty are increasingly normalised. Appropriation therefore becomes ubiquitous
in contemporary culture, which diminishes its clear gestural quality and capacity for emphasis. It is for this reason that my approach reconfigured appropriation strategies towards the more relevant considerations of contingency that frame digital video practice and its installations. Building this framework then ensured a reflexive and rigorous engagement with these conditions, qualifying the role of circulation in determining contemporary meanings. Digital materiality becomes a substance by which appropriation can be built into relevant contemporary forms and contingency can emerge from practice into meaning.

The possible extension of this research on contingency could focus on the potential for the particular strategies of approach or modes of analysis that have formed a component of my framework. As my research has synthesised elements of linguistics, philosophy of meaning, communication theory, information theory and digital structures, a deeper investigation into any of these components would yield important research. Each of these aspects was only engaged for the capacities I deemed relevant to digital video installation, thus a change or narrowing of medium would necessitate a deeper engagement with the relevant theories of contingency. This could contribute greater insight and mobilisation of contemporary artistic frameworks by positioning a strategy deeper in established structures of meaning.

A final point bearing consideration is the role of non-art-based practices as both influences on and analogues to my framework of appropriation. The interaction of differing media is emphasised throughout this project, but the intermedia landscape also promotes a large expanse of broader cultural exchange. It would be useful to determine the precedent for my contingency process in the broader cultural exchanges of internet, music, or various subcultures. My research could also be considered in its possible wider cultural applications and the differing role this would have to an artistic context. Like this completed project, further questions on the role of art would reveal a shift in its frames of meaning that should be examined in terms of its wider cultural relations.

My research has argued that contemporary cultural situations shift appropriation practice into more ambiguous territories. Digital exchange normalises the copy and mutes the gestural capacity for appropriation to operate as a mode of critique. In this
setting, contingency as an existing network of potential meaning becomes a privileged operation that can be mobilised and accelerated through video practice. This approach is aimed towards producing sustained ambiguity as an extension of the inherent contingencies of contemporary cultural meaning and as a means of distancing my approach from previous critical modes of appropriation. Both the materiality of digital video and the framing capacity of the installation operate within the wider exchange of cultural meaning. In my research, these concepts situate my practice within contemporary techno-cultural frameworks, and reinforce the agency of accelerating these processes towards creative outcomes. Accelerating this cultural agency allows for new networks of meaning to emerge, which are fraught and precarious, but mobilise contingency towards an engaging ambiguity that finds increasing relevance in contemporary settings.
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