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Goldfield Studies

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Dawn Roe

Leigh-Ann Pahapill

Lisa Zaher

GOLDFIELD STUDIES

The dialogue within this essay serves as a response to the series Goldfield Studies, a work itself prompted by the history and landscape of this eponymous region of Victoria, Australia. The imagery produced takes the form of paired and multiple still photographs and a digital video sequence, displayed in triple-projection. The discussion is framed by the artist's introduction, which defines the project as a critical consideration of cultural memory in relation to the opposing perspectives of indigenous and colonial settler narratives, pastoral landscape representations, folklore and myth. A collaborative dialogue between an artist and art historian who share common research concerns follows the introduction. The conversation that ensues addresses the work's multiple access points while questioning the ontological status of photographic representation and its subsequent relation to metaphysical questions of Being. The essay concludes with a response by the artist, furthering the participatory nature of the dialogue in relation to experience and representation.

Artist's Introduction

Dawn Roe

In May of 2011, I served as artist-in-residence at the Visual Arts Centre of LaTrobe University, located in the Goldfields region of Australia. The photographs and video works produced here serve as a record of my response to the surrounding bushlands and the disparate histories that comprise this space (Figure 1). Though not always visible, the abandoned mine shafts that pierce these grounds serve as markers, unearthing a complex web reaching back to the era of the first gold strikes for which the region is known. This particular landscape, with its temporal shifts present in the form of both physical and psychic traces left by man and nature, proved a provocative vehicle for extending my research on the relationship between perception and memory.

During my time in the Goldfields, I came to understand this space as a repository of cultural memory constructed from the opposing perspectives of indigenous and colonial settler narratives, pastoral landscape representations, folklore and myth. Though cognizant of my outsider status, I felt an affinity to these bushlands in the same way most of us have a familiar response to the forest in general. In responding to the space, I thought equally about how various interactions within the region impacted the landscape both physically and metaphorically. The specific residue of gold mining remains present in the form of abandoned mine shafts that are "capped" with a criss-cross of twigs and branches, having the look of shallow graves. Yet the very rich histories of the ancient past remain

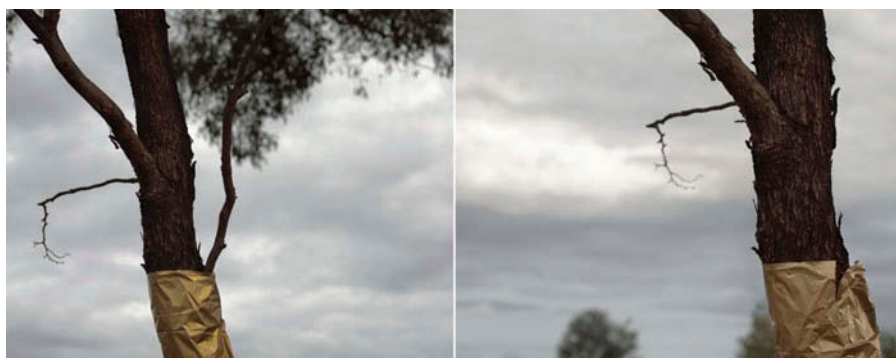


Fig. 1 Goldfield Study (Gold and Tree), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

overwhelmingly present as well, in the form of rock formations and lookout points, and within the myths attached to natural fauna, birds and other animals.

Confronted with this past, I found myself looking to uncover the poignancy of present moments, and the fleeting resonance of immediate experience. My photographic process combines a documentary approach with direct interventions into the landscape as well as constructions in the studio. Deliberately clunky fabrications incorporate gold fabric and other materials that refer to mining, while they also echo the unsettling imagery of gothic fairytales that intermingle with this space.

Goldfield Studies engages in overlapping conceptions of time. As Rebecca Solnit has written of Muybridge's Yosemite photographs,

though landscape's obvious subject is space, its deepest theme is time. Images of lush landscape speak of the organic and cyclical time of plant life and the daily cycle of light and darkness. Photographs speak as well of the moment of vision the photographer made permanent, of the split second to minutes the aperture of the camera was open and light poured on the film. (Solnit 104)

The forest is an ideal space for imaging time *beyond* an isolated point as well, due to its vast and monotonous structure, always continuing beyond our field of vision or frame of reference. As noted by Simon Schama, the "woodland interior has been habitually conceived of as a living space" with its "shifting zones of light and darkness and relentless dense stands of conifers" (84). The familiarity and abundance of forestlands tends to mark these spaces — and our response to them — as simplistic. Yet these primordial lands remain saturated with disparate histories encompassing both recent and ancient epochs that allow for extended investigations relating to issues of time and perception. Working on location throughout the noted mining sites of the Goldfields with only a limited knowledge of the area led me to further question how this space has been understood or known historically, and whether that way of knowing contrasts with contemporary perceptions.

Landscapes are culture before they are nature; constructs of the imagination projected onto wood and water and rock. But it should also be acknowledged that once a certain idea of landscape, a myth, a vision, establishes itself in an actual place, it has a peculiar way of muddling categories, of making metaphors more real than their referents; of becoming, in fact, part of the scenery. (Schama 58)

While the particulars of location are essential to this series, the site was ultimately secondary to my primary concerns around the discrepancies between space as experienced in the past, and as represented in the present. Only a glimpse of each setting is offered, with each scene represented as a distinctly separate perception, often excluding or obscuring fragments of trees, rock, land and sky (Figure 2, Figure 3). Whether or not we can immediately name what we see in a photographic representation, its verisimilitude is always paramount. This recognition promotes twin readings and multiple reference points, leading the viewer to both accept and question the space or place of the image and its multiple meanings.

In an effort to maintain an emphasis upon the relentless flux of our temporal continuum, I present the work in the form of paired or multiple images as both still photographs and digital video. In contrast to a singular perception, the simultaneity inherent to experience is accentuated through the use of viewing strategies that



Fig. 2 Goldfield Study (Gold, Twig and Dirt), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.



Fig. 3 Goldfield Study (Digging Site #2), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

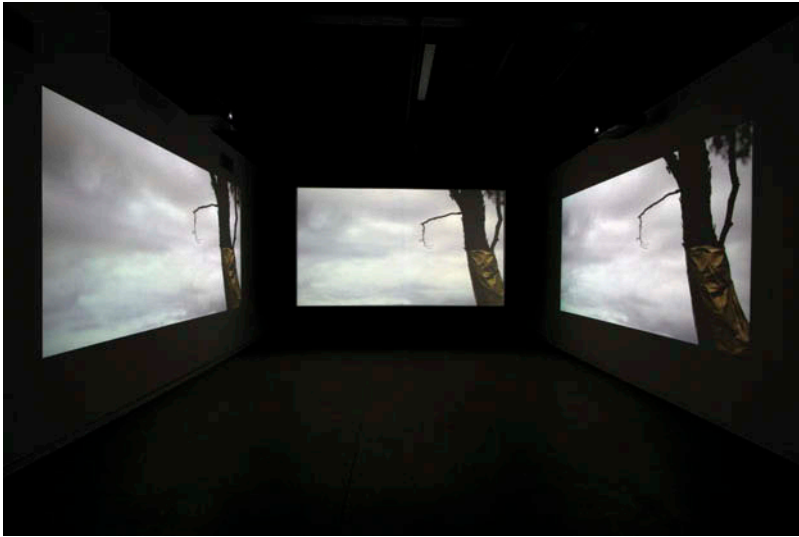


Fig. 4 Goldfields (Installation View), Screen Space, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, 2012. HD video, triple screen projection. © Dawn Roe 2012.

deliberately press together stasis and movement as both captured and reactivated in sequential still photographs or multi-channel video projection (Figure 4). Stressing the cognitive shifts between now and then/here and there, articulates the necessary duration of present experience, suggesting that “your perception, however instantaneous, consists in an incalculable multitude of remembered elements; and in truth, every perception is already a memory” (Bergson 194).

A Collaborative Engagement

The concerns brought forth in the previous section, coupled with a critical consideration of a recent video installation of this work at Screen Space in Melbourne, Australia, form the basis of the conversation that follows. Since the spring of 2012, I have been engaged in an ongoing discussion with installation artist, Leigh-Ann Pahapill (MFA, University of Chicago), and art historian, Lisa Zaher (PhD, University of Chicago), around issues of representation in relation to media specificity. Our initial dialogue developed as a panel discussion centering on Pahapill’s recently completed installation at the Cornell Fine Arts Museum in Winter Park, Florida, which included sculptural elements replicated based on photographs from the Bertolt Brecht archive, as well as stand-alone still photographs and a multi-channel digital video work. Zaher also contributed an essay to the catalog produced for this exhibition, wherein she posed thoughtful questions of aesthetic and perceptual experience that laid the groundwork for what has become a long form discussion between the three of us. This experience has led us to continue working together in the form of conference presentations as well as another recent panel discussion centering on the Goldfields work in Portland, Oregon.

Hoping to engender a response that might illuminate the overlapping access points within Goldfield Studies, I extended an invitation to consider this work in written form to Pahapill and Zaher. Instead of writing individual essays, the pair chose to engage in an open-ended and challenging dialogue between themselves, and the work. Our mutual research interests and past

experience working with one another allowed this process to be collaborative in form, leading Pahapill and Zaher to use this opportunity to further extend our conversation, and continue the process of questioning.

(To view a video of the triple-projection installation, please visit the artist's website, www.dawnroe.com)

In Conversation

Dawn Roe's *Goldfields* (A Triple-Screen HD Video Installation with Audio)

Leigh-Ann Pahapill and Lisa Zaher

LZ: When I first watched *Goldfields*, I was mesmerized by its Dziga Vertov-like cataloguing of forms of stillness and motion — both those found in nature and those made cinematically. The stillness of the trees, the fleetingness of the clouds, and the stilled stream that ripples to motion find homonyms in Dawn's act of recording, from static shots to pans and turns. Presented in triple projection, I found myself at times uncertain of the stasis or movement in each shot, trying to fix, in my mind, an awareness of the repetitions and subtle differences across each image (Figure 4). Several viewings later, this task of locating repetitions and differences still compels me, but now I find myself haunted by its protagonists — agents of action and subjects of attention that repeat and are repeated. Of these, of course, the trees are most prominent, as well as the birds and crickets that we hear but do not see.

I wonder if you found yourself similarly as a witness to these protagonists, to their polyphonic soliloquy that speaks of both time and place. How do you see the photographic performance of stillness and motion worked out with or through the performances of each subject?

LP: Indeed, I also recognized “protagonists” immediately — from the ridiculously feeble “runt of the litter” tree (sapling?) in drag, to the s-curved exaggerated contrapposto posed tree in the forest through to the absentee fire tender (Figure 5). They are axioms, or signs, cliché images, familiar forms — art historical, canonical and so on. Things that I cannot “see” without attaching a scheme of meaning to them. For me, they appear — or are made to appear vis-à-vis the collocation of the moving and still image, as if by arresting the image it immediately becomes something so easily nameable — a known. Badiou has written about this phenomenon in *Being and Event* as *being as one*, which is an operational result, an effect of the operation of the *count as one*. Each time the sequence shifts from moving to still image I find this phenomenon to occur; I count as one the tree now *con-sisting* — or standing together with other presentations, for example, {tree, figure, contrapposto}. I can no longer see the tree in experience, as a presented multiple or as a figure of presentation. Each time the image is stilled the figure of presentation becomes a representation and I see it in syntax, that is, as regimes. The moving image sequences present themselves as presentations in a consistent multiplicity that in the act of presenting become embedded in knowledge. I find this to be quite compelling.

Let me take this a little bit further in response to your characterization of “agents of action” and point out that a curious thing happens for me in this work whereby I find



Fig. 5 Goldfield Study (Tree and Smoke), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

myself as a viewer aligned with the camera operator. Saying this, I mean that I am acting on the scene — or operating, as it were, and not just passively taking in the scenery. I become an agent of action, and in this activity, *I become (briefly)*. In this regard, the action that I find particularly interesting is the framing activity that is referenced and its relationship to being or presence as multiple. For Badiou, ontology is a situation, and, through representing activity, being emerges but then regresses: “the one, which is not, cannot present itself; it can only operate . . . it is retroactively apprehended as non-one as soon as being-one is a result” (*Being and Event* 25). The sequencing of the video (as a series of successive representations) also echoes this ontological structure as it continuously cycles between moving and still images (Figure 6). As soon as I count as one, that one regresses and I find myself participating in a stream of presentations only



Fig. 6 Goldfields (Installation View), Screen Space, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, 2012. HD video, triple screen projection. © Dawn Roe 2012.

to have the next count as one emerge as the sequence stills. I'd like to link this idea to your (really interesting) conflation of the multiple and the singular, the "polyphonic soliloquy" that you identify and ask if the performing subjects you are thinking of also include the viewer?

LZ: Yes, I think that in the work as a whole the viewer is called to action. However, I am not sure I find myself, as you do, aligned with the camera. Even though the shots in each of the three screens are the same, I find my attention split from one screen to the next. Do I bear witness to, or act upon the event as the camera does, or do I bear witness to the events as presented by and through the projected images? Am I implicated in the act of looking that occurred in the act of recording the event, or am asked to identify, to locate, to fix that which seemingly slips from one screen to the next?

For me, it seems the viewer is asked to act *not* with the camera, panning as it pans, waiting as it waits, looking and listening with its mechanical eye and ear; rather, the viewer performs a synthetic function, taking up the space between shots, performing physically, and not merely perceptually, the conditions of cinematic experience. The juxtaposition of still and moving images similarly produces a space within which the viewer may act, by noting the starts and stops of movement, by remembering from one screen to the next what was just seen, determining what had been, what remains and what is no longer. Each screen gives its own "now-point" (to borrow the philosopher Edmund Husserl's term).¹ We perceive the now-point before us, while through memory we confirm a shared duration across each image. The ripple effect in the water stands out for me as a moment when the individuality of each now-point conflicts with the shared generality of the durational image. Given the context of this work, produced in the bushlands that once served as the site of Australia's gold mines, the work seems to place some pressure on the viewer to reconcile the past with the present. The acts of identifying, locating, and fixing that I mention above rely heavily upon coming to an awareness of the significance of memory, whether we think of this in terms of primary retention — the memory that, according to Husserl, "holds on to" that which has just passed and forms a unity with the now-point of perception, or in terms of an invoked cultural memory that may be particular to those viewers who have experienced this region, or whose knowledge of its history has been passed down through generations (Husserl 194).

I wonder if the very nature of what qualifies as an ontological grounding is not placed in question here by Dawn's work. Even the act of synthesis, of unifying past and present, seems a little tenuous and contingent. There are, after all, in addition to the blurring of stillness and motion, breaks throughout the sequence from night to day. Time flows and is both interrupted and stalled. While Nature may have reclaimed the space marred by Culture, the landscape remains broken, masked by darkness in the opening scene, and wrapped or marked by synthetic gold material throughout. Shots that seemingly offer a view through thickets of shrubbery sometimes return back a surface (Figure 7). What might the failure to determine stilled images from moving ones, to reconcile past and present, to identify surface from depth, do to any ontological claims made on behalf of the viewer, the landscape, or the medium?

LP: The irreconcilability that you describe is key for Badiou's ontology since the situation that emerges on the scene (screen) cannot, in fact, be accounted *for*. For Badiou



Fig. 7 Goldfield Study (Gold, Weed and Log), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

the *count as one* is not *one* and that in his formulation the *one is not* being (non-being) as “being is neither one nor multiple . . . [and] ontology, if it exists, is a situation” (*Being and Event* 25). So indeed, I couldn’t agree with you more, the act of synthesis *is* tenuous and inconsistent with this work. Interestingly, I can identify a parallel structure between the larger axioms that structure the sequence, for example the Categorical (as the structure that enables the presentation of a presentation from an *inconsistent multiplicity*, or what you are referring to as the irreconcilable) and pattern of emergent presentation within the structure itself (to become a *consistent multiplicity* or that which *con-sists*, or can be understood as standing together, i.e. the symbols of cultural memory). For Badiou, the realm of the irreconcilable that I take you to be referencing also falls outside the structure that frames the ontological situation and in fact it is the axiomatic structure that creates the consistent multiplicity from an inconsistent one:

Ontology, axiom system of the particular inconsistency of multiplicities, seizes the in-itself of the multiple by forming into consistency all inconsistency and by forming into inconsistency all consistency. It thereby deconstructs any one-effect; it is faithful to the non-being of the one, so as to unfold, without explicit nomination, the regulated game of the multiple such that it is none other than the absolute form of presentation, thus the mode in which being proposes itself to any access. (*Being and Event* 30)

Getting back to my aligning myself with the camera during the sequence, I think it is important here to say that as much as I find myself to indeed be “panning as it pans, waiting as it waits, looking and listening with its mechanical eye and ear,” I am not able to discern (name) what I am to be waiting and looking for, and listening to *until* it presents itself to me. This is critical to Badiou’s account of non-being:

What is required is that the operational structure of ontology discern the multiple without having to make a one out of it, and therefore without possessing a definition of the multiple . . . an axiomatic presentation consists, on the basis of non-defined terms, in prescribing a rule for their manipulation . . . an explicit definition of *what* an axiom system counts as one, or counts as its object-ones, is never defined. (*Being and Event* 30)

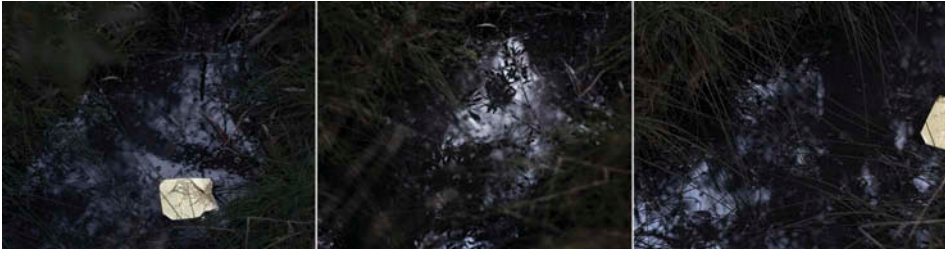


Fig. 8 Goldfield Study (Gold and Stream), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

This is where the strength of this work lies for me — that it takes me from the undefined, to the defined, to the one, and back again with a formal elegance that is consistently ruptured by a kind of ridiculousness that is so unexpected: The classicism of the draped figure is ruptured by the chintzy gold lamé fabric; the carefully composed landscape shots similarly slip into 1960s hallucinatory kaleidoscopic wallpaper; and the Goldsworthy-esque *Rivers and Tides* construction reveals a cheap sheet of gold leaf (Figure 8). An additional layer of formal elegance emerges through Dawn’s editing, which shifts the scene in and out from what appears to be three channels to a single channel several times throughout the installation. Unlike you, I am not finding myself studying these moments tracing the movement from one screen to the next — rather I feel a sense of relief as I am pulled away from the framing moment to reposition myself in a much more vast, dare I say sublime, moment that is once again ruptured by an accompanying cliché (the bird call, the campfire, the tide . . .). I find that these moves that juxtapose the known with the undefined serve to prevent just the sort of ontological synthesis that you refer to above.

Getting back to your earlier remarks, I see this work to be very heavily invested in the failure (to determine, to reconcile, and to identify) that enables a critical reappraisal of the role of the viewer, of the idea of the landscape, and of lens-based practices. Of the latter, I want to specifically raise the issue of the relationship of lens-based practices to truth, and in particular to wonder what is at stake when the documentary image shifts in and out (as I feel it does here) of “authenticity” and whether this failure to fix representation allows Dawn to represent the unrepresentable. Put another way, does her refusal to determine, to reconcile, and to identify *a* politic, *a* point of view allow a glimpse into what structures the axiomatic presentation, to the view of what *in-consists*, the *impure multiplicity*, to the multiple units of thought by which we create meaning (Badiou, *Being and Event* 30)?

LZ: I think so. I think we agree in stating that *Goldfields* gestures towards forms of universally accepted truths that either cannot be defined, or conventionally go unstated or unacknowledged. But for me the question remains as to whether the axiomatic structure operating in *Goldfields* is singular and universal, or multiple, yet shared intersubjectively. The passage from Badiou that you cite above suggests to me that, in his formulation, it is *through* the epistemological situation that the ontological situation may emerge; that is, through repeated acts of coming to an awareness of how we know things in the world we open up the conditions of possibility for understanding *Being*. But in *Goldfields*, what is

the entity that becomes known, and who or what performs the acts of knowledge? Do we interpret *Goldfields* as addressing selfhood and *Being*, or cultural memory and historical belonging, or medium-specificity? Or is there something about the nature of *Goldfields*, its subject matter, its media and form of address, that brings together an inquiry into the ontological status of *Being*, history, and photographic media in a manner that is not a trivial overlapping of three divergent questions, but rather a claim to the fundamentally integral character of all three?

I am taking my cue here from the American photographer, filmmaker, and theorist Hollis Frampton, who, in a review article of an exhibition by the photographer Paul Strand, identified two parts to any work of art: its deliberative structure and its axiomatic substructure. The deliberative structure refers to that which is visually apparent in a work of art; the axiomatic substructure “consists of everything the artist considered too obvious to bother himself about—or, often enough, did not consider at all but had handed him by his culture or tradition” (Frampton, “Meditations” 61). What interests me greatly in thinking about *Goldfields* is how we might understand the axiomatic structures that inform the landscape, the artist and her medium, and each spectator coming together. Dawn has described the landscape of *Goldfields* “as a repository of cultural memory constructed from the opposing perspectives of indigenous and colonial settler narratives, pastoral landscape representations, folklore and myth” (Roe, above). Multiple axiomatic structures embedded within the landscape, split between the causally defined historic time of post-colonial narratives, and the anti-historical, cyclical time of traditional civilizations, speak through cinematic sequences of duration and repetition (Figure 9). The anthropologist Mircea Eliade has argued that the source of modern man’s creativity rests in his ability to make history, and that in periods of late capitalism this is, for most men, essentially an illusion (156). Archaic man, on the other hand, “is free to be no longer what he was, free to annul his own history through periodic abolition of time and collective regeneration” (Eliade 157). Might we not understand Dawn’s use of duration, of blurring stillness and motion, and of repetition as an attempt to think photography outside of historic time, as participating in the periodic cosmogony that characterizes nature? Might not Dawn’s prescription for an ontology of photographic media be grounded in the same phenomena that govern ritual: “the ‘magic’ [that] exists



Fig. 9 Goldfield Study (Leaves and Web), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

in the periodic phenomena of life appearing” (Burnham 149). Might not *Goldfields* provide a creative defense against what Eliade describes as the “terror of history” and an alternative conception of *Being*?

LP: I feel like you are absolutely right on how the still/moving image formal strategy that Dawn employs enables an apprehension of the landscape as axiomatic while at the same time pointing to elements that work to structure the axiom itself. In Dawn’s representational strategy the landscape somehow manages to engender experience and representation *at the same time*: her image of the landscape shifts from *my* experience of the landscape to a generally accepted representation of the same.ⁱⁱ As you suggest, Dawn seems to be using form (such as duration and repetition) to draw attention to the structure, rather than the content, of that experience. Of course, by her emphasis on the structure (vs. the representation) she enables us to regard the content that piggybacks upon the structure critically. In her patterning of moving sequences punctuated by still images, she mimics our activity as viewers as we navigate the terrain of experience and representation (Figure 10). By creating this formal echo, she draws our attention to the ways in which form and content reinforce one another — that selfhood and being are embedded in cultural memory and historical belonging and that we understand or define ourselves in such a relation of performativity within these named (signed) constraints. We are the campers in the Other landscape, we are the beachgoers that witness, but are not responsible for, the crying child. In her juxtaposition of moving and still images, Dawn seems to situate us as tourists all the while breaking each sublime moment with an irony (this never happens). We cannot live outside of language, syntax, and representation — and it strikes me here that Dawn is asking us to reflect on the ways that the past informs the present by bootstrapping form rather than content (what a relief!).

While you and I share the inclination toward an ontological lens for regarding the work, I am reminded just now as I look again at the piece of the many other points of access presented here. For example, Dawn’s repeated use of the triptych structure and the humor in the work are two other, very different, means by which one can begin to think about this work (Figure 11). Interestingly, for myself, with just this mention, viewing the work again initiates the process of rupture once more, where art historical



Fig. 10 Goldfield Study (Tree and Digging Site), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.



Fig. 11 Goldfields (Installation View), Screen Space, Melbourne, VIC, Australia, 2012. HD video, triple screen projection. © Dawn Roe 2012.

convention provides me with a vehicle for meaning as well as a vehicle for showing how meaning is made.

Art is the process of a truth, and this truth is always the truth of the sensible or sensual, the sensible as sensible. This means: the transformation of the sensible into a happening of the Idea (Badiou “Fifteen Theses”).

Artist’s Response

Dawn Roe

An at times distracting preoccupation with temporal and spatial concerns has led me to continually return to the phenomenological theories specifically addressed within the writings of Henri Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.ⁱⁱⁱ The furthering of this mode of inquiry framed within a complex ontological study, such as undertaken in the form of the extended conversation above, propels this thinking and works to push forward an ongoing process of questioning within my practice. Refusing to pinpoint one area of fixation, the participants in this dialogue (myself included in absentia, but present within the work) stress the convergence of individual components as being equally essential aspects in conveying meaning.

With the *Goldfield Studies*, I deliberately chose to work within a space of loaded historical significance while imposing the limitations determined by the genre of landscape. This provided a framework that was rigid enough to contain and describe the subject matter, but fluid enough to allow the overlapping subjects of the work to shift within by virtue of formal and presentation strategies (Figure 12). Indeed the context is critical



Fig. 12 Goldfield Study (Gold, Wall, Weed and Branch), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

and not arbitrary, as pointed out by Zaher when she emphasizes that because the work was “produced in the bushlands that once served as the site of Australia’s gold mines, [it] seems to place some pressure on the viewer to reconcile the past with the present” (Zaher, above). She further implies the significance of “an invoked cultural memory that may be particular to those viewers who have experienced this region, or whose knowledge of its history has been passed down through generations.” In focusing on the manner with which the landscape has been structured, Pahapill relates that it “somehow manages to engender experience *and* representation *at the same time*: her image of the landscape shifts from *my* experience of the landscape to a generally accepted representation of the same . . . [by] using form (such as duration and repetition) to draw attention to the structure, rather than the content of that experience” (Pahapill, above).

These opposing experiential access points reverberate within the viewer, as they did with myself as I engaged with these spaces while working in the field for the project. Having arrived in the Goldfields without a preconceived idea about what I might do while there, these intersections became a starting point. Surrounded and dwarfed by the gum trees that harbored a cacophony of endless birdcalls, carefully sidestepping abandoned mine shafts – there was a palpable intensity. Even with (or perhaps because of) such specificity, general historic and personal access points remain. Looking to the natural world as a site of significance draws upon a philosophical lineage that traces endless inquiries into metaphysical questions of Being. The seemingly dead time of uninhabited forest spaces in particular prevents any kind of urgent response, and forces an engagement at a distractingly slow pace – perfectly situated as a counter to the rapidly cycling perceptual clutter of our minds.

The abundance of a priori matter that inhabits our psyches is addressed in Pahapill’s detailed and challenging reading of Badiou, which suggests a myriad of structural intricacies to be considered in relation to categorical and presentation concerns. It is only retrospectively that I have been able to relate Badiou’s theories of the One and the Multiple to the *Goldfield Studies*, and my preoccupation with immanence and presence or presentation. Pahapill’s focus upon Badiou’s consideration of ontology as a situation led me to think very specifically about the methodologies I employed in the field and studio while capturing, recording, and crafting imagery, as well as during the editing process



Fig. 13 Goldfield Study (Tree, Gold and Branches), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

where I meticulously selected sub-fragments from a much larger whole to form into a “structured presentation.” Somewhat paradoxically, all of these highly self-conscious choices were made in an attempt to engage with the world in an unmediated manner, drawing out any immediacy that *might* still be able to be experienced throughout the act of making/taking a photograph or recording video, and of being witness to the resulting representation (Figure 13). Badiou’s contemporary, the French philosopher Francois Laruelle, speaks to these ideas, describing “a legend of the birth of philosophy in the spirit of photography” equating this to a

transcendental photographer . . . with no camera, and perhaps for that very reason destined ceaselessly to take new shots of that first flash — consigned to extinction — constrained thus to comment interminably on that first shot by taking yet more, to engage himself in an *unlimited-becoming-photographic* — so as to verify that the flash, the World, the flash of the World — that is to say, philosophy — really has taken place, and was not just a trick of the senses. (Laruelle 2)

It is somewhat enchanting to think that this suggestion of relating our experiential understanding of the world through images in a photographic manner — with or without a camera — has been ever-present, and certainly well before the invention of the camera as a hand-held or even box-like apparatus.

Now, though, we *can* possess the world in photographic form, and so one might assume that the medium’s ability to fix a moment in space and in time would offer the perfect balance of contemplative reverie and objective analysis (Figure 14). Yet this brings us back to the (sometimes) difficult separation between “authentic” lived experience and its representation, and to what we ask of the camera — whether it halts time in its two-dimensional form or reactivates it within a sequence of moving images. Further, it raises a question as to *what* we actually possess when the camera image is presented and encountered. Preceding Laruelle’s notions of a transcendental photographer sans camera, Hollis Frampton had evoked a similar concept in his essay “For a Metahistory of Film: Commonplace Notes and Hypotheses” with his naming of an “infinite cinema” (Frampton, “Metahistory” 134).

A polymorphous camera has always turned, and will turn forever, its lens focused upon all the appearances of the world. Before the invention of still photography,



Fig. 14 Goldfield Study (Gold, Twig and Sapling), 2011. Pigment prints mounted to aluminum, dimensions variable. © Dawn Roe 2012.

the frames of the infinite cinema were blank, black leader; then a few images began to appear upon the endless ribbon of the film. Since the birth of the photographic cinema, all the frames are filled with images.

There is nothing in the structural logic of the cinema filmstrip that precludes sequestering any single image. A still photograph is simply an isolated frame taken out of the infinite cinema. (Frampton, “Metahistory” 124)

This image of a frame, any frame, being plucked from the flow lets us think of the instant or moment as a tangible object of sorts — one we can hold within our grasp. The still image stands as a stable relic of the past whereas the moving image simultaneously presses together past and present, continually replacing one for the other. Here then, perhaps, is the essence of time itself, as much as we can possibly understand it via a photographic (reproductive) thinking, if we can call it such. Addressing this immensity, Badiou writes, “Infinity is the Other on the basis of which there is — between the fixity of the already and the repetition of the still more — a rule according to which the others are the same” (Badiou, *Being and Event* 147). And we can think back to Frampton’s “infinite cinema” in this way. As the camera “has always turned, and will turn forever” there is an ongoing process of continual recording that we might think of as endlessly taping/filming over itself, comingling that which lingers with what is yet to come. Transferring this from operator to spectator, a similar occurrence transpires when one is presented with a representation of this optical flow. The suspension of disbelief comes quickly within montage as our perception and cognition of moving images promotes immediate acceptance of time regained. Zaher conjures these magical qualities when she suggests we might consider “an ontology of photographic media [that is] grounded in the same phenomena that govern ritual” (Zaher, above). Indeed it is precisely the crutch of culturally engrained imaging that allows us to “think photography outside of historic time, as participating in the periodic cosmogony that characterizes nature.” Disengaging with (or avoiding) essentialist preoccupations with the photographic image — such as those bound to formalist, socio-political, scientific, or autobiographical concerns — provided the opportunity for *Goldfield Studies* to

permeate and drift throughout these currents directly alongside questions particular to the medium itself, while simultaneously addressing being/self, space/time.

If there is a photographic realism, it is a realism “in-the-last-instance”; which explains why to take a photograph is not, at least, as far as science is concerned, to convert one’s gaze, to alter one’s consciousness, to pragmatically orientate perception . . . but to produce a new presentation, emergent and novel in relation to the imagination, and in principle more universal than the latter. (Laruelle 63)

Notes

- i. See Edmund Husserl, “A Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time,” in Donn Welton, ed., *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 186–221.
- ii. “axiom, n.”. A proposition that commends itself to general acceptance; a well-established or universally-conceded principle; a maxim, rule, law. OED Online. March 2012. Oxford University Press. <http://ARTIST.oed.com.proxy.uchicago.edu/view/Entry/14045?redirectedFrom=axiom> (accessed June 03, 2012).
- iii. See Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory* (New York: Dover Publications, 1912 and 2004) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962).

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