FALLING AWAY

Catherine Yass at Ambika P3

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Edited by Davide Deriu and Michael Mazière

Preface

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Falling Away presents a selection of Catherine Yass's films of architectural structures from the past twenty years, creating the most comprehensive exhibition of her work to date. The buildings in Yass's films are undergoing demolition or construction, some are falling into disrepair; as they crumble, so too do the powers behind them. The viewer is drawn into dizzying spaces as the camera is turned upside down, plunged into water, lowered from cranes, buried under falling rubble. Addressing urgent issues around architecture and the institutions it embodies, the exhibition contributes to the current debate on how built environments shape our lives.

Today, Yass's work gains a new sense of urgency in light of the pandemic amidst which we curated the exhibition. As many commentators observed, our lives appeared to be suspended at this extraordinary juncture. In Britain, the crisis exposed the fundamental role of public services, such as the NHS and the BBC, whose common function was lauded in these times of necessity by those same politicians who had brought them to the brink of collapse. Meanwhile, the construction sector all but ground to a halt. As the world order is shaken to its foundations, Yass's vertiginous films invite us to reconsider the deep imbalance of its material and social structures.

This catalogue comprises seven essays by art and design writers who respond to each of the films in the exhibition. Our own pieces complement these, providing a critical introduction to Yass's work and a reflection on the challenge of curating 'the vertical' in Ambika P3. We are grateful to all the authors, and to Clare Hamman for her meticulous editing.

Above all, we wish to thank Catherine Yass for her generous and patient assistance during the long phase of preparation. *Falling Away* was initially due to take place in 2020 but plans were halted by the outbreak of COVID-19. The delay enabled us to incorporate her new work created specifically for this exhibition, *Concrete Mixer* (2021), which engages a site-specific interaction with the space of Ambika P3. If we managed to realise this event in such turbulent times, it is thanks to the tenacity and dedication of all the people who have been involved.

Contents

CURATORS' ESSAYS

The Art of Vertigo:
On Catherine Yass's Architectural Visions

Davide Deriu

> I remember climbing up the roof of where I lived as a child and sitting astride it. The transition from feeling exhilarating omnipotence up there above everything, to [the] absolute terror of falling was momentary but intense. It was like sitting on the line between death and survival. At that moment I felt completely alert and present to the world.[1]

The opening quotation is taken from a lecture titled 'Falling Away' that Catherine Yass delivered at the University of Westminster in 2015. Her childhood memory evokes the state of balance we seek out when facing the danger of losing our bearings and falling into the void. It awakens our ancestral imagination of the abyss, that bottomless place which opens up when the ground underneath our feet slips away.[2] This perception of groundlessness shapes our fears as well as desires of succumbing to the force of gravity. Through a personal anecdote, Yass implicitly summed up the ambivalence of vertigo – a sensation that is associated with a spectrum of emotions ranging from thrill and elation to fear and anxiety. In psychoanalytic terms, the child's state of alertness reflects the vital affirmation of a subject who negotiates the tension between life and death drives through the grounded recognition of her being-in-the-world.[3] The distinct spatiality of Yass's recollection offers a cue to revisit her engagement with architecture as a site of vertiginous experience.

Fears of Falling

Vertigo is an ambivalent term that designates a variety of phenomena across the sciences, arts and humanities.[4] This broad semantic field is the legacy of a word that has described a variety of physical and mental states since ancient times, yet has taken up a specific significance within the modern medical discourse. In medical terminology, it defines a symptom of perceptual disorientation that manifests itself as an illusion of movement, either of the subject or of the surrounding environment, and is often related to disorders of the balance system.[5] In common language, however, the term is used much more loosely to describe various feelings of giddiness, dizziness and disorientation – intended either literally or figuratively. The popular association of this word with the fear of heights further complicates matters. This particular fear, which can lead to an anxiety disorder known as *acrophobia*, relates to the bodily experience of high places but also to the existential angst that arises from the perceived danger of falling.

Amongst the cultural representations of this phenomenon, Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) remains an inescapable reference. The male protagonist's struggle to cope with heights is triggered by an accident that occurs in the opening scene: the rooftop chase in which police detective John 'Scottie' Ferguson slips down a pitched slope and clings to the gutter, while a fellow policeman falls to his death in an attempt to help him. Having retired from his job, Scottie is haunted by this traumatic event throughout the film. His plight calls to mind Gaston Bachelard's memory of climbing to the spire of Strasbourg Cathedral, a frightening experience that never left him. However much the philosopher sought to shake off this moment from consciousness, its memory traces haunted him with unforgiving images:

> My dreams continue to be plagued by that imaginary fall. When nightmares of anxiety come on, I know for certain they will end with a fall onto the rooftops of Strasbourg. And if I die in my sleep it will be from that imaginary fall, my heart constricted, crushed.[6]

In the early 1770s, when Strasbourg Cathedral was the world's tallest building, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had climbed to its top in order to overcome his fear of heights. In *Vertigo*, a bell tower (the less imposing *campanario* of San Juan Bautista in California, recreated in the studio) works for Scottie as a site of anguish and redemption.

The incident that opens the film is followed by a series of slippages that lead Scottie and Madeleine, his friend's wife whom he chases, to fall alternatively in time as well as space – and, of course, in love too.[7] The severest episode of vertigo occurs when Scottie, on a mission to figure out Madeleine's strange behaviour, follows her up the stairs of the bell tower then freezes when he looks down into the stairwell. If this scene continues to impress today's spectators, that is due to the masterful suspense created by Hitchcock, whose cinematographer Robert Burks used a special in-camera trick to represent Scottie's attack of dizziness (a dolly zoom that has come to be known as 'Vertigo effect'). Yet the enduring power of that scene might also relate to the fact, discovered by neuroscience research, that climbing a tower remains the most common precipitating stimulus of height vertigo.[8]

Although Yass does not reference Hitchcock directly, *Vertigo* clearly resonates through her work. Her film installations arouse visceral feelings that affect the sense of balance at different levels. In fact, the phrase *falling away* suggests not only a sensory experience of verticality but also, in her own words, 'a sensation of falling away from yourself.'[9] This feeling in turn is related to the deeper sense of disorientation that is unearthed by that experience. In the aforementioned lecture, Yass discussed various uses of the verb *to fall* and observed that

'identity…falls away when we fall asleep'.[10] A state akin to reverie can indeed be felt by watching her films in which architecture has the texture of dreams – or hallucinations. For Yass, the kind of vertigo that is induced by the visual encounter with heights may be symptomatic of a deeper attraction:

> Perhaps as with sleep, there is something about vertigo which is at play between desires and drives. Vertigo can be felt even when you are safe, say on a roof with a safety fence. You know you won't fall, but the fear remains. As there it would be impossible to fall, perhaps this fear is more about the fear of actually wanting to fall – a fear of some kind of drive that would will us to fall.[11]

Although this impression was described in a merely speculative way, it chimes with those recorded by various writers who have explored the links between the sensation of vertigo and the existential conundrums it reveals. A classic example can be found in Milan Kundera's philosophical novel, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984), whose main female character, Tereza, is beset by an unceasing feeling of vertigo. She is constantly torn between the desire to elevate her existence and an 'insuperable longing to fall', a split that manifests itself in dreams of stunning beauty. Reflecting on this, Kundera offered an intriguing definition of vertigo that would resonate in Yass's words three decades later:

What is vertigo? Fear of falling? Then why do we feel it even when the observation tower comes equipped with a sturdy handrail? No, vertigo is something other than the fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves.[12]

This common yet unfathomable impulse, which in French is called *l'appel du vide*, has recently aroused the interest of researchers in different fields. Although there are still many unknowns around the voice of the abyss that lures us, psychologists have shed light on the so-called 'high place phenomenon'.[13] Empirical studies suggest that the call of the void is linked to a broad spectrum of 'anxiety sensitivity', although – contrary to prior assumptions – it may not necessarily relate to suicidal instincts.[14] Accordingly, subjects with affective disorders related to anxiety would be more likely to misinterpret the 'safety signal' that is perceived when facing the potential fall from a high place as an 'urge to jump': consequently, the command to pull back from the edge would respond to a self-defence mechanism rather than to a subconscious desire to leap.[15] Therefore, instead of denoting a high death drive, 'experiencing this phenomenon may have the counter-intuitive effect of affirming one's will to live'.[16] This hypothesis is a further cue to examine Yass's vertiginous films and the particular ways in which they engage with architecture as their ostensible subject matter.

Architecture as Subject

Yass's approach to buildings and spaces dates back to her studies at the Slade School of Fine Art in the 1980s, when she became interested in architecture as embodiment of ideology.[17] This creative stance, driven by feminism, was further pursued through a foundation course at the Architectural Association. Yass's student projects aimed at 'playfully teasing the autonomy of architecture' and prompted a critical attitude to the built environment that would resurface in her artistic practice.[18] This is evident in her early artworks of the 1990s, namely the lightboxes realised by superimposing negative and positive images of the same subject taken at short intervals. The uncanny effects of this technique were brought to bear on a series of spaces (Corridor; Baths; Toilet; Capsule; Grave; Stage; Bridge; etc) that aroused what Yass called 'a sense of dislocation.'[19] As the latter word suggests, the photographic transparencies disrupt our perception of their subjects by taking them out of their contexts and situating them in a visual world of their own.

What makes these works so unsettling is the artist's ability to conjure up places that look strangely familiar through pictures that make us question what we see, hence our position as observers. Yass herself, in an interview, suggested a duality that echoes the ambivalent nature of vertigo: 'I think these places both seduce you and repel you.'[20] The

Catherine Yass, 'Corridors' (1994)

impression of falling into space, horizontally rather than vertically, is particularly strong in the *Corridors* series (1994) realised at Springfield Psychiatric Hospital. For this commission Yass chose to set her camera on the interior spaces of the building rather than on its residents. The eerily empty spaces, similar to endless tunnels, draw attention to the power structures concretised by the building – a statement of the artist's concern with the ideological role of architecture and the institutions it houses.

The sense of dislocation that permeated Yass's 1990s' work took powerful new forms during the noughties, when verticality became a focus of her films. A significant shift was marked by the acclaimed piece, *Descent* (2002), which was shortlisted for the 2002 Turner Prize. Here film and lightbox complement each other to yield a dramatic vision of high-rise construction in Canary Wharf, the business district at the core of the vast urban renewal project that transformed London's Docklands during the 1980s and 1990s.[21] Shot on a foggy day, the film couches its subject in an aura of mystery. Our gaze slides up along the vertical structure in slow motion and, as the fog gradually dissipates, we realise the camera – mounted on a crane – is moving down and not up as it initially seemed. Michael Newman has aptly noted that the picture is arrested before touching the ground, much as it happens in dreams of falling.[22] Somehow the film's end can be regarded as a wake-up call from the dream of an upside-down world.

Through simply inverting the picture after filming, Yass overturns our whole perception of the structure that is being built. Tate curator Lizzie Carey-Thomas suggestively wrote in the Turner Prize catalogue: 'The imagery is beautifully meditative and melancholic; we are not so much falling as drifting, dislocated, through an unfamiliar landscape.'[23] And yet, *Descent* is not a purely aesthetic exercise in vertical landscape perception. By reversing the upward direction of the

corporate city, this work reveals a deeper political motive: the sky-bound process of construction is turned on itself as the gaze is slowly grounded. *What goes up must come down* – it seems to say.
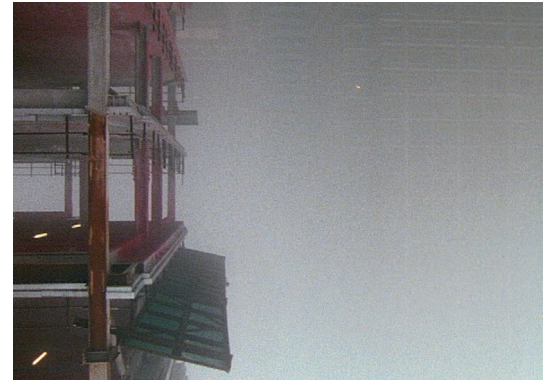
Catherine Yass, 'Descent' (2002)

Once again we are reminded of the psychology of gravity theorised by Bachelard, who considered the double movement of ascent and descent in dialectical terms: 'Verticality is so impressionable a human dimension that it occasionally permits an image to be elongated, stretching it in two directions at once, both upwards and downwards.'[24] Likewise, *Descent* pulls our gaze along the vertical axis, confounding our notions of lightness and heaviness. The building crane mediates a perception of space in which the upward drive is invariably tied up with an earth-bound movement. In the process, our perception of time is affected as well – it becomes

somewhat elastic. Indeed, multiple times coexist in *Descent*. Due to a parallax effect, the closest building on the left appears to move faster than the more distant ones on the right. Overall the sequence is pervaded by an unnatural slowness since the implied fall, which would only last a few dramatic seconds, is stretched over eight long minutes. The sense of dislocation makes you interrogate *when* as well as *where* the scene is taking place; for the construction site evokes a mythical place that has both archaeological and futuristic semblances at the same time. In this respect, Yass has referred on various occasions to the myths of Icarus and the Tower of Babel as exemplars of failed dreams to conquer the sky; hubristic tales that are bound to resurface in the age of vertical urbanism.

Catherine Yass, 'Last Stand' (2019)

Bodies at Heights

Descent brought to the fore of Yass's work the critique of verticality as a prominent feature of capitalist urban development. Her latest film to date, *Last Stand* (2019), was shot on a building site in Nine Elms amidst the largest regeneration area in London. It too was filmed from a crane that was found on site. Unlike the downward movement of *Descent*, however, in *Last Stand* the camera sets off by tracking upwards along the vertical concrete structure. Blue numbers are etched on each floor, punctuating the ascent like giant elevator buttons. At the summit stands the artist herself, encaged by a metal scaffold and surrounded by iron rods jutting out of the concrete slabs. Perched on top of the rising tower, Yass is taking a stand against the real estate development driven by property market values that has been reshaping London's landscape. Vertical construction here embodies the stealthy yet relentless triumph of neoliberalism: the hegemonic ideology that relies upon the compliance of subjects-entrepreneurs to perpetuate its logic of 'spontaneous order', a logic whose insidious forces have permeated the physical and social fibres of the city.[25]

The cranes dotting the landscape are ominous indexes of this process. Just as in *Descent*, Yass harnessed a crane's function to film the very site it was building: she developed her own makeshift dolly crane by converting the construction machine

into a shooting platform. Lodged in a cradle, the camera moves in circles around the artist's body standing unwavering on the half-built thirteenth floor and shows the urban environment all around (at one point the newly-built US embassy comes into view). The encircling of the subject from the air is reminiscent of Steve McQueen's *Static* (2009), a short film shot from a helicopter that hovers over the Statue of Liberty in New York scrutinising it from different angles and distances. If *Static* addresses issues of freedom, surveillance and control in relation to American history, *Last Stand* uses multiple rotations of the camera to conjure up the vertiginous growth of contemporary London, largely driven by the construction of office blocks and luxury apartments.

By turning the gaze of power on itself, Yass's body becomes a living measure of the scale of construction that surrounds her. The sky is more than a mere background to the scene: its atmosphere becomes an integral element of the landscape that is being transformed. While an aeroplane flies in the distance, the sound of seagulls makes you aware of the agency of urban nature in the midst of the building site. The birds' baleful sounds, which intensify over the course of the film, are not the sign of hope that used to alert seafarers to the approaching shores but a less reassuring presage of greed and predation. With this in mind, *Last Stand* can be said to conflate three interrelated forms of vertigo: first, the vicarious

vertigo that is felt through identification with the artist's body; secondly, the visual disorientation caused by the revolving camera movements; and, thirdly, the dizzy pace and scale of construction along with the power structures it manifests. The combined effect of these levels of perception, from the experiential to the conceptual, induces a sense of dislocation that is even more pronounced than in Yass's previous works.

Over the years that separate *Last Stand* from *Descent*, the figure of the body-on-the-edge has become widespread across the arts and popular culture. Back in 2002, eight months after the events of 9/11, the endurance artist David Blaine performed a stunt in New York, called 'Vertigo', in which he stood for thirty-five consecutive hours on top of a 30m-high pillar (numbers do matter in such record-breaking endeavours). The exploit ended with Blaine jumping off to safety in front of a crowd of fifty thousand onlookers. While this stunt is related to a time-honoured tradition of extreme performance and illusionism, its specific modality speaks to the zeitgeist of an age in which *everything is possible* – or so we are led to believe. This mood is epitomised by the so-called 'rooftopping' craze that emerged in the early 2010s, when scores of urban explorers began to climb tall structures, often illicitly, in order to conquer their summits and capture the view from above. What links their pursuit of trophy
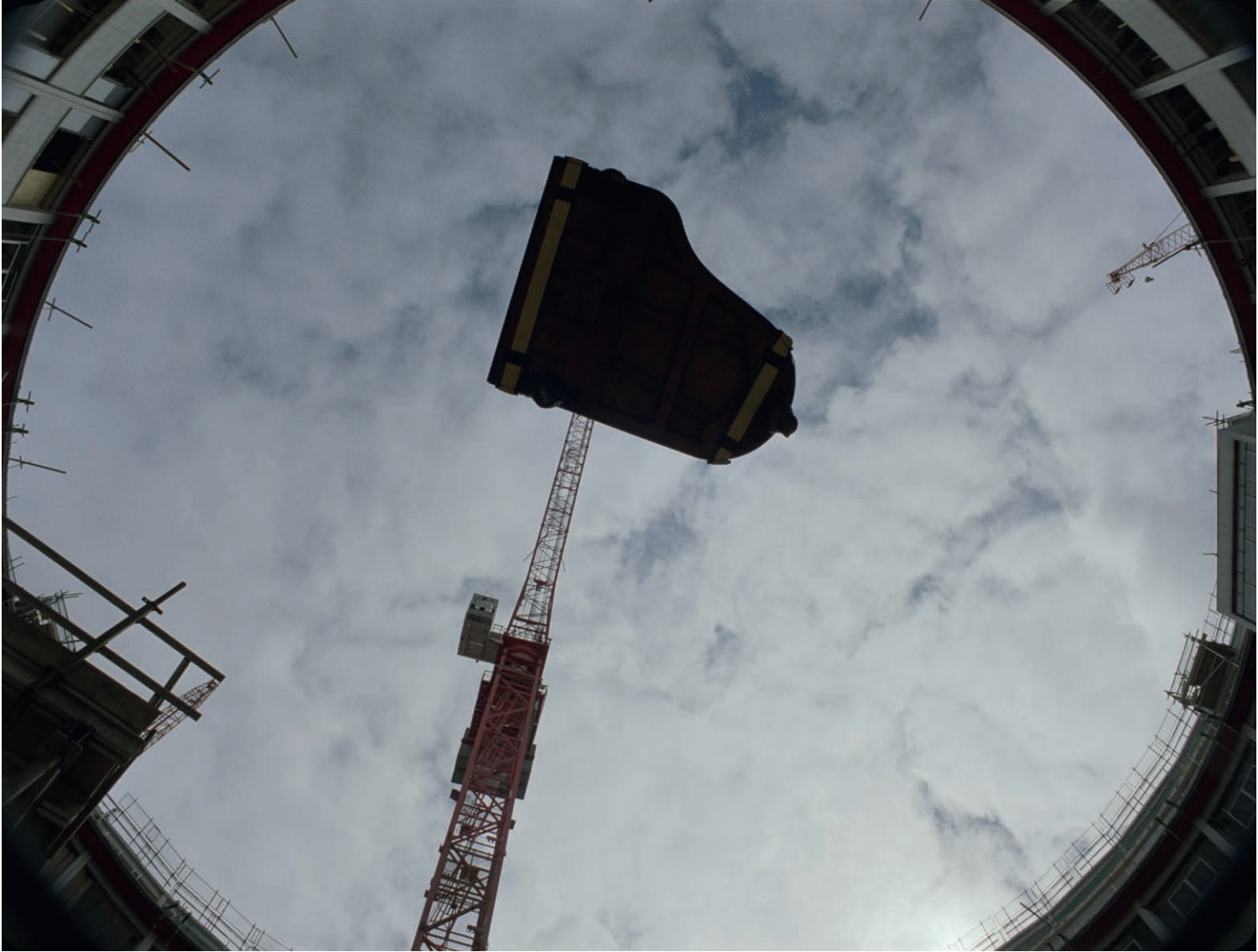
shots with public performances such as Blaine's is a common intent to display the (primarily male) body as the agent of extreme gravity-defying feats: a performing body that has become the signifier of a way of *living on the edge*, as evidenced by a plethora of films, advertisements, music clips, etc.[26] The act of standing atop a tall structure, invariably staged for the camera, encapsulates the subject of today's 'performance society'.[27]

Last Stand offers an implicit counterpoint to this trend. Rather than thrilling the viewer with a sensational feat, Yass embodies an altogether different type of endurance by standing up to rampant property development. The artist does not cast herself as a heroic figure but rather as a vulnerable human being who bears witness to a landscape that is changing out of all proportion. Bruegel's 'Tower of Babel' paintings are a palpable reference to the rise of sky-bound architecture, and a reminder of the ill-fated story that inspired the most famous depictions of a construction site in the history of art. With her defiant stand, Yass seems to reconnect with that moment when, as a child, she 'felt completely alert and present to the world'. Shifting the terrain from a domestic rooftop to a corporate tower, *Last Stand* lays bare the tension between the hubris of vertical urbanism and the spectre of its downfall.

Catherine Yass, 'High Wire' (2008)

Hanging in the Balance

In a not-so-distant past, high-rise architecture served different purposes as well. Yass's film installation, *High Wire* (2008), tackles the issue of social housing by focusing on Red Road flats, the large residential complex in Glasgow that has since been demolished. Built by the Glasgow Corporation in the 1960s, when it was the tallest housing project in Europe, over time Red Road came to epitomise the failures of housing policies in the UK.[28] The estate was initially hailed as a modern solution to the city's slums, yet became increasingly segregated and blighted by crime. After decades of social anomie and neglect, compounded by the presence of asbestos used to fireproof the structure, demolition plans were afoot when Yass set her sights on the estate. Working with the tightrope artist Didier Pasquette, she staged a high-wire walk between two of the 31-storey-high towers and filmed

it from different points of view – one of the cameras being mounted on the funambulist's helmet. The resulting multi-channel projection is one of Yass's most complex works to date, and probably the most vertiginous one to watch.

Pasquette's performance was designed to engage with the experience of heights that is common to social housing estates across the country, thereby reiterating the tension between the dream of conquering the sky and the related fear of falling. In *High Wire* these drives are polarised through the chiastic relationship between place and performance. The chosen site epitomises the ambition of post-war architects and planners to apply the typology of the skyscraper to social living, *but also* the anxiety of living in stacked apartments at the margins of the city. On the other hand, the funambulist embodies a fantasy of liberation from gravity, *but also* the perilous act of walking a rope at the mercy of the elements.

The ancient art of funambulism was on the wane when Philippe Petit revived it in the 1970s through a series of stunts that astonished the world.[29] His famous 1974 walk between the Twin Towers in Manhattan, which became the subject of numerous books and films, was said at the time to have humanised the corporate buildings of the World Trade Centre.[30] Petit's *coup* established high-wire

walking as an urban practice that exposed the dizzy spaces of contemporary cities. At the same time, it indicated that vertigo, 'the keeper of the abyss', could be overpowered.[31] It is telling that Roger Caillois, in his seminal book *Man, Play and Games* (1958), singled out funambulism as the game of vertigo that exemplifies the human quest for equilibrium: 'On the high wire,' he wrote, 'the very heart of prowess and the only aim is to master vertigo. The game consists expressly in moving through space as if the void were not fascinating, and as if no danger were involved.'[32] Real danger, however, is never far from players of this game. One of the greatest acrobats of the twentieth century, Karl Wallenda, fell to his death while walking on a high wire battered by heavy winds during a publicity stunt in San Juan, Puerto Rico, in 1978. This tragic event, which was recorded on camera, caused great consternation and changed the public perception of the 'gravity heroics' epitomised by the figure of the wire walker.[33]

This precedent must have been known to Didier Pasquette (an apprentice of Petit's), when he set off on his walk at Red Road, in July 2007, in the sight of Yass's multiple-camera setup and a crowd of local residents. The performance was hindered by the wind and Pasquette had to stop mid-walk and step back to safety. This unexpected twist was deemed to have rendered the whole project vain at the time, yet ended up lending it further meaning. Instead

of celebrating the fantasy of weightlessness, the funambulist's body became the unwitting catalyst of a failed architectural ambition that was about to collapse. While Pasquette showed great dexterity on the wire, in the process he dramatically revealed the human frailty in the face of great heights – an anti-Icarus who renounced his aerial feat to preserve his life. The funambulist's traumatic survival endowed the artwork with a vitalistic affirmation that reverberated through the place itself. As Steven Connor observed,

> The wire-walker of *High Wire* represents a new kind of allegory for us, one that bears, appropriately enough for a work that has a residential complex as its setting, on the question of accommodation, of where we are to reside and the kinds of living it may be possible for us to make there.[34]

Echoing the infamous fate of the Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri, the Red Road estate turned out to be a short-lived experiment of residential architecture and was torn down despite a campaign to prevent its demolition. The downfall of this complex speaks to the contested fate of modernism in British architecture. As Catherine James points out, '[t]wo distinct ideas are contained in Yass's *High Wire*: the psychology of the fall and the relationship of human identity to the architectural spaces of modernism.'[35] These notions are linked more closely than they might seem, considering that modernist architecture mounted a sustained challenge to gravity. While addressing this complex condition, Yass made a nostalgic homage to welfare state architecture that resonates with the politics of her other works.

Interestingly, stills from *High Wire* have since been used to illustrate the protracted saga that led to the demise of Red Road flats, a testament to the artist's and funambulist's joined abilities to capture the imagination of the place in a poignant way. By destabilising the subject through multiple camera viewpoints, Yass further developed her art of vertigo that would culminate in *Last Stand*. Our vicarious identification with the aerialist seeking balance on the wire generates a sense of dislocation with regard to the socio-spatial context of the scene. This mismatch is akin to Kathleen Kirby's notion of vertigo as 'a rift between subject and reality.'[36] The aborted performance at Red Road makes us perceive an incongruity between inner feelings and outer reality: a tension between internal and external spaces, between personal and social dreams, that triggers the emotional charge of this artwork.

The anxiety elicited by *High Wire* is revisited by other means in *Safety Last* (2011). This sui generis work repeats in a loop the famous scene of the classic
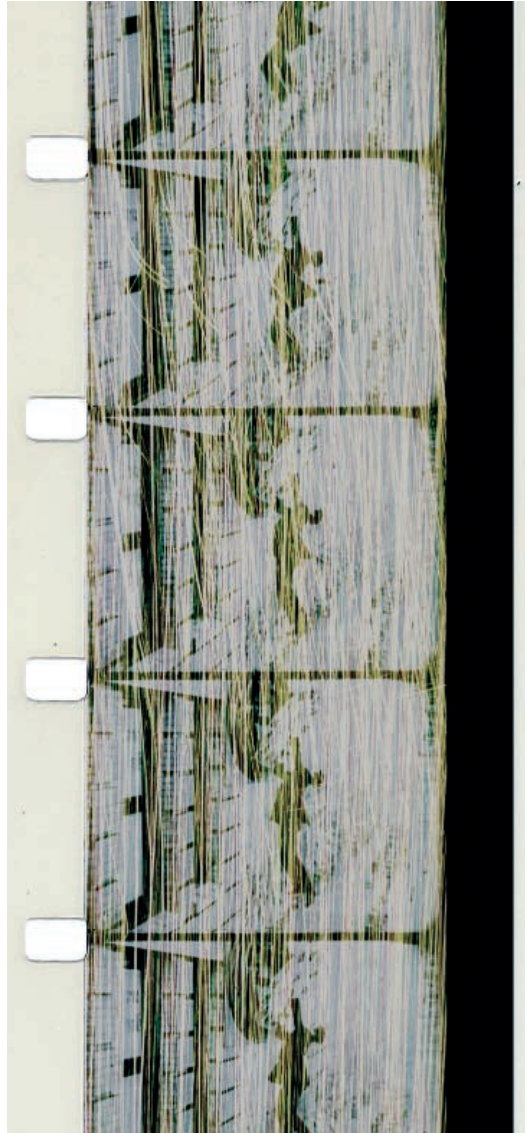
silent comedy, *Safety Last!* (1923), in which Harold Lloyd clings on to the hand of a giant clock attached to a building façade – a humorous precursor to Hitchcock's cliff hanger. By scratching the film through successive loops while the actor is pulling the hand down anticlockwise until he is silently erased from the picture, Yass set in motion the inversion of time which the scene alludes to. Her film makes a subtle reference to the aspect of verticality that is inherent in the cinematic medium itself through the functioning of the movie camera and the projector alike. The scratches in the celluloid left by the reel rotation of analogue projectors are linked with the vertical motion of the film and, therefore, with the illusion of movement it conjures up – an effect that Yass exaggerated with the aid of sandpaper.

But what is it that eludes our gaze in this film? Lloyd's repeated gesture, clutching a hand of the clock as though time could save him (us?), parodies the incessant quest for stability in a dizzy urban environment. Indeed, *Safety Last* might also be regarded as a comment on the rise of the vertical metropolis, a western myth that has become increasingly globalised. Whilst this work departs from Yass's contemporary subjects, it reasserts the constant preoccupation of her art: hanging in the balance between the desire for omnipotence and the anxiety of falling.

Catherine Yass, 'Safety Last' (2011)

Catherine Yass, 'Lighthouse' (2011)

Precarious Structures

Other films have cemented Yass's interest in architecture undergoing transformation. Her choice of subject is dictated by a precise artistic intent, with the exception of some works that have resulted from serendipity. This is the case with *Lighthouse* (2011), a piece commissioned by the De La Warr Pavilion: only while visiting the arts centre in Bexhill-on-Sea did Yass discover the forsaken carcass of the Royal Sovereign Lighthouse standing on a platform five miles off the coast. Lighthouses are secluded places that exist between earth and sea, a liminal zone that has captured the imagination of a number of writers and artists, ranging from Virginia Woolf to Robert Eggers.[37] To Yass's mind, the Royal Sovereign Lighthouse held particular interest for the modern concrete tower standing on the edge of the platform and suspended on the sea, uninhabited.

Inaugurated in the same year as Red Road flats (1971), the lighthouse was also approaching its demise when Yass filmed it.[38] Its precarious state raises further questions about modernity and our ambivalent relationship with its material structures. Concrete is a conceptually slippery material that has historically been endowed with a variety of symbolic and political meanings.[39] It is equally associated with some of the most successful examples of modern architecture and with some of its grandest failures. Against this background, the Royal Sovereign Lighthouse is a minor structure, yet Yass perceived a hidden meaning in what she later described as 'a vulnerable relic of Modernist omnipotence'.

Suspended between past and future, the subject of *Lighthouse* lies in a state of precarious balance that is depicted in vertiginous fashion, expressing the artist's interest in 'the spatial dimension of time'.[40] This condition is represented through an articulated camera work that makes us approach the subject by boat, then fly over it in circles, and finally plunge in the water – where the film ends. As ever in her filming practice, Yass devised a specific set of techniques to achieve these effects, such as a camera-ready helicopter and a diver's immersion gear. The airborne gaze empowers us to hover over the lighthouse and inspect it from varying distances and angles. And yet the viewer's position is never a comfortable one. A mood of suspense pervades the film since we are

never certain where or when the aerial manoeuvring will end up. The picture is most dizzying when the helicopter footage is turned upside down to simulate a mid-air rotation. Visceral feelings are also elicited by the final sequence, where the camera dives underwater: here the sense of dislocation climaxes as we see the concrete structure covered with algae. By simulating an abrupt fall into the sea, the artist evokes the double force that is inherent in the Icarian myth which, as Bataille observed, combines a longing to reach the sun with the violence of a sudden collapse: '[The myth] clearly splits the sun in two – the one that was shining at the moment of Icarus's elevation, and the one that melted the wax, causing failure and a screaming fall when Icarus got too close.'[41]

Lighthouse also resonates with contemporary art discourse. It calls to mind Hito Steyerl's comments on the widespread sense of free fall that pervades twenty-first-century visual culture.[42] Steyerl suggests that this condition reveals the very idea of a safe and stable ground as a construct that originated in linear perspective, a scopic regime that has been increasingly overcome by new forms of groundless perception:

> Traditional modes of seeing and feeling are shattered. Any sense of balance is disrupted. Perspectives are twisted and multiplied. New types of visuality arise.

> [...] Grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backwards onto an agonizing present, we may realize that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable.[43]

Yass's films form a relentless exploration of these new modes of vision in ways that reflect the uncertain times in which we live. We have seen how her work is driven by a deep concern with the social role of architecture. While *High Wire* makes a comment on the vertical world of social housing, *Lighthouse* dwells on the maritime authority and its modern communication systems.[44] Other works by Yass deal with the architecture of public institutions such as the BBC and the NHS. Although verticality is less pronounced in them, her art is consistently geared towards destabilising the viewer's position vis-à-vis the built environment so as to challenge our conception of the power structures that underlie it.

Yass's first piece on the BBC, *Flight* (2002), was prompted by the refurbishment of London's Broadcasting House. Shot from a remotely-controlled miniature helicopter flying around the building's roof, this was the first piece in which the artist experimented with the rotation of the image as a means of turning the subject on its head, prompting the curator Álvaro Rodríguez Fominaya to interpret it as a visual experiment in 'the kinetics of vertigo.'[45] Rather than making a comment on the building's

transformation, the work was mainly intended to explore the multiple significance of air – at once medium of telecommunication and field of vision.

More recently, Yass was commissioned to work on another BBC site, the historic Television Centre in London's White City. *Aeolian Piano* (2017) was shot as the studio facilities were relocated to make way for commercial and residential spaces. The Television Centre had been inaugurated in 1960, after a decade in the making, as part of the post-war drive to develop public services for the nation. To Yass's mind, a whole vision was departing with it. The physical removal signalled the latest step in the progressive dismantling of the welfare state that began in the Thatcher years. The film shows a grand piano being hoisted by a crane, carried across the central court – a circular space known as the 'doughnut' – and finally lowered back down. *Aeolian Piano* is entirely focused on this heavy yet delicate object that is caught in a state of suspension. The grand piano was a popular feature of early comedy films, from Buster Keaton to Laurel and Hardy, which made its unwieldy bulk a favourite butt of jokes and gags. In *Aeolian Piano*, however, it becomes the graceful remnant of a bygone era.

Sound, a crucial aspect of Yass's architectural visions, is integral to this piece as well. The title alludes to the Greek mythological figure of Aeolus, who gives his name to the harp whose strings are played by the wind. This is precisely what happens to the grand piano once it circles up in the air: the sound of its strings pierce the atmosphere like a lament as the instrument appears to resist the forced move. During this slow agony we are invited to contemplate the changing landscape against a background of cranes.[46] Yass's camera work comprises an array of panning and tracking shots, rotations, and close-ups that accentuate the vertiginous sensation caused by the instrument hovering in the air. The closing sequence is particularly haunting: the piano is shot from below, turning around itself then starting its descent and approaching the viewer like a menacing ghost, until its black shape fills the entire frame. This is the end…but only a provisional one.

Yass set about filming again, a year later, at the site of an eighteenth-century hospital that was

Catherine Yass, 'Aeolian Piano' (2017)

undergoing partial demolition. The refurbishment of the Royal London Hospital, intended to make space for Tower Hamlets Council's new Civic Centre, was the occasion to tackle the chronic plight of the National Health Service. *Royal London* (2018) captures the building's fall into ruination. By so doing, it evokes the collapse of a public institution that epitomises the ethos of the welfare state, threatened by a political ideology masked as economic austerity. While the pace of *Aeolian Piano* is slow and contemplative, in *Royal London* it accelerates to the point of utter disorientation. The camera eye performs dizzying evolutions in rapid sequence: rotating and looking into the stairwell; gliding down along the handrail; dwelling on the objects scattered around; descending the stairs and tilting upside down; then looking up through an aperture from which debris is falling towards us.

Catherine Yass, 'Royal London' (2018)

The last shot, which echoes *Aeolian Piano*, is repeated in reverse-shot with effects that are ever more abstract towards the end. Deliberately or not, this scene is reminiscent of the beam of light coming out of a film projector. What we see through the light are not speckles of dust, though, but scattered detritus. The viewer is exposed to the impact of that collapse by a camera buried under the falling debris, whose occasional sounds make the space almost tangible. The cinematic metaphor is heightened by implicit references to *Vertigo*: not only in the opening stairwell shot but also in the burial scenes, which hint at the nightmare of falling into the grave through which Hitchcock evokes the death drive. In *Royal London* the sense of disorientation transcends the experiential level to picture a seemingly unending spiral of social disintegration.

Art of Vertigo

A pervasive sense of vertigo affects the body of film works that Yass has made since the early noughties. For all their diversity, their subjects are consistently depicted as ruins. They are variously seized in a process of construction, abandonment, dereliction, or demolition (in the case of *Safety Last*, the fading image itself denotes a process of ruination). Each of them evokes a fall of some kind. A slow drop is pictured in *Descent*; upward and downward movements define *Aeolian Piano*; the camera spins

its way through *Royal London*; it moves up, swirls around, and spirals down in *Last Stand*. A freefall is enacted in *Lighthouse*; whereas a human fall is averted in *High Wire*, foreshadowing the towers' eventual collapse. The spiralling movement that recurs in these works echoes Icarus's upward élan and his downfall at the same time.

Yass's films conjure up dynamic visions of places while also alluding to the deeper political and economic forces that underlie them. Architecture is invariably depicted in a state of precarious balance, accentuated by the presence of bodies and objects in space. Giving material form to power structures and institutions, buildings are suspended in time as well as space, oscillating between desires of elevation and fears of falling. The memory of a child who found a point of equilibrium between these opposite impulses sums up the drive behind Yass's distinct art of vertigo. Her work harks back to a state of equipoise that is increasingly removed from our social life. Not by chance has Yass's work been associated with those art practices that embrace dizziness as a method, seeking out 'the creative and generative potential of this in-between state.'[47] Bringing this method to bear on architecture, her work radically subverts the stability of the ground and explores the capacity of film to create new types of groundless visuality. If these films make you dizzy, they also make you alert and present to the world.

Acknowledgements

Images
p 6 *Installation of 'High Wire', German Gymnasium, London, 11 April – 26 October 2008*
p 14 *'Aeolian Piano' (2017)*
p15 *'Royal London' (2018)*

Endnotes

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18 Yass, Conversation, 13 March 2020.

19 Parveen Adams, 'Interview with the artist', Catherine Yass (London: asprey jacques [sic], 2000), p. 84.

20 Adams, 'Interview with the artist'.

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Curating the Vertical
Precipitous strategies at Ambika P3

<div align="right">Michael Mazière</div>

It was meant to be a centre for the building industry. The actual design and construction hall was ultra-simple and is a 7/8ths scale model of Portland cement Association laboratory in Illinois. It was built by the LCC who were the education authority (ILEA) and the site was an old workhouse which included a graveyard. The stones can be seen in the gardens in Paddington Street.[1]

In this essay, I propose a reading of the site through past exhibitions I have curated which have addressed verticality – directly or indirectly – through form, content, and structure. In most cases galleries and exhibition spaces tend to operate on the horizontal

The model for Ambika P3: the Portland Cement Association, structural development laboratory, 1958

plane – exhibitions are approached from eye level and the audience navigates these spaces without questioning their physicality and the construction of the space. Conversely, at Ambika P3, artists and curators must engage with both the scale of the space but also with its height as each exhibition negotiates sets of complex spatial relationships to become manifest.

My intention is also to provide a historical context and critical perspective for the exhibition of Catherine Yass's work at Ambika P3. Originally designed and built as a testing space for concrete, P3 is now a testing space for curatorial and artistic practice with an emphasis on site specific, experimental and risky research endeavours. The site has been used extensively in relation to verticality, partly because the space demands it but more so as a central strategy for both the creation of new commissions and the design of large group and solo exhibitions. In this context, Catherine Yass's body of work in film and photography which engages with both verticality and concrete is a strong match with the space, providing numerous opportunities for aesthetic and formal encounters between the work, its environment and the resulting impact on audiences and public engagement.

Ambika P3 – *From Concrete to Art*

'It's an unbelievable space, deep underground beneath a university, which I find a very nice metaphor', says Goebbels, who likens the venue to the Arctic 'doomsday vault' that will preserve 3 million seed varieties in case of global catastrophe – a nuclear winter, say, or an asteroid impact.[2]

Testing concrete at Ambika P3, 1972

Opened in 2007, Ambika P3 is the University of Westminster's space for international contemporary art and architecture, presenting a public programme of solo and group exhibitions, education projects, talks and events. Built in the 1960s as a concrete testing facility, its dramatic and impressive scale, with 14,000 square feet of space, offers opportunities for creative activities and provides an inspiring venue for the exhibition of art and architecture. In order to remain flexible, the space was developed without altering its original footprint or its industrial elements – it is neither a gallery nor a cinema but a project space. Formed with minimal investment and a lightness of touch, Ambika P3 is an example of the economical redeployment of an existing resource, conceived primarily as a site for experimentation and research. This architecture of minimal change is a challenge to architects to make spaces both materially and economically sustainable. In order to retain a blank canvas for curatorial experiments it has for the most part been left untouched, with only minor modifications made to provide public accessibility. From the outset, the focus has been on allowing artists, curators and researchers to transform the space according to the needs of particular projects. The space provides generous but specific limitations – it is underground, it has no daylight and is divided into two equal areas – one with a 10-metre-high ceiling and the other with a low roof held up with pillars.

The tripartite nature of Ambika's programming is based on three connected but distinct strands: firstly the curated programme of new exhibitions and commissions; secondly the commercial use focusing on connected creative enterprises such as Design Week, Fashion Week and Frieze Week; and thirdly the teaching and research use by staff and students of the University itself. While these are distinct

sectors, a symbiotic relationship has developed over time between the different constituencies leading to productive forms of cross fertilisation and collaboration.

In the last twenty years, contemporary art has witnessed an exponential increase in its exhibition spaces, audience numbers and its market value. The new millennium and its Lottery funds brought a large network of white cube-based art centres across the UK. The anarchy of the studio and artist-run spaces of the late twentieth century have been transformed into managed churches of culture, sleek art agencies, global gallery brands and the rise of the star curator. It is against this institutionalisation of creativity that Ambika P3's position lies, providing a more process based, site specific and open proposition for the cultural sector.

Exhibitions and Commissions
Keith Wilson and Richard Woods, *How Green is my Space?*, 2007

Ambika P3 provides substantial space and height but also numerous vantage points with a mezzanine and a long balcony from which to engage with the works or events taking place. Once the space had been opened to the public it was important to signal its new use as an art and architecture project space and this was achieved by commissioning the artist Richard Woods to lay a completely new floor:

> a floating, 4mm ply veneer floor, wet printed with a repeated black-on-pea-green image of a flower. We might think of this floor as an idea interposed between the visitor and the space – somewhere where concrete masses planned for use in Spaghetti Junction and The Channel Tunnel once endured high impact smashes.[3]

Ambika P3 today (High side)

The launch of Ambika P3 during Architecture Week in June 2007

As signalled by Tom Morton, the idea behind this commission was to make a strong statement about the space's new use. The positioning of Keith Wilson's large scale galvanised steel sculptures which use the visual language of railings, street furniture, market stalls and cattle runs also sent a clear signal that we were occupying the space in its entirety. Wilson's works are often 'performative', engaging the viewer and inviting them to interact physically with them – leaning, sitting, or even playing around them. Woods' work crosses boundaries between art, architecture and design and is most often made up of exaggerated, garish representations of traditional British architectural and interior motifs, such as wooden flooring, chintz wallpapers, crazy paving, or red bricks. Combined, these two artists' works addressed both the territory and the elevation of the space – Wilson's landscape art was brought indoors while Wood's floor mapped out a new territory at the same time as alluding to the weight of British sculpture. This initial project did not focus specifically on the vertical but it provided an indication of the possibilities which the site was to provide: a vertical space for the artworks to occupy but also numerous viewing points and levels from which the public could engage. As the first curatorial iteration it also signalled how the physical space could be altered to subvert our expectations – bringing landscape art indoors and using candy-coloured faux stone house cladding makeovers to transform the floor.

The title *How Green is my Space?* was also relevant as Ambika P3 had been transformed in an act of cultural recycling – a process which would give it a fresh lease of life with minimal cost and build.

Amanda Levete and Zaha Hadid, Established & Sons, 2007

The high end furniture atop their tall black plinths

The use of Ambika's height as a visual strategy was quickly confirmed by our first commercial hire in the space, the launch of company Established & Sons' high-end marble furniture by Amanda Levete, founder and principal of architecture studio AL_A, and Zaha Hadid, the late British-Iraqi Architect. Placed on tall black plinths reminiscent of the monolith in *2001: A Space Odyssey*, these objects, high above the ground, gained status and value as well as a certain element of mystery as they could

not be touched by the visitors. Verticality, used in this way, places the object above the viewer in order to make it unattainable, turning the audience into pedestrians. As we will see in the curated works I present, there are many other ways to use the height of the space which can engage and give agency to the viewer.

Heiner Goebbels, *Stifter's Dinge,* Artangel, 2008

Our next project was a collaboration with Artangel to present the extraordinary work of Heiner Goebbels: *Stifter's Dinge* is a composition for five pianos with no pianists; a performance without performers, a play with no actors. This work utilised the full spectrum of space in Ambika P3, creating an immersive world in which the audience could enter to experience the performance.

> It is a work which invites an audience into a space filled with sound and vision: an invitation to see and to hear, revolving around an awareness of objects. Objects in a theatre are usually part of the set or serve as props with a largely illustrative function. But here they become protagonists in an interaction of image, light, sounds and voices, wind and mist, water and ice.[4]

In this manner, numerous works with different audiences and aims were making use of Ambika P3

and stretching the boundaries of how a space can be occupied physically and formally with particular attention to how the design and scaling would affect the viewpoints and itinerary of the audience.

Height enabled the work to be lit to create the desired mise-en-scène

Sculpture and Cinema

In 2009, in response to the vertical nature of the site and my own research and practice in installation and artists' film and video, I embarked on a series of curatorial experiments which would address the vertical axis through a deconstruction of the cinematic apparatus. This 'Sculpture and Cinema' project consisted of three commissioned exhibitions by visual artists investigating and challenging the established relationship between projection, space and audience through film, video and installation in this architectural environment.
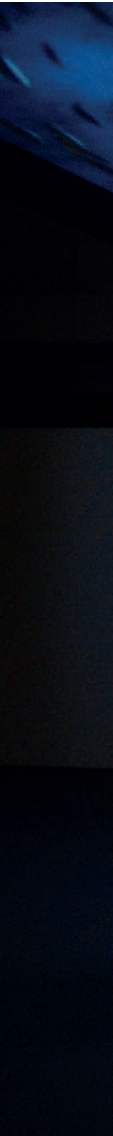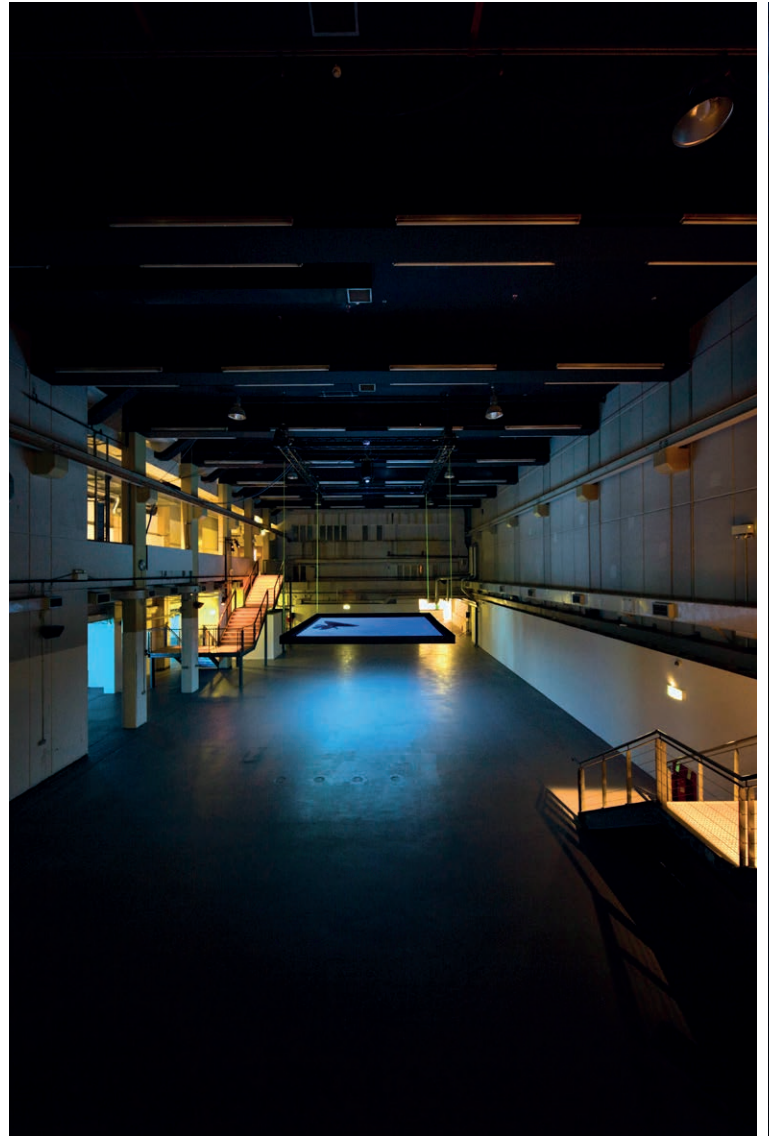
David Ward, *RINK*, 2009
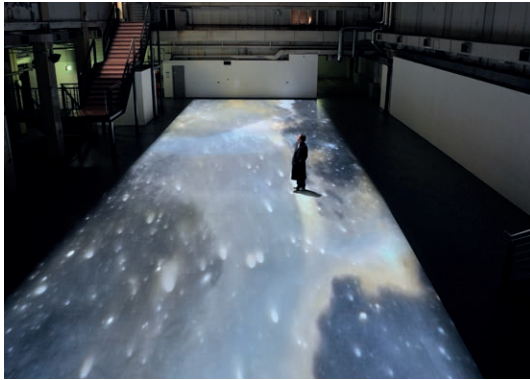
Standing on the screen at 'RINK', 2009

In the first of these works, *RINK: A Skating Drawing Floor* (2009), the artist David Ward was commissioned to transform the floor of P3 into a huge light drawing. *RINK* is about our relationship to the ground – the vertical body in relation to the horizontal plane – and the passing of time. It is a work in which the floor plane becomes a screen illuminated by projected light, taking the cinema screen and rotating it through 90 degrees and inviting the viewer to step, physically, on to that surface. *RINK* was some thirty metres long, illuminated by a constantly changing, twenty-one-minute looped cycle of light-drawings projected down on to the floor from high up in the roof of the space. The imagery of these projections was subject to continuous shifts: fades, cross fades and the movement of lines drawing themselves across the floor. The audience, once in the space,

could view the work or step on to it to experience it and become part of it – in this way it turned our expectation literally upside down, placing the viewer inside the fourth wall of cinema.

Anthony McCall, *Vertical Works*, 2011

The second exhibition in this series was *Vertical Works* a new work by Anthony McCall commissioned for Ambika P3 in collaboration with Sprüth Magers Gallery. McCall is internationally recognised for his ground-breaking work which occupies a space between sculpture, cinema and drawing. His work for Ambika P3 similarly involved projection from above the high space, but the aim here was not to question the surface of the screen but rather the manifestation of a light beam in 3D space. The artworks use digital projectors to beam precise shapes on to surfaces that are carefully positioned around the exhibition space. The beams of light pass through an artificial mist, creating the impression of sculptural forms suspended in the air. The projections shift and mutate as they cycle slowly through a series of sequences that are programmed to repeat over the course of the day. Visitors entering the space could walk through the illuminated haze and interact with the circles, straight lines and waves that are the basic elements used by McCall in most of his light installations.

Anthony McCall's work had previously dealt with the horizontal light beam of the cinema projector (as in

his seminal work *Light Describing a Cone*, 1973) and in his earlier Serpentine exhibition (Anthony McCall, 30 November 2007 – 3 February 2008), but there the aim was to create solid horizontal light cones. In this situation, McCall explored solid-light works that are oriented vertically projecting downwards from the ceiling on to the floor, forming ten-metre-tall conical 'tents' of light, with a base of about four metres. Here, the projected line-drawing on the floor is, quite literally, the footprint of the work, with the three-dimensional 'body' rising from the floor and finally narrowing to a point at the lens of the projector, well-above one's head. Four of these works, each of them shown in the UK for the first time, were presented as a single installation here comprising *Breath* (2004), *Breath III* (2005), *Meeting You Halfway* (2009) and *You* (2010). The poetic element of these projections, which transforms the projectors into 'suns' and so enables audiences to bathe in light, was central to the work. The key element that makes these projections work is haze in the atmosphere; while McCall's early pieces involved cigarette smoke from the audience, his contemporary works involve the use of several haze machines which 'solidify' the light.

> While the geometric pieces of the 1970s were based on a principle of equivalence between line and plane, from 2000 on, the post-geometric pieces played on the forms' reversibility, on exchanges between interior and exterior, and the equivalence of horizontal and vertical vectors. At the same time, the

adoption, from 2000 on, of mist-producing machines generated a texture both uniform and larger scaled – so that McCall was able to increase the scale of his pieces, conceived from then on as installations and projected in continuous cycles.[5]

The audience experiencing 'Vertical Works', 2011

McCall's *Vertical Works* were a great success, especially in relation to audience engagement – since we had laid carpet upon the whole of the floorspace many people came at various times in the day, lunchtime or after work to simply bathe in the lights and quiet atmosphere. The audience here had to lie horizontally and look up at the projections – staring into the beams themselves which created new images upon them and reversed the traditional relationship to the projection apparatus, through both verticality and orientation.

Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, *The Happiest Man*, **2013**

Set built for 'The Happiest Man', including traditional cinema seating and the domestic interior room

The next exhibition in this triptych was by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, titled *The Happiest Man*. After the reinterpretation of screen and projection by Ward and McCall, the third part of this project focused on the auditorium – both as a physical space and as a cultural and sociological context. While the construction of a screen and projection set-up was straightforward, the creation of a 150-seat classic cinema with the addition of a domestic room was challenging. Through lighting and build, the Ambika P3 space was transformed to provide within itself two different contexts – that of the public sphere (the cinema) and that of the private (the room). This brought to the fore how context is a defining element in the curating and reading of art, and simultaneously the difference between the personal and collective

experience of an audience. The audience was able to move between public and private contexts only because the Ambika P3 space has neutrality – it is a space for experimentation and does not present the language of the gallery or museum. Although this work was not addressing verticality directly, it is complementary to the other two works and provides further questions around the geometry and perspective of the audience in relation to the screen as well as the role of the physical and social contexts of the viewer's position in traditional cinema.

All three of these works highlight aspects of the cinematic spectacle through play, presenting the elements of illusion (screen, projection, site) as material objects within the poetic framework of the space.

Viewpoints and Awe

Ambika P3's public entrance straight from Marylebone Road leads you through the back of the university's car park, delivering you to the mezzanine where you enter with a complete vista of the space below. After many exhibitions it has become clear that this vantage point is crucial to the power of the site and all the exhibitions depend on this first impression. This overview empowers the viewer, giving them a sense of the scale but also the satisfaction derived from a feeling of ownership

of the scene below. Benjamin Grant explores these emotions in his Overview Project,[6] describing how the aerial vantage point gives us the illusion of knowledge and can also lead to a shift in our mental states:

> I think what I'm ultimately trying to achieve is for my audience to have an experience of awe. This psychological feeling occurs, by definition, when someone is exposed to something perceptually vast in size or complexity… Studies show that these individuals feel like they have more time available to them, an increased desire to collaborate, and are more open to long-term thinking.[7]

Viewing from the mezzanine during Fashion Week, 2011

Although the view looking down on to the space of Ambika P3 is not the same as the satellite images used in the Overview Project, it nevertheless generates a similarly complex set of impressions in the individual. As the viewer approaches the railings and peers out, often into the dark, the vista empowers and literally gives them space and time.

David Hall, *1001 TV Sets (End Piece…) 1972-2012*

'These old TVs on scaffolds – they are rather like sheep waiting to go to the slaughter.' David Hall

In David Hall's 2012 exhibition *End Piece…*, the relationship between viewpoint and work was further developed providing two very different experiences for the viewer. The first as an observer from the height of the mezzanine and balcony, and the second as an engaged nomad wandering among the sea of television sets. The commission *1001 TV Sets* was a reconfigured version of an earlier work *101 TV sets* which had been shown at the seminal Video Show, Serpentine Gallery, London in 1975. The new configuration at Ambika P3 was a major update and

scaling up of the work that both restated its value as an intervention in visual and media arts and marked the end of analogue broadcast in the UK. The new *1001 TV Sets* developed through the imagination of the artist and the curatorial dialogue which took place throughout the process.

The effect of the site and the impact of the vista from the entrance of this exhibition is very well illustrated by journalist and broadcaster John Wilson as he came into the space while recording his impressions for the radio programme Front Row – it also gives a very articulate summary of the quite unique experience of entering the site:

> We start our next item in a service yard underneath the University of Westminster building, in Marylebone in Central London. We are here for an exhibition by the veteran video artist, David Hall. The show is called *1001 TV sets* and is tapping into the idea that, in a few weeks' time, on April 18th the analogue television signal will be switched off once and for all. Now, I'm going to walk into the doorway here which leads to a subterranean chamber. We can hear noise building. Walking into this gallery space, it's an enormous subterranean chamber about the size of a football pitch, possibly even bigger, and I'm standing on a gallery overlooking a sea of televisions. Each one of those analogue sets has been upended, facing up and broadcasting simultaneously the five analogue networks, that are still broadcast and will

be broadcasting until April 18th. It really is an assault on the senses: colours, flashing lights, even though it's only five channels it builds to a cacophony of sounds and a series of strobing images. It's quite disorientating, and reaching down to each one of these television sets is a wire I presume, the antenna, the cable bringing the picture, the signal in. But there's a net of wires that gather on the ceiling like a spider's web.[8]

Installation of the sea of televisions and aerial cables, 2012

This short narrative recorded live as Wilson entered the space embodies many of the elements which I have outlined above – the striking effect of firstly finding a space hidden away beneath a central London building and then upon walking into the vista from the mezzanine allowing you to observe both the sea of televisions as well as the hundreds of cables looping down from the ceiling.

Martina Amati, *UNDER*, 2015

This project was a continuation of approaches developed through the work of Ward, McCall and the Kabakov's, experimenting with projection, site and audience. As the curator of Ambika P3 I was approached by Martina Amati and her producer Pinky Ghundale who wanted to translate a single screen work into a film installation on the art of freediving, practised by British-Italian BAFTA-winning filmmaker and artist Amati. This was her first time working in an installation setting, as all her previous work was single screen film made for the cinema.

Martina Amati inspecting the installation at Ambika P3, 2015

The challenge was to curate an exhibition which translated the experience of freediving into an installation, and to see how gravity-free weightlessness could be experienced by an audience within the boundaries of an immersive film and video installation. The work deals with freediving but there is a sense that this falling into the depth of the sea is like the Falling Away which Catherine Yass's work refers to. This can be seen in the fascination which surrounds the extreme sport of freediving which is like the enthrallment of parkour – both involve engaging your body with no support into the dangerous voids of space. In the case of *UNDER*, in order to translate this fall we decided to use a large hanging screen in the middle of the space on to which we projected the film which follows Amati on her 30-metre freedive. At this point I collaborated with Sam Collins, Head of Production at Artangel, who had worked on Heiner Goebbels's *Stifter's Dinge*, David Ward's *RINK* and Catherine Yass's *High Wire*. We decided that the main piece would be projected from above in the high space on to a screen positioned parallel to the ground which floated about 6 metres up so that the audience would be able to view it from multiple positions. This 6.4 x 4.8 metre screen hung from the ceiling, suspended in mid-air hovering above viewers' heads. The audience was able to view the film from above by standing on the balcony and the mezzanine, and from the main floor below the screen, enabling them to experience UNDER in either an immersive or distanced manner, through a variety of perspectives.

Conclusion

Catherine Yass, 'Concrete Mixer' (2021)

The use of verticality as a key strategy in many of the Ambika P3 projects was driven initially by the serendipity of the curatorial process but quickly became one of the arsenals in the design, layout and geometric considerations of all the projects. As Ambika's three strands of programming cross-fertilised, an increasing number of projects started to use the height as a central component of their exhibition plans. In group exhibitions or major solo shows, the space is populated with a variety of structures which engage in the relationship between the exhibited materials, the viewing positions and the audience itinerary as important factors in the design. The curated programme always engages with the space in a site-specific manner – adapting the space to the work of the artist, as opposed to most contemporary art galleries which adapt the work to the space; or, in the case of new

commissions, requiring the artist and curator to create works which address the site directly.

Many users have capitalised on the volume of Ambika P3 by building structures within it such as platforms or raked seating which expand the viewing capacity of the space and transform the base into a stage. This ability to alter the relationship between the high and low points of the space is key to the myriad ways in which the cavernous interior has been configured in relation to the vertical and the potential views that are generated. The site is activated by the tensions created between dichotomous notions such as interior/exterior, dark/light, empty/full and high/low. What is most striking over the decade of artistic and curatorial practice in Ambika P3 is its flexibility and adaptability. The vertical is used in a range of ways – artworks can

be above or below the viewer and a multitude of different perspectives can be created for the viewer to engage with them. But the greatest impact is achieved when the artist, curator, production and technical teams engage in a collaborative manner and address both the geometry of the space as well as its effect on the viewer.

In the *Falling Away* exhibition of Yass's work, co-curated by Davide Deriu and related to his research into architecture and vertigo, we have applied these production values to Yass's film installation work. The design of the spaces is collaborative and developed in a process-based manner with the final layout developed through many iterations. Furthermore, the links between the work and the site are numerous as the very material of concrete, the basis for Ambika P3's original existence, is also the subject of Yass's new work, *Concrete Mixer*. Created for this exhibition, it engages with a critique

of the material of concrete in numerous ways – by using a concrete mixer truck's turning drum as a spinning device for the camera to record the construction sites of East London and by projecting it on to a specific concrete wall within Ambika P3. This experiment with filming from moving viewpoints draws another parallel with the curatorial strategies of Ambika P3. The new twin screen film exhibited alongside Yass's body of work will open up questions about modernist high-rise architecture, and how to represent and evaluate it. Curation at Ambika P3 will benefit by furthering its engagement with the challenges of vertical space and the poetics and aesthetics of elevation. In *Falling Away*, the interaction between the works and the space will amplify the precariousness and disorientation of the films on a visceral and psychological level, extending the debate and opening the experience to wide-ranging audiences.

Images

p. 28 Anthony McCall, 'Vertical Works' (2011)
pp. 34-35 (left) Anthony McCall, '*Vertical Works*' (2011); (centre & right) Martina Amati, '*UNDER*' (2015)

p. 27 Source: Chicago Architectural Photographing Company, Old Orchard Road. CPC_01_D_0287_001, Chicago Photographic Images of Change digital image collection, Special Collections and University Archives, University of Illinois at Chicago

Endnotes

1 'Interview with Professor Paul Regan' in Ambika P3: Volume 1 (June 2007-August 2009), Katharine Heron and Michael Mazière (eds), (London: University of Westminster School of Architecture and Cities, 2009), p. 18.

2 Kate Connolly, 'When Pianos Attack: What if Actors Stood Aside and Let the Props Steal the Show?', G2, The Guardian, 27 March 2008, p. 28.

3 Tom Morton, 'Keith Wilson & Richard Woods', in Ambika P3: Volume 1, p. 36.

4 Heiner Goebbels, 'Now we Recognise the Noise: Stifter's Dinge', in Ambika P3: Volume 1, p. 64.

5 Philippe-Alain Michaud, 'Line Light: The Geometric Cinema of Anthony McCall', October, Vol. 137 (Summer 2011), pp. 3-22: p. 19.

6 'Overview: A New Perspective of Earth'. (Available: https://www.over-view.com/) [Accessed: 10 April 2021]

7 Romullo Baratto, '"There is Power in Seeing the World from Above": An Interview with Overview's Benjamin Grant', ArchDaily, 19 August 2020. (Available: https://www.archdaily.com/945868/there-is-power-in-seeing-the-world-from-above-an-interview-with-overviews-benjamin-grant) [Accessed: 10 April 2021]

8 John Wilson, 'Front Row', BBC Radio 4, 16 March 2012 (28'). [09'33"-11'08"]

FILM ESSAYS

Last Stand

Last Stand: The lookout as protest   Maria Walsh

The film opens with the camera tracking up along the numbered storeys – from 2 to 12 – of a concrete tower core on a development site in Nine Elms, Vauxhall, London. This development, which includes the Battersea Power Station Development and the new US Embassy, is, as Anna Minton says, one of the capital's 'most epic […], both in terms of its size and in iconic status'.[1] The oddness of a smooth count-up, an inverse of film leader countdown, hardly prepares the viewer for the revelation at the top of this minimalist-like structure of a slight, solitary figure in long shot, facing towards the screen and the place where the viewer too will take a stand.

LEVEL 12

The view from on high was written about in the second half of the twentieth century in relation to two towers that were emblematic of modernity – the Eiffel Tower (Roland Barthes) and the World Trade Center (Michel de Certeau). Anachronistic in relation to our contemporary moment, they are nonetheless a place to begin to scope out the stakes involved in Yass's uptake of the bird's-eye view. For Barthes and de Certeau, this view affords pleasure. For Barthes it offers both the satisfying 'continuity of panorama (duration)' as well as 'decipherment of parts within it'.[2] The former enables the paradox of an autarchic immersion in what is surveyed; the

latter, the joy at recognising familiar landmarks and conjuring those that can't be seen but are topographically known to the surveyor. These two twentieth-century writers move out from the bird's-eye view in different directions. Barthes remains on top of his tower, whereas de Certeau, to whom I shall return when Yass's camera descends, moves away from the 'voluptuous pleasure' it affords and delves into the city below.[3] Barthes meditates on how the Eiffel Tower is both a lookout that turns the city into an object for the gaze and is itself an object that can be gazed at from other vantage points in the city. This doubling of the look is replicated in its construction as a vertical structure that is nonetheless formed by open-latticed cross-sections that allow this tower to be looked through as well as at.

LEVEL 11

Yass's tower, standing twelve storeys high, is a lookout that no longer affords – in both senses of the term – the hazy view of the city spread out beneath it like the sea, the kind of view that so captivated the French writers.[4] For Yass, the lookout is transformed into a stare at a horizon populated by looming cranes and rising luxury apartment blocks that obstruct the bird's eye view. The durational contiguity of Barthes's autarchy is superseded by the no-time of development modelled on the computerised

fantasies of architectural corporations and aided by neoliberal planning deregulation. Its *topos* is the sky's virtual liquidity, what Yass calls 'the privatisation of the sky through selling it as real estate'.[5]

LEVEL 10

Reflexively propped on the off-screen crane that is building the tower Yass stands on, the camera sweeps round to its right side, revealing the block to be one of two concrete modules. The interval between them could tempt a parkour stunt, a projection that is swiftly knocked on the head by its swerve, floating in mid-air, to the back of the tower. Its empty core is exposed. It is as if the façade of this building will be constructed on nothing, much like the economic transactions it symbolises: the abstraction of money, once tied to gold, now unfettered in speculative finance. A weird loop joins this hollow mass and the horizon that Yass looks towards, her back turned to the viewer like Caspar David Friedrich's *Rückenfigur*. The horrific emptiness of the Burkeian romantic sublime has here been recast as a fantasy of infinite reflection in the gleaming mirrored glass and steel that characterises contemporary property development. What kind of body does this produce? Elizabeth Grosz claimed that 'built environments cannot alienate the very bodies they produce' as bodies and buildings are co-constitutive and inscribe one another in each other's image.[6] However, she also admits that 'what may prove unconducive is the rapid transformation of an environment such that a body inscribed by one cultural milieu finds itself in another involuntarily'.[7] *Last Stand* proposes a body at odds with its environment, a body that stands in for the invisible bodies – 'the destitute, the homeless, the sick and the dying'[8] – that have been displaced to make way for techno-sublime lifestyles.

LEVEL 9

Nine Elms is a seven-phase development. This includes the Sky Pool, 'a swimming pool suspended ten storeys up in the air [spanning the space] between two luxury tower blocks'.[9] For Minton, this plan is 'a symbol of the divisive housing market with the super-rich literally able to look down on everyone else while they swim'.[10] I don't think they will look down, though. Much as the sun-worshippers who might have populated the therapy room atop the Sun Tower proposed for Paris in the competition won by Eiffel,[11] I think they will look up to the sky, their Ultra-High Net Worth protecting them from what are considered the problems of urbanisation – the pollution, crime and filth of the streets below.[12]

LEVEL 8

Yass is protesting the privatised sell-off of the London skyline, a sky that is also zoned by the flight paths that bring in Russian, Middle Eastern, Asian, Chinese and some British investors to London.[13] As Minton documents, London's rapacious property developments, which include leisure and cultural arms – the creative industries playing a supporting

role in accelerated regeneration – are manifestations of a shift from housing as a social good to being a marketised commodity. Thirty years prior to Minton, but using a similar critique, Elizabeth Wilson wrote that the high value of land in the city 'means that the working-class populations are shovelled out […] to be replaced by glamorous and profitable property developments'.[14] She observed that '[w]omen, ethnic minorities and the working class in general have been caught between a paternalistic form of planning in which surveillance and regulation played a key role, and a profit-driven capital development that has been unbelievably destructive of urban space'.[15] Concluding optimistically, Wilson proposed that more involvement by women might make city planning more conducive to multiple users. A quarter of a century later, Minton also concludes optimistically with examples of positive grassroots protests such as Focus E15, a campaign by mothers threatened with eviction from temporary accommodation in Stratford, and the reactivation of movements such as 'Right to the City', which promotes the collective reclamation of urban space. But the cranes march on, indefatigable.

LEVEL 7

Of course, the tactics of the street and the unpredictable assembly of communities occur despite this march, but what kind of protest can an individual artist make if she feels their demolitions in her body? Yass's *Last Stand* reaches a filmic climax that is more of a diminuendo than a crescendo. As the camera revolves to the tower's left-hand side, her vulnerable frame passes in front of and covers over the phallic high point of the Nine Elms Tower opposite, making it disappear for a split second. Meeting her opponent in a duel she has called but ultimately can only lose, it is as if for that moment at least she has regained the autarchy of the bird's-eye view. Yass refers to the asceticism of Saint Symeon the Stylite, the Medieval saint, who lived on a post in the desert for thirty-seven years, as a kind of precursor to her resistance. I think of Simone Weil whose asceticism, in solidarity with the suffering of those in occupied France during World War II, resulted in her death from starvation (or anorexia) – an anti-heroic sacrifice in which something larger than oneself *almost* defeats the individual body.

LEVEL 6

An abrupt cut to the only close-up in the film brings the viewer level with this female surveyor. Immobile and stern, her features meld into a silhouette that *almost* merges into the whitish blue sky striated by a passing plane. In her confrontation with the anonymous face of Capital, her army are the squawking birds, heard but not seen, in this *almost* indexical image of dissolution.

LEVEL 5

The camera tracks back down and around the tower to stare up at the solitary figure. No rückenfigur, she

is bereft of a lookout that would affirm her existence. In her last stand, she becomes the blind spot in the unseeing gaze of Capital which subjects everyone to a life of exile, some to privacy and luxury, others to loneliness and deprivation.

LEVEL 4, 3, 2….
Level 1 is missing in Yass's filmic analysis of the tower. It will probably be a gated car park and entrance fitted out with security systems that rank as high as the tower. But the spatial everyday tactics of those practitioners who occupy de Certeau's ground level of the streets will continue despite, and in conjunction with, the sell-off of the sky. Bypassing the imaginary totalisations of the bird's eye view, de Certeau claims that '[t]hese practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen; their knowledge of them is as blind as that of lovers in each other's arms'.[16] However, *Last Stand* is rightly a pessimistic film. Resilient to the end, Yass's impervious figure stands resolute but foreshadowed by the unseeing object that casts its hollow mantle over London's clay fields. The equally blind, but unloving, face of Capital.

Endnotes

1 Anna Minton, Big Capital: Who is London For? (London: Penguin, 2017), p. 20.

2 Roland Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower' in The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1997 [1979]), pp. 3-18: p. 11.

3 Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City', in The Practice of Everyday Life, trans. Steven F. Rendall (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London University of California Press, 1984), pp. 91-110: p. 92.

4 While de Certeau is predominantly critical of the aerial view and its totalising vision, he immerses himself in its 'voluptuous pleasure' in the first few pages of 'Walking in the City'.

5 Artist's notes, email to author, 2 December 2019.

6 Elizabeth Grosz, 'Bodies-Cities', in Beatriz Colomina (ed.), Sexuality and Space (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992), pp. 241-253: p. 249.

7 Grosz, 'Bodies-Cities', pp. 249-50.

8 Elizabeth Grosz, Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2001), p, xvii.

9 Minton, p. xii.

10 Minton, pp. 23-24.

11 Barthes, p. 6. For more detailed information about this proposal, see Wolfgang Schivelbusch, Disenchanted Night: The Industrialization of Light in the Nineteenth Century, trans. Angela Davies (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California and London: The University of California Press, 1988), pp. 128-133.

12 See Minton for a discussion of how the super prime property market for 'Ultra-High Net Worth Individuals' – there are estimated to be 4,900 of these individuals in London – is interconnected to the housing crisis, p. xii. Average-income earners and the poor move to the periphery or out of the capital altogether. High Net Worth Individuals in London are estimated to be in excess of 500,000.

13 See Minton, p. xiii.

14 Elizabeth Wilson, The Sphinx in the City (London: Virago Press, 1991), p. 143.

15 Wilson, p. 152.

16 de Certeau, p. 93.

Royal London

Royal London: Dying away   Christopher Kul-Want

At the time Catherine Yass made the film *Royal London*, between 2013 and 2018, the building of the eponymous East End hospital had largely fallen into ruins; and yet, despite no one remaining in the hospital, and with its demolition already underway, *Royal London* possesses a powerful sense of animated occupancy. It is as if certain unseen forces had remained in the hospital in spite of its vacancy, imbuing it with drives of their own. What is manifested in *Royal London* is an uncanny sense of the departing life of the hospital, itself, although this is by no means the only tangible presence that still roams the building.

Edited and recorded in a manner so that continuity is constructed from the camera's point of view, the principal structural element of the film is composed of a line of descent: beginning high up in the hospital's central stairwell beneath a grand Victorian iron-and-glass skylight, this line winds down a flanking staircase, then moves past a series of evacuated treatment rooms, eventually ending in the basement of the hospital where the camera, along with vision itself, is interred beneath the falling rubble of the destroyed building. Moving from high to low, and from light to dark, this line of movement embodies what Yass describes figuratively as 'the

living organism' of the hospital. Succumbing to demolition, this 'living organism' – the body and soul of the hospital – takes its final steps towards its end, the last journey and entombment of which is rendered in the film's unfolding.

In embodying the hospital's interment, *Royal London* enacts a form of commemoration. In the first place, the film is commemorative of the Royal London Hospital and its working life, which over the years since 1740 when it was first built has, as the artist says, 'witnessed births, deaths and all states in between.' Additionally, the film might be seen to commemorate the institutions that traditionally have supported hospitals such as the Royal London: that is, the National Health Service (NHS) and, more widely, Britain's welfare state. Throughout the five years of the making of the film, the demolition of the Royal London Hospital resonated with great concern in the UK – a concern that is still present – about the future of the NHS with hospitals and networks of social care up and down the country facing closures owing to a grave lack of state investment. As the artist said in 2018 when she made the film,

'It is not only the hospital that is being dismantled. The letters NHS are just discernible on the dust

sheets coming down with the rubble, unintentionally hinting at the steady erosion of NHS services. In the midst of this collapse, the hospital's title Royal London suggests that both London and our sense of statehood are under threat of destruction, especially in these historical moments of uncertainty.'[1]

The National Health Service is one of a number of institutions that Yass has made films about; others include the BBC (*Flight*, 2002; *Aeolian Piano*, 2016), the Canary Wharf trading banks (*Descent*, 2002) and the Red Road housing estate in Glasgow (*High Wire*, 2008). Indeed, the subjects of much of Yass's photographic work since she first came to prominence as an artist in the 1990s are also concerned with public institutions. Yass's engagement with these institutions arises from her interest in their original democratic, and often utopic, vision that underlay their communitarian and welfare sense of purpose (the obvious exception to this being the trading banks on Canary Wharf). In these films the utopian hope underlying each of the institutions is frequently figured through a movement of ascent. In this respect, *Royal London* follows suit with an upward view of a skylight as the opening shot of the film; but, thereafter, the camera plunges inexorably downwards until, finally, it is buried under rubble in the building's basement.

Like many of Yass's films, therefore, *Royal London* is shaped by two opposing forces of direction: that of ascent *and* descent. In the films encompassing a movement of ascent, especially *Descent* (where the movement works in two opposite directions at once) and *High Wire*, there is an excessive albeit impossible desire that makes itself felt to transcend gravity – and even to fly. The converse side of this exorbitant urge evoked in Yass's films is to fall and, as *Royal London* makes clear, the consequences of such a fall, from high to low, is death. What is enacted in these Icarian movements of ascent and descent in Yass's films, including *Royal London*, is the subject's anxiety of disappearance that arises as a consequence of the utopian objectives of the institution (in its generic sense as a socio-symbolic structure). One such anxiety is that the progressive, communitarian ambitions of the institution, if taken to their extreme, could erase difference so comprehensively that the subject is absorbed into the institution to the point of vanishing altogether. On the other hand, in so far as the institution inevitably fails in achieving its utopian ambitions, there is the danger that its collapse results in that of the subject, too. And yet, if the subject attempts to resist the institution, to step outside the symbolic altogether, then this risks foregoing the support of an indispensable structure by which to exist.

The logic in all of these foregoing alternatives determines the subject's anxiety of falling, underlying which is a constant anticipation, and

fear, of annihilation and death. In *High Wire*, what is made tangible as the tightrope walker steps out on to the wavering line high above the ground, and then retreats backwards to a position of safety, is both a dream of ascent but also a palpable fear of falling to the ground; such is the vicarious pleasure of watching a high-wire artist out on the rope. *Royal London* is similar to *High Wire* in this sense, and follows on from where the former film left off, acting out the inevitable fall(-out) that results from the subject's identification with the institution's attempt, metaphorically speaking, to ascend skywards.

For a brief time, as the camera descends the main stairwell in *Royal London*, a viewpoint is established that runs parallel to the bottom level of each of the stairs. Positioned in the central well of the building by the side of the iron railings that bounds the staircase, the camera moves in tandem with the silent, descending steps while watching them from a slight distance. Perhaps, if only momentarily, this creates a safe haven apart from the final fatal journey that the film embodies. But there would seem to be no safe havens in *Royal London*. What was initially an estranged experience – as the subject gazed at what is invisible, attempting, however impossibly, to hold this force of impending mortality at a distance – is soon overrun. In a matter of moments the camera transfers to a viewpoint on the staircase and hurriedly rushes downwards.

And then, suddenly and unexpectedly, on the next set of stairs, a sense of bodily stability is abandoned altogether when the camera cuts across the corner angle of the side railings of the stairs and, subsequently, in a rapid swing of 180 degrees shifts upside down so that the final descent to the bottom floor is accomplished from a viewpoint close to the ceiling. In this way the subject's viewpoint that begins with the spiralling movement down through the central shaft of the building, and concludes with the giddy angle of view upside down at the bottom of the stairs, are conjoined together in a movement that is unconstrained by bodily limits. It is as if a certain vital force, propelled by gravity, paradoxically frees itself from the ground, while plunging towards it, skipping and dancing as it goes.

No doubt there is a pleasure taken in destruction here, but this by no means exhausts all of the forces that pervade *Royal London*. What shapes the cavorting movement on the final set of stairs, and which was present from the beginning, is the invisible, downward force of mortality itself, and it is from this that another, upward tempo is derived. It is as if the film seeks to create other directional lines, lines of flight that are not governed by the subject's fantasy of sovereign authority as figured by the monocular skylight at the beginning of the film. Towards the end of the film, with a series of fissures appearing in the building's fabric as it undergoes demolition,

golden and blue streams of light pour down to earth mingling with the building's ruins. Propelled through a breach in the roof, the hospital's detritus – cement, plaster, steel girders, trash – are like secretions and tears falling from a body; in their sometimes violent, but also graceful, progress to earth they compose an elegiac testament to the building's passing. And, as vision diminishes in the dying moments of the film, pale fractals of grey and blue form a beautiful pall in the breach, tendering fleeting glimpses of mortality's gift.

Endnotes

1 This comment, originally about the increasing privatisation of the NHS, and Brexit, has been further inflected by the COVID-19 pandemic. All quotations in the text are from Yass's unpublished outline for the film. I am grateful to the artist for sharing this outline with me.

Aeolian Piano

Aeolian Piano: Sound and Fury   Lucy Reynolds

Divested of the signs of human presence, the structures and modes of conveyance depicted in Catherine Yass's films and photographs are mute yet formidable barriers; not only to the passage of people, but also to her camera as it seeks to navigate them. She gains access through the agency of her filmmaking tools, challenging the inscrutable solidity of a lighthouse out at sea (*Lighthouse*, 2011), for example, by flipping it upside-down in the frame through the airborne eye of a helicopter. Her tactics of the travelling shot often owe much to the era of Harold Lloyd and the early film travelogue, where lack of suitable equipment necessitated the placement of the camera on vehicles already in motion such as trains and boats. In films like *Descent* (2002), where the camera is mounted on a main frame hanging from a crane that moves slowly down a high rise building, the mechanical ride becomes the point. As the circling helicopter in *Lighthouse* demonstrates, however, Yass gives as much consideration to the space around and above buildings, as to the structures themselves. This is another way through which she undermines their solidity, by evoking the atmospherics accompanying vertiginous scale. Her camera explores states of suspension and flight, embodied not only through the camera, but through the passage of other bodies in space; such

as the precarious journey of Didier Pasquette, as he attempts to walk a tightrope between tower blocks in *High Wire* (2008).

The building which Yass's camera navigates in her 2017 film *Aeolian Piano* has a particular potency in this regard. In response to the invitation of local community arts group White Noise, *Aeolian Piano* follows the journey of a grand piano out of the half-demolished site of the BBC Television Centre at White City in West London, as it is winched skyward amongst the cranes which signal the Centre's demise, prior to the site's transformation into luxury flats. The piano's slow ascent over the partly destroyed building starts at what was once the centre of the building, above the basement, where a number of grand pianos were unexpectedly discovered when the building was being cleared for demolition. The film takes its name from the Aeolian Harp: an instrument (harp-like or box-shaped) whose strings are arranged to generate harmonics from the movement of the wind. Swaying upwards, the high wind draws the piano's strings into ghostly song, performing a melancholy reprisal of the broadcasts once 'on air' in the building below.[1] Yass's levitating piano functions as a sounding board: intercepting perhaps, as it travels upward, the echoes of lost news bulletins, signature tunes,

orchestral concerts or canned laughter once created in the studios below.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, when the BBC's power as an organ of propaganda and national reach had been vindicated by the role it had played in wartime morale, the construction of a purpose-built centre for the making of entertainment programmes, alongside news, came to the fore. The low status of the new technology of television, for a corporation mainly concerned with radio broadcast until then, was also significantly bolstered by its popular coverage of the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The post-war BBC had the mandate to develop the brief enshrined in its Royal Charter by its first director general Lord Reith, back in the 1930s, to 'inform, educate and entertain',[2] and the governmental and public support to develop it. The BBC Television Centre could be seen to have embodied this ambition. Its distinctive semi-circular shape, from the initial designs drawn up by the architect Graham Dawbarn in 1949, came to encompass a fan of twelve production studios of varying sizes enclosing a central point of entrance – glimpsed in the outside broadcasts of countless programmes as the years passed.

Finally declared complete in 1960, Dawbarn's design for the building evokes the early post-war modernism associated with national architectural projects such as the Royal Festival Hall. Yet, the Television Centre was predicated on its activities, rather than its appearance, which was subject to alterations in response to the changing demands of televisual culture in the fifty years of its operations. As one of its long-time camera technicians Roger Bunce describes:

> 'The building itself was huge – only seven stories [sic] high (plus basement and the mysterious sub-basement), apart from the East Tower, but the area it covered was considerable. As well as the studios, scenery block and restaurant block there were countless hundreds of offices. When they ran out of space in the 1980s they built even more offices on the roof of the scenery runway that encircled the main block. Thousands of people worked there every day – most not having a clue what everyone else did.'[3]

The different studios, in-house workshops and facilities at Television Centre defined the mixed programming created for the BBC's 'domestic networks'. It was designed to cater to broad tastes: a 'something for everyone', but with the further aim of providing 'everything for someone.'[4] Here, Andrew Crisell explains, the 'high-minded intention' was to juxtapose new content alongside the familiar, in order 'at all times to give her "something a little better than she thought she wanted."'[5] This tactic of a carefully curated plurality, however elitist, accounted for the ambitious scope of the Television Centre described by Bunce; even when, in its latter

years from the 1980s, the BBC was subject to the outsourcing of talent and skill to commercial or independent production companies.

Aeolian Piano exemplifies how the negotiation of place in Yass's films is not only delineated in movement, but in her attention to the palpable temporalities the sites in her films register. Buildings are variously represented in states of making, and unmaking. The high-rise buildings presented as film loops in *Descent*, or most recently *Last Stand* (2019), are caught in a cycle of construction continually repeating itself, and never completed. This might be considered an embodiment of the capitalist logic which Susan Buck-Morss observes, in her study of Walter Benjamin's *Das Passagen-Werk*, as 'bringing to consciousness the rapid half-life of the utopian element in commodities and the relentless repetition of their form of betrayal: the same promise, the same disappointment.'[6] And indeed Benjamin's prescient notions of '"always-again-the same"' and '"history-become-space"'[7] can be felt across Yass's work, in the high-rises she scales and the discarded buildings she portrays in their wake in films such as *Aeolian Piano*, *Lighthouse* and *Royal London* (2018). Yass's use of moving image media declared obsolete, such as 35mm (in the case of *Aeolian Piano*) and 16mm celluloid, inscribes into her images of these abandoned places an additional patina of erasure and loss: enacting a form of entropic reciprocity.

In *Royal London*, the images of the Royal London hospital's empty rooms are dramatically erased when Yass's camera is literally covered with the rubble of the collapsing edifice.

The encroaching demise of earlier cinema and television technologies has received much attention from film studies in recent years, encompassing reflections on the passing of a culture of film criticism and cinephilia, alongside contextual and technological studies of changing media. If this is a recent turn in film scholarship, ethnography has long concerned itself with the issue of accounting for disappearing cultures. Namely, James Clifford's denigration of the discipline's attempt to catch the 'disappearing object' as 'a rhetorical construct legitimating a representational practice' where '[t]he other is lost, in disintegrating time and space, but saved in the text.'[8] As an artist, Yass is not alone in addressing the loss of those technologies and cultural spaces which have sustained her creative enquiry over decades. Indeed, the chance to respond to the destruction of the BBC Television Centre might be considered a double blow, as she seeks to frame in celluloid a building that was once a principal conduit for national communication through the moving image.

Yass's use of obsolete media to record – and parallel – the processes of decay she identifies in

the buildings she films, might thus appear as a neat expression of melancholic momento mori, as well as salvage ethnography. This is to underplay the sense of fury contained within the artist's work. Her films depict the violence, not only of time's slow entropy but also the devastation left by the wrecking ball. The nuanced interplay of her camera's mechanical choreographies with the time signature of celluloid intends a pointed critique about the capitulation of public-funded civic service to commercial interests and political expediency. It is no coincidence that the structures that she pictures resonate in cultural readings of twentieth-century history, and the utopian promises that were made to serve the public realm: be this the technological futurism once embodied by the Royal Sovereign lighthouse, or the Red Road tower blocks in Glasgow – modern housing perceived as both exemplary and later notorious. In a melancholy double play on the idea of 'medium', the airborne piano of *Aeolian Piano*

amplifies the lost noise of cultural activity ambitious to offer 'something for everyone' to a national population of increasingly diverse allegiances, with marked ethnic and class origins and identifications. By setting into motion the piano's strange skyward journey, Yass attunes the viewer to the frequencies of bodies, buildings and activities now absent. In an age of televisual 'narrowcasting' Yass's lone piano asserts the absence of this cacophonous collectivity, however problematically patrician its founding principles.

In this sense, *Aeolian Piano*, and Yass's work more broadly, is less concerned with either ethnographic processes of salvage or the historical retrievals of media archaeology. Her films act as advocates for the re-construction of a culture of civic respect and accountability, for which these demolished buildings might serve as models rather than simply reminders.

Endnotes

1 Yass describes how a careful post-production process distilled the sounds and vibrations emanating from the piano, which were recorded using a 'helpinstill' microphone system. The earlier sounds are the amplified creaking of the body of the piano as it is lifted out of the building, with the 'truest' recording of the wind in the strings taken from the beginning of the piano's flight into the air.

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Safety Last
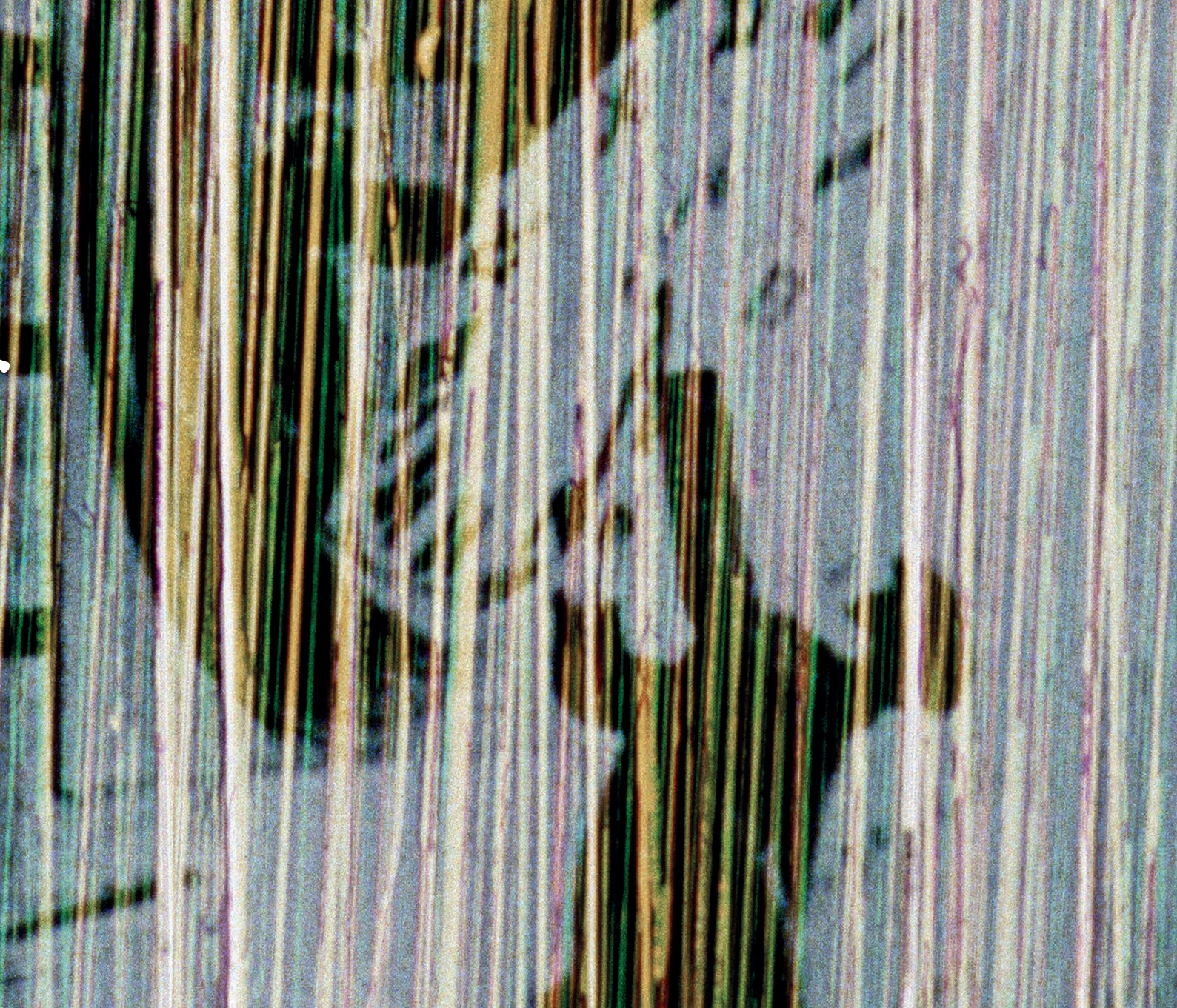
Safety Last: Risk and Repetition Josephine Kane

Fifty metres above a bustling downtown Los Angeles street, teeming with cars, delivery trucks and ant-like pedestrians, a lowly department store clerk dangles from the distorted arm of a giant clock face… This classic scene from *Safety Last!*[1] features Harold Lloyd in his trademark 'human fly' routine. Almost a century after this scene was filmed, it remains one of the most recognisable images in cinematic history, endlessly reproduced, replayed, remixed, and referenced. The film's ability to time travel – a fluid temporality heralded by the giant clock face with its warped arm – is remarkable.

Catherine Yass reworked this scene for her own film, *Safety Last* (2011), selecting a clip where Harold Lloyd pulls the clock hand backwards as though to reverse time. The clip is repeated and looped, marking time like a clock. As it does so, it becomes increasingly scratched until Harold Lloyd and the crowd below are erased. Yass's choice of scene and the mode of her intervention prompt us to reconsider the experiences of modernity: technology, flowing crowds, routine and spectacle. Film has played a critical role in mediating these experiences over the last hundred years or so, and I want to explore here the ways in which Yass's work speaks simultaneously to the

shock of the new in 1923 and to the disorientating realities of our present time.

The development of moving images at the end of the nineteenth century signalled the arrival of modernity. The technology itself was, of course, revolutionary but early cinema also provided a unique document of living in a world defined by instability. Popular films were filled with images of machines, cities and new modes of transport which, combined with the perceptual demands of viewing edited sequences, helped audiences to make sense of their experience of 'modern times'. As Walter Benjamin observed, the camera 'extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives'.[2]

Safety Last! was made during the heyday of the silent comedy era. It is a hugely popular fast-paced action film which follows the misadventures of a naive young man seeking success in the big city. In it, we encounter all the perils of modern urban life – towering skyscrapers, speeding motor cars, anonymous crowds and vast shopping emporiums. These totems of modernity were not conjured up by an imaginative set designer, but filmed at real locations around Los Angeles.[3] Harold

Lloyd's dizzying climb at the end of the film was itself inspired by the exploits of real-life 'human flies', steeplejacks and sailors who scaled public buildings without safety equipment, drawing huge crowds across America in the early 1920s.[4] In this way, the vertiginous landscape of the modern city was appropriated for thrilling entertainment, and in the service of masculine celebrity.[5]

In 1923, cinema audiences experienced the shock of modernity quite literally through action films like *Safety Last!* which were designed to startle, terrify and excite. But the enduring popularity of Lloyd's death-defying stunts reveal a contradiction in the modern experience. On one hand, they appeal to an age-old desire for thrill, for intense sensory engagement, the feeling of being truly alive. On the other, they reveal a growing public consciousness around danger. These oppositional impulses resulted in the growth of vicarious thrill-seeking, a cultural shift which was also reflected in the world-wide enthusiasm for rollercoasters and other mechanised thrills at this time.[6] Action films, like amusement parks, offered cheap commodified forms of thrill which were regulated, contained and rendered safe by new technology.

Heightened risk in modern life was initially understood as an unfortunate but necessary by-product of progress. However, in response to the sheer number of industrial and transport-related accidents in the early twentieth century, an interest in prevention began to emerge. The more conscious a society becomes of limiting and avoiding real danger, the more it will seek out experiences which simulate it.[7] In this context, films like *Safety Last!* became crucial loci for the commodification of risk, both through the vicarious entertainment value of actors like Lloyd, and the very real hazards faced by the daredevil performers who inspired them. There is a tragic irony in the fact that Harry Young, a professional 'human fly', fell ten storeys to his death while publicising the film's release in March 1923.[8]

Enjoying ersatz danger from the comfort of their upholstered seats, the cinema audience watched Harold Lloyd on the big screen, but they also watched themselves in the everyday crowds captured on the streets below. Here we see a mass of spectators squeezed together on the pavement, momentarily united in suspense and mesmerised by the spectacle above. The visceral experiences of this kind of crowd was a source of fascination, particularly at a time when the anonymity and indifference of urban life preoccupied contemporary writers such as sociologist Georg Simmel. In his pioneering essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', Simmel observed a unique psychological adaptation in turn-of-the-century urban crowds.[9] In order to cope with the ceaseless barrage of sensory stimuli, urbanites
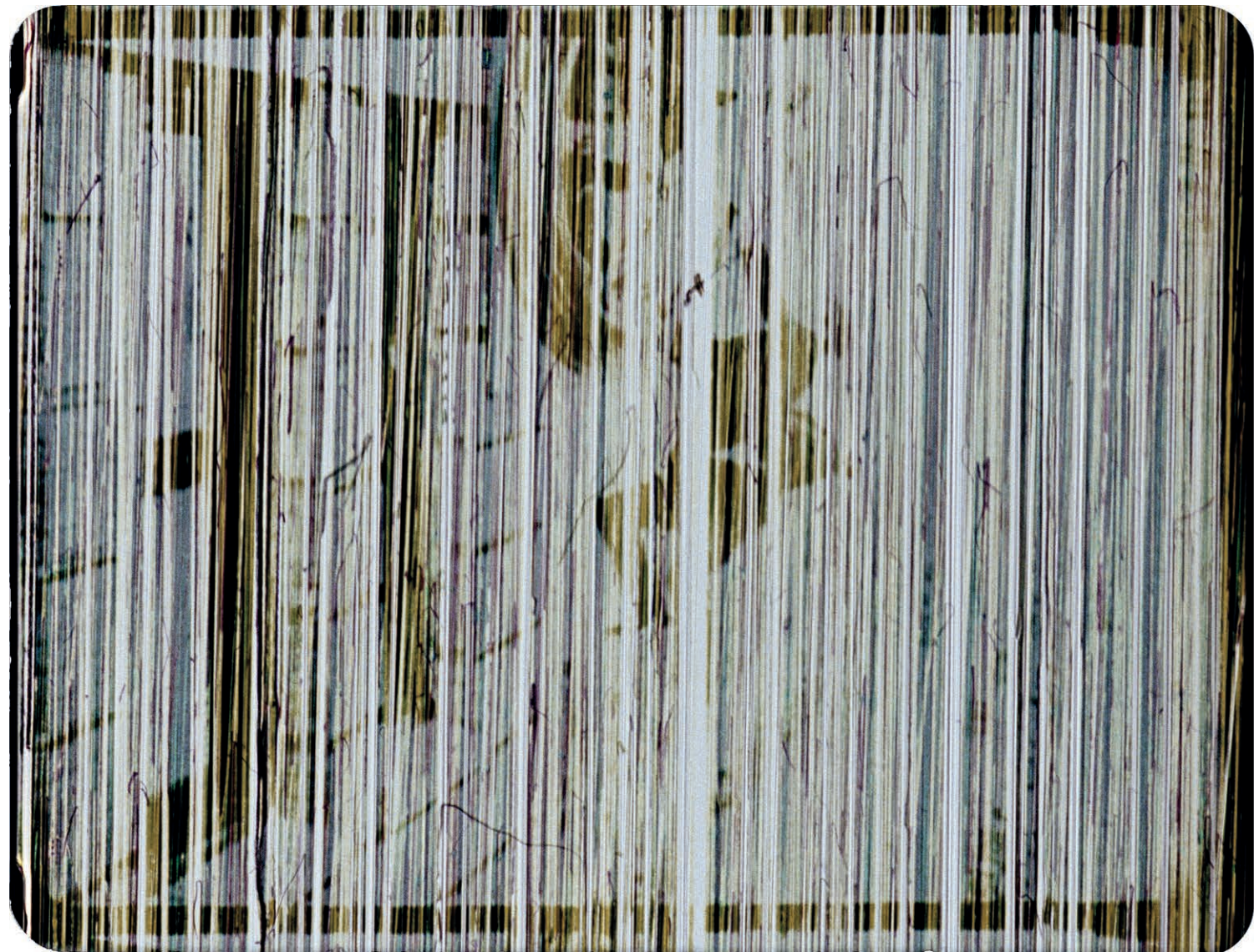
attempted to distance themselves mentally and emotionally from their environment. In extreme cases, agoraphobia and hypersensitivity led to a nervous breakdown. More commonly, indifference towards human relations resulted in what Simmel called the blasé attitude.[10] This was a kind of mental layer offering protection from the over-stimulation of modern life. Simmel, and later Freud, suggested that only new or extreme stimuli (shocks) could penetrate this protective layer and the blasé attitude drove people to seek out ever-more intense experiences.[11]

Hollywood directors in the 1920s understood that the success of action films depended on new sensations which might snap the jaded urbanite out of their apathy and satisfy an apparently insatiable appetite for novelty. The climactic moment in *Safety Last!* was inspired by Lloyd's own experience of being an urban spectator:

> I watched him [Bill Strothers] scale this whole building […] until he finally reached the top. Well, it made such a terrific impression on me, and stirred my emotions to such a degree that I thought, 'My, if I can possibly do that to an audience – if I can capture that on screen – I think I've got something that's never been done before'.[12]

A century later, it's striking how familiar these experiences of urban modernity still are, but also how relevant the formula for thrill-seeking remains. Despite the profound transition to a user-centred world of digital images and immersive personal technology, audiences continue to be driven by a desire to feel the pulse of life from the security of their living rooms. Furthermore, the city continues to be a source of thrilling danger, with urban crowds drawn to high-rise spectacles where an emotional intensity might still be found, as the popularity of glass walkways and vertiginous viewing platforms demonstrates.[13]

Yass's two-minute loop serves as a commentary on this continuity. Caught in an endless cycle, we watch the heart-stopping moment with diminishing sensation and, with each repetition, the scratched lines etched through the image multiply, mirroring our own internal adjustment. Faced with this ceaseless stimulation we grow immune and the thrill of the moment recedes from view, like the image itself. The scratches record and document the act of repetition, like marks etched on a scoreboard, impossible to count, blurring into one. These tracks echo the sensory buffer we create to cope with a constant barrage of information and data.

Repetition is itself a hallmark of modernity, found in the regularity and clock-watching of the industrial workplace and the algorithms of the smart city. Jeffrey Schnapp talks about two distinct regimes of

repetition which dictate the relationship between machines, human bodies and speed. The first, based on Enlightenment ideas, approaches humans and machines in terms of duplication and identifies modernity with standardisation and predictability. The second opposing regime, anti-Enlightenment in essence, views human and machine in terms of surprise, and identifies modernity with novelty, danger and unpredictability.[14] Yass's *Safety Last* positions itself across these two regimes and, in doing so, the artist's loop perfectly captures a central paradox of modernity. The action film is able to commodify thrill only by rendering apparent danger safe. The shock of the new – the pervading sense that we are living in a time of irreversible and man-made change which marks a decisive break with the past – is set against the predictability of infinite repetition. The timelessness of the clip makes it as resonant today as it was at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Endnotes

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4 Arthur B. Friedman and Harold Lloyd, 'Interview with Harold Lloyd', Film Quarterly 15(4) (1962); Jacob Smith, 'The Adventures of the Human Fly, 1830-1930', Early Popular Visual Culture 6(1) (2008), pp. 51-66: pp. 51-2.

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10 David Frisby, Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1988), pp. 73-4.

11 See Frisby, Fragments of Modernity, pp. 20-22.

12 Harold Lloyd quoted in Harold Lloyd: The Man on the Clock, T. Dardis (New York: Viking Press, 1983), pp. 117-118.

13 Davide Deriu, 'Skywalking in the City: Glass Platforms and the Architecture of Vertigo', Emotions, Space and Society, 28 (August 2018), pp. 94-103. See also Davide Deriu and Josephine Kane, 'Guest editors' introduction: Towards a Vertigology of Contemporary Cities', Emotions, Space and Society, 28 (August 2018), pp. 79-83.

14 Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Crash (Speed as Engine of Individuation)', Modernism/modernity 6(1) (1999), p. 34.

Lighthouse

# *Lighthouse*: To the Lighthouse   Jean Wainwright

Turning, she looked across the bay, and there, sure enough, coming regularly across the waves first two quick strokes and then one long steady stroke, was the light of the Lighthouse. It had been lit.[1]

Designed to withstand battering by winds, pummelling by waves and magnificent sea sprays, catching the light on their white reflective surfaces or shrouded by sea mists, lighthouses are both monumental and seemingly precarious. They are the subject of myths and romance, continuously warning of impending danger, waves breaking against their structures 'in white splinters like smashed glass upon the rocks.'[2] As a teenager, the sound of the North Foreland Lighthouse booming out its repetitive and compelling warning of dangers lurking beneath the sea's surface in disorienting sea fog provoked in me an imaginative reverie.

Catherine Yass's fascination with lighthouses began with her interest in the design of some of their structures: she was 'attracted to the way that the lighthouse standing in the sea was supposedly saving people's lives, which is aspirational but it is not always going to work – as if they are trying to control the waves'.[3] This, coupled with Yass's dreams of drowning and her previous films focusing on

vertiginous experiences, such as *Descent* (2002) and *High Wire* (2008), kindled in her a desire to complete a trilogy. But it was not until she was offered a commission by the De La Warr Pavilion in Bexhill-on-Sea and discovered the Royal Sovereign Lighthouse, a distinctive and surreal looking modernist structure in the shallow waters of the English Channel, five miles off Eastbourne, that she found her subject for *Lighthouse* (2011). The strangeness and beauty of the Royal Sovereign design intrigued her, it was 'almost alien to its surroundings'. It had been deserted since 1994 when automation removed the necessity for three lighthouse keepers to live, for up to three months at a time, in the middle of a churning sea. Yass studied The Royal Sovereign's distinctive construction and, observing that its large platform supported on a column faced north, south, east and west, began thinking of how she might film it 'like a temporal drawing'. She was also fascinated by the feat of engineering that had gone into its design and completion in 1971, the long and painstaking clearing of underwater boulders and the preparation of screeding on the seabed to make the solid foundation. Replacing the previous lightship that had marked the Royal Sovereign shoal since 1895, the structure was towed and floated out in sections and, once the central column was in place,
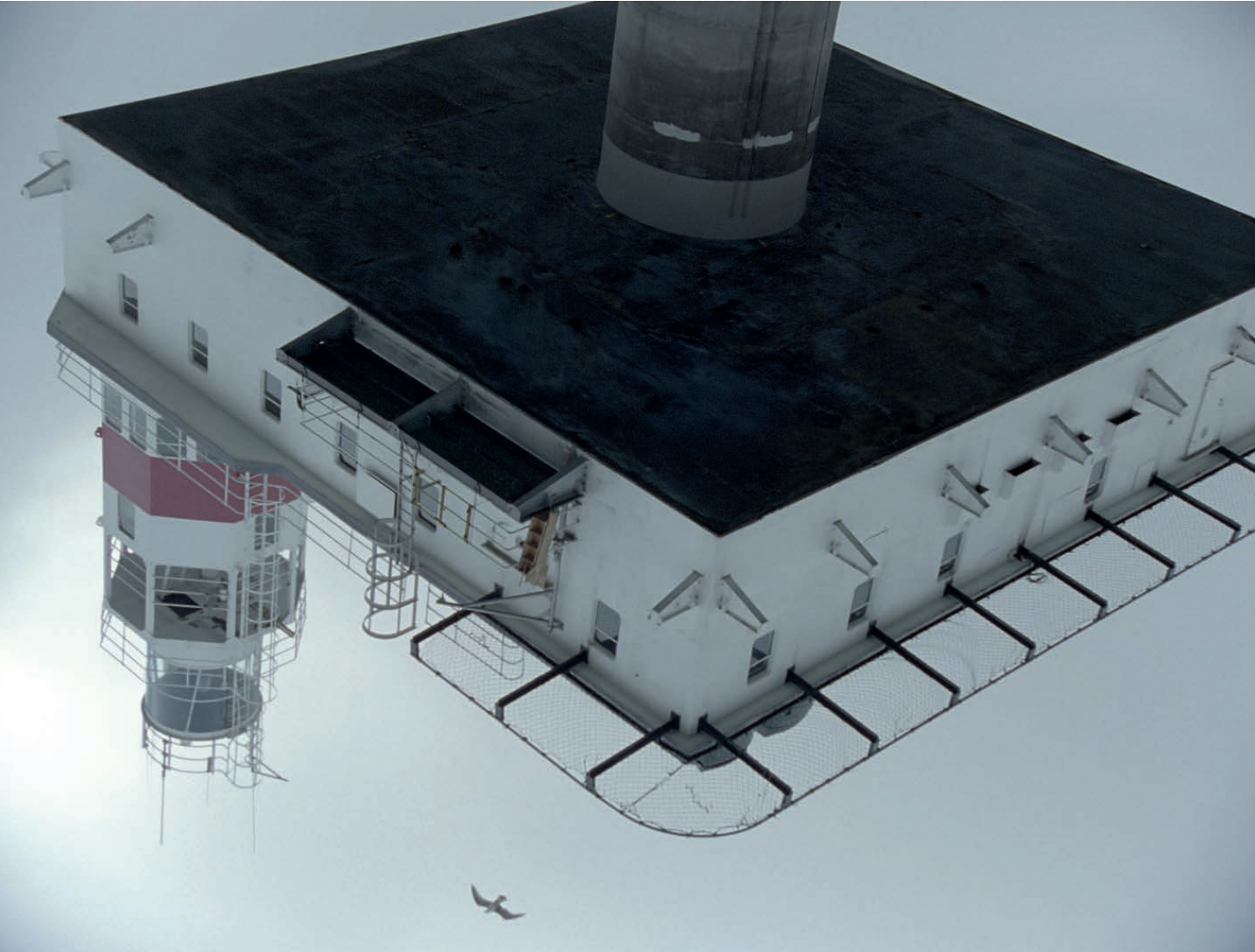
the telescopic inner section was jacked up in an ingenious way.

In *Lighthouse* Yass wanted to acknowledge both her fears of falling and drowning and her thrall of the sea; she also wanted to evoke her fascination with leaning over the side of boats and being mesmerised by the 'suck and wake' as the vessel slices through the waves, but at the same time, how boats or helicopters (both used in her film) would bring on her motion sickness. Yass described the effect as feeling as if 'something in my body is resisting the disorientation and it's very physical…Maybe the sickness comes out of a fear of displacement'.[4] To evoke a psychological portrait of the Royal Sovereign as well as acknowledging the feat of modernist engineering that the lighthouse represents, she deployed clever cinematography and editing. Her idea was to begin the film in a controlled way and then

> break it down as if you were drowning, or you were thrown off-balance and fell into the sea, how in those circumstances your bearings would disintegrate… for me, it's like a parallel with dying: you would maybe forget the logic of things and maybe time and language would start to get all jumbled up, or come undone. You know, if you have a flat spiral made out of paper and you cut it and you pull the bottom out and it goes into another dimension – I was thinking in that direction.[5]

Yass's meticulous planning left nothing to chance, which when dealing with the vagaries of unpredictable seas and changeable weather patterns was challenging. To fully realise her vision, she needed a cinematographer (Franz Pagot) skilled in underwater and stunt filming; she had to frustratingly wait months for the perfect weather conditions and needed to grapple with the logistics of filming from a helicopter. The underwater sequences also proved challenging. Firstly they could not take place when originally planned due to the amount of sea algae; additionally both the stunt rider on the underwater bike and diver had to carry knives in case they became entangled in fishermen's nets or other debris which were lurking underwater hazards.

Yass's vision was very different from those images that are familiar to us of tempestuous seas pounding against the traditional red and white Bell Rock lighthouse designed by the engineer Robert Stevenson in 1810 or JMW Turner's painting for a frontispiece to promote Stevenson's revolutionary design in 1819. Nor is it like Edward Hopper's 1927 paintings of Cape Elizabeth Light (also known as Two Lights), where he focused on depicting the stark form standing silently and magnificently on land from different viewpoints and lighting conditions. Yass instead staged a drama for our bodies and our imagination. She proactively evoked the psychological dangers that lurk in the depths and

shallows of seas, and the effects on architectural space pitched against the power and unpredictable nature of currents, the challenging upwelling and downwelling.

Yass's original sketches for filming portrayed a circulating helicopter on one level above the structure, then a cut to a close-up also circling round the lighthouse, but this time with the image itself turning on the plane of the screen. The turning theme would be maintained when the camera goes on to the boat:

> although the image isn't spiralling any more the confusion is continued, because rather than doing a straight spiral I opened it out, going down the post, so it was as though the spiral was losing its own logic and coming undone. When the camera goes underwater there's another spiral: it goes around the post again, but upside down. You don't notice it at first, but there's light coming from the bottom of the image which gives a sense of having lost your balance or orientation. [6]

Yass's initial plans are beautifully executed. Citing Kristeva as an influence, she 'dances' round the structure transferring her vertiginous experiences into our tumultuous journey, as our bodies become the camera lens and we experience 12 minutes 42 seconds of being tumbled and turned around the

lighthouse and its platform, circling, spiralling, being suspended upside down and submerged. We begin our disorientating experience on the sea's surface at eye level, our horizon pitching and rolling with each wave, the sound of the wind in our ears. Sunlight suddenly emerges illuminating the grey sea surface with dancing silver highlights. We are then taken on a dizzying swoop above the Royal Sovereign as we are rotated around in a bird's eye view. Our eyes are not allowed to rest as the lighthouse is circled constantly until we are pitched upside down, disorienting us and causing us to lose our centre of gravity. We are then flung down to sea level again, seeing the waves swirling above us rather than below. The film continues with increasingly destabilising camera angles as we are rotated around the structure like a clock and are moved up and down the circular column into the swirling whirlpool of waves which threatens to suck us down to the sea bed. The beautiful camera work captures the idiosyncrasy of the Royal Sovereign's design in all its modernist splendour; the light, the tower, the accommodation, the ladders, the helipad platform.

As the film progresses the camera becomes more unstable, moving constantly from pan shot to close up, the editing seamlessly catapulting us from above to below through twists and reversals viewed from the boat and the helicopter, although we see neither. The strange structure seen from above and beneath

becomes even stranger as we are constantly rotated. We do not see the treacherous rocks beneath the surface or the hazards of the shallow shoal waiting to run a ship aground, but rather are caught in the centrifugal force caused by the lighthouse itself and are sucked underwater. The sound changes at this point to that strange muffled sensation that one gets when suddenly submerged. We can just make out though the green murkiness, sea lichen and barnacles clinging to the structure's column, its central core holding steady while all around water seethes.

As Yass suggests, most of her shots were pre-planned but she only thought of being upside-down underwater when she saw the light coming through the surface of the sea. We are poignantly reminded of scenes of drowning, of seafarers or migrants, of lost lives, but her film is executed with not a body or shipwreck in sight, rather we are the ones being tipped upside down and caught in currents which we cannot conquer. The entire film is designed to upset our balance, disorient us and make us feel what Yass experiences: it reminds us of the fragility of our bodies and our instincts to try to keep equilibrium. There is perhaps a poetic potency in this loss of orientation provoked by the film, in our current climate, her film as a metaphor for our human condition.

At the time of writing, the Royal Sovereign Lighthouse is in the process of being decommissioned, its expected deterioration over fifty years increasingly presenting a hazard to those it is trying to protect. It is waiting to be dismantled piece by piece: another challenge to be fought against the unpredictable sea which is both our ally and our enemy. While lighthouses stand like watchtowers guiding and guarding us, we fight over our territorial rights to the sea. Yass's film will remain as a poignant reminder that, however sturdy, these distinctive structures are eventually overcome by the relentless, emotionless and often brutal power of the waves. Yass has created a requiem, a swansong, a powerful reminder of precariousness and balance.

Endnotes

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2   Woolf, *To the Lighthouse* (2018), p. 314.

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4   Author's interview with Yass.

5   Author's interview with Yass.

6   Author's interview with Yass.

High Wire

High Wire: Feeling the Fall

<div style="text-align:right">Catherine James</div>

A body balanced on a wire stretched across the top of two skyscrapers is a drama of voluntary vertigo and a sight that sears the imagination. It is also a vision of freedom from earthbound constraint. With Philippe Petit's extraordinary feat of crossing a wire between the Twin Towers in 1974, tightrope walking had transitioned in context from the natural sublime of Niagara Falls, popular with funambulists during the nineteenth century, to the urban skyline of modernity. As Davide Deriu remarks: 'By reviving an ancient practice on the wane, Petit transposed onto the sky of Manhattan the gravity challenge Blondin had brought on Niagara Falls, thereby redefining the experience of the abyss for the urban age.'[1] In her work, *High Wire* (2008), Catherine Yass selected the generic, post-war tower blocks of Red Road in Glasgow to film a tightrope walk by the funambulist, Didier Pasquette. Organised in conjunction with Artangel, Yass filmed Pasquette attempting to cross a wire installed between two of the 89-metre tower blocks in July 2007. The resulting installation includes filmed footage arranged across four screens and four black-and-white negative lightbox images of the site.

High Wire forms a powerful meditation on the failed utopian projects of 1960s' planning. As Artangel

director, James Lingwood explains: 'Red Road was the perfect place for the conjunction of two different dreams – the architects' and planners' dream of building into the sky, and the individual one of walking into the air: planning, containment and control countered by an expression of space and freedom.'[2] Instead of creating some airy ideal, most post-war housing schemes such as Red Road became mired in social problems and structural decline, demolished less than fifty years later. Pasquette's walk into the air between the towers was imagined somehow as a symbolic counterpoint to the neglect and deprivation associated with Red Road.

Built during Glasgow's slum clearance between 1964 and 1969, Red Road was constructed to provide 4,700 new homes for residents from the old city tenements. The towers themselves, composed of steel frame and deadly asbestos, resembled bleak parodies of 'Manhattan' style, lacking decorative masonry, entablatures or architectural fancies. The scheme's chief architect, Sam Bunton, warned residents that they should not expect any 'airs and graces', as if modern acrophilia were shadowed by failure from the start.[3] At the time of their completion, the Red Road towers composed the highest residential housing development in Europe.

By selecting this environment for *High Wire*, Yass challenges the architect's original injunction by invoking a mingled condition of gravity and grace; the disenfranchisement and neglect endemic in this high-rise social housing plan in contrast to the initial dream of living in the air.

For Yass, the project held even graver consequences, since Pasquette's walk was conducted without safety ropes. This meant extending her artistic agency as never before, mediating his treacherous walk through a camera installed on his helmet. It was almost a step too far. As it turned out on the day, powerful crosswinds at the site prevented Pasquette from completing his 45-metre walk to the other side. After setting out with gritty confidence, at the point of reaching the 20-metre mark, he was forced to retreat by walking slowly and poignantly backwards to the platform. It apparently took many hours for the performer to regain his composure after feeling so imperilled on the wind-blown wire. Nevertheless, his walk in the air was captured forever in Yass's film, conveyed through different camera angles and viewpoints.

Pasquette's failure to cross the wire could be said to enfold wider interpretations. Circus acts such as trapeze and tightrope walking symbolise an aspiration to the superlative; however, the dreadful prospect of a real fall is painfully exposed in *High Wire*. First exhibited in 2008 at the Centre for Contemporary Arts in Glasgow, *High Wire* was shown across four different screens, placing the viewer at the centre of an unstable field of perception. Poised over the drop below in a state of contagious vertigo, we are made to feel the intense danger of moving out across a void. In order not to fall, the wire-walker must produce a stay against the way bodies naturally lean or project forward in anticipation of life, our natural telos of being. Instead, the tightrope demands a body that tames or corrals its energies and inclinations into perfect gravitational alignment. The funambulist's tentative occupation of the air above the cavernous drop between the towers highlights complex connections between human identity and the psychology of the fall.

Falling and failing are profoundly linked.[4] Whilst falling from height is thrilling to the BASE jumper or parachutist, it is also the preserve of suicides and, in the context of sky-high architecture, a subversion of architectural logic. Perhaps we might say that architecture represses our own trembling condition and the unstable condition of earth in its imperative to enclose and stabilise the body. However, the failure of the Red Road towers on a social level, together with their subsequent demolition, produced an opposite effect of precarious identity. Suicide-by-falling was a too frequent event at the estate, as if the vertiginous existences of residents lent the idea

too easily. It is of course the space of the fall that exercises the imagination. How is identity dissolved in that terrifying conversion from falling subject to fallen object? As Kristen Kreider and James O'Leary reflect: 'Is it into or out of thinking that you moved when you crossed that border into falling? When you stepped over the threshold between your worldly existence and a realm of pure force?'[5] In falling, identity is erased as selfhood converts into object-hood.

Historically, Niagara Falls has played host to both tightrope walkers and suicides. Andy Warhol's fascination with death, as developed in his Death and Disaster series, was partly inspired by Marilyn Monroe's death (he chose her publicity shot for the 1953 film, *Niagara*, as the source for his screen prints).[6] Michel Foucault's argument that suicide is a form of resistance to power is at some level echoed by the wire-walker's edgy ownership of the space across the fall.[7] There is something naturally subversive about using high buildings for gravity-defying climbs and balancing acts. It is perhaps the physical work of the performers to move into or stay up in the air that signifies no other motivation than making play or poetry. Play represents opposition to the Protestant work ethic and, by extension, to the paternalistic modernisers who moved large populations into the sky on the periphery of cities such as Glasgow.

There are certain fundamental contradictions in the way architecture encloses the abstract and the experiential. Yass's lightbox negatives of Red Road resemble ghostly palimpsests of Bunton's original plan frozen in time. However, the artist complicates time by scoring a line across the negatives to represent the high wire: thereby she uses a literal inscription by hand to interrupt photography's spell and the architect's dream. Skyscrapers are born of utopian dreams, but end in the failure of society to match up to that vision. To make a street in the sky or reach ecstatically into the realm of air is naturally utopian, the air being understood as a 'vast oubliette' or infinitude.[8]

Yass's photographs and films have a tendency to open up space, whether water, voids, or sky. Whether layering photographic images or slowing down time, she opens up space for thought. Photographic negatives and inversions of space form part of the same continuum. Many of her works create oblique and multiple views, producing glinting diagonals. These new angles of sight disclose whatever is concealed in the slanted viewpoint or vector: the inverted images of the lighthouse off the coast of Bexhill (*Lighthouse*, 2011); the slow descent down a skyscraper (*Descent*, 2002); or the world turned upside down in a remote-controlled helicopter flight (*Flight*, 2002). The state of falling is a conscious revelation

of death in life and a heightened awareness of our eventual disintegration into earth. Similarly, the four screens of High Wire connect at our shaky centre, revealing the truth of how our bodies continually lean and shift out of their centre. The film explodes the fantasy of the stable viewpoint in order to manifest the shaky ground that underlies our embodiment. In the general run of things, our bodies are stuck on the ground, scurrying around in peripatetic and forgetful flow. Hence, we often fail to see space or different perspectives. It seems that for Yass, the ocular and the political are profoundly linked, so that in order to open up new ideas and opportunities, we need to see things from a very different perspective.

Endnotes

1   Davide Deriu, 'Taming Vertigo: Philippe Petit and the Subject of High-Wire Walking', in Ruth Anderwald, Karoline Feiertag, and Leonhard Grond (eds), Dizziness – A Resource (Berlin: Sternberg Press, Publication Series of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, 2019), pp. 118-136: p. 135.

2   James Lingwood, Catherine Yass: High Wire (London: Artangel, 2008)

3   Paul Dalgarno, 'Last Days of the Tower', Sunday Herald Magazine (11 May 2008), p. 10.

4   Garrett Soden, Falling (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2003), p. 278.

5   Kristen Kreider and James O'Leary, Falling (Isle of Wight: Copy Press Ltd., 2015), p. 77.

6   Warhol was also intrigued by Evelyn McHale's suicide fall from the Empire State Building. Warhol's Fallen Body: Suicide (1962) was taken from Robert Wiles's famous photograph of McHale lying on a crushed car below, her insides liquefied. Dubbed 'the most beautiful suicide', the image of the young woman was reproduced in Life magazine on 12 May 1947.

7   Christian Hite, 'The Art of Suicide: Notes on Foucault and Warhol', October, 153(1) (July 2015), pp. 65-95.

8   Steven Connor, The Matter of Air: Science and Art of the Ethereal (London: Reaktion, 2010), p. 275.

Descent

Descent: A Fold in Time   Michael Newman

In the 1972 movie *The Poseidon Adventure*, an ocean liner carrying insufficient ballast is turned belly-up by a tidal wave originating in a seabed earthquake. A group of passengers, led by a preacher (Gene Hackman) have to make their way from the ballroom, where they were celebrating the New Year, to the propeller-shaft, which is now the highest point of the ship, and, they hope, above water. By comparison with the passengers' precarious ascent downwards, or descent upwards, the uninflected movement of the camera in Catherine Yass's video installation *Descent* is much more measured. Nonetheless, the simple conceit of inverting the footage that was filmed from a descending crane beside a tower in an office development in the process of construction manages to generate, out of its strange inexorability, an anxiety equal to or even greater than that induced by the disaster movie.

Descent commences with what appears to be the image of a platform suspended in a foggy sky. What is it hanging from? As our point of view begins to rise, or the platform to descend, we slowly pass, on the left side of the screen, floor after floor of the skeleton of a skyscraper. The viewer might notice something strange: fluorescent strip-lights are on the floors. About three-quarters of the way up and

right of centre, a light like a star can just be discerned through the mist, flickering on and off at regular intervals. The fog clears, and a building emerges facing us – the light, we now see, is in or reflecting on one of its windows. Another building appears behind that one and a recessive space opens up in the middle of the image. It is apparent that we are not rising, but descending, yet the buildings are inverted. A tarpaulin flaps at the side of the skeleton, suspended upwards. Now we have reached floors that have received their skin of glass. We can make out the ground, the clay earth of a construction site, and behind that a road with traffic. The ground is coming not up but down to meet us from above. A pulse of light is flashing, and another beside it, at a different rate. We see a hut, and construction workers in fluorescent jackets walking like flies on a ceiling. Then, with a slight bump, the movement stops and the film ends before we reach the ground, or it reaches us.

Canary Wharf, where Yass's *Descent* was shot, is part of the London Docklands real estate development, where the grid of global capitalist financialisation has replaced the old docks. The typical 'international style' corporate office tower introduces a radical asymmetry between those inside and outside.

Jeff Wall, in his essay 'Dan Graham's Kammerspiel', discusses the way in which for those looking up from the street, although glass office towers provide the illusion of transparency, the absence of any visual focus in the grid of the buildings causes the focus to slide along their surface. As a result, these towers offer no privileged locus for the identification of power. From the penthouse office above, the corporate executives gaze down at the city streets below; though apparently detached and in control, they are also caught in the grid's network of power:

In the upper registers of the tower are the executive suites which, inverting an old urbanistic schema, become also the most prestigious and coveted living spaces… In these dwellings, and the offices out of which they have evolved, the entire urban grid is revealed to the majestic gaze of the occupant, a gaze which cannot be returned symmetrically by anyone. The occupant can easily imagine the transcendent social invisibility which envelops him in the act of gazing at the city. At this point the occupant experiences the unique thrill of being theoretically invisible. This elevation to theoretical invisibility is the source of an exaltation whose content is in part the sheer intoxication of power in a power-hungry society, and is in part constituted by a wave of displaced energy: that of the man in the street who, in looking wonderingly upwards, recognizes his own subjection to surveillance…[1]

Because the movement of the shot in *Descent* is vertical rather than horizontal, and allied with the structure of an office tower, it engages the phenomenology of power implicit in such a structure. However, at the same time Yass's film frustrates and disrupts the visuality implicit in the architecture of global capital. First, Wall's description presupposes a clear view, whereas Yass's video begins in the clouds, where the look is dissipated and enveloped, until the glimmering light we can just make out becomes the illumination emanating from the window of a facing building. Second, the viewer is brought down in such a way that, near the end, the ground rushes not up but down from above to almost meet them. If the later stages bring the subject down almost to the base of the tower, the ground fails to promise support, since rather than rising from below to provide a surface on which to land, due to the inversion of the footage, it drops from above. Suddenly, at the last minute, the ground comes down as if to crush us, like that moment of the impending catastrophe in a dream, which we avert by waking up.

Descent allowed Yass to explore further the implications of the temporally divided present condensed into still images in her transparencies on lightboxes. Forming part of the original installation of *Descent*, these include areas of blue and acid green caused by making a print from a juxtaposition

of a positive and a negative, taken with an interval of about five seconds. By inverting the footage during the editing process of *Descent*, Yass doubles the movement. Because it is not up or down, but up and down, this both divides the present, and folds the 'line' of time back on itself. Just as we are simultaneously moving up and down, so we cannot tell whether we are moving from the past to the future or the future to the past.

Film and video opened up for Yass the possibility of a direct exploration of movement, which again took two directions: the movement of a human subject and the movement of the camera. Yass's *Descent*, which consists of a single, long vertical tracking shot, recalls two key works from the history of experimental film by Michael Snow, *Wavelength* (1966-67) and *La Région Centrale* (1970-71). *Wavelength* comprises a forty-five minute zoom shot from a still camera in a studio steadily approaching a photograph of sea-waves on the facing wall, in the course of which four incidents happen, including a death, to which the zoom remains indifferent: the question raised is that of the relation between the human event and the camera-event. The camera is capable of taking us beyond human existence: a zoom is possible for camera-vision, not for unmediated human vision. The 'indifference' of the camera movement to the human events in *Wavelength* is echoed, and magnified, in *La Région*

Centrale, which proposes a mode of seeing that not only is mechanically produced by the camera and the rotating device but seems positively inhuman.[2]

The steady, measured descent of the crane that controls the movement of the camera reminds us that the latter is a mechanism. At the same time, the viewer identifies with the viewpoint of the camera. The effect of this is to facilitate the transition discussed above from human perception to camera perception as something different from the human. Yass's installation thus becomes the site for a becoming-machine of the human. In the history of cinema this development is initiated by Dziga Vertov's 1929 film *Man with a Movie Camera* where the vision of the camera is assimilated with the life of machines in the city. The detachment of the camera from the human is taken to an extreme in the extraordinary long shot in Michelangelo Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975), during which Locke (Jack Nicholson), a journalist who has assumed the identity of a dead arms-dealer, dies off-screen, as the camera, moving slowly and evenly, passes through a barred window-frame and performs a 360-degree pan. Continuing though the death of the main character, performing an operation that would be beyond the capacity of a human body, the camera becomes the embodiment of an inhuman gaze. *Descent* takes its place among experimental films exploring the experience of 'real

time' as a mode paradoxically made possible by a mechanism, pre-eminently Andy Warhol's *Empire* (1964), which consists of a single static shot through several rolls of film of the Empire State Building, New York, filmed from the forty-fourth floor of the Time Life building. The inversion of the footage in Yass's much shorter *Descent* opens up the actuality of 'real time' to another dimension.

The combination of the extremely measured pace and a single direction with a disorientation seems to increase the more we can see as the fog clears. We think we can orient ourselves – situate our body in relation to the directions of up, down, left, right, forward, back – but precisely because we attempt to do so, once we think we can see where we are, the disorientation becomes all the greater. That from which we think we can get our bearings rather betrays us. Our familiar world is shaken and, confronted with the anticipation of death, we are invited to re-appropriate it in another way.[3] The shot stops before the ground is reached and starts again in the clouds. For terminus is substituted the loop of repetition. Is *Descent* like the repeated dream that marks the attempt to 'bind' a trauma, to make it bearable? Among the definitions of 'Depression' in Webster's Revised Dictionary (1913) are: a sinking; a falling in of the surface; a sinking below its true place. Depression and melancholy involve a movement downwards that combines the physical and the

psychic. Yet, in the early stage of *Descent* a point of light glimmers through the fog, as if blinking at a wreck to come: warning or salvation? If the point of light is the place from which the gaze looks at you,[4] exactly where the subject is situated in the film remains obscure, and in any case is a movement rather than a position, and one where the queasily inverted ground is approached but never reached. Is not the gulf that is spanned that between the non-human, associated with the machine-vision of the camera, and the finitude of the existence of the human being suspended between life and death? But, at the same time, descent is also ascent.

This is extracted and revised from a longer essay, 'A Fold in Time: Catherine Yass's Descent' in *Catherine Yass*, (Exhibition catalogue, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno), Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain: CAAM, 2005.

Endnotes

1 Jeff Wall, 'Dan Graham's Kammerspiel', in Gary Dufour (ed.), Dan Graham: Exhibition Catalogue (Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 1985), p. 26.

2 See Gilles Deleuze, Cinema 1: The Movement-Image, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 80-86.

3 See Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), pp. 279-311.

4 For the gaze as point of light, see Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis, trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 94-97.

DETAILS

Catherine Yass

Catherine Yass (b. London, UK, 1963) lives and works in London. She trained at the Slade School of Art, London; the Hochschüle der Künst, Berlin; and Goldsmiths College, London. In 2002, Yass was shortlisted for The Turner Prize. She also represented the UK at the 10th Indian Triennial, 2001, and won the Glenn Dimplex Photography prize in 1999. Her work features in a number of collections worldwide including Tate, London; Arts Council of England, The British Council and the Government Art Collection, London; The National Museums and Galleries of Wales; MoMA, New York; The Jewish Museum, New York; Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh; the National Museum of Women in the Arts Collection, Washington DC; The Linda Pace Foundation, USA and the Phillips Collection, UK.

Major commissions and exhibitions include Legacy, The Supreme Court, to celebrate 100 years of women in the Law (2019); Royal London, Vital Arts (Barts Health NHS Trust) artist residency and Wellcome Trust (2018); Aeolian Piano, to mark the departure of the BBC from the BBC TV Centre (2017); Decommissioned, The Jewish Community Centre, London (2013); Rambert Dance Company, London (2013); Lighthouse, De La Warr Pavilion (2011); High Wire, Artangel (2008); Lock, a British Council residency at the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River (2006); and the set design for Split Sides, Merce Cunningham, Brooklyn Academy of Music, New York (2003).

Group shows include RHE: Everything Flows, Galerie Lelong NY (2021); The Architecture of London, Guildhall Gallery (2019); Precarious Balance, Centre of Contemporary Arts, New Zealand (2016); Work, Rest, Play: British Photography from 1960s to Today, The Photographer's Gallery, London / Mingsheng Arts Museum, Shanghai (2015); MART Museum, Rovereto, Italy (2014); Mumok, Museum Moderner Kunst, Vienna (2014); Walk on: From Richard Long to Janet Cardiff – 40 Years of Walking, Plymouth, UK (2014).

Recent publications include *The Roundel: 100 Artists Remake a London Icon. Art on the Underground* (2016); *Work, Rest and Play. British Photography from the 1960s to Today*, The Photographer's Gallery (2015); *Why does it not have to be in Focus?* Julie Higgins, Thames and Hudson, UK (2013); *Sanctuary: Britain's Artists and their Studios*, Thames and Hudson (2012); *The Mechanical Hand. Artists' Projects at Pauper's Press*, Black Dog Publishing (2012).

Films

Concrete Mixer (2021)
HD video transferred to digital media, 4'10"

Director of Photography Nick Gordon-Smith
Editor Catherine Yass
Thanks to Capital Concrete

Last Stand (2019)
16mm film transferred to digital media, 4'10"

Director of Photography Jono Smith
Sound Catherine Yass, Simon Keep
Stills camera Matan Ashkenazy
Editor Catherine Yass
Site Management Matthew Loughlin, Killian McHugh
Post Production Management Silver Salt Restoration
Conform Anthony Badger, Silver Salt Restoration
Colourist Ray King, Silver Salt Restoration
Supported by Guildhall Gallery and Bellway Homes
Thanks to David Broder, Robin Klassnik, Jessica Ramsay, Elizabeth Scott

Royal London (2018)
16mm film transferred to digital media, 4'35"

Director of Photography John Adderley and Jamie Cairney
Motion Control Specialist Justin Pentacost
Grip James Grimes
Sound Simon Keep
Editors Catherine Yass and Roberta Bononi
Studio Hilary Knox
Post Production Management Silver Salt Restoration
Conform Anthony Badger, Silver Salt Restoration
Colourist Ray King, Silver Salt Restoration
Supported by Vital Arts (Barts Health NHS Trust) Artist-in-Residency and the Wellcome Trust
Thanks to James Peto, Catsou Roberts, Skanska Demolition

Aeolian Piano (2017)
35mm film transferred to digital media, 20'23"

Developed with Hughes Meyer Studio
Architectural Producer Francesca Hughes, Hughes Meyer Studio
Producer David Broder
Architect Gergely Kovacs, Hughes Meyer Studio
Structural Engineer Matthew Wells, Techniker

Assistant Structural Engineers Jan Tomsu and Amir Alwan, Techniker
Director of Photography Jono Smith
Camera Operators Oliver Ledwith, Luke Menges
Focus Puller Chris Pollitt
Clapper Loader Ben Jones
Grip Adrian Macarthy
Rigger Pat Daly
Stills Camera Hilary Knox
Sound Recordist Nigel Albermaniche
Sound Design Simon Keep
Editor Catherine Yass
Production Manager Parissa Dunn
Piano Rig Paul Rhodes
Piano Tuner Hugo Veryzer
Site Management David Ivory, Mace
Crane Drivers Ian Greaves, Bob Manchester
Banksmen David Briggs, Frank O'Hare
Post Production Consultant Tim McGill
Post Production Management Marcus Gage, MX1
Conform Anthony Badger, MX1
Colourist Ray King, MX1
Commissioned by White Noise
Supported by Arts Council England, Alison Jacques Gallery, Galerie Lelong
Thanks to Margot Bannerman, Michael Brzezinski, Amy Dickson, Liza Fior, Hugo Glendinning, Jonathan Meyer, Simona Hughes, Alison Jacques, Maurice Ostro, Mary Sabbatino, David Sheppard, Anthony Spira, Sabine Unamun

Lighthouse (2011)
35mm film transferred to digital media, 12'44"

Producer Keiko Nagai
Director of Photography Franz Pagot
Sound Simon Keep
Editors Catherine Yass and Roberta Bononi
Helicopter Flying Pictures
Skipper Roger Wilson, Malcolm Charles Durrant
Boat crew Tack Baldwin, Nicky Button, James Matai, Martin Qesku
Studio Hilary Knox
Post Production Management Silver Salt Restoration
Conform Anthony Badger, Silver Salt Restoration
Colourist Ray King, Silver Salt Restoration
Supported by Arts Council England, De La Warr Pavilion, Alison Jacques Gallery, Galerie Lelong
Thanks to Alan Haydon, Alison Jacques, Mary Sabbatino, Sabine Unamun, Jane Won

Safety Last (2011)
16mm film loop, 2'10"

Editor Catherine Yass
Film edit no.w.here
Film print Haghe Film
Film loop David Leister
Thanks to Harold Lloyd Estate

High Wire (2008)
16mm film and HD cam transferred to digital media, 7' 4" [Four screens]

Two versions: four screens and one screen

High Wire artist Dider Pasquette
Director of Photography Ossie McLean
Camera operators Alick Fraser, Lewis Buchann, Alan Maxwell, Kathy Friend, Marcus Domleo
Sound Simon Keep
Editor Catherine Yass
Location managers Tom Dingle and Rob Bowman (Artangel)
Concierge managers Enrico Amato, Linsey McCabe
Estate Co-ordinator Richie Carroll
Site security Gary Lathan, Safety First Solutions
Rigging RLJ Mechanical Services Ltd
Health and Safety Marion Lamb
Structural Investigation Doug Henderson
Post production Soho Images
Commissioned by Artangel and Glasgow International
Supported by Arts Council England, Glasgow International, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Institut Français
Thanks to James Cassidy (GHA), James Lingwood, Francis McKee, the residents of Red Road Flats Glasgow, Nina Pearlman

Descent (2002)
16mm film transferred to digital media, 8' 7"

Director of Photography Mattias Nyberg
Editor Catherine Yass
Post production Soho Images
Supported by Canary Wharf Public Arts Programme
Thanks to Theresa Bergne, Len Thornton

Special thanks to Christopher Kul-Want and Enna Thea Kul-Want

Authors

Davide Deriu is Reader in Architectural History and Theory at the University of Westminster. His research explores critical intersections between spatial and visual cultures, and appears in journals such as *Architectural Theory Review*, *The Journal of Architecture*, and *Emotion, Space and Society*. Edited works include *Emerging Landscapes: Between Production and Representation* (Ashgate, 2014). At Westminster, he currently leads the 'Vertigo in the City' project. He previously curated the exhibition 'Modernism in Miniature: Points of View' at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (2011).

Catherine James is Lecturer in Academic Practice at University of the Arts, London and Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. Since completing her doctoral studies at the London Consortium in 2004, she held the post of Lecturer in Modern & Contemporary Art at Christie's Education for many years and has contributed to a variety of conferences and journals related to her research on gravity in art and performance. She published her book *Falling for Gravity: Invisible Forces in Contemporary Art* with Peter Lang in 2018.

Josephine Kane is a design historian with a special interest in experiences of pleasure, modernity and the built environment since the nineteenth century. She has written about the history of urban thrill-seeking and the design of early amusement parks and co-edited 'Vertigo in the City', a special issue of *Emotion Space and Society*, with Davide Deriu (2018). She teaches on the History of Design masters programme run jointly by the Victoria & Albert Museum and the Royal College of Art.

Christopher Kul-Want is a writer and editor of *Philosophers on Art: From Kant to the Postmodernists, A Critical Reader*; and *Philosophers on Film, From Bergson to Badiou, A Critical Reader* (Columbia University Press, 2010; 2019). He is leader of the Master's in Research course in Art Theory and Philosophy at Central Saint Martins, University of the Arts, London.

Michael Mazière is an artist and curator, and Reader in film and video at the University of Westminster. His practice encompasses the production of artworks, the curation of exhibitions, lecturing, and writing about artists' film and video. He is the co-founder and curator of Ambika P3, an experimental research space for international contemporary art, an active member of the Centre for Research and Education in Arts and Media, and co-editor of the *Moving Image Review and Art Journal*, a peer-reviewed scholarly publication devoted to artists' film and video and its contexts.

Michael Newman is Professor of Art Writing at Goldsmiths, University of London. He has published numerous essays on modern and contemporary artists, as well as thematic essays on the wound, the horizon, memory, drawing, and nonsense. He is the author of *Richard Prince Untitled (couple)* (2006); *Jeff Wall: Works and Writings* (2007); *Price, Seth* (2010); and 'Stuart Brisley: Performing the Political Body and Eating Shit' in *Stuart Brisley* (2015). He is co-editor of *Rewriting Conceptual Art* (1999) and *The State of Art Criticism* (2007). The exhibitions he has curated include Tacita Dean at York University, Toronto; Revolver2 at Matt's Gallery (with Robin Klassnik), London; and FIGURE/S: Drawing After Bellmer at The Drawing Room, London.

Lucy Reynolds has lectured and published extensively. Her research focuses on the moving image, feminism, political space and collective practice. She edited the anthology *Women Artists, Feminism and the Moving Image*, and co-edits the *Moving Image Review and Art Journal* (*MIRAJ*). She runs the MRes in Creative Practice at the Centre for Research in Education, Art and Media (CREAM) at the University of Westminster. As an artist, her ongoing sound work *A Feminist Chorus* has been heard at the Glasgow International Festival, the Wysing Arts Centre, The Grand Action cinema, Paris and Grand Union galleries, Birmingham.

Jean Wainwright is an art historian, critic and curator living in London. She is Director of the Fine Art and Photography Research Centre (FAPRC) at the University for the Creative Arts. Her areas of expertise are in contemporary art and photography, with particular reference to the artist's voice and Andy Warhol. Jean has published numerous catalogue essays and book chapters, and regularly appears on radio and TV. She has curated a number of exhibitions including three on the theme of the sea. Her book *Ship to Shore: Art and the Lure of the Sea* was published in 2018.

Maria Walsh is Reader in Artists' Moving Image at Chelsea College of Arts, University of the Arts London. She has published on artists' moving image and critical theory in *Rhizomes, Angelaki, Screen, Film-Philosophy, NECSUS* and *MIRAJ* (*Moving Image Review & Art Journal*). She is Reviews Editor of *MIRAJ* and her art criticism appears regularly in *Art Monthly*. Recent publications include: 'Female Solidarity as Uncommodified Value: Lucy Beech's Cannibals and Rehana Zaman's Some Women, Other Women and all the Bittermen', in *Women Artists*, *Feminism and the Moving Image* (Bloomsbury, 2019); and *Therapeutic Aesthetics: Performative Encounters in Moving Image Artworks* (Bloomsbury, 2020).

FALLING AWAY

Catherine Yass at Ambika P3

22 October 2021 – 21 November 2021

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Business & Venue Manager Niall Carter
Production and Installation Manager Jonathan Samuels
Venue Assistant Eleftherios Dimoulias

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