

# Multiscreen video art

The advantage of the multiscreen over single screen presentations

Nick Terra

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Mentor: Patrick van Rossem

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## Introduction

Since the early sixties there has been an increase in artists who have been using video and film as their medium, either documenting performances or making grand scale Hollywood style films like Matthey Barney's *River of Fundament* (2014). Video art never really moved me. Most of the time I sat through about five minutes of it, noticing my attention was not with the screen all the time. In November I went to see *Expanded Cinema* in the EYE Museum, Amsterdam. The exhibition showed the work of Isaac Julien (1960), Yang Fudong (1971) and Fiona Tan (1957). The first two I had only read about, the latter I had already seen work of. Most of the shown works were over 30 minutes in running time, and surprisingly I sat through them entirely. My attention was somehow caught by the multiple screens installed in different formations. I could not experience all the footage at the same time, which led me to staying a bit longer for every work. Sitting in the museum's restaurant I wondered what had happened. How was I able to sit through all of the works without losing my attention? Were it perhaps the multiple screens?

Finding more information on multiple screen video art didn't seem easy. There seemed to be a deficit in articles really focusing on this usage of the medium video and in particular about the multiscreen environment. This caught my attention and I decided to research this artistic strategy in my master thesis. As medium in art, video is now both recognized and used worldwide. But why do artists choose for multiscreen presentations instead of single screens? This is not the easiest question; like asking a painter why he made something red instead of green. But looking at the advantages of multiple screens compared to single screen video projections seemed like an interesting niche of video art theory which was not yet covered enough. My lead research question in this thesis is: what advantages does the artistic use of multiple screens have over the use of a single screen in video art installations?

In chapter one I will therefore sketch a small history of video art and tie the evolution of multiscreen video art to the rise of performance and installation art, as well as to certain evolutions within visual culture. Chapter two will look at the work of three artists and the artistic intentions behind the use of multiple screens in their oeuvres. Chapter three will analyse these intentions and reasons by relating them to the critical reception of the works in reviews and scholarly writings of art critics and historians. The artists I will discuss are Shirin Neshat, Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong. Two of them I encountered at the *Expanded Cinema* exhibition. Fiona Tan was initially my third artist, but after a period of research, I found that there were not a lot of interviews done with Tan, which slowed down my research and made it difficult to come to conclusions. I therefore looked at other artists and found Shirin Neshat to be of great interest. She seemed an interesting case, as she had been moving from photography to multiscreen and later to single screen video art. I could have taken a lot of other artists, but since the exhibition *Expanded Cinema* used Julien, Fudong and Tan, I thought it would be good to use their work as an example for my writing. It gave me a chance to really see and experience the work and analyse them thoroughly. Chapter one will mostly be compiled of information from anthologies on video art, art history, and in specific the art history of the 1960s and 1970s and the transformation of visual culture as it developed under the rise of mass media. This chapter will form the theoretical framework for the next

chapters. The case studies done in chapter two and three will use interviews with the named artists, visual analyses and descriptions of their work as primary sources. In chapter one the artistic intentions for the use of multiscreen will be examined by comparing them to exhibition reviews and critical texts on the artists. This comparison also allows the understanding of the use of multiscreen installations within a critical art discourse.

Throughout my thesis Stan Douglas and Christopher Eamon's (ed) *Art of Projection* (2009) and Micheal Rush's *Video Art* (2007) have been a prime source for my research into multiscreen video art practice and function as an infrastructure of my analyses.<sup>1</sup> Rush illustrates contemporary artists' use of different types of video and film, including multiscreen, while Douglas and Eamon describe one of the first big examples of multiscreen installations in public in the form of the Charles and Ray Eames multiscreen presentation for the World Fair of 1959. For the work of Isaac Julien, Shirin Neshat and Yang Fudong, the following publications have been crucial: Georgio Verzotti's *Shirin Neshat* (2002), Arthur C. Danto's *Shirin Neshat* (2000), Arthur C. Danto & Marina Abramovic, *Shirin Neshat* (2010), B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich* (2002), Li Zenhua, *Yang Fudong* (2012) and Zhang Yuxuan, *Interview the Power Behind* in Li Zenhua a.o, *Dawn Mist Separation Faith: Yang Fudong's Solo Exhibition* (2009).

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<sup>1</sup> Beatriz Colomina's chapter *Enclosed by images: The Eameses' multiscreen architecture* in Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon's *Art of Projection*(2009) shows examples of multiscreen presentations in the past. Chapter four of Micheal Rush's *Video Art* (2007) presents an overview of the current use of multiscreen video art.

## Chapter one

An introduction into the changes in the art world and those in visual culture starting from the 1950s up until now related to the rise of video art.

In order to understand current notions of video art and multiscreen video installations, a short introduction on video art and its rise will be dealt with in this first chapter. The chapter will introduce some important changes in the art world and visual culture starting from the 1950s up until now. The 1950s marked the growth of consumer products in the United States. US citizens were given easy access to more affordable electronics and by 1953, 66 percent of American households owned a television set. By 1960 that number had risen to 90 percent.<sup>2</sup> Film and video equipment became significantly cheaper and therefore more accessible to consumers, including artists. In 1965 Sony launched the Portapak, a handheld camera and portable video tape recorder which became a revolutionary step for experiments in film. It was much more professional than the earlier 16 millimetre Bolex camera from the 1940s and the cost was only one tenth of professional television cameras, which were priced at \$10,000 to \$20,000 dollars. The Portapak was priced at a more affordable, but by no means cheap, \$1,000 to \$3,000 dollar.<sup>3</sup> Anyone wanting to make films and documentaries was now no longer dependent on Hollywood- and mainstream television studios.<sup>4</sup> Video was a new and explicitly modern medium, which attracted artists, seeking new means, and politically active groups, both of whom were able to reach a broad audience without being subjected to the power of big film studios or producers.

During those same post-war years art went through rapid developments. Boundaries between different media disappeared and art became a large melting pot not shy of combinations between the traditional media and dance, film, photography, music and writing.<sup>5</sup> Performance art made its entrance and with that, public participation became an imminent part of the art world. The performers sometimes wanted to document their work and the video camera was an excellent tool.<sup>6</sup> Conceptual art, also on the rise during this period and a basis for much contemporary art, was tightly connected to performance art. Like performance artists, often also seen as conceptual artists, conceptual artists tried to evade the notion of art as a commodity. Performance is something which is hard to buy or collect and the same goes for conceptual art. Trying to engage the viewer instead of letting them be passive consumers was one of the key elements. According to Peter Wollen, the artists used texts, photos and found objects in order to get the attention of the public.<sup>7</sup> For land- and some installation art, a viewer was needed for the piece to exist. Experience was the central tenet in these works, not their mere physicality. With the work of Larry Bell, Dan Graham and Bruce Nauman the participatory element of performance art was taken inside the gallery and shown together with other works of art, such as painting and sculpture. The performative was no longer temporary. The performative happened when the viewer stepped into the piece and experienced it. The active role of performing moved from the artist to the viewer. Peter Campus' early installations of the 1970s mark this change in art. In *Interface* (1972) and *mem* (1975) viewers were confronted with their own images, which were filmed and concurrently transmitted, skewed and enlarged on big screens in the gallery.<sup>8</sup> If there is no public, there is no skewed and enlarged image, only the gallery walls would then be filmed. All things exist once its existence has been acknowledged upon that point of

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<sup>2</sup> Micheal Rush, *Video Art*, London 2007, p.16.

<sup>3</sup> idem p.7.

<sup>4</sup> idem p.7.

<sup>5</sup> Traditional media meaning painting, drawing, sculpture.

<sup>6</sup> Irving Sandler, *Art of the postmodern era From the late 1960s to the early 1990s*, Colorado 1998, p. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Peter Wollen, 'Global Conceptualism and Northern American Conceptual Art' in László Beke a.o, *Global Conceptualism, Points of Origin, 1950s to 1980s*, 1999 pp. 73-85.

<sup>8</sup> Micheal Rush, *Video Art*, London 2007, pp.32-33.

seeing it and the same would count for a painting or sculpture. With the performative arts entering galleries and museums, the (performance) piece would not exist if there is no public taking knowledge of it. The work of art would be the viewer seeing his or her enlarged and skewed image projected upon a wall, or seeing his or her own images filmed from the back in one of Bruce Nauman's corridor pieces. This too would be the case for the performative works of Franz Ehrard Walter or the Franz West 'Adaptives', in which the visitor becomes the performer. The evolution of video art, the performative making its entrance in art (although it had already been there since Dada theatre and Duchamp's installations like *Bicycle Wheel* (1913)), the rise of installation art and the disappearing boundaries between media, created a basis for multiscreen video art to evolve from. An artist was not only a sculptor or a painter anymore, he became an artist working in all these different media. He could combine videos and present them as sculpture, or create an installation in which the viewer became the activator. Artists experimenting with installation and video combined the two to create one of the first video installations with multiple screens. They would cross boundaries by combining elements of video and film, seen in Hollywood's big productions, with single screen narrative films.

While the art world and artists became used to film and video technology, the wider public became accustomed to bigger and better commercial information streams that were trying to seduce the viewer into buying products. Cinema, television and video morphed into something else: a mass medium to politically and commercially inform people, and a medium to sell products through. Gene Youngblood wrote in his seminal *Expanded Cinema* (1970), which dealt with the evolution of media and the dispersion of information, that the network of media: cinema, television, radio, magazines, books and newspapers, created a service that carried 'the messages of the social organism'. According to Youngblood it established meaning in life and created mediating channels between man and man, and man and society.<sup>9</sup> War rooms and traffic control centres were places that could be seen as a preliminary model for multiscreen video installations. Interlocked projectors with multiple screens showing multiple films allow for everything to be played simultaneously. Nowadays there are beamers and media players, but the synchronized connection between the different players is a must. In order to monitor and be as up-to-date as possible on current events in war and traffic, multiple screens displayed an array of the latest information coming from different parts of the world or roads. The employee could make the best possible decisions: are we going to attack? Do we close off that tunnel? ... In *Art of Projection* Beatriz Colombina writes that: 'We are surrounded today, everywhere, all the time, by arrays of multiple, simultaneous images - in the street; at airports, shopping centres, and gyms; but also on our computers and television sets'.<sup>10</sup> She elaborates on this state of being surrounded by images in an article on the Eameses multiscreen presentation *Glimpses of the USA* (fig. 1.1) which was shown at the Moscow World Fair in 1959. There the Eameses created an installation of video streams never seen before in public. This may be one of the first publicly shown multiscreen installations and it was seen by three million impressed visitors.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, London 1970, p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> Beatriz Colombina, 'Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' multiscreen architecture' in Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon, *Art of Projection*, Ostfildern 2009, p. 40.

<sup>11</sup> Beatriz Colombina, 'Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' multiscreen architecture' in Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon, *Art of Projection*, Ostfildern 2009, p. 40.





1.1 - Charles and Ray Eames, *Glimpses of the USA*, installation view US pavilion, World fair 1959.

The Eameses' *Glimpses of the USA* was one of the first multiscreen installations seen by a large audience and was similar in its working with many current multiscreens. The Eameses film presented a typical work- and a typical weekend in the United States, composed by still and moving images from magazines, photographers and artists.<sup>12</sup> It was a break with linear narrative, which shows a single stream of information. *Glimpses of the USA* only showed snippets of information, but the message was clear: 'we are the same as you [USSR], but, on a material level, we have more.'<sup>13</sup> Presenting streams of information in non-linear narrative and fragmented structure can be seen as one of the foremost properties of multiscreen installations. This property is already present in one of the earlier multiscreen installations, namely *Glimpses of the USA*, by the Eameses.

Earlier on in 1952 the Eameses' had, together with George Nelson, given an experimental lecture which included multiple projectors. *A rough sketch for a Sample Lesson for Hypothetical Course* (1952) was the first of many multimedia presentations the Eameses would give.<sup>14</sup> In all of them they would try to communicate the maximum amount of information in a pleasurable and effective way.<sup>15</sup> Communicating the maximum amount of information was something that was also done by Andy Warhol and his Exploding Plastic Inevitable during the 1960s, although it is arguable how effective the idea was in its execution. They used three to five films, and

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<sup>12</sup> Beatriz Colomina, 'Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' multiscreen architecture' in Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon, *Art of Projection*, Ostfildern 2009, pp. 38-39.

<sup>13</sup> idem p. 41.

<sup>14</sup> Beatriz Colomina, 'Enclosed by Images: The Eameses' multiscreen architecture' in Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon, *Art of Projection*, Ostfildern 2009, pp. 42-43.

<sup>15</sup> John Neuhart, *Eames Design: The work of the Office of Charles and Ray Eames*, New York 1989, p. 91.

a same amount of slide projectors, multiple strobe lights, moving spots, pistol lights and mirror balls next to playing at least three different pop records at once. Communicating the maximum amount of information must have been an impressive and immersive experience for all the viewers, listeners and dancers coming to the shows and events created by Warhol and the Exploding Plastic Inevitable.



1.2 - Nam June Paik, *TV Garden*, 1974, collection K21, Düsseldorf.

One of the first artists in the 1960s to work with multiple screens was Nam June Paik. Paik used multiple monitors in his work and during his lifetime used them in different sorts of installations. He built a robot with limbs, a head and body made out of television screens, as well as a wall made out of television screens, and has installed a number of screens in a large room filled with plants, *TV Garden* (1974) (fig. 1.2). With his work, and that of Wolf Vostell, multiple screens as installations became apparent in the 1960s. The walls or rows of television screens, like Paik's *Moon is the Oldest TV* (1965), can be seen all over the world in electronics stores today. Gene Youngblood wrote in his seminal work on expanded cinema that 'in the ascending spiral of evolution each new generation absorbs the experiences of the previous level and expands upon them' and that this expansion has 'reached a velocity of evolutionary acceleration at which several transformations occur within the life-span of a single generation.'<sup>16</sup> These works from the 60s created starting points and inspired many of the artists working with video installations including Shirin Neshat, Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong.

Since the 1960s a lot has changed in video art. The equipment has made tremendous changes and nowadays anyone with a smartphone can make videos and edit them with a simple click on a computer. This has revolutionized and simplified the possibilities for artists. They can use video as a medium without having to have an education in editing. Therefore they are not limited by editing and no longer have to use unedited film,

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<sup>16</sup> Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, London 1970, p. 47.

like some of the artists in the 60s and 70s had to. They can cut, copy and paste multiple films and multiple images crisscross.

Just as the 1960s, when the Portapak was launched and video cameras became more affordable for consumers and for artists, the nineties gave way to a wide array of video projectors that were significantly cheaper than previous projectors. These easily accessible projectors made it easier for artists to create (larger) video installations.<sup>17</sup> The period in which video art came up, that of the early phase of documenting conceptual and performance art, had a great impact on the way the medium was used (as a document of the performative/body). As from the start, the medium was not only used to document performances but also to create interactivity with viewers. Artists already used video in installations in the 1960s. The technological advancement and with that the more accessible ways of editing and filming have made it even easier for contemporary artists to create large and complicated video installations. Recently with multiscreen set ups has been a trendy way of working among artists. The transformation of the world into one dominated by images and information has made it possible for artists, together with the increased access and plummeting prices of technology, to make multiple screen installations without confusing the viewer.

The viewer is familiarised with an overload of information due to years of exposure to multiple screen-in-screens on computers, mobile phones, tablets and a plethora of other electronic devices. The viewer has become used to filtering information from the dozens of television channels they have, all the internet pages they can access and the information they receive from digital billboards and other advertising in public areas. In installation art however, the viewer is surrounded by the work, entering it and possibly being captivated by it. It 'colonises the viewer's attention completely' writes Claire Bishop in *Installation Art. A Critical History*.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Micheal Rush, *Video Art*, London 2007, p. 223.

<sup>18</sup> Anne Ring Petersen, *Attention and Distraction: On the Aesthetic Experience of Video Installation Art*, RIHA Journal 9 (7 october 2010), <http://www.riha-journal.org/articles/2010/ring-petersen-attention-and-distraction> (viewed 25-1-2015).

## Chapter two

Shirin Neshat, Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong and why they use a multiscreen presentation.

*“More and more, I dislike standard feature films... Many of them make me feel like I’m enduring them, or even that I’m wasting time.” – Yang Fudong<sup>19</sup>*

Yang Fudong (1971), who has become known in the twenty-first century for his multiscreen video installations, states his growing dislikes of watching standard feature films. Feature films obey certain industry standards, like the montage cut, the narrative of frames, standard sound and the handling of shots.<sup>20</sup> Fudong feels like he is wasting time watching them, let alone making them. But why make multiscreen installations? Yang Fudong is one of many artists today working with multi-screen installations. The following chapter tries to answer why more and more artists like Fudong are using video in this particular way. Yang Fudong, together with Isaac Julien (1960) and Shirin Neshat (1957) are taken as prime examples of the tendency to work with multiscreen installations.

### **Shirin Neshat**

Shirin Neshat was born in Iran in 1957 and left for the United States to study art in 1979. In that same year a revolution brought down Iran’s regime and changed the political landscape. Due to the revolution Neshat was only able to return to Iran in 1990, a year after the death of Ruhollah Khomeini, the man who became the leader of Iran after the revolution. The lifestyles of the Iranian people had changed radically during the time between 1979 and 1990, and more specific, the new politics impacted women. The main subject of Neshat’s work is the division between men and women from the perspective of Islamic and Iranian culture, through which she also emphasizes cultural differences between the Middle-East and the West.<sup>21</sup> During the reign of the Persian monarchy, which lasted until 1979, the women in Iran enjoyed many rights.<sup>22</sup> Iran had long been a wealthy, westernized country in which woman had been forced to give up wearing veils in public. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, women wearing a veil weren’t served in bars or allowed in shops. Wearing a veil was then considered to be a sign of modesty and Muslim identity. The change in attitude towards wearing a veil was a consequence of the westernization of Iran and the pro-American regime of Shah Reza Pahlavi (1877-1944) who was also influenced by the Turkish reformer Mustapha Kemal Ataturk (1881-1938).<sup>23</sup> Shirin Neshat had left Iran in 1979 to study in the United States and returned for the first time in 1990.<sup>24</sup> By then, women in Iran had been forced to wear veils, which the new rulers saw as a pre-eminent symbol of Persian culture and as a sign of identity of the new theocratic regime imposed by Khomeini and his followers.<sup>25</sup> Neshat made her photographic series, *Women of Allah* (1993-1997) (fig. 2.2) after visiting Iran a second time. In *Women of Allah* Neshat explores various ideological aspects of the revolution, such as the return to a more Islamic culture, the Persian

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<sup>19</sup> Chris Chang, ‘Take Five. The spectatorial fortitude of Yang Fudong’ in *Filmcomment* vol. 45. No 5 (September-October 2009) p.21.

<sup>20</sup> Zhang Yaxuan, ‘Interview The Power behind’ in Li Zhenhua, Yuko Hasegawa, Molly Nesbit a.o., *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith: Yang Fudong’s Solo Exhibition*, Shanghai 2009 p. 182.

<sup>21</sup> Giorgio Verzotti, *Shirin Neshat*, Milaan 2002 p. 179.

<sup>22</sup> Octavia Zaya, ‘An Exteriority of the Inward’ in Octavia Zaya (ed.), *Shirin Neshat La última palabra / The Last Word*, Milan 2005, p. 11-15.

<sup>23</sup> idem p. 17.

<sup>24</sup> idem p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> idem p. 17.

identity and the idea of martyrdom, which has been popular in Iran since the revolution.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the series Neshat uses three elements: the veil, which in her work is linked with the gaze, the gun and text. Neshat uses the veil in most of her work and states that it is a garment of power instead of repression.<sup>27</sup> It becomes a uniform, according to the artist.<sup>28</sup> Where most of the body language and the majority of the face is covered by the chador (veil), the gaze remains one of the only options for direct physical contact points between a man and a woman.



2.1 - Shirin Neshat, *Fervor*, 2000, installation view.

The veil is used as a powerful icon and as something that empowers women to excite a man by only their gaze. This use of the gaze can be seen in Neshat's work from 2000, *Fervor* (fig. 2.1).<sup>29</sup> *Fervor* is a double screen projection, in which the screens are presented side by side. In *Fervor* a man and a woman individually walk along a road. Each of them is projected on one screen, until they meet each other at a crossroad. They exchange views and the woman continues walking. The man stops and watches the woman walk away. During the short interaction, a moment of tension arises when the man and woman look at each other. The suspense of what could happen is enlarged by the mysterious allure of the woman, who is wearing a veil and seen from the back. What happens cannot be seen. Does she smile at him?

In the next scene, both male and female are shown at an event in a small town. Men and women are divided at the event by a cloth which hangs in the middle of a square. A man is shown lecturing on a stage, warning the public on the seductions of men and women and the dangers of sexual desire. The speech becomes increasingly aggressive and the speaker states that men and women should resist such evil forces. The moment of interaction seen earlier at the crossroad, maybe a short moment of flirtation between the man and the

<sup>26</sup> Giorgio Verzotti, *Shirin Neshat*, Milaan 2002 p. 80.

<sup>27</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Shirin Neshat*, BOMB 73 (Fall 2000).

<sup>28</sup> Arthur C. Danto & Marina Abramovic, *Shirin Neshat*, New York 2010, p. 19.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Shirin Neshat*, BOMB 73 (Fall 2000).

woman, suddenly turns into guilt and anxiety when seen in the light of the speech. The woman quickly flees the event.

Shirin Neshat uses the female gaze to destabilize the confidence of the male body. Confidence is created through others; the other, here the female, endorses the males' being. The male receives female attention and this boosts his confidence. The confidence of the male body is formed by the other, in this case the attention or gaze of a woman. His confidence flourishes because the females' confidence is less apparent and therefore not conflicting with the male's confidence. Therefore this concept of confidence is reliant on the state of confidence of the other, as well as the existence of the other to reinstate the male's confidence. Neshat attempts to make the confidence of the female and her gaze equal to that of the males'. By the veiling of women, the eyes and therefore the gaze, remain one of the only forces for a woman to validate the males' confidence. Through this, the veiling of the woman makes her more able to find her own suitor rather than being subjected by a man. Her body is covered, and little body language can be seen. She approves of the man with her gaze, and not vice versa.<sup>30</sup> The gaze is used throughout a large part of the artist's work and adds a feminine touch to her work.<sup>31</sup>

This feminine element is contrasted by the use of a gun. In the photo series *Woman of Allah* the gun, a masculine symbol, is shown besides the woman's head or held in between feet aiming at the viewer. These feet, and at times hands and faces, portrayed in the photos are covered in Arabic writing. These phrases are poems by Iranian women, most of them about love.<sup>32</sup> Due to the strict government and law, women are not free to do what they want in Iran. Women are separated from men in public events, they are veiled so as not to arouse men with their bodies and are not allowed to participate in public means of expressions such as singing. Neshat's works comment on and examine these issues, such as with poetry about love by Iranian women in the *Woman of Allah* series, a woman singing a contemporary song in the video *Turbulent* (1998), and the power of the female gaze in *Fervor*. After working with photography Neshat felt she had reached a limit and that she had exhausted the subject matter which dealt so directly with politics. She wanted to create work that was more poetic and lyrical. She wanted to be able to create work that allowed for wider interpretation while still being about Islamic culture.<sup>33</sup> Therefore she started working with the medium video.

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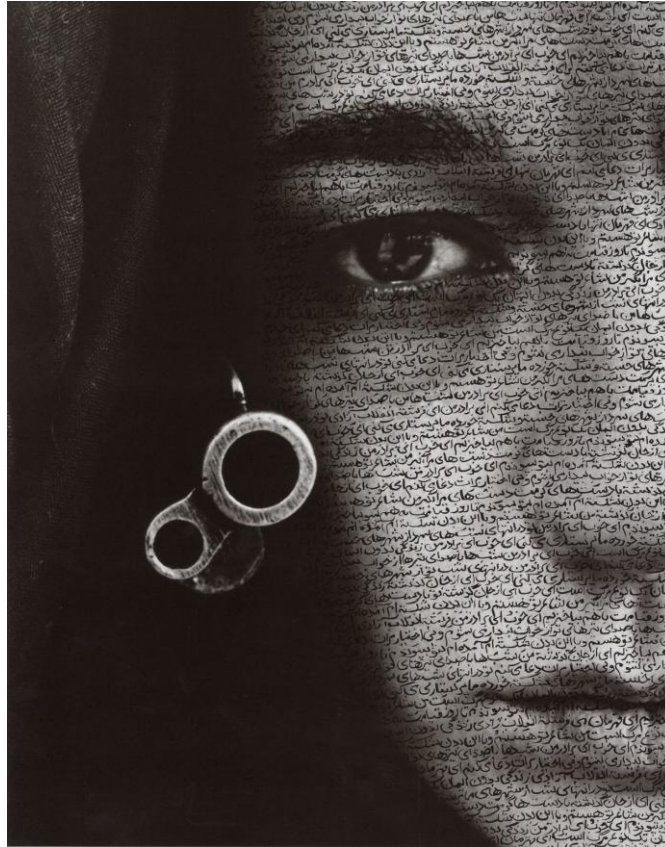
<sup>30</sup> Lindsey Moore, 'Women in a Widening Frame: (Cross-) Cultural Projection, Spectatorship, and Iranian Cinema' in *Camera Obscura* 59 volume 20 number 2, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Hamid Dabashi, 'Bordercrossings: Shirin Neshat's Body of Evidence' in Georgio Verzotti, *Shirin Neshat*, Milan 2002, p.39.

<sup>32</sup> Georgio verzotti, 'Shirin Neshat. That which always speaks in silence is the body' in: Georgio Verzotti, *Shirin Neshat*, Milan 2002, p.76.

<sup>33</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Shirin Neshat*, BOMB 73 (Fall 2000).





2.2 - Shirin Neshat, *Woman of Allah*, 1993-1997

Film and video had more potential than photography and allowed the artist to tell a story instead of only implying one. The step to film and video was the most logical as it was an extension of photography; it became “moving photography”. Neshat’s problem with photography was primarily that it became too final and monumental, while film is open to multiple ways of interpretation.<sup>34</sup> ‘I had an immense desire to learn how to tell stories to my audience.’<sup>35</sup> As stated before, Neshat turned to video in 1996, and her first work *Anchorage* continued the *Women of Allah* series and showed Shirin herself in a veil. The four minute projection first shows Neshat in prayer, she then pulls out a pistol and shoots at the viewer. She drops the gun and starts dancing, a meditative dance, which is normally exclusively performed by Iranian men.<sup>36</sup> Around 2002 she felt that ‘film is the most complete form of art because it has everything. It has photography, theatre, performance, storytelling, painting, sculpture.’<sup>37</sup> *The Shadow under the Web* (1997) (fig. 2.3) was her first multiscreen installation. It is a work that has four projections, every projection is shown on a different wall, making *The Shadow under the Web* an environment the viewer has to step into and move around in. In the Islamic culture, many spaces are divided between men and women. The private is considered a female space, the public a male space.<sup>38</sup> Neshat, as an Iranian living in the United States, moves in between both the public and private space.<sup>39</sup> She also moves on the margin of the two cultures which results in this work.<sup>39</sup> In *The Shadow under the Web*,

<sup>34</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Shirin Neshat*, BOMB 73 (Fall 2000).

<sup>35</sup> Arthur C. Danto & Marina Abramovic, *Shirin Neshat*, New York 2010, p. 13.

<sup>36</sup> Georgio Verzotti, *Shirin Neshat*, Milan 2002, p. 89.

<sup>37</sup> Babak A. Ebrahimian, *Passage to Iran*, PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 72 (September 2002) pp. 49.

<sup>38</sup> Hamid Dabashi, ‘Transcending the Boundaries of an Imaginative Geography’ in Octavia Zaya (ed.), *Shirin Neshat La última palabra / The Last Word*, Milan 2005, p. 46.

<sup>39</sup> Octavia Zaya, ‘An Exteriority of the Inward’ in Octavia Zaya (ed.), *Shirin Neshat La última palabra / The Last Word*, Milan 2005, p. 21.



Neshat, as a veiled woman, is shown running through four different spaces, which she calls 'private, public, sacred and natural'.<sup>40</sup> She is filmed running through Islamic spaces such as a mosque. In this work the artist crosses borders and breaks boundaries. The spatial boundaries are used as a metaphor for the social structures in Islam that Neshat focuses on in her work.



2.3 - Shirin Neshat, *Shadow under the web*, 1997, stills.

*Turbulent*, her first double screen opposite projection, explores the social structure in Islamic Iran. It shows the absence of women in musical practice.<sup>41</sup> The viewer is part of this social structure since the projections are on opposite walls, the viewer stands in between these two screens and has to choose which screen to look at. One screen shows a male singer singing what is said to be a passionate love song. He is standing on a stage performing for a large audience of only males. Near the end of the song a woman appears on the other screen, standing on the same stage in the same theatre, but the theatre is empty. She begins to sing. Her moaning, whispers, changing intonations and emotional breathing find the interest of the man on the first screen, who stares towards (the screen of) the woman. The man had been singing a traditional song in a traditional environment; the woman creates a new and alien sound.<sup>42</sup> The viewer is activated and becomes an editor, because they have to choose what side to look at and what side to miss, they are forced to make a decision. 'This creates a very interesting experience' says Neshat.<sup>43</sup> The topic of cultural division between masculine and feminine in Islamic culture is the conceptual fundament to Neshat's opposite projections.<sup>44</sup> The

<sup>40</sup> Hamid Dabashi, 'Transcending the Boundaries of an Imaginative Geography' in Octavia Zaya (ed.), *Shirin Neshat La última palabra / The Last Word*, Milan 2005, p. 46.

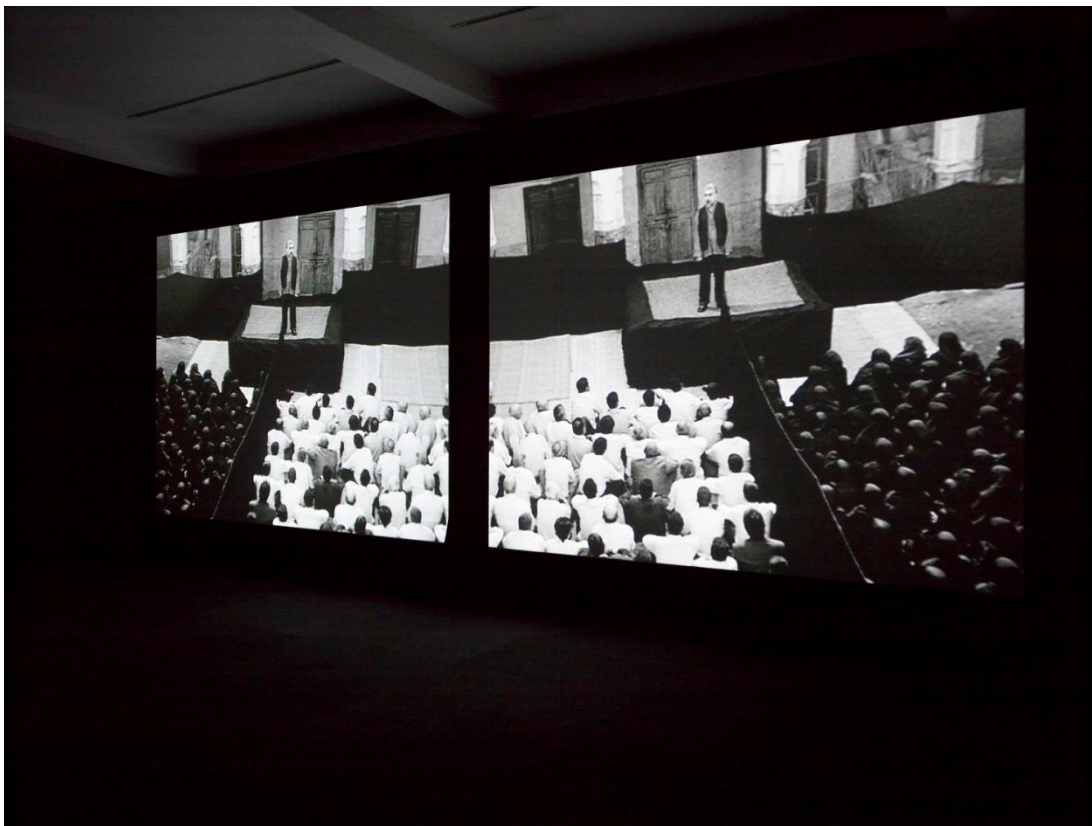
<sup>41</sup> Arthur Danto & Marina Abramovic, *Shirin Neshat*, New York 2010, p. 45.

<sup>42</sup> Octavia Zaya, 'An Exteriority of the Inward' in Octavia Zaya (ed.), *Shirin Neshat La última palabra / The Last Word*, Milan 2005, p. 21-23.

<sup>43</sup> Francine Birbragher, 'Shirin Neshat' in *Art Nexus* 50 vol. 2 (2003) p. 92.

<sup>44</sup> Giorgio Verzotti, 'Shirin Neshat. That which always speaks in silence is the body', in *Shirin Neshat*, Castello di Rivoli, Milan 2002, p.77.

viewer is made aware of the division of the sexes in Iran. Shirin made two other installations using opposite projections, *Rapture* (1999) and *Soliloquy* (1999). All three installations are conceived around the division between the masculine and feminine. The installation design of each work ties in with the concept of the work, it shows two sides.<sup>45</sup> In *Turbulent* opposites black/white, man/woman, empty/full theatre, communal/solitary, rational/irrational and traditional/non-traditional music are seen.<sup>46</sup> *Rapture* shows men wearing white shirts, and woman in black veils, they are positioned in a deserted landscape (females) and fortress (males), silence (males) and sudden chanting (females).<sup>47</sup> *Rapture* relates gender, in Islamic culture, to nature and culture. It shows both sexes existing in a vacuum, separated from each other.<sup>48</sup> *Rapture* shows a group of men running around in a fortress with seemingly no specific purpose. While the men are running around, the other screen shows a group situated in the desert. The group is composed of veiled women, who are silently observing the men in the fortress.<sup>49</sup>



2.4 - Shirin Neshat, *Fervor* 2000, installation view.

*Fervor* (2000) shows the division of men and women side by side, through the use of the two screens next to each other (fig. 2.4). It refers to the division of men and women in public spheres in Islamic countries. In *Soliloquy* Neshat is seen in between different cultures. Western versus Middle-Eastern cultures is juxtaposed by showing different forms of architecture as symbols of culture, in opposite projections.<sup>50</sup> A traditional small,

<sup>45</sup> Gabriele Machert, *Shirin Neshat*, Vienna 2000, p. 36.

<sup>46</sup> Giorgio Verzotti, *Shirin Neshat*, Milan 2002, p. 98.

<sup>47</sup> Work seen at Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam Library.

<sup>48</sup> Gabriele Machert, *Shirin Neshat*, Vienna 2000, p. 38.

<sup>49</sup> Octavia Zaya, 'An Exteriority of the Inward' in Octavia Zaya (ed.), *Shirin Neshat La última palabra / The Last Word*, Milan 2005, p. 23.

<sup>50</sup> Giorgio Verzotti, *Shirin Neshat*, Milan 2002, p. 120.

presumably Middle-Eastern desert town and a modern Western city are the main subjects. Neshat is seen watching both towns through a window before entering the desert town. At first she enters the traditional town, walking through small alleyways and around decorated sand coloured buildings, all of which are empty. Meanwhile, on the other screen, Neshat is standing still, looking through the window directly at the viewer. When Neshat reaches a square in the desert town, she stops and at the same time, on the other screen, she is seen leaving the modern apartment-flat she was in, driving her car on the highway and walking around in a busy subway station. Neshat shows the opposites between a Western and a Middle-Eastern space, but also between a crowded and an empty one. *Soliloquy* is the last work to use opposite projections.

Since 2001 Neshat has been producing large amounts of work with single screen projections, *Pulse* (2001), *Passage* (2001), *Possessed* (2001) and her feature length film *Women without Men* (2009), for which she won a Silver Lion at the 2009 Venice film festival, are all single screen projections. The main difference between these later video works can be found in the way Neshat builds characters. In *Rapture*, *Passage* and other works, Neshat had treated people “sculpturally” as she states herself. Shirin Neshat says that in those works she ‘treated people sculpturally, devoid of any character or identity. They were simply iconic figures.’<sup>51</sup> She used herself and the other actors in the works simply as vessels to project certain qualities and ideas on. In order to get the concept of the videos across there was no further need to ‘build’ a character. The characters did not need a background, a family, a context or a job, for the viewer to relate to them. This came to a stop in her film *Women without Men*.<sup>52</sup> In *Women without men*, Neshat turned a novella into a film and this required telling the stories of the different characters in the book, hence building a character and not using the actors as ‘sculptural’ pieces in the films. Neshat turned to making videos because she wanted to do more than imply a concept, she wanted to tell a story, and multiscreen installations gave her the opportunity to tell the story she wanted to tell. The medium of video and film had the potential to be highly poetic according to Neshat, and she felt she could incorporate elements of photography, painting and sculpture in them. She was also able to experiment with music, sound, choreography and performance.<sup>53</sup> When Neshat’s ideas of the stories she wanted to tell changed, the multiscreen installation became less obvious in her work. The concept of Neshat’s works turned from showing opposites from within the Islamic culture and between Western/Middle-Eastern cultures into making a feature length film based on novels of female Iranian writers. Due to this shift, she changed from using the multi-screen installations into using predominantly a single screen.<sup>54</sup> Occasionally she returns to multi-screen structures, like *Tooba* (2002), *Mahdokht* (2004) and *Games of Desire* (2009). Neshat made multi-screen installations ‘because there was no narrative and it was more about a spatial experience. [...] the design should not be random; rather it should really tie in to the concept. Also, I was interested in the relationship between the viewer and the piece.’<sup>55</sup> Shirin Neshat worked around the opposites of the male and female world and the relation between the masculine and feminine in Islamic culture. It shows the difference in

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<sup>51</sup> Eleanor Heartney, *Shirin Neshat. An interview by Eleanor Heartney*, *Art in America* 97 issue 6 (june/july 2009) p. 154.

<sup>52</sup> idem pp. 154-159.

<sup>53</sup> Website Tribes, *Interview with Shirin Neshat in Paris by Nina Zivancevic*, 2008 < <http://www.tribes.org/web/2008/05/26/interview-with-shirin-neshat-in-paris-by-nina-zivancevic/> > (visited 20-4-2014).

<sup>54</sup> Arthur C. Danto, *Shirin Neshat*, *BOMB* 73 (Fall 2000).

<sup>55</sup> Babak A. Ebrahimian, *Passage to Iran*, *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 72 (September 2002) p. 48.

the abilities to express oneself. In *Turbulent*, singing is shown, which is forbidden in public for women. She also shows the division between male and female spaces, in *Rapture* and *Fervor*. Neshat's use of dual screen projections is an interesting medium for showing the concept of opposites between sexes. Neshat explains: 'unlike a cinematic picture, where you are sitting in your chair and are passive, here you become a part of the piece. It's a very emotionally and psychologically demanding situation in which you have to keep debating whether you should be looking on this side or that side. You can never watch both at the same time.'<sup>56</sup> Neshat hereby tries to enhance the engagement of the viewer.<sup>57</sup> The role that the narrative played in Neshat's works caused her to switch from multiscreen installations to the single screen. By using a single screen as the medium, the progression of chronological time and the building of characters and the continuation of the storyline is easier to follow for the viewer. This also means that you cannot give the viewer an active role; they can always see the whole of the picture. This does not help Neshat's purpose of activating the viewer. With a multiscreen presentation, the viewer would miss certain scenes or links between scenes and therefore miss parts of the story or the building of characters, as the viewer cannot register everything that happens on the screens. Using multiscreen installations can therefore be seen as a tool for Shirin Neshat that tied in directly with the concept of showing different types of opposites. Neshat's subjects were not stories, they were opposites. Showing these opposites on two screens makes the viewer tangible of the division between male and female and between the Western world and the Middle-East.

### Isaac Julien

Around the same time as Neshat, Isaac Julien also started working with multi-screen installations. From 1983 he had made several short films and documentaries. Black identity and sexuality are key themes in Julien's early work. In later works he explored themes related to ethnicity, music and film culture, colonial historiography and postcolonial theories.<sup>58</sup> *Who Killed Colin Roach?* (1983), *Territories* (1984) and *The Passion of Remembrance* (1986) are examples of Julien's earlier films which revolve around racism, black identity and sexuality and portray the government's stance against demonstrations by minorities.<sup>59</sup> *The Passion of Remembrance* works around racism, sexism, homosexuality, and the generation gap. The work uses two storylines and it was the first time, but not the last, that Julien used multiple story lines. In *Looking for Langston* (1989) Julien explores black masculine homosexuality through the Harlem poet Langston Hughes. In 1996 Julien makes his first dual screen projection, *Trussed*.<sup>60</sup> Julien's website states that 'dualistic feelings of erotic pleasure and loss in *Trussed* are enhanced by its projection on 2 screens showing identical, but flipped, images that are set in a corner at right angles.'<sup>61</sup> *Trussed* works around concepts of sex and death, pain and pleasure, and race.<sup>62</sup> Images of affection between a black and white male couple and a black lover in a wheelchair are

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<sup>56</sup> Babak A. Ebrahimian, *Passage to Iran*, PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 72 (September 2002) p. 48.

<sup>57</sup> idem pp. 46-48.

<sup>58</sup> Eveline Bernasconi, 'Kaleidoscopic Images of Culture' in Veit Görner & Eveline Bernasconi, *Isaac Julien. True North Fantôme Afrique*, Hannover 2006 p.22.

<sup>59</sup> Website Isaac Julien 'The passion of remembrance' <<http://isaacjulien.com/films/passion>> (visited 13-4-2013).

<sup>60</sup> Website Isaac Julien, installations, *Trussed* <http://isaacjulien.com/installations/trussed> (visited 1-3-2013).

<sup>61</sup> Idem.

<sup>62</sup> Amanda Cruz, 'Introduction' in Amanda Cruz *The film art of Isaac Julien*, New York 2000 p. 8.

shown in multiple tableaux vivants. Julien states they are ‘a Robert Mapplethorpe in motion’.<sup>63</sup> Around 1999 Julien begins to work with three screens; *Three (The Conservator’s Dream)* (1999) and *Long Road to Mazatlán* (1999) (fig. 2.5) are the first examples of Julien using more than two projections.<sup>64</sup> *Three (The Conservator’s Dream)* is a three-screen piece in which the outer two images are the same, but flipped like in *Trussed*. *Three (the conservator’s dream)* shows images of dance in an exploration of desire. An African-American couple is seen in a museum and at an opera, while the main protagonist of the work, the conservator, is seen looking at them and longing for them. According to Julien’s website, Julien introduced the conservator in order to complicate the gender and sexual issues of the heterosexual African- American couple.<sup>65</sup> *Long Road to Mazatlán* is set in San Antonio, Texas and explores North American film references, impressions of the southwest and the culture of the border region of the USA, cowboys and homoerotic iconography.<sup>66</sup> The path of a white and a Latino gay cowboy is followed within the iconic western cowboy environment. Julien explores masculine behaviour from western action films and works such as Andy Warhol’s *Lonesome Cowboys* and David Hockney’s *Swimmers and Pools*.<sup>67</sup> Julien restages scenes from these works and, within a homosexual context, combines them with the myth of the cowboy.<sup>68</sup>



2.5 - Isaac Julien, *Long Road to Mazatlan*, 1999, installation view

*Long Road to Mazatlán* is set up like a triptych. The three screens can form a single picture or two or three different pictures. Some of the images progress from one screen to the other.<sup>69</sup> *Long Road to Mazatlán* was also made as a single screen version. ‘I wanted to test myself: Could it be as interesting as making a three-

<sup>63</sup> Amanda Cruz, ‘Introduction’ in Amanda Cruz *The film art of Isaac Julien*, New York 2000 p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Website Isaac Julien, installations <http://isaacjulien.com/installations> (visited 2-3-2013).

<sup>65</sup> The Conservator’s dream < <http://www.isaacjulien.com/installations/theconservatorsdream> > (visited 29-4-2014).

<sup>66</sup> David Frankel, ‘Isaac Julien, The Long Road to Mazatlán’, <http://artpace.org/about-the-exhibition/?axid=58&sort=title> (visited 2-3-2013).

<sup>67</sup> Amanda Cruz, ‘Introduction’ in Amanda Cruz *The film art of Isaac Julien*, New York 2000 p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich*, Art Journal Vol.61, No. 2 (Summer 2002) p. 51.

<sup>69</sup> Amanda Cruz, ‘Introduction’ in Amanda Cruz *The film art of Isaac Julien*, New York 2000 p. 8.

screen version? The truth is that it's not. [...] Once you make this kind of work, it is very difficult to go back to linearity of single-screen film because it is such an exhilarating feeling to be able to film in a way that I call "meta-cinematic" Julien says about the single screen work.<sup>70</sup> Julien explains this meta-cinematic method as having multiple positions and cameras you can use and take advantage of. You can use the images in an exciting way during editing. The ability to deconstruct the cinematic iconography, such as the narrative and the linear progression of scenes, into different parts becomes a possibility. The deconstruction of these traditional elements of cinema brings up the question 'is the cinema we are seeing really as exciting as it could be'?<sup>71</sup> By his use of multiscreen installations Isaac Julien questions contemporary visual culture, especially modern cinema.<sup>72</sup> Julien questions the dominant single narrative representation by combining multiple narratives in a multiscreen installation. There is not one author who is the indefinite source of significations, but he is the one who limits, excludes, and chooses.<sup>73</sup> The author's work is caught up in filiations and the reader perceives multiple perspectives.<sup>74</sup> Julien's work can therefore be seen in the light of postmodernist texts and theories. For example Roland Barthes' *From work to Text* in which Barthes writes that a work, be it a work of art or a text, achieves its meaning not by its own given meaning but by the different shifting conceptions and meanings formed around the work. These interplay and create an ever-changing meaning for the work.<sup>75</sup> This relates to Barthes essay 'Death of the Author' in which he proposes a similar point, namely that the author does not give meaning but the reader does. Seen in the light of Isaac Julien's multiscreen works, or multiscreen work in general, Barthes propositions count as being counter Hollywood and a single perspective narrative, since the active maker of the work is the viewer and not the author.

Julien's *Long Road to Mazatlán* was mostly shot with three cameras filming at once, capturing different perspectives of the same scene or world at the same time. Julien says: 'you are able to have a fuller relationship to the actual scenes or tableaux, which are being constructed in that moment.'<sup>76</sup> This opposes single screen movies, which flourish on illusion. In single screen movies, the illusion and imagination of the viewer is triggered. In a single screen movie, by showing a group of youngsters in a dark house and a masked man entering the back of the house, our imagination quickly calculates the possible outcomes of this scenario. The single screen builds up to this moment, the climax, where after a scene a new scene has to set in, which has to build towards a climax again. Using more than one camera and using them at the same time is also an advantage for editing purposes. It gives the possibility to deconstruct the cinematic iconography, raising questions about conventional cinema, its dependence upon illusion and it being subject to strong narratives. A single-screen projection prioritizes the narrative, as a linear line. Single-screen and multi-screen vary in the notion of experiencing time. The multiscreen is not dictated through the continuation of a narrative or the

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<sup>70</sup> B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich*, *Art Journal* Vol.61, No. 2 (Summer 2002) p. 54.

<sup>71</sup> Idem, p. 54.

<sup>72</sup> Isaac Julien & Christine van Assche, *Isaac Julien livre numéro 8.315 espace trois-cent-quinze nouveaux medias*. Centre Pompidou, Parijs 2005 p. 44.

<sup>73</sup> Michel Foucault, *What is an author*, 1969 in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, *Art in Theory. 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford 1999, p. 927.

<sup>74</sup> Roland Barthes, *From work to Text*, 1971 in Charles Harrison & Paul Wood, *Art in Theory. 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Oxford 1999, p. 943.

<sup>75</sup> Isaac Julien & Christine van Assche, *Isaac Julien livre numéro 8.315 espace trois-cent-quinze nouveaux medias*. Centre Pompidou, Parijs 2005 p. 44.

<sup>76</sup> B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich*, *Art Journal* Vol.61, No. 2 (Summer 2002) p. 53.



sequence of scenes. The viewing experience is to show a wider variety of scenes, stories and perspectives at the same time.<sup>77</sup> The masked man could miss the group of youngsters in his house and continue his own storyline without making the tension of a possible rendezvous disappear. These two storylines could coexist on a multiscreen installation and not interfere. While one screen was already playing the scene where the masked man was in the house, the screen with the group of youngsters could show them coming out the house and walking away, while, in the back, the masked man would arrive in a car. The viewing experience thus gets more intensified.



2.6 - Isaac Julien, *Fantôme Créole*, 2005, installation view.

In *Fantôme Créole* (2005) (fig. 2.6) Julien explores using a fourth projection. *Fantôme Créole* is a four screen work that consists of two other works, *True North* and *Fantôme Afrique*. *True North* shows the icy landscapes of the polar circle. The work takes as primary source the writings of Matthey Henson, an African American who was one of the key members of the 1909 Arctic expedition of Robert E. Peary. Henson was one of the first to ever reach the North Pole. Apart from Henson's route to the North pole, which is retraced by actress Venessa Myrie in Julien's film, the work circles around the notions of other movements, that of the ice in the polar circles. It shows the vast white, snowy landscapes of Iceland and Northern Sweden. *Fantôme Afrique*, shows quite the opposite of the snowy views of Iceland and Sweden. It shows distinct images of urban and rural Burkina Faso. Sandy African rural landscapes are combined with the images of empty squares surrounded by

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<sup>77</sup> B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich*, Art Journal Vol.61, No. 2 (Summer 2002) p. 53.

the single story buildings, traditionally painted, of Ouagadougou, the capital of Burkina Faso. The main subjects are the architectural identity of these opposing regions, together with archival footage of colonial expeditions and key moments from the history of Africa.<sup>78</sup> In the work the actors are not characters who tell a story, but they are used to link scenes.<sup>79</sup> They are seen in multiples scenes, since there is no storyline to link the scenes, being the link between these scenes. The characters do not evolve; there is no elaboration of their persona, their background, job or family. It is just the actor as link between scenes and tales. The lack of narrative is used by Julien in order to activate the spectator and to make the spectator create meaning between the different projections. The previously mentioned flourishing on illusion is an important property of single screen in comparing it to multiscreen. Finding a storyline is ultimately human, as we are only able to experience time in a linear fashion. Not for nothing the Hollywood feature film, linear and singular in its narrative (usually), is highly popular by the mass audience since the 1930s. The spectator therefore starts to create meaning between multiple projections, trying to find a link, a relation, a storyline. The “positioning of the screens forces the viewer to change position and grasp the totality of the presentation”, writes Mark Nash, an academic, critic and long-time collaborator of Isaac Julien.<sup>80</sup> The viewer has to turn around to see the screen facing his back, and turn his head around to see the screen on the left and right. With even bigger installations, such as Julien’s *Ten thousand waves* (2010) (fig. 2.7), the viewer has to move around the room to see everything. By walking in the installation, the viewer becomes more aware of his own position in the installation and has to make decisions about what to see. They become more aware of what they see, since they have to filter and choose it, and with that become a more active participant. With this method of working, the viewer’s mechanisms of determining meaning is disturbed, directed, or set free. He thinks about what he sees on screen one, two and three and looks for the link between the earlier seen footage and with that information he picks the best screen to look at.

The viewer is therefore forced into a more intensified way of looking and is assisted to create relations between what he has seen. Julien explains that the viewer is conditioned by contemporary filmmaking (Hollywood), which departs from chronological narratives and storyline building.<sup>81</sup>

In a gallery space viewers, however, don’t anticipate experiencing the same things as in a movie theatre, says Julien. In a single screen work, the linear progression makes a set narrative. Multi screen works questions this traditional notion of experiencing time in film and viewing film.<sup>82</sup> This, together with the human condition of only being able to experience time in a linear fashion, demands that the viewer will try to find a storyline, or a link between scenes and screens. Julien tries to dis-orchestrate the way we look at something and the way we manufacture an image. He tries to make the audience self-reflective, create a certain type of critical disposition and at the same time he tries to seduce the viewer. He knows the public might not be interested in the subjects of his work. He concentrates on dis-orchestrating the audience in order to keep watching his work. Using

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<sup>78</sup> Christina Dittrich (ed.), *Isaac Julien Expeditions*, Milwaukee 2012, p. 10.

<sup>79</sup> Mark Nash, ‘Fantôme Créole’ website Isaac Julien <http://isaacjulien.com/installations/fantomecreole> (visited 2-3-2013).

<sup>80</sup> Idem.

<sup>81</sup> B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich*, Art Journal Vol.61, No. 2 (Summer 2002) p. 54.

<sup>82</sup> Idem.



multiscreen video installations can be seen as a tool for Julien to give his possible viewers a visually stimulating environment to attract their attention.<sup>83</sup>



2.7 - Isaac Julien, *Ten Thousand Waves*, installation view.

The next step in Julien's evolution in multi-screen projections is *Ten Thousand Waves*. This is because it is the first time Julien made an installation with this many screens. The use of nine screens came into being because both Julien and Hayward gallery chief curator Stephanie Rosenthal, wanted the audience to move. 'I'm trying to break down the normal ways that we watch moving images' Isaac Julien says.<sup>84</sup> Seven screens in *Ten Thousand Waves* are positioned in a circle with in the centre two screens that have a projection that can be seen from both sides of the screen. This room-filling installation cannot be seen in its totality from one spot, as a spectator you have to move around or make the decision to miss one or two screens. *Ten Thousand Waves* mingles an incident in Morecambe Bay, England, in which twenty-three illegal Chinese immigrants drowned, with Chinese history and the deconstruction of old and new cinematic techniques.<sup>85</sup> The installation operates in a way Julien describes as 'reparational aesthetics': by offering the viewer a different standpoint, he wants them to feel this different points of view. By using footage of police material on the drowning, a 15<sup>th</sup> century Chinese fable, a re-enactment of a 1934 Chinese film 'The Goddess', live calligraphy, and the sound and visual power of stormy water, Julien created an immense layering.<sup>86</sup> With his use of nine screens the viewer gets immersed in the work. The screens surround the viewer and the viewer has to link all these different layers and the different stories together. 'That physical integration creates its own mise-en-scène, an absorbing but somewhat

<sup>83</sup> Videointerview 'Youtube: Is This Art? - Volume 17: Race, Politics and Dispossession - New Media in Film' <[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghl\\_00quAOE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ghl_00quAOE)> (visited 13-4-2013).

<sup>84</sup> Mathieu Borysevicz, *China Imagined*, Art in America Vol. 98, Issue 8 (September 2010) p. 60.

<sup>85</sup> idem p.57.

<sup>86</sup> Ingrid Commandeur, 'Isaac Julien' in brochure published by the exhibition 'Expanded Cinema' (2012) in Eye filmmuseum, Amsterdam.

uncomfortable experience - like immigration itself.<sup>87</sup> Showing the police footage together with scenes from waves in the ocean on the nine screens creates an environment where the drama of the drowning is enhanced and the power of water is shown. Mixing in parts of a re-enactment of the 'The Goddess' movie, a Chinese classic in which a goddess protects local fishermen, brings a cultural background to the dramatic event of Morecambe Bay, England. These immigrants, probably poor farmers or maybe fishermen, were not prepared for the force of the sea and seem not to be protected by the Chinese goddess.

The ability to edit and show different parts, perspectives, angles and elements of different stories combined in a multiscreen environment, (thereby allowing the spectator all possible relations and modes of interpretation), is the key to why Isaac Julien chooses to work with multiple screens. He can deconstruct the different existing cinematic iconographies and gives the viewer the ability to experience multiple perspectives. He is also able to show the same scene or same story from multiple angles at the same time and is not dependent upon a certain way of showing time or using narrative. Julien hands the viewer tools to see that there is not one set story, but multiple stories with different perspectives. Hereby Julien is able to raise questions about representation. Julien is, similarly to Neshat, interested in the relation between the viewer and his/her position within the installation. By attracting the audience with beautiful imagery on multiple screens which grasp attention, Julien is able to seduce an audience in exploring subjects like race and sexuality, representation and history.

*"My cinema- multi-screen installation – traces an affective itinerary in which literalism is eschewed and representation questioned"*<sup>88</sup> – Isaac Julien

### **Yang Fudong**

Yang Fudong is the artist with the youngest oeuvre. Fudong was not trained as a filmmaker but as a painter at the China Academy of Fine Arts in Hangzhou. Fudong's work is highly attractive and according to Chris Chang, senior editor at film magazine *Filmcomment*<sup>89</sup> each and every frame could be exhibited as a still. The majority of Fudong's works circle around the ambitions of the modern-day Chinese adult. 'Every educated Chinese person is very ambitious, and obviously there are obstacles, obstacles coming either from society or from inside oneself' states Fudong.<sup>90</sup> His films question contemporary Chinese life through historic and mythological references such as Chinese myths and tales, and by referencing historical and contemporary Chinese intellectuals. The communist system had started to change, much of it on the economic side of it. But after the failure of the pro-democracy movement in China in 1989, which did not succeed in ridding the country of the government's oppression, the contemporary Chinese intellectuals were left with deep psychological scars. In order to escape the past economic oppression, the intellectuals developed into entrepreneurs, the nouveau riche, devoting their lives to making money. This phenomenon resulted in a crisis of the status of Chinese

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<sup>87</sup> Mathieu Borysevicz, *China Imagined*, Art in America Vol. 98, Issue 8 (September 2010) p. 60.

<sup>88</sup> Isaac Julien & Christine van Assche, *Isaac Julien livre numéro 8.315 espace trois-cent-quinze nouveaux medias*. Centre Pompidou, Paris 2005 p. 44.

<sup>89</sup> Chris Chang, 'Take Five. The spectatorial fortitude of Yang Fudong' in *Filmcomment* vol. 45. No 5 (September-October 2009) p.21.

<sup>90</sup> Website Moore Space, Hans Ulbrich Obrist, *Interview with Yang Fudong, 2003*, <<http://www.themoospace.org/oldmoospace/YangFudong/Texts.html>> (visited 21-4-2014).

intellectuals. They no longer participated in efforts to change society.<sup>91</sup> This marginalisation of the contemporary intellectuals by the Chinese society is one of the main subjects in Fudong's slow-paced and dreamlike films. Fudong integrates the character of a stereotype contemporary intellectual in his work by incorporating them in ancient myths or scenery from the 1930s.



2.8 - Yang Fudong, *Seven Intellectuals in a bamboo forest*, still.

One of these myths is 'The seven sages of the bamboo grove'. Fudong uses 'The seven sages of the bamboo grove' in his five-part work *Seven Intellectuals in a bamboo forest* (2003-2007) (fig. 2.8). The myth tells a story about a group of men, intellectuals, fleeing the chaos during the Warring States Period.<sup>92</sup> During this time (475BC - 221BC) a unified China was created under the Qin dynasty (221-206 b.C.).<sup>93</sup> All the while, a new social group emerged, the intellectuals. They were useful to local leaders, as they gave advice and taught the younger generations. The existence of this group of teachers allowed a group of the more privileged to become better educated. This class of the better educated became known as *shih*, literati. They eventually evolved into what is now known as Mandarins. During this time, one kingdom, that of Zhou (which preceded the Qin dynasty), took over various other states and provinces.<sup>94</sup> In *Seven Intellectuals in a bamboo forest* a group of men takes refuge in a bamboo forest to flee the chaos of worldly matters.<sup>95</sup> The contemporary Chinese intellectuals portrayed in Fudong's work are trapped between emotional uncertainty, the Chinese society and possible democracy. They

<sup>91</sup> P. Behrman, *Yang Fudong*, Art Monthly Issue 296 (May 2006) pp. 37-38.

<sup>92</sup> Website Yang Fudong 'Seven Intellectuals Part 1' <<http://yangfudong.com/content/Seven%20Intellectuals%20Part%201/intro.htm>> (visited 14-4-2013).

<sup>93</sup> Gordon Kerr, *A short history of China: From ancient dynasties to economic powerhouse*, E-book published by Oldcastel Books 2013, pp. 24-25

<sup>94</sup> Idem.

<sup>95</sup> Website Yang Fudong 'Seven Intellectuals Part 1' <<http://yangfudong.com/content/Seven%20Intellectuals%20Part%201/intro.htm>> (visited 14-4-2013).

are also torn in opposite directions, with great ambitions and ideals such as earning money and success, but also the creation of a Chinese democracy.<sup>96</sup> The myth of the seven sages is used as a metaphor to show the resistance of the young Chinese intellectuals against the pace of change in China. A similar major change led the sages to flee the area when great wars were fought, eventually creating a unified China under Qin dynasty rule. The intellectuals in Fudong's works cannot cope with the change of China and find themselves in an identity crisis.<sup>97</sup> In Fudong's work these intellectuals are portrayed as young suited men and elegantly dressed women, the stereotype of the businessmen and women whom the intellectuals became after the failure of the pro-democracy movement. They are seen wondering around dreamy cityscapes, woods, hills, water and farmlands in the installations of Fudong. The intellectuals seem as though they are empty shells that have lost the fight for their dreams, and who are now filling this void with the temporal joy of earning money and spending it for leisure. In *Tonight's Moon* (2000) suited men chase after birds in a garden and play on boats.<sup>98</sup> They are behaving like the rising wealthy class in China, working less, and playing more. They are spending their private time boating and walking through western-styled parks.<sup>99</sup>

*First Intellectual* (2000) (fig. 2.9), *City Lights* (2000), *Don't worry it will be better* (2000) and *Jiaer's Livestock* (2002) (fig. 3.1) also show young men in suits. The photo series *First Intellectual* shows a suited man, bleeding, standing on a wide empty Beijing boulevard. He is holding a briefcase in one hand, a brick in the other. For Yang Fudong, it represents a scene in which the man wants to attack someone in return, but does not know whom. Fudong writes that he does not know if the problem stems from either himself or society.<sup>100</sup> The single screen video *City Lights* shows an office employee's daily routine of sleeping, waking up and longing for something other than this daily routine. The employee is seen staring out of his office window, into the world. An alter ego of the employee fulfils the desire of the worker to be elsewhere, to not be in his daily cycle. He walks around town, in surrealistic views of the employee walking with an umbrella, recalling for instance Rene Magritte's work. *Jiaer's Livestock* (2002) shows two identical rooms both with one large projection and within a suitcase some smaller monitors, which give possible storylines. In both large projections, a city man, possibly one of Fudong's frequently used intellectuals, is seen arriving in a rural area. One storyline shows that the city man is robbed and killed by two peasants, which are later robbed and killed by a tea-picker. The other room shows the man being helped by the peasants, which he then kills. The screens in the suitcases give more details of both versions, and tend to give the viewer a wider array of details and perspectives to apply to the storyline.

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<sup>96</sup> Bingxia Yu, *Transcending the city*, Afterimage Vol. 37 Issue 3 (Nov/Dec 2009).

<sup>97</sup> Idem.

<sup>98</sup> Yuko Hasegawa, 'Yang Fudong. Beyond reality' in Flash Art no 241 (march-april 2005) p. 103.

<sup>99</sup> Anuradha Vikram 'Memories of China: Yang Fudong's Nostalgic Dissillusionment (November 26, 2013)

<<http://hyperallergic.com/95597/memories-of-china-yang-fudongs-nostalgic-disillusionment/>> (visited 29-4-2014).

<sup>100</sup> Yang Fudong, 'A thousand words Yang Fudong talks about the seven intellectuals' in ArtForum 42 No. 1 (September 2003), p. 183.



2.9 - Yang Fudong, *The First Intellectual*, 2000, c-print.

Next to contemporary life in China, Fudong also uses 1930s Shanghai style scenery in his work. Fudong tries to 'connect to forgotten Shanghai, and its cinema, in order to make sense of today.'<sup>101</sup> In the 1930s next to having a thriving film industry, Shanghai also was one of the great financial centres of the world.<sup>102</sup> Shanghai in the 1930s was a city of transgression, like current China. Shanghai was Chinese yet international; it was colonial and colonized. Today China is communist and capitalist.<sup>103</sup> The Chinese are in a state of in-between, not poor and under communism, but also not wealthy or free as they would be under a democracy.<sup>104</sup> This ambivalent position of the Chinese is one of the key themes of Fudong's work: his characters only enjoy wealth, not the freedom to do anything with it. The Shanghai scenery of the 1930s is seen in Fudong's *The Fifth Night* (2010) (fig 2.10), which is set on a 1930s Shanghai square. The work consists of a seven-screen video black and white projection, with all the screens set next to each other on one long wall. All screens are composed in one single shot of the same 10.36 minutes on the set.

<sup>101</sup> Davide Quadrio & Noah Cowan *Yang Fudong*, Kaleidoscope 19 (autumn) 2013 < > (visited 19-11-2013).

<sup>102</sup> Scott Tong, *Shanghai: Global Financial Center? Aspirations and reality, and implications for Hong Kong*, October 2009 < <http://cec.shfc.edu.cn/download/fba2a11a-ea6a-4b40-92e1-ea9b71bc3c7e.pdf>> (visited 18-11-2013).

<sup>103</sup> Davide Quadrio & Noah Cowan *Yang Fudong*, Kaleidoscope 19 (autumn) 2013.

<<http://www.undo.net/it/magazines/1384450177#.UodX829H19w.twitter>> (visited 19-11-2013).

<sup>104</sup> As seen from a western point of view in which democracy versus communism means free versus not-free. Free in this context is a highly debatable definition. The work free is used here as simple western viewpoint, believing people under a democracy are free to do what they want.



2.10 - Yang Fudong, *Fifth Night*, 2010, installation view.

The square, scenery and the people moving around the square in 1930s clothing give a nostalgic feeling to the dark scene. The seven screens show the big square from different vantage points and each camera follows a different person walking on the square. The people who are lead actors in the work are never seen on two screens at the same time. When someone walks off on the right side of a screen, he or she will appear at some point on the next screen on the right side. The square is surrounded by buildings on both sides. Dead centre on the square is a stage with a couch and a staircase leading to nothing. Wooden crates are stacked on top of each other at the outer left side of the square near the buildings there. The right end of the square is a place where a broken tramway is being repaired and further right a pair of fancy chairs is placed. The entire square is filled with activity. The tramway is being repaired, people are gardening, boxes and crates are being carried and a blacksmith is working on his anvil. Some older looking men are sitting on the couch in the centre of the square. The main characters are slowly walking around the square, from one end to the other, crossing each other's paths but not really interacting. The characters walk around, with faces often full of expression. However, they fail to really connect with each other. They notice each other and calmly stare at each other, but never start a conversation.<sup>105</sup> The people in *The Fifth Night* just seem to wander around the square. They can be seen as the earlier mentioned intellectuals, who have no real purpose in their lives. They earn money to fill the gap between life and death.

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<sup>105</sup> Website Hereelsewhere 'Yang Fudong: Fifth Night' < <http://hereelsewhere.com/see/yang-fudong-fifth-night/> > (visited 16-4-2014).

In *The Fifth Night*, what is the forefront of one projection is the background of another. A character is never the main character on more than one projection. They shift from one projection into another. The seven-screen parallel projection is characterised by Fudong as a ‘traditional Chinese long-roll painting’, where a story is seen by holding the roll in two hands about forty centimetres apart and scrolling the paper roll from one end to another.<sup>106</sup> Fudong has skilfully orchestrated his team, keeping in check that none of the cameras were seen in another shot, and that all people fluidly move from one camera shot into the other. Fudong’s idea of using the seven-screen installation ‘matured before the initial production: capturing the video output from seven monitors that were connected to seven film cameras [when he was overseeing production of one of his films ed.]. Rather than the recorded film stock, this comprised the body of the piece on exhibit.’<sup>107</sup> A second version of *The Fifth Night* is composed of a ten-screen projection and runs fifty minutes against the ten minute projection time of version one. Version two is a ‘preview’ of version one and shows the last rehearsal, a bad scene of each shot, three extra projections with photo documentation and a documentary projection.<sup>108</sup> Fudong made this work because he felt that after making the work *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith* (2009) the process of filmmaking itself attracted him the most.<sup>109</sup> *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith* is an installation of eight different screens set up individually in the room playing silent films without narratives. The actors who at the same time look like they are from the 1930s and from the present play Cliché scenes. *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith* is made of eight takes that were not up to standard and that normally would not have been used. ‘Where did all the bad takes go? Shouldn’t they exist even if they were not perfect? In other words, should I reveal my working process by showing multiple takes as well as the mistakes I made?’ wondered Fudong.<sup>110</sup> By using multiple screens Fudong thinks the audience may be able to make a highly personal experience, which they can construct themselves.<sup>111</sup> Fudong says: ‘The movies that people generally approve of, conventional movies, they have industry standards, or aesthetic standards. For example, a film should run a certain length, present you with a certain narrative, elicit from you a certain response.’<sup>112</sup> The installation of work in the exhibition space allows the viewer not to have the need to sit through the whole film. The viewer also does not enter the space before the films starts, most of the time they enter while the projections are already playing, since most of them are on loop.

Fudong says, “You can watch through the whole film, or you can skip around, or pick and choose. [...] The feeling of a movie theatre is a silk thread, but in an exhibition room, it’s like several needles stuck in one place, or like a sculpture. If it were shown in a movie theatre, it would also have a different structure; at the very least its narrative would be stronger. Audiences mould ideas for you, between different parts and scenes, and some ideas are not necessarily linked to your original ideas. Right now, the exhibition room presentation of this film is broken apart, and then arbitrarily put together.”<sup>113</sup>

<sup>106</sup> Li Zhenhua, ‘Yang Fudong’ in BOMB magazine 118 (2012), unnumbered.

<sup>107</sup> Idem.

<sup>108</sup> Idem.

<sup>109</sup> Idem.

<sup>110</sup> Idem.

<sup>111</sup> Website Hereelsewhere ‘Yang Fudong: Fifth Night’ < <http://hereelsewhere.com/see/yang-fudong-fifth-night/>> (visited 16-4-2014).

<sup>112</sup> Zhang Yaxuan, ‘Interview The Power behind’ in Li Zhenhua, Yuko Hasegawa, Molly Nesbit a.o., *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith: Yang Fudong’s Solo Exhibition*, Shanghai 2009 p. 181.

<sup>113</sup> Idem pp. 181-182.

He states that he likes the broken up style of watching movies. Fudong elaborates by saying: "It gives people a different feeling from what you have after watching one movie all the way through." Yang Fudong constructs a framework with his multiscreen installations. By walking amidst the screens the spectator will be able to create his or her own story or interpretation. This in contrary to conventional film, where the narrative is set out, and the audience in a movie theatre needs to sit out the whole film.<sup>114</sup> Fudong states that people's acceptance and understanding of unlimited formal possibilities make him the happiest. Fudong states: "that his films are open to interpretation."<sup>115</sup>

## Conclusion chapter two

For Shirin Neshat, photography became too final and monumental. She had the desire to tell stories to her audience and with that desire she stepped into the realm of film, proclaiming around 2002 that film was the most complete form of art. In her multiscreen work Neshat explored the social structures in Islamic Iran, the opposites between male and female in Iran and Islamic countries and the differences between the west and the Middle East. Showing these themes by using multiple projections caused the viewer to become an active participant in the work. The viewers were physically put in between the different sides shown by Neshat. As viewer you had to turn around to see the other projection and thereby missing what was happening on any other projections. You were either looking at the male or female side, but not at both at once. By encountering works of Neshat, the viewer gets activated in his or her watching experience. They are stopped in their wandering through rooms in museums, watching one painting after another. They are stopped and their attention is being pulled by multiple projections at once. They have to choose.

That position of choosing is why Isaac Julien does not think the single screen versions of his work are as exciting as his multiscreen works. While making them, he can actually show a scene from different sides at once, this creates new ways of editing but also opens up possibilities within narrative and the passage of time in his work. Through using multiple projections, Julien is able to question Hollywood standards for film and narrative. In a postmodernist and poststructuralist way he is able to show that there are multiple narratives from which the viewer is in charge himself. Since the continuation of time is not a given anymore, he is also able to make the viewing experience more exciting. Different continuations of time immerse the viewer into a mixture of images and stories. Within a single subject the viewer is able to connect with multiple perspectives and layers. They decide what projections to look at and what stories to link together. The natural human urge to find or create a storyline, due to our capacity only to experience time in a linear fashion (and Hollywood's use of that condition) creates a situation in which the viewer will start to tie together the different streams of film and information seen in the multiple projections surrounding him. The viewer is activated in creating their own story or narrative from the different projections, and although Isaac Julien meticulously puts together the different feeds of information, the viewer will have a chance to interpret the work on a broader base than a

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<sup>114</sup> Zhang Yaxuan, 'Interview The Power behind' in Li Zenhua, Yuko Hasegawa, Molly Nesbit a.o., *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith: Yang Fudong's Solo Exhibition*, Shanghai 2009 p. 181.

<sup>115</sup> Li Zenhua, 'Yang Fudong' in BOMB magazine 118 (2012).



single screen presentation. This creates a position for Julien to propose other perspectives on history or society.

Yang Fudong feels like he is enduring and wasting his time watching single screen films. He creates multi-screen works so the audience can construct their own more personal experience. Fudong sees his films as imperfect, and uses 'left-over' material and bad takes in his actual work. Something very unlike Hollywood or film in general, this exemplifies Fudong's take on film. The viewer does not have to sit through the whole film. They can see a part and walk out of the exhibition space. This fragmentation of the viewing experience means that the viewer will not get hold of a narrative or unfolding storyline. The audience will mould their own ideas and link the scenes in their own way.

All three artists are trying to engage the audience; they try to let the audience participate more often and less passively. By doing this they oppose most single screen films, videos and Hollywood aesthetics. They also oppose most Hollywood subjects, showing subjects that reflect or show differences in and between cultures, subjects on sexual orientation and political freedom and history. In the single screen films and videos viewers are passive, waiting for the storyline to unfold. In the multiscreen works of Shirin Neshat, Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong, the viewer participates in the piece by entering it. They have to stand in the middle of the projections, turning around and link what they are seeing, or walk around different screens. They become subjects who give meaning to the information they receive, creating a storyline themselves within the given information of the artist. The artist of course still limits the viewer in their abilities of choosing material since the artists still edit and cut wherever they want. By activating the viewer, the artists create a more direct and active role with his viewer creating more time and more engagement with the work. In this way the artists are able to explore film and video in a broader sense, questioning Hollywood aesthetics, narrative, time, representation and presentation. Shirin Neshat differs in a way from Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong in that she mostly worked with two screens, creating an opposition. Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong often work with more than two screens, creating dispersion in viewing experience. The viewer is not positioned in between two sides and therefore almost mandatory has to pick one.

### Chapter three

How do art critics and art historians receive the multiscreen? Is their reception comparable with the artists' intentions, set out in chapter two?

In the previous chapter it was pointed out for which reasons Shirin Neshat, Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong chose the multiscreen, but how do art critics and art historians, among other audiences, receive this choice and usage?

Are the artist's intentions in line *with* the experiences and opinions of art critics, art historians and other audiences?

Claire Bishop and Nicolas de Oliveira both argue that immersion in installation art is of high importance for a higher engagement with and from the viewer. Bishop even suggests that due to engaging installations viewers will become more active in the social-political arena. She states that when a viewer moves through a work, this activates the viewer and might result in a more active engaging role outside of the work.<sup>116</sup> Graham Coulter-Smith opposes Bishop's writing by saying that immersion deactivates the viewer from engaging and that it creates a passive viewer, because the viewer does not have any distance between him and the subject. He recalls Bertold Brecht and his theatre theory about creating distance between the viewer and work by showing the viewer that the play is a construct. Coulter-Smith writes that Bishop's theory does not consider this distance between work and viewer, which is needed for the critical investigation of the work's subject. What Coulter-Smith writes is that Bishop 'is claiming that *immersion* activates while Brecht argues that immersion deactivates. [...] like Brecht, [Roland] Barthes argues that immersion leads to passivity whereas being confronted with a more challenging text leads to an activation of the reader.'<sup>117</sup> Coulter-Smith is so focused on the meaning of immersion however, that he misses that while being immersed one can still have a certain distance to a subject. Through the use of multiple non-relating information streams, the artists can create a certain distance between works and the viewer. The artist can create a distance between the objects in their installation, creating an activating environment in which immersion does not necessarily mean a close relation with the subject, but a more stimulating environment for the viewer. The installation creates an active role for the viewer to search for links between the streams of information or objects in the installation and combine them because the form one body of work. This could be seen as the 'more challenging text' suggested by Barthes to lead to activation of the reader. Coulter-Smith however does also bring up an interesting point:

'So long as the viewer remains aware that she or he is viewing a construction then a creative and critically reflective engagement is possible. But if the immersion is so total that the viewer loses critical distance then the effect is regressive. There may be an experience of *jouissance* but the degree to which this is emancipatory is debateable.'<sup>118</sup>

This quote is interesting in the light of Fudong's use of bad film takes and Isaac Julien's use of scenes in which people are filmed in green screen studios (showing the construction behind mind-grasping computer generated scenery) but before the background has been digitally edited in.

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<sup>116</sup> Graham Coulter-Smith, *Deconstructing Installation Art*, 2006, < <http://www.installationart.net/Chapter2Immersion/immersion02.html> > (visited 25-1-2015).

<sup>117</sup> *Idem.*

<sup>118</sup> *Idem.*

## Shirin Neshat

Shirin Neshat started working with video after she felt photography was holding her back from telling a story to her audience. She felt photography was only able to imply a story. Neshat started to use multi-screen installations, as this tied in with the concept of her work; showing opposites and showing the dualities between sexes in Iranian culture and dualities between the Islamic world and the west. Using the multiscreen meant that the audience was more engaged, according to Neshat. 'Unlike a cinematic picture, where you are sitting in your chair and are passive, here you become a part of the piece. It's a very emotionally and psychologically demanding situation in which you have to keep debating whether you should be looking on this side or that side. You can never watch both at the same time.'<sup>119</sup> Do art critics and art historians agree with this vision?

Michael Rush, playwright and filmmaker, writes that the architectural placement of the projections in Neshat's work is essential. According to him, this placement creates sympathy for both male and female, sides in the 'gender wars' seen in Neshat's work such as *Rapture*. 'Neshat [sic] places the viewer literally in the middle of the metaphoric gender wars being waged on opposite walls. Her approach is a subtle one, allowing for sympathy for both sides of this great divide.'<sup>120</sup> Anne Berk tones down Micheal Rush's statement of sympathy for both sides in her article in the *Financieel Dagblad*. She states that the placement of the viewer in between the screens creates a physical dimension in which the viewer has to place himself in both positions, with an emphasis on 'has to'.<sup>121</sup> This contrasts with what Rush says. But Neshat's goal of making it an emotional and psychological situation seems to be reached according to both writers.

The duality in Neshat's work and the multiscreen presentation she uses to show these dualities result in her work being called physical in several articles. In her article *Frayed connections, fraught projections: The troubling work of Shirin Neshat* Lindsey Moore goes as far as saying that the multiscreen installations create an 'intermediate and uneasy viewing space' replicating 'the splitting of identity between cultural modes of experience'.<sup>122</sup> Hripsimé Visser writes that the two screens facing each other create a place where the viewer is literally physically placed between the 'men in business clothes and typical Islamic women, in between culture and nature, between harmony and unrestrained desire'.<sup>123</sup> This position is in between both bridges and separate gendered positions, suggests Lindsey Moore.<sup>124</sup> The uncertainty created by the use of two opposite screens forms the opportunity for the viewer to contemplate 'how culture is both produced by, and produces, its subjects and others.'<sup>125</sup> With this expression of views, Moore implicates that Neshat's work is not only reflecting upon separation and differences between sexes in Iranian culture, but also on the differences between the western and Islamic world. Whereas westerners experience the Islamic people shown in Neshat's work as different, the Islamic people are accustomed to the separation of sexes and therefore experience the

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<sup>119</sup> Babak A. Ebrahimiyan, *Passage to Iran, PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 24 no. 3 (September 2002) p. 48.

<sup>120</sup> Micheal Rush, 'Imperfect lives' in: *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art*, vol. 21 no. 3 (sept 1999) p. 71.

<sup>121</sup> Anne Berk, *Voorbij pamflettisme*, Het financieel dagblad, fd persoonlijk zaterdag 4 februari 2006, p 21.

<sup>122</sup> Lindsey Moore, 'Frayed connections, fraught projections: The troubling work of Shirin Neshat' in *Women: a cultural review*, volume 13, issue 1 (2002) p. 9.

<sup>123</sup> Hripsimé Visser, *Shirin Neshat*, Stedelijk Museum bulletin 01, 2006 p 22.

<sup>124</sup> Lindsey Moore, 'Frayed connections, fraught projections: The troubling work of Shirin Neshat' in *Women: a cultural review*, volume 13, issue 1 (2002) p. 9.

<sup>125</sup> Idem.

western way of life as unconventional. Moore hereby suggests that Neshat shows the viewers of her work what she, as a woman coming from the Islamic world but living in the west, is seeing, and she is able to shed light on both these cultures. Scott Macdonald continues from Moore's point of view and writes that 'the spectator's physical position, looking back and forth between two different worlds, echoes and embodies Neshat's psychic (psychological) position, caught between her past and her present, and between her fear of losing her individuality within a traditional Islamic definition of womanhood and her feelings of separation and isolation within a modern Christian-based society.'<sup>126</sup> The dual screen installations reveal a 'schizoid' diaspora artist 'torn between heritage and aspiration'.<sup>127</sup> For MacDonald, Neshat's dual-screen works tell the story of a woman caught in between cultures, not belonging to both. Macdonald and Moore both categorise the work of Neshat as one of diaspora, multiculturalism and not only dualism in Islamic sexes.

Aphrodite Désirée Navad wrote an article on the subject of Neshat's own identity and how this reflects in her work. In *Unsayin' life stories: The self-representational art of Shirin Neshat and Ghazel* she writes that through the use of multiple projections, 'Neshat makes the viewer feel the lack of resolution, the wavering back and forth that marks her life and others who have experienced exile.'<sup>128</sup> Navad continues, stating that 'the space between Neshat's dual screens is commonly read as representative of the artists' intermediate cultural position, a transitive "third space" around which different worlds are made to spin.'<sup>129</sup> This reflects back upon what Micheal Rush wrote that the placement of viewer and screens creates empathy for both parties in the piece with the viewer. Micheal Rush's comment can be seen as one of multiple outcomes of this 'third space' created by multiscreens. This 'third space', let's say a new perspective; 'around different worlds are made to spin' seems like art critics and art historians' main outcome of Neshat's use of the multiscreen. The choice to use a multiscreen presentation is made to show opposites, dualities in a culture or in between cultures. By using mostly two screens, Neshat creates not per se a certain immersion, but more of a position in which the viewer is able to see both sides but also hold a certain distance towards both sides. This makes viewers aware of their position in between these cultures. It has the distance Graham Coulter-Smith calls for in his book *Deconstructing Installation Art*. The multiscreen enhances the possibility to form a new perspective on both positions within the culture or on both cultures, Islamic and western. Neshat's multiscreen works create a 'third space', a space Neshat has been living in for a large part of her life, mediating between Islamic and western culture, a space with preconceptions about Islamic culture, in which the viewer is placed when stepping into the installation.<sup>130</sup> Neshat's emphasis on using the multiscreen to engage the viewer more than with a single screen film can be seen as something the critics and historians appear to agree on. The results of this engagement are, however, quite diverse. Neshat's video installations work on multiple levels, whether being caught in between gender issues, deciding what side to pick or feeling empathy for both, or seeing it all in a larger perspective and using Neshat's work to see the difference between western and Islamic culture. The

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<sup>126</sup> Scott Macdonald, 'Between two worlds: An interview with Shirin Neshat' in: *Feminist Studies*, vol. 30 no. 3 (Fall2004), p. 624.

<sup>127</sup> idem p. 625.

<sup>128</sup> Aphrodite Désirée Navab, 'Unsayin' life stories: The self-representational art of Shirin Neshat and Ghazel' in *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, vol. 41 no. 2 (summer 2007), p. 44.

<sup>129</sup> Lindsey Moore, 'Frayed connections, fraught projections: The troubling work of Shirin Neshat' in *Women: a cultural review*, volume 13, issue 1 (2002) pp. 11-12.

<sup>130</sup> Kees Keijer, Shirin Neshat, *De witte raaf*, jaargang 20, no 120 (maart-april 2006) p. 120.

outcome of this increased engagement that Neshat creates via her multiscreen works seems rather hard to pinpoint, the viewer could become more aware of his own position in between cultures or more aware of Neshat's position. Lindsey Moore writes that western viewers possibly cannot connect with the Islamic and Iranian images shown in Neshat work. They will therefore not step into the 'third space' created in between screens, but into a fourth one. A space in which the viewer does not connect with the position Neshat is in herself.<sup>131</sup> Scott MacDonald argues that the viewer in Neshat's *Soliloquy* 'echoes and embodies Neshat's physical position'.<sup>132</sup> What Neshat's own intentions are in her work, seems questionable. She never speaks directly about her goal, and mostly says that the multiple screens create a space in which the viewer is challenged in choosing a side to look at. Does Neshat want the viewer to become more aware of their own positions, thereby creating a platform in which the viewers can relate to other cultures more easily and become more accepting of other cultures; or does she want the viewer to be aware of the differences and the position Neshat herself is in, and feel compassion about this position? The third perspective shows viewers a position they are not in. Neshat offers a position outside of the comfort of their own culture. To step into the artwork's world, is a chance to make the first step outside of one's own culture, this does not always work according to the critics and often creates a fourth space in which the viewer remains looking at the 'other' culture.

### **Isaac Julien**

A lot has been written about the work of Isaac Julien. Julien has been in the film, video and art world for approximately the same time as Neshat and in the beginning of his career he mostly worked around subjects of blackness and homosexuality. His multiscreen installations have mostly been written about a subject and interpretation based level and Julien's presentations and multiscreen practice has not really been interpreted much. The critics that have written about Julien's use of the multiscreen seem to agree with each other and with Julien's saying that he is dissecting the traditional movie and cinematic qualities of single screen, standard narrative works. That he questions representation.

Through the use of multiscreen installations, Isaac Julien questions contemporary culture and cinema. With the use of multiple screens Julien creates the ability to deconstruct the cinematic iconography of narrative and the linear progression of scenes. The deconstruction of these traditional elements in cinema spark questions such as whether the cinema we are seeing really is as exciting as it could be?<sup>133</sup> Is this the only outcome? What happens with the other characters? Race, sexual orientation and immigration are key subjects in works by Julien. By using multiple screens, Julien combines multiple stories and perspectives, with which he hopes that the viewer can create new perspectives on these subjects. According to Julien, the viewer is 'able to have a fuller relationship to the actual scenes or tableaux, which are being constructed in that moment'.<sup>134</sup> Julien thus uses the multiscreen to practice critique on representation, used in cinema, but also the representation of race, immigration and sexual orientation. The artist uses the multiscreen to activate the viewers to think about these

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<sup>131</sup> Lindsey Moore, 'Frayed connections, fraught projections: The troubling work of Shirin Neshat' in *Women: a cultural review*, volume 13, issue 1 (2002) p. 12.

<sup>132</sup> Scott Macdonald, 'Between two worlds: An interview with Shirin Neshat' in: *Feminist Studies*, vol. 30 no. 3 (Fall2004), p. 624.

<sup>133</sup> B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich*, Art Journal Vol.61, No. 2 (Summer 2002) p. 52.

<sup>134</sup> B. Ruby Rich & Isaac Julien, *The Long Road: Isaac Julien in conversation with B. Ruby Rich*, Art Journal Vol.61, No. 2 (Summer 2002), p. 53.

problems of representation. His practice can be seen in the light of postmodernist theory and has links with Bertold Brecht's theatre practices. Brecht confronted his viewers with the narrative structure his plays had, exposing the difference between reality and fiction. He disliked the immersion of the viewer into the story and the empathy the viewer created for certain characters. He tried to expose the relationship between audience and actors, creating a certain distance between them. Isaac Julien does a similar thing, showing the constructs of film making, via pre-edited green screens takes, in combination with postmodernist and post-structuralist theories, showing multiple perspectives and storylines at similar times. Deconstructing narrative and creating a position in which the audience defines their meaning of the work, not the meaning Julien gives it.

B. Ruby Rich, film critic and commentator, says in her interview with Isaac Julien that his work accrues more power because of his use of multiple screens. According to her, Julien gets to be incredible generous with the viewer, not having to choose between shots and narratives, as ordinary filmmakers have to do.<sup>135</sup> The narrative can continue on one screen while other shots can be shown on other screens and vice versa. Julien is able to show us the apparatus of filmmaking, 'in a way that deconstructs and dissects cinema. It restores us to that time before all the final decisions are made in a traditional movie, which has such a relentless linearity.'<sup>136</sup> Jane Dyer quotes Julien in her article saying: 'One of the problems with cinema is that there are certain expectations, so making a work for a gallery or museum freed me up to really explore things in a way that one wasn't perhaps quite able to in a more conventional space.'<sup>137</sup> She writes that 'the "certain expectations" by which Julien feels constrained are both narrative and psychological: the experience of pleasure by means of both narrative coherence and heteronormative sexual identification afforded by mainstream cinema.'<sup>138</sup> She continues saying that Julien evades and resists conventional cinema by resituating himself outside of conventional cinema, in alternative spaces available to art installations. According to Dyer, Julien makes the viewers restate their relationship to mainstream cinema by his use of ironizing the before-mentioned cinematic pleasures. With this, Julien tries to create a measure of self- reflection and distance towards mainstream cinema with his viewers, writes Jane Dyer.<sup>139</sup> 'Julien uses available technology to extend the possibilities of what cinema can communicate and how it can be experienced.'<sup>140</sup>

## Yang Fudong

Fudong's work is set up as a framework in which the viewer can combine the different experiences to mould their own perspective on the subject. The movie is no longer 'a silk thread' but 'it's like several needles stuck in one place' as Fudong likes to call it.<sup>141</sup> Fudong hands the viewer multiple scenes and possible stories and

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<sup>135</sup> Idem p. 51.

<sup>136</sup> Idem p. 52.

<sup>137</sup> Richard Dyer, 'Isaac Julien in conversation', *Wasafiri* 43 (Winter 2004) p. 29.

<sup>138</sup> Jane Bryce, 'Riffing on Omeros: The relevance of Isaac Julien to the cultural politics in the Caribbean' in *Small Axe* 32, vol. 14 no. 2 (June 2010) pp. 88-89.

<sup>139</sup> Idem.

<sup>140</sup> Carolyn Tennant, 'Occupying the collection' in *Afterimage* vol. 39 no. 4 (jan/feb 2012) p. 22.

<sup>141</sup> Zhang Yaxuan, 'Interview The Power behind' in Li Zenhua, Yuko Hasegawa, Molly Nesbit a.o., *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith: Yang Fudong's Solo Exhibition*, Shanghai 2009 pp. 181-182.

endings, all of which the viewer can choose from and more importantly think about. 'What makes me happiest is people's acceptance and understanding of films with unlimited formal possibilities. My films are open to interpretation' states Fudong in an interview with Li Zenhua, a writer and curator.<sup>142</sup> He questions the possibilities traditional single screen film has.



3.1- Yang Fudong, *Jiaer's Livestock*, 2002-2005, installation view.

Chris Chang states that the visitors of Yang Fudong's show at the Asia Society in 2009 'could walk in and out of it without seeing the films from beginning to end, and still have a sense of the exhibit as a whole'.<sup>143</sup>

'Seeing the works of Yang Fudong, especially his films and video installations, is to encounter stories and situations within which the logic of the facts represented – with their cause-effect, beginning-end, and their before-and-after implications - seems at times to lose its importance' writes Marcella Beccaria in *Parkett*.<sup>144</sup>

Can this be compared with what Fudong said about his work where the movie is no longer 'a silk thread' but 'several needles stuck in one place'?<sup>145</sup> Beccaria continues by writing that fragmented editing, used by Fudong, together with his use of multiple screens, mean that the spectator needs to choose what to follow, and implies that other developments are impossible to follow. 'His work does not provide safe answers and he re-examines the notions of fiction', Beccaria writes.<sup>146</sup> He is able to do this because he exhibits in a gallery space. The viewers are not mandatory to sit through the film as in a movie theatre. They can come and go, choosing to sit through the whole film or just a fragment.<sup>147</sup> Zhang Yuxuan, cited in *October* magazine, states that the notion of people not being obliged to stay made that Fudong was able to increase the fragmentation of a story. Even

<sup>142</sup> Li Zenhua, 'Yang Fudong' in *BOMB* magazine 118 (2012).

<sup>143</sup> Chris Chang, 'Take Five. The spectatorial fortitude of Yang Fudong' in *Filmcomment* vol. 45. No 5 (September-October 2009) p.21.

<sup>144</sup> Marcella Beccaria, 'Yang Fudong: Towards a new abstraction' in *Parkett* no 76 (2006) pp. 72-77

<sup>145</sup> Zhang Yuxuan, 'Interview The Power behind' in Li Zenhua, Yuko Hasegawa, Molly Nesbit a.o., *Dawn Mist, Separation Faith: Yang Fudong's Solo Exhibition*, Shanghai 2009 pp. 181-182.

<sup>146</sup> Marcella Beccaria, 'Yang Fudong: Towards a new abstraction' in *Parkett* no 76 (2006) pp. 72-77.

<sup>147</sup> *Idem*.



to the point where no story needs to be told.<sup>148</sup> His questioning of cinema, which thrives on stories being told, shows new approaches to time and narrative.<sup>149</sup> Li Zenhua states in an interview with Fudong that Fudong's recent works (the interview was done in 2012) have only one connection to traditional film, and that is the way they were shot, using cameras. In the realms of viewership and exhibition format Zenhua argues that it would be hard to identify them as films.<sup>150</sup> It's a pity that Zenhua does not explain his points more elaborately in the interview, although he later tries to continue by asking if Fudong's 'films should be called films or some other thing?'<sup>151</sup> His point is clear though, Fudong does not make traditional cinema.

Bean Gilsdorf also reflects on the work of Fudong not being a film, but does not give an answer on what else it is. He writes that: 'as the actions of the characters never add up to a coherent, plot-driven account, the video reads less like a "movie" and more like watching strangers go about their lives; the viewer is free to invent a story while acknowledging that it is not *the* story. The fundamental ambiguity of Yang's work means that there is space for the viewer regardless of her cultural perspective, a place for cinema that opens possibilities instead of projecting exhaustive narratives.'<sup>152</sup> The point made by Gilsdorf about the space for viewers regardless of their cultural perspectives is confirmed by Courtney Malick in her review of the *Estranged Paradise* show at the Berkeley Art Museum. She writes that Fudong's work, through his use of multiple screens, relates to the confusion which is produced by changes in life, society and tradition. She concludes with saying that the work of Fudong does not necessarily have to be linked to changes that only occur in contemporary Chinese culture.<sup>153</sup>

Yang Fudong is also seen by critics as an artist that opposes the rules of (mainstream) cinema. He shows new approaches in time and storytelling. Multiple critics and scholars seem to agree that Fudong is able to make work without a strong narrative in which the viewer creates their own path. Fudong feels like he is enduring and wasting his time when watching single screen films. He creates multi-screen works so the audience can construct their own more personal experience. The critics seem to agree with Fudong in this aspect. Fudong is able to make this kind of video work due to the locations where he shows his works, museums and galleries. There, viewers are not set in thinking about a beginning-and-end, they walk in one room and decide themselves when they continue to the next.

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<sup>148</sup> Molly Nesbit, 'Wild Shanghai grass' in *October* 133(Summer 2010) p. 84.

<sup>149</sup> Li Zenhua, 'Yang Fudong' in BOMB 118 (winter 2012), unnumbered.

<sup>150</sup> idem.

<sup>151</sup> idem.

<sup>152</sup> Website Dailyserving: Bean Gilsdorf 'Yang Fudong: Estranged Paradise at the Berkeley Art Museum', September 6, 2013 <<http://dailyserving.com/2013/09/yang-fudong-estranged-paradise-at-berkeley-art-museum/>> (visited 10-12-2013).

<sup>153</sup> Website SFAQ Online: Courtney Malick, 'Review: Yang Fudong's "Estranged Paradise" at the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archive', September 2013 <<http://www.sfaqonline.com/2013/09/review-yang-fudongs-estranged-paradise-at-the-berkeley-art-museum-pacific-film-archive/>> (visited 10-12-2013).

### **Conclusion chapter three**

Whereas Shirin Neshat's multiscreen work opposes the sometimes narrow perspectives on other cultures, be it east or west, from a third perspective, that of the artist herself, the multiscreen work of Julien and Fudong tends to oppose traditional cinema and its qualities according to the critics. It is not clear whether Neshat tries to place the viewer in a position similar to her own or that she tries to show them the differences between cultures. Critics seem to share her viewpoint in that viewers are put into an emotional and physical demanding position when stepping into her multiscreen works. The outcome however differs between critics. Some argue that the viewers will not step into a third perspective, that of Neshat herself living in and out both cultures, but step into a fourth perspective, looking from outside into the Islamic and Iranian culture and into Neshat's position. Others argue that she creates a space in which one has to choose between sides.

Fudong and Julien like Neshat question subjects and create new perspectives for viewers on these subjects. The perspectives they create however, are more open, in relation to the subjects themselves. The viewer is not directly put in-between the male and female world of Iran and has to choose. The viewer is shown more than two perspectives on a certain subject, allowing the viewer to choose their own narrative or outcome. In Neshat's work, the subjects are really closed off; in Julien's work the subjects are already more open for interpretations and in Fudong's work the subjects are mostly vague, due to which own interpretation is something needed from the viewer.

That Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong both also differ is obvious, but they are more related to each other than to Neshat. They both question filmmaking, something not seen in Neshat's work, and through this, representation, which Neshat obviously questions but in a different way. By presenting multiple stories at once, and using footage of the production process of the work, for example bad- and green-screen takes, they both question the way in which history, narrative and culture are made and projected upon the public.

Neshat questions, through her own position in between cultures, people's expectations and viewing point of other cultures. She shows her own place, that of not belonging in the west nor the Middle-East, and uses that to change the perception of viewers about their own identity and that of other cultures. Julien and Fudong question cinema and its expectations and results, opening it up, creating more possibilities. Creating these extra points of view and possibilities allows the viewers to become more aware of those possibilities but also of the limits of cinema, narrative and cultural perspectives. The viewers are able to create a more personal experience and storyline.

## Conclusion

Why did Shirin Neshat, Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong chose multiscreen as their medium, and why is this multiscreen presentation of video for them more interesting than using a single screen video projection?

In chapter one I wrote a small history of video art. The development of video art can not be considered outside of the rise of conceptual and performance art. Video art became a ground for conceptual and performance based artists who used it to document their work, and in a lot of cases these documentations became works on their own. This enhanced the influence of the medium video. Simultaneously, the influence of performance art had caused the viewer to become a performer, or activator, without whom the piece would not exist or be complete. Artists started to rely on the engagement of the viewer and started to create installations that gave viewers a more stimulating relation and active role in and with the work. The immersion within the artwork was mandatory.

While the influence of video art rapidly increased, so did technology. Video equipment became more affordable, editing easier, and more and more artists started to experiment with the possibilities of the medium, trying to engage the viewer on different levels. From the nineties onwards video art became a phenomenon taken on by artists from all over the world.

Since the 1970s artists had changed from working merely with painting or sculpture, into artists working multidisciplinary and working in all sorts of media. By the nineties the viewers had also evolved, getting accustomed to multiple information streams at the same time. Where multiscreen presentations had at first, during the Eameses multiscreen presentation on the world fair, been something new and mind-blowing, people today are used to following information streams on multiple screens at the same time. Be it in a bar watching sports or on different windows opened on a computer screen.

In chapter two I tried to unravel the reasons why Shirin Neshat, Yang Fudong and Isaac Julien chose multiscreen environments as their medium. Art history, evolving techniques and accustomed audiences had created an environment for the artists to work in the medium of video and specific multiscreen video. But why did they choose multiple screens? Chapter three compared the artist's intentions of choosing multiple screens as their medium with the experiences and opinions of art critics, art historians and other audiences about their use of the multiscreen.

During the nineties Shirin Neshat had returned to Iran, her home country, and started to work on the differences she saw between the Iran she was raised in, how Iran had become, and the western world she had been living in for the past decade. In order to show these opposites in a less monumental and final way than her initial photography, she moved into working with multiple videos. This resulted in video installations, which according to both critics and the artist herself are physically demanding for the viewers, who have to choose where to look. According to Neshat and her critics, this usage of multiple screens is supposed to make relating to the different subjects and sides shown in the works easier. With her multiscreen work Neshat creates a

position for the viewer to stand in between opposites: a meta-perspective. This perspective allows for the viewer to emphasize to both parties their respective (cultural) identities, although this is not at all guaranteed as viewers might not immediately connect to foreign cultures and identities in the works. Simultaneously, the possibility to create empathy among the viewer is problematized due to fact that Neshat's works seem to be derived from her own position, which is one of not belonging to either middle-eastern, Iranian, or western culture, and which reflects on her position as a diaspora artist and human being. From a critical perspective, then, it might be argued that Neshat, in her work, focuses primarily on her individual position. On the one hand, Neshat's use of the multiscreen, proves an effective instrument to simultaneously show opposites. On the other hand, however, the effectiveness of her work in general is limited to her individual position in between cultures.

Both Isaac Julien and Yang Fudong seemed to have moved towards multiscreens to show and stretch the possibilities of cinema. With their multiscreen work, they both question representation, history, narrative, time and cinema itself. They are able to do this because of the spaces they show their work in. The museums and galleries have visitors who do not have the expectation of sitting one and a half hour watching a feature film. Both Fudong and Julien argue that single screen works are less tempting, bore them and are inferior compared with the possibilities of the multiscreen.

In the case of Yang Fudong's work, this discontent with the limited possibilities of single screen cinema results in works that are often criticized as open-ended and narrative-less. Fudong investigates the properties of cinema, which leads him to deconstruct them, rather than to create works with a concise narrative structure. Through this deconstruction, Fudong both investigates and emphasizes the relationship between cinema and reality. In mainstream cinema the feature film acts within boundaries. Scenes, angles, plots which do not fit these boundaries are thrown away. Fudong uses these leftovers (scenes, angles and plots) to question the limitations of cinema. Therefore, it can be argued that Fudong's use of the multiscreen did not emerge from a desire to engage the viewer, but rather is the result of his artistic research on the properties of cinema.

Unlike Yang Fudong, Isaac Julien is not questioning the properties of cinema. Rather, he appropriates the multiscreen to make the viewer aware of exclusions, in western grand narrative. By using multiple screens Julien attempts to confront the viewer with histories that were marginalized or neglected on racial or sexual grounds. Julien critiques the exclusion of minorities in the west, while simultaneously creating awareness of these specific histories. It might be argued, then, that Julien's preference of the multiscreen over the single screen emerges from his critique of how history is constructed and how 'things' are left out.

I started out questioning why artists use the multiscreen over single screen. By investigating the work of three artists who have both made single and multiscreen works, it has become clear that although their individual intentions differ, there appears to be a denominator for in their use of the multiscreen: simultaneity. The work of all three artists appears to confront the fact that there always is a plurality of narratives and that 'our' reality consists not of one but of many perspectives. In this sense, Shirin Neshat uses the multiscreen to emphasize her problematic position in between western and middle-eastern culture, Yang Fudong necessarily works with multiple screens to investigate the properties of cinema in relation to reality, while Isaac Julien appropriates the multiscreen to show the flaws of western history and its neglected narratives.

Shirin Neshat's work differs from the work of Fudong and Julien in that it confronts the viewer with the impossible choice between two cultural narratives. Fudong's work showcases the limitations of mainstream cinema in relation to the simultaneous existence of multiple narratives. Julien's work emerges from the dominance of western grand narrative.

It is important to note that this focus on both the plurality of narratives and the simultaneity of events does not come out of the blue. The rise of mass media, telecommunications and the increasing dominance of the screen, paved the way for the conscious understanding that narratives (cultural and individual) and in fact life itself, happens outside individual perspectives. In different terms, the multiscreen installation is exemplary of a post-modern worldview.

Since this thesis has focused exclusively on the artistic considerations for the use of multiscreen (over single screen) in video art, there are a number of topics that have been left untouched, which allow for further research. In a philosophical context research on the relation between post-modernism and the multiscreen could do with further development. In a cultural-historical context the relation between visual culture and the multiscreen could be further researched.

From the perspective of art history, it seems valid to investigate the changing properties and contemporary status of the multiscreen. In this thesis, three renowned multiscreen artists have been discussed, who started working with multiscreen when it was a relatively new artistic medium. Today, the multiscreen is an established artistic medium, and a new generation of artists are pushing its boundaries. It would be interesting to discuss their multiscreen work in relation to recent developments within our visual culture.

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