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reunion: A Journey Through History, Symbolism, and Fear

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reunion: A Journey Through History, Symbolism, and Fear
A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather Noël Fassié who passed away in February of 2007.

~Ta passion, ta grace et ta voix poétique sont avec moi pour toujours.~
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Abstract

REUNION: A JOURNEY THROUGH HISTORY, SYMBOLISM, AND FEAR

By Vanessa Laure Fassié, M.F.A.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2007

Major Director: Sonali Gulati
Assistant Professor, Photography and Film

The contents here in examine the artistic process undertaken by Vanessa Fassié to create the mixed media work, reunion. The subjects of fear, archetypal symbolism, personal and collective histories were examined through research, archival evidence, video, sound, movement, and installation. reunion, examines not only the powers of personal and collective histories through the symbolic language of archetypes, but also how fear manifests and evolves through time. The culmination of this work was the creation of an installation within the Anderson Gallery at Virginia Commonwealth University. This Thesis was created through the use of Microsoft Word 2004.
Chapter 1

Introduction

The interaction of dance, video, sound, and performance enables a dialogue between time, space, and movement. As these varying elements overlap or separate, they distinguish themselves and in turn collectively begin conversations. These mixed media interactions impart ‘unseen’ or ‘invisible’ human dialogues. Through mixed media, I investigate the themes of fear, archetypal symbolism, personal and collective histories. The endeavor to create environments in which these dialogues may develop lies at the core of my work.

The use of the body as a vehicle of expression may enable one to evaluate one’s environment from the eyes of a living, moving, evolving entity. As a dancer, I create images from a deeply personal space, and often use autobiographical information to fuel the content of my work. Interpretations of artifacts that represent personal and collective history and memory (archival evidence, personal dreams, recollections etc.) combine to form a foundation. This foundation ‘sets the stage’ within which I perform mentally, physically, and creatively. The historical use of the body within my work, influences the creation of my videos and sound scores.

In an attempt to extend the possibilities of working with time, space, and movement, I utilize film and video. The power behind the temporal aspects of film and
video allow me to explore interpretations of personal history and the gulfs that lie between remembered events and the present. Within these videos, powerful archetypal symbols, connected to our dream language and collective histories, are also examined.

The sound design that accompanies my work is inherently tied to my investigation of the varying manifestations of human fear. It is often heavy and dark in tone, layered with intermittent moments of silence. The sound is structured to engage the space, and converse with the movement of the images. The atmosphere is balanced between recognizable sounds from nature (wind, water, cicadas), room tones, and unidentifiable sounds that could potentially encourage personal interpretation.

My most recent work, reunion, was created through an artistic process that combined research, rehearsal, performance, video, sound, and installation materials to present an immersive mixed media environment. reunion, examines personal and collective histories through the symbolic language of Jungian archetypes. Over riding this attempt is a personal interest in understanding how fear evolves and manifests through time. reunion unfolds dually through the language of symbols and the reinterpretation of past events. Through reunion, I combine the powers of personal and collective histories to charge the space and potentially activate the audience’s memories.
Chapter II
Exploring History, Symbolism, and Fear

Accompanying my artistic engagement with mixed media, is an equally important process of research and investigation that continuously informs the development of my work. While the categories of history, symbolism, and fear may seem broad and wide-ranging as stated, the research is focused on garnering inspiration from their varying representations. This interest stems from repetitive, personal, apocalyptic childhood dreams.

My study of history began as an excursion into my personal history, particularly the examination of the archival evidence including: oral narratives from family members, photographs, slides, and films. Secondly, I was greatly intrigued by events or figures from art history that related to my queries regarding our understanding of mortality and the after-life. Through this historical tracing, I was searching for representations of fear of the unknown. I also examined various events within social history that powerfully address human fears connected to mortality such as the decimating effects of the Black Plague.

Due to the powerful nature of my childhood dreams, I was drawn to an investigation of dream theory. These studies have revealed theories as to how dreams and their symbols may function. The study of symbolism began through an
examination of Carl Jung’s theories. For Jung, ‘dream dimensions’ of time and space were different from ‘conscious dimensions’ of time and space and each deserved its own rightful evaluation (Jung, *Man and His Symbols* 8-12). Jung felt that there were two layers that created the unconscious: the ‘personal unconscious’ and the ‘collective unconscious’. The personal unconscious rested upon the deeper and hidden collective unconscious. The collective unconscious was not individual but in fact universal, making its “contents and modes of behavior…more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals” (Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 4).

The contents of the collective unconscious were defined through the term ‘archetypes’. Archetypes represent archaic or primordial images that Jung sensed had existed since ancient times. The investigation of the interplay between dream states and consciousness has encouraged me to explore ideas surrounding collective memory. This exploration brought me to utilize both personal and non-personal archival films and slides within *reunion*, enabling me to ‘borrow’ collective memories of ‘humankind’ in order to create a canvas of the here and now (Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* 5).

Prior to *reunion*, I created a series of videos and sound scores entitled *regard(e)*. *regard(e)* was my first attempt at working with dream symbolism. Similar to my current work, I was attempting to bring my audience to a heightened awareness of the existence of mind body connections, stimulated through moving images and changing sounds. The environment presents dream symbol imagery, shifting landscapes, and a
subtly textured sound score that attempts to draw the viewer into an immersive experience.

*regard(e)*, consists of three chapters, which can be viewed either in succession or individually. The title holds a reference to the French words ‘regard’ (a noun meaning ‘the act of looking with a purposeful intention’) and ‘regarde’ (a verb in the informal command mode meaning ‘look’), and the English word ‘regard’ (a verb meaning “to observe or look at with a firm, steady gaze; look at attentively”) (Le Petit Robert, 1494; Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1195).

*regard(e)*, intertwines images of fleeting dream-like moments in relation to a relatively solitary female character. She is reflecting upon the world that is connected to her physical and mental state. The viewer is not presented a specific time or place, allowing for multiple interpretations of the conscious and/or unconscious visual events. As *regard(e)* continues, the woman begins to move through these inner and outer worlds and through this process the viewer is brought further inside these dream-like environments as they encounter varying layers of symbolic imagery.

The movement of the woman is literal and symbolic, as she consciously moves towards or away from the circumstances that are entering her psyche. Some of the basic symbols used include: a door, a window, a cloud, a path, and a house. The changes in light (natural and artificial) and focus (soft and hard) help simulate the movement through the shifting stages of consciousness. While not directly addressing issues connected to mortality, *regard(e)* hints at the inner struggle to understand one’s dually faceted relationship to the internal psyche and the external natural world.
Ensuing the creation of the *regard(e)* series, I was presented with the opportunity to work with archival film footage from the National Archives in College Park, Maryland. Through this experience the film, *witness* was created. This film was my first attempt to not only work with archival film but also symbolically represent my repetitive childhood apocalyptic dreams. The film was structured to illustrate traumatic familial, social, and natural events that I believe help sustain our connections to fear. The natural events presented (floods, fires, earthquakes) are interlaced with images of the everyday (children at school, adults at work) and the symbolic image of the wolf. This was a direct reference to the wolf like character that presented itself in my dreams. The sound for this film is brooding, dark, and uneasy. It’s composition mimics the sickening feeling one may have before a tragedy occurs, the air heavy and about to burst. Thus, through the use of archival footage I was able to re-contextualize these filmic events and link them to the world of the personal and the collective.

Following *witness*, I created the video *louve*, which was my first attempt at structurally combining archival film and digitized video. The title referenced the French word ‘louve’ (a noun meaning ‘female wolf’) and my personal identification with the character of the wolf. Through research, I came to understand that it is man who has deformed the wolf, in retaliation of the fear that his own bestial nature incites. This is clearly illustrated by the werewolf scares that were created by the Roman Church in its attempt to gain control over property, land, and the psyche of the population.
louve combines images of the wolf and symbolic imagery that represents the repercussions of personal traumatic events. This was the first video within which I utilized images of myself. Although self referential, my face is typically hidden by shadows or only partially revealed within the frame. This autobiographical reference helps establish the presence of an adult figure who is attempting to decrypt the cipher of the symbols. The archetypal symbols presented are remnants of what has traversed the bridge between childhood dreams and adult interpretation of memory. The need to not only access archetypal symbols but also utilize my physical presence within my work, returned through the creation of reunion.

Within all of my works, the sound design attempts to create aural spaces that allow the viewer to float between noise and ‘silence’. The recording of ‘room tone’ or ‘environmental sound’ is essential to all sound scores. These recordings of ‘silence’, allow a time imprint to be placed within the work. The tension between the varying levels of ‘silence’ and noise were balanced alongside the images presented within the videos.

The tightly woven relationships between the sounds and the images were composed to draw the viewer further into varying dream-like environments. While some videos are more intense than others, they typically all employ tones that support a heavy and at times menacing atmosphere. These videos and their sound scores endeavor to articulate that “[we] hear, not just through the ears, as a conscious activity, but through the whole body, in a mixture of fully conscious, peripherally conscious and unconscious awareness” (Toop 47).
Chapter III

Video Stills:

regard(e), witness, and louve

1. regard(e) 1 4:53 2005
2. regard(e) 2 5:08 2006
3. regard(e) 3 5:47 2007
4. witness 6:22 2005
5. louve 6:57 2006
6. louve 6:57 2006
Chapter IV

*reunion*

*reunion*, began as an attempt to understand how fear evolves and manifests collectively through time. Acknowledging fear is the beginnings of its understanding. Commencing from a personal space, I decided to study the time period within which my dreams had occurred. This examination began as a search through my family’s archives. These included physical documents such as photographs, slides, and films as well as the oral histories relayed by my mother and father. These archives, allowed me to reconnect with a time period that I was a part of, but could not fully recollect. While all these materials have played a part in the formation of *reunion*, my father’s slides overwhelmingly drew me in.

The slides were digitized, by means of a mini-DV camera. They were processed and manipulated through online digital software. Art historical slides (including works by Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, and Albrecht Dürer) were added to this collection, in an attempt to introduce symbols and imagery from a much more distant past than my own. The end visual effect of this manipulation was often a zoomed in slowed down image, within which the colors were very saturated and the movement of
the pixels apparent. In essence, this process allowed a still image to become a moving image. Within this progression, a new life was created for the forgotten images.

With respect to the audience, the slides utilized were dated enough that most would recognize them as images from the past. The fact remains that an adult audience collectively shares the fact that they were once children. There is thus the potential that they will be able to find commonalities within the family based images. In turn, the use of art historical images helps to foster connections within the arena of the collective unconscious.

Through the act of transference, the original language of the slides was completely altered. Reprocessed and reorganized, I sorted them into a loose narrative. The structure of this narrative is divided between two sections and projected through a dual projection set-up. The first section travels through periods of white light intersected with the symbolic images of the wolf, a shadow figure, and varying abstractions of environmental imagery (clouds, tree bark, a butterfly within a hazy landscape). The second section falls into spaces of darkness, interlinked by highly saturated slide imagery and the continual evolution of the shadow figure. These images function like iconic remolded casts for new memory imprints. The reverence one feels for the final images lies in their recognizable features that still demand explanation.

The title ‘reunion’, came through the process of altering the slides. I stumbled upon a slide within which my French grandmother and myself were present. After closely examining the image I noticed that the apron she wore had the word ‘REUNION’ spread across the chest. While her apron was referencing "l’île de la
Réunion” (an island off the eastern coast of Africa), it seemed fitting to the work and it stuck. As my grandmother passed away in May of 1990, my discovery of this slide seemed to harbor a subliminal message that invited me to further investigate my past. 

reunion became a realm in which family members alive and dead reunited with one another amid symbolic imagery, shifting sounds, and during certain parts of the process my moving body.

Performance and choreography greatly influenced the structure of the videos, and for a while reunion existed as a performance piece. Later, I took myself out of the work in the effort to create an installation. Similar to louve, the shadow footage of my moving body was inserted in an effort to reference my current physical and mental connections to the work. This shadow figure is struggling through the fears of mortality and its own animal nature. A number of symbols reappear from past works such as: the wolf, a door, clouds, and the shadow of a body moving through space. These images reference autobiographical history and the desire to understand the hidden language of the unconscious and its fears.

The sound score for reunion (created in collaboration with William Marshall Brown III) went through a number of stages before reaching its final state. The sound was structured to represent a passage through time, one in which recurring elements act as conscious landmarks. Closely tied to the images, the original sound score included samples of the electric guitar, footsteps, water, wind, fire, and the foghorn like sound of someone blowing into a glass bottle. These sounds, like the images, function as
archetypal references. Later, I began to feel that the sound was too heavy and needed within it a period of calm reflection, which would potentially help to ‘cleanse’ the space.

The second version of the sound score added lighter synthesizer based tones, reminiscent of the Andean reed flute. The sounds of the reed flute reference a childhood story (told by my French grandfather) in which I broke into a dance upon hearing their tones within a town square in Carpentras, France. These archaic flute tones were highly layered and changed in pitch as they flowed one into the other. Sounds of cicadas (a nature reference to the regions of Provence, France and Southwest, Virginia) and an old recording I had made on an analog tape were also inserted. The lighter sound score was paired with the first half and the darker sound score with the second half. As reunion is a looped installation, I desired to give the audience a chance to reflect upon the images through ‘balancing’ the dark and light energies of the sound score. The final result of the sound score created a ‘sound map’ that molded the installation space and guided the audience through the varied layers of time presented through the videos.
Chapter V

*reunion:*

Video, Rehearsal, and Performance Stills

The following stills document the video *reunion* and the accompanying movement process that occurred throughout my work. Performances of *reunion* occurred during the fall semester of 2006 most notably: Friday October 13 at the Virginia Commonwealth University Dance Department Salon, Saturday October 21 at the Hollins University Fall Dance Gathering, and Tuesday November 28 at the Dixon Place Theatre in New York City. Informal showings for the Virginia Commonwealth University Photography and Film Department and select guest artists (including William Pope.L, Anna Gaskell, and Lana Lin) occurred throughout the 2006-2007 school year, within the Pollack building (rooms 301 or 305) at Virginia Commonwealth University.
Video Stills
Rehearsal and Performance Stills

1. Rehearsal, Room 301, Pollack Building, VCU, Richmond Virginia
2. Rehearsal, Room 301, Pollack Building
3. Final Critique Performance, Room 305, Pollack Building
4. Rehearsal, Dixon Place, New York City
5. Hollins University Fall Dance Gathering, Roanoke, Virginia
6. Hollins University Fall Dance Gathering
7. Hollins University Fall Dance Gathering
8. Hollins University Fall Dance Gathering
Chapter VI

Art Historical Influences

Aligned with my examination of personal history is an equal investigation of art and social history exploring our societal understanding of mortality and the afterlife. Researching representations of ‘fear’ in art history enables one to perhaps access a collective symbolic pool of human emotion. This research is an attempt to jump from an examination of personal history to that of a more universal archetypal history, whose qualities may contain a collective essence that still permeates within our modern society.

The desire to understand my apocalyptic dreams led me to examine the Northern Renaissance work of Hieronymus Bosch, Pieter Bruegel, Albrecht Dürer, and various depictions of The Dance of Death. All these works address themes surrounding humanity’s weaknesses and inevitable mortality through Christian symbolism.

Examining Hieronymus Bosch’s overwhelmingly saturated symbolic paintings connected me to varying historical representations of archetypes and oneiric environments. Bosch “replaces the Paradise and Hell of the Middle Ages, which were objective images of the celestial and infernal hierarchies, with subjective visions that correspond to the conceptions of the great mystics and exist only within the inner world of the soul”(30). Bosch’s work is not merely a pictorial rendition of Christian themes
and in some ways could be seen as anticipating psychoanalysis as he utilized “the whole acuity of his penetrating mind to draw from his memory and experience dream symbols that are valid for all mankind” (Tolnay 30). In addition, the ‘hidden’ symbolic gestures within *The Garden of Earthly Delights*, 1516, greatly inspired the structure and formation of *reunion*. These painted gestures were compared to similar ones found within my father’s slides, and subsequently utilized during my rehearsal and editing processes.

Throughout *reunion*, the sound and images function to draw the audience into a space of dark contemplation. The images are dated and reference the past. The past presented is one in which a great deal of mystery exists. This is a space where moving shadows mingle with pixilated portraits. All of the images are shown through the filter of digitization, and this modern technology is presented as cryptic and troubling. The dance of the shadow figure represents the presence of mortality amongst the images. In essence, the shadow is struggling to find peace with the information that surrounds it.

The act of including my shadow within *reunion* is also connected to my interest in *The Dance of Death*, depicted on the walls of various churches in Europe and in the film *The Seventh Seal* by Ingmar Bergman. The *Dance of Death*’s powerful allegory portrays members of medieval society being led away by the skeletal character of death. Depictions of *The Dance of Death* “presents death as a great social leveler—a jolly, ghoulish, jitterbugging democrat who insists on dancing with everyone at the party no matter how rich or poor, how highborn or lowborn” (Kelly 292). These artists were not simply creating works that depicted folklore and religious tales, they were expressing
the commonality that all humans share: mortality. The exploration of this fear drives a
great deal of my work.

*reunion* not only references my interest in these histories, but also the history of
the symbol of the wolf. The examination of man’s history with the wolf, allotted
knowledge of man’s historical fear of his own animal nature. These fears have not
disappeared through the evolution of our societal structures and religious freedoms. The
inability to accept our animal nature produces guilt, shame, and fear. Within *reunion*,
the image of the wolf is used to incite and subsequently question the authenticity of
these fears. The wolf’s image is equated to man’s fear of himself. The thrashing
movements of the shadow acknowledge that one must fight the varied plagues of fear
that accompany one’s existence.
Chapter VII

Art Historical Stills
List of Sources: Art Historical Stills


Chapter VIII

Contemporary Art Influences

“He wrote me: I will have spent my life trying to understand the function of remembering, which is not the opposite of forgetting, but rather its lining. We do not remember, we rewrite memory much as history is rewritten. How can one remember thirst?”

Chris Marker, Sans Soleil (1983)

Similar to performance, memory is always located in the present, even though it is dependent upon the rendering of past events. Memories are living, changing, intangible entities different from archival objects (such as photographs or films) that operate as memory retrieval systems whose modes of representation are concrete. In comparison to memories, “photographs are momento mori. To take a photograph is to participate in another person’s (or thing’s) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time’s relentless melt” (Sontag, On Photography 15).
A photograph is not simply a transparency of an event that happened but also an image that someone chose to take. “All memory is individual, un reproducible – it dies with each person” (Sontag, Regarding the Pain of Others 86).

Through the creative process connected to reunion, I have begun to understand how memory functions. This has increased my ability to recognize and manipulate the fictions created through my mind. Aligned with my historical research I have examined contemporary artists who have greatly influenced my work and the understanding of its themes. Through this examination I have gained insight into contemporary art practice and dialogues that are currently exploring the varying drives that fuel human action.

Christian Boltanski’s installation work confronts ideas connected to the passing of time through the recontextualization of archival materials. He addresses memory and loss through works that seek to memorialize the anonymous and those who have disappeared. Boltanski mainly uses archival photographs of people who are dead, many of whom were victims of WWII. The use of archival materials (newspaper clippings, photographs, found snapshots, clothing, candles, light bulbs) traces (reconstructs) memory, confronts death, and memorializes human commonalities. While reunion does not physically display the actual archival materials used, there is an active attempt to recall life-stories and display them so as to create new memories of forgotten pasts.

Within reunion, the images and sounds represent the intertwining of physical and mental memory reservoirs. Through Christian Boltanski’s work, ”it is possible to understand memory as [a] transient performance, an endlessly reiterable recreation of the past, mediated each time through the body” (Caines, pars.15-16). The use of archival
materials is a form of re-contextualization that Boltanski’s memory must ‘perform’ in order to ‘create’ new memories that he can mold and in turn display. Boltanski’s use of archival materials, reveals how intrinsically the process of memory implies performance in its reliance on immediate translation.

As we look at photographs through time, they become inventories of mortality. “Photographs state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading toward their own destruction, and this link between photography and death haunts all photographs of people”(Sontag, *On Photography* 70). The desire to revisit the past and reconfigure its events was enabled through the creation of *reunion*. This was not a desire borne out of nostalgic sentiment but rather out of the curiosity to examine and potentially gain perspective upon events beyond the current scope of reasoning.

Much like a photograph, time is embedded in the structure of film. However, film can function as a time machine that visually transports us through both time and space. Our experience of the transportive quality of film, however virtual, is tied to our linear conception of time. Through my personal attempts to recontextualize archival film materials, I have attempted to visually deconstruct the linear construct that is attached to them. Driving these attempts is an exploration of fear in relation to mortality. Through their examinations of time, memory, and dreams, directors such as Ingmar Bergman, Andrey Tarkovsky, David Lynch, and Chris Marker have heavily influenced my artistic endeavors. These directors all utilize innovative surreal or dreamlike sequences that investigate one’s interpretations of reality, personal and collective identity, and spirituality.
Contemplating the concept of audience engagement, led to the exploration of immersion through installation. My interests in the immersive qualities of spirituality created a desire to construct a space where one might possibly unfold into an experience of mystification. I am inspired by installation artists like Bill Viola and Shirin Neshat, who create spaces where questions connected to mortality can be dually physically experienced and mentally contemplated.

While considered a pioneer in the medium of video art, Bill Viola’s installations are total environments that encompass the viewer in image and sound. His works tend to focus on universal human experiences: birth, death, and the awareness of consciousness. He is heavily influenced by spiritual traditions ranging from Zen Buddhism, Islamic Sufism, to Christian mysticism. Viola’s language creates an environment that allows the viewer to explore collective memory through a typically slowed down, mesmerizing tableau of symbols, generally accompanied by the presence of “elemental substances such as fire and water that take on mythic proportions with his spectacular treatment” (Ravenal 73). Viola’s symbolic use of the gaze of the owl within the video *I Do Not Know What It Is I Am Like*, relates heavily to my use of the wolf within *reunion*. Through the gaze of the animal we see ourselves, “while sensing the irreconcilable otherness of an intelligence ordered around a world we can share in body but not in mind” (Viola 143).

Viola’s installations are typically on the scale of a grandiose theatrical experience. My work is inspired by his use of archetypal images and sounds that create environments where reality is presented as “a nonlinear layering of the past and present,
and of external perception and inner consciousness” (Ravenal 93). The idea of ‘layered time’ is very specific to reunion, as it attempts to conjoin images from an archaic distant past with images from a more recent past.

Due to their length and looped presentation, Viola’s work invites the viewer to engage in an “archaic mode of visual engagement” (Townsend 13). Although the length of reunion (18 minutes) does not compare with the length of Viola’s works, the use of slow motion that both reunion and some of Viola’s works engage, encourages an art “that refuses the spectator control over the image [while embedding] its audience within its structures” (Townsend 10).

Similar to Viola’s and Boltanski’s installations, reunion involves the act of ‘stepping out’ of time in order to enter another realm or universe. Perhaps, by opening doors into memory, collective symbols may appear with which an audience can relate and interact. While the installation environment may instill a sensation of disconnection from the self, it is my aim to create an immersive experience where the viewer may experience temporary moments of transcendence. Transcendence may lead to further contemplation through which one may reconnect to forgotten memories or dreams and perhaps better comprehend our hidden fears and forgotten histories.
Chapter IX

Contemporary Art Stills
List of Sources: Contemporary Art Stills


Chapter X
Conclusion

The connections inferred through the viewing of the installation of *reunion* develop over time through the looped repetition of visual and aural elements. In contrast, a performance “occurs over a time which will not be repeated. It can be performed again, but this repetition itself marks it as ‘different’. The document of a performance then is only a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present” (Phelan 146). The power of performance is contained in the immediate transference of the represented moment. No two performances can ever be duplicated, and in this way, performance also mimics the translation of memory, as it too metamorphoses with time.

While performance and its accompanying rituals were essential elements to the creation of *reunion*, the final presentation of the work did not involve live performance. *reunion* evolved into a work that would be shown within the context of an installation. Through its creative process, the temporal abilities potentially accrued to installation work revealed themselves. “Video installation…places the viewer’s consciousness and body in the middle of the artwork” (Ravenal 15). In a sense, constructing an installation space, is a bit like creating a dance work for the stage, as a choreographer prepares a
world to present to an audience. The difference lies in the role of the viewer, who is
given the choice to move through space, rather than staying seated inside the
proscenium setting. Within video installation, the images presented “bring viewers
back to themselves by requiring them, not the video’s creator, to make decisions about
where to look and how to assimilate disconnected information “(Ravenal 15).

Although mostly based on the recontextualization of archival evidence reunion
still contains traces of personal performances (the shadow footage) that occurred within
a studio setting. These performances have been highly edited and processed, until what
remains of them is literally an outline of their original state. These imprints, like the
slides, are now trapped within the structure of the video. This tracing of my body is
now a physical part of the work, and engages in dialogue with both the archival and
surreal image sequences.

Through the act of stepping outside of the work, I have been able to garner fresh
perspectives upon the role of performance within my process. The performative
movement of the shadow figure became tied to the structure of the video and thus
severed the movement’s connection to the realm of the here and now. Although
troubling at first, I eventually realized that through this separation the movement
became strongly tied to my interest in archetypal symbolism. In addition, the
movement gained strength and visual power from its internal connections to the other
images.

reunion began as a process based on intimate physical work and developed to
include the schematic planning of an environment in an effort to support its visual,
aural, and metaphorical concepts. *reunion* endeavored to engage its audience through a unique experience, by placing them within the work itself. Through my excursion into history, archetypal symbolism, and fear, I have learned a great deal about the collective connections that exist within our world. It is my hope that *reunion* will activate the varied layers of the viewer’s memory, allowing them to potentially engage in the intangible experience of performance.
Chapter XI

Installation Stills

The following pages document my installation process at Virginia Commonwealth University’s Anderson Gallery. The work was displayed within Gallery 6 of the Anderson Gallery, from April 27 through May 6, 2007.
Bibliography


The Seventh Seal. Dir. Ingmar Bergman. 1957.


Vita

Vanessa Laure Fassié was born on September 28, 1978 in Roanoke, Virginia, and holds dual citizenship in both France and the United States. She graduated from Northside High School, in Roanoke, Virginia in 1996. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Dance from Hollins University, Roanoke, Virginia in 2002. Continuing on at Hollins University, Vanessa received her Master of Arts in Liberal Studies in 2003. Prior to her arrival at Virginia Commonwealth University, she taught dance in Salem, Virginia at Roanoke College and at the Roanoke Ballet Theatre of Roanoke, Virginia. She additionally served as a full-time teacher’s aide, teaching English to refugee and immigrant children, at Westside Elementary, Roanoke, Virginia. While at Virginia Commonwealth University she served as a teaching assistant for three semesters, and in the spring of 2007, taught Digital Filmmaking through the department of Photography and Film.