

# Reflecting on Metamodern Slow Film in *The 51 Paintings Suite*

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## Abstract

This paper is the first of two works that contextually responds to *The 51 Paintings Suite*, a long-term study that investigated metamodern affect, trauma memory, and slow cinema through practice-based film art. It consolidated a significant body of long-form slow films published between 2012-2023 across public screenings and online scholarship. The aim of the study was to consolidate perspectives about trauma memory and slowness through the moving image that led to the discovery of a new way to model metamodern affect in slow films which I term a 'structure of reason'. These films developed an epistemological response to metamodernism that challenged existing scholarship focused on an ontological structure of feeling. As this research has reflectively aligned metamodern theory to the production of these films it sought to establish new knowledge about trauma memory and slow films within critical studio practice. The outcome of the published study will be reflected through, first, a significant dossier of practice-based slow films argued to be unique and significant to the field, second, a new theoretical model to consider trauma through metamodern affect in slow films; and third, an original and significant advancement of film-based metamodern scholarship.

Keywords: Slow cinema, affect, metamodernism, trauma memory

## BACKGROUND SUMMARY

*The 51 Paintings Suite* was a long-term study in the defining of a theoretical model and moving image artefacts which asked:

- How do the films of the *51 Paintings Suite* explore a relationship between slow films and trauma memory?
- How can this relationship be contextualised through a contemporary theoretical framework?
- How did this framework challenge and expand my studio practice to generate new knowledge from the making of the films?

The aims of the project derived from these research questions were:

- To develop a significant body of films that explores slowness as a screen-based mechanism for engaging with trauma memory.
- To contextualise the films through key theoretical contributions about trauma memory and slow cinema.
- To situate these contributions within a framework of contemporary theory.

The objectives of the project derived from these aims were to:

- Produce a suite of long-form films that demonstrated a relationship between slowness and trauma memory.
- Expand on this relationship by developing a theoretical model embedded through screen practice.
- Generate new knowledge by challenging and expanding metamodern theory as a response to affectual modelling within the films.

The research produced three main outcomes which were:

- The completion of six long-form films known as *The 51 Paintings Suite*
- The creation of an affectual model termed 'a structure of reason'
- Defined a way to consider metamodern theory to comprehend slow cinema and trauma memory in my studio practice

The research established three problems that:

- Identified a gap in research by questioning how the relationship between slow films and trauma memory in the films can be understood through metamodern theory.
- Addressed a lack of integration between theory and practice by contextualising the body of work within a theoretical model.
- Challenged the limitations of current metamodern theory by proposing a new affectual model (a structure of reason) developed through studio practice.

The research resolved these problems by:

- Developing a practice-led theoretical framework that directly emerged from the process of making the films.
- Producing a series of long-form films that embodied, tested and demonstrated the affective aspects of slowness and trauma memory.
- Establishing a unique affectual model termed 'a structure of reason' that challenges and expands on existing metamodern theory about slowness and trauma memory.

Throughout this contextual statement I will refer to a set of key terms to be defined as:

- Slow cinema – a classification of moving images that employs a reduction in pace through the cinematic.
- Art films – a classification of non-narrative moving images that reflect on poetic, conceptual, and theoretical contexts embodied through art.
- Trauma memory – the voluntary and involuntary recollections of past events associated with negative impactful emotions. Intertwined with this is, first, the

memory of the event which is shaped by trauma and second, the emotional reactions felt when the recalled event is prompted or triggered in memory.

- Metamodernism – a set of cultural readings after the end of postmodernism defined by two schools of thought being the Dutch School and the Nordic School. Metamodernism considers its theoretical contributions to be relevant to near and current society between 2000 and the 2020s.
- Structure of Feeling – a term and theoretical model used in metamodern discussion to describe a state of affect derived from oscillating values which are often in contrast to each other but not dominant over one nor the other.
- Structure of Reason – a term and theoretical I have developed to challenge metamodern theory by using an epistemological approach to determine and define affect through trauma memory and slow films.
- Metamodern Affect – an affectual experience derived from oscillation in metamodern theory.
- Oscillation – the comparative examples used in metamodern theory to make contrast of two opposing values through an affectual model
- Between – a metamodern term to describe the presence nested within two oscillating values
- Among – a metamodern term to describe the nature of

## DEFINING THE RESEARCH

This article defines a significant body of slow films under the title of *The 51 Paintings Suite* (2012-2024) developed initially from 2006 onwards to contest aspects of trauma memory through lens-based artefacts. These moving image works were conceived as an initial response to an event I witnessed in September 1998 as first responder to a double fatality car crash on the Eastern Freeway in Melbourne, Australia. A distinctive memory from this moment was a crowd of people watching the veiled resuscitation of a mutilated woman who bled to death in my lap. These people appeared frozen in time as the passing traffic moved by in what I recall as a cognitive slow motion. Looking back, I consider this memory a visual ‘signal’ grafted within my moving image practice, reflecting Jean Baudrillard’s (1981) ideas of signs and signals and Guy Debord’s (1967) notion of the spectacle. These prompts were later assessed in the subject of the *51 Paintings Suite* a series of nine long-form slow films of duration between 48 – 79 minutes each: *51 Paintings* (2012), *The Tailor of Autumn* (2014), *Indigo Rising* (2017), *Winter Orbit* (2020), *In the Journey of Midnight* (2021), *The Black Period* (2022), *Fading Light* (2023), *Northern Light* (2024) and *Everything* (2024). These films were made first as short form aesthetic experiments between 2006-2011 then later developed between 2012 and 2024 as polished slow art films.

Trauma and art in the moving image enable a context for practitioners to explore human suffering within a cinematic form. Through slow cinema, the affordances of time, space, and immersiveness lend themselves to enquiries about the traumatic in ways that, arguably, other forms of art cannot convey in the same contextual materiality. For example, when comparing Francisco Goya’s *Disaster of War* (1820) with Bela Tarr’s *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), both artefacts skilfully undertake representations of trauma accounts in different approaches. Yet for Tarr, his slow cinema work produces the tedium of duration that affects the way an audience may be submerged into trauma, to what Hodgkin (2009) describes as a ‘mourning work’. The mechanics invite a broader debate about how trauma and slow films can be

explained in a way that moves beyond classifying films as ‘about trauma’ in what Inna Arnaudova and Muriel Hagenaars term as a ‘trauma film paradigm’ (2017). Moreso, this contextual statement will consider how these films deployed slowness as a mechanism to raise discussion about trauma memory in a way that was prompted from the traffic memories I recalled at the car crash site. Trauma and slow films, then, are a research interest in contextualising the *51 Paintings Suite* films. It, first, seeks to clarify how this relationship was used in contextualising the films and second, how this relationship then tested and challenged metamodern theory as a way to offer new comprehension of slow art films about trauma in my studio practice. I have done so by intentionally leaning away from the methodologies of film theory and film philosophy, especially the film-as-text approach, to settle instead in finding a new knowledge to contextualise the films through metamodern affect.

In retrospect, I began at the start of production to find a connection between memory and place and more so, how memory can be represented within the subject of the video frame. My reflective practice generated a body of knowledge guided by an interest in making art about trauma memory. In doing so, metamodernism was selected as a scholarship capable of interrogating the effects of traumatic memories embodied within the films. Over time, I was drawn to the critical writings about metamodernism to comprehend a sense of affect through the production of the early works. Moreover, parallel to these signals, the metamodern in contemporary scholarship critically interweaves emotions, sincerity, and affect as part of a theoretical model engaging the films of *The 51 Paintings Suite*. Indeed, at the same time as these films developed, an emerging discussion about affect in the period after postmodernism became known first as post-postmodernism (Turner 1995), altermodernism (Bourriaud 2005) and digimodernism (Kirby 2009), later developing into what is now called metamodernism. While this term has appeared loosely across the arts and social sciences for decades, it was not until 2010 with the writings of Vermeulen and van den Akker that the term gained traction as a solidified response to describe an era after postmodernism declined. ‘As much of what we understand to be metamodern was digressed during the debates of the Dutch and Nordic schools of Metamodernism in the 2010s (Vermeulen, van den Akker, Gibbons 2010, 2014, 2017)’ (Wilson 2023, p.2), these arguments established a way to differ cultural readings of contemporary practice after and beyond postmodernism (Hassan). Contemporary metamodernism orientated through the ontological centred on an oscillation between two elements that evoked a ‘structure of feeling’ (Vermuelen). In as much as the two elements which metamodernism oscillates – the singularity of modernism and the relativist assessments of postmodernism – current perspectives (Vermeulen et al) understand these opposites as coexisting yet separated from each other’s dominance or influence. The nature of this oscillation causes an affect between these two contrasts known as a ‘structure.’

Even earlier though, a ‘structure of feeling’ was originally termed by British filmmaker Raymond Williams’ *Preface to Film*, who ‘wrote this manifesto [in 1954] as he was trying to raise money from the British Film Institute to make his first film’ (MacKenzie, p.607, 2014). Williams’ position was to view a structure of feeling tied to ‘German expressionist film of the twenties’ (Williams p.612, 2014) as a totality between drama and performance, and between theatre and cinema where ‘it is in art, primarily, that the effect of the totality, the dominant structure of feeling, is expressed and embodied’ (p.611, 2014). Williams goes on to say that where a ‘structure of feeling, as I have been calling it, lies deeply embedded in our lives; it cannot be merely extracted and summarized; it is perhaps only in art—and this is the importance of art—that it can be realized, and communicated, as a whole experience’ (p.613, 2014). By this, I argue that the core of metamodern thought compelled by a structure of

feeling originates from Williams in his distinction of drama and imitation *between* filmmaking and theatre, and the affectual relationships *between* audience and performance he termed the ‘unusual psychological conditions in the audience for its full communication’ (p.612, 2014). The origins, then, of metamodernism’s structure of feeling stem from an affectual discussion in Williams’ manifesto becomes more resonant in light of recent scholarship.

When later applied by Vermeulen and van den Akker in the context of periodising theory after postmodernism, contemporary readings of a structure of feeling are also reflected in concerns noted by Slavoj Zizek’s commentary on utopic rethinking (2014) and Puggioni (2023) who examines how ‘anxiety has stimulated and encouraged the emergence of creative daily practices’ (p.2, 2023) in contemporary society in a constant state of anxiousness and crisis. Metamodern scholarship, especially from Vermeulen, Gibbons, and van den Akker, acknowledges that a structure of feeling is, concurrently, a primary way for observations about social sciences to categorise, and periodise, the radical shift away from postmodernism. Yet I argue that Williams’ work observes the ontological but are unpacked epistemologically in the way its grounding observes emotional connectivity within the subject as an embodiment in art and performance but through imitation. While metamodernism has conveyed an adaptation of this structure of feeling in its current form, the origins of Williams’ structure were embodied within cinema, something that metamodernism has applied elsewhere; away from cinema and toward the social sciences (Gibbons, 2017, Vermeulen, 2015). Subsequently, my research remains critical of an ontological approach of screen affect in metamodernism to favour of an epistemological reading thus applied to the films. Through this development, I sought to find a better way to locate a new approach to trauma memory and slow cinema through practice. This challenged metamodern scholarship, and with this a structure of feeling, to produce a new affectual model more suited to the nuances of trauma memory reflected in practice-based research. My aim here was to advance metamodernism from a sense of being to a sense of reason based on my journey through trauma memory that, when coming out of its effects, sought to find reason in these memories and subsequently, knowledge about its effect through my practice.

Current scholarship defines metamodern theory as a structure of feeling which oscillates two contrasted values independently of one another to better understand the complexities of culture and society after postmodernism. It does so by stating two fundamentals which I have challenged. They are:

- ‘metamodernism is a structure of feeling’ (van den Akker, Vermeulen, 2017)
- ‘metamodernism should be situated epistemologically *with* (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism’ (Vermeulen, van den Akker, 2017, p.5)

I acknowledge these two key points in expanding existing scholarship to establish that:

- metamodernism can also orientate to an affectual model termed ‘a structure of reason’
- ‘a structure of reason’ can pivot to a better understand of slow films and trauma memory through screen-based practice

In situating my films within a current set of theory, I wanted to challenge existing knowledge to propose a new reading of metamodernism that differs in what has been widely accepted as ‘being metamodern’ since the formation of these principles unfolded in the 2010s. My intention, though, is to find new approaches from existing theory in what I later proposed as ‘a structure of reason’.

When applying this affective model to the films, I discovered a new way to comprehend trauma memory and slow films in my practice. In doing so, the differences between current scholarship and a structure of reason model presented a series of barriers to the ongoing research which were:

- Current metamodern theory is limited to a limited number of original books about metamodernism.
- There is a scarce number of authors who write original material about metamodernism.
- Metamodernism is loosely defined as a structure of feeling without substantial theoretical modelling of metamodern affect.
- There is no scholarship available that considers an epistemological affectual modelling of metamodernism outside of a structure of feeling.
- There is a gap in research connecting trauma memory and slow films in metamodernism.

I explored how to respond to these barriers by applying my concerns to developing a contextualisation as a structure of reason from the films. The research was then enabled to consider slowness as a cinematic device to better understand how the oscillation between slow films and trauma memory intersects an affectual framework within my practice.

## ONTOLOGY VERSUS EPISTEMOLOGY

In discussing Bourriaud’s claim about altermodernism which frames it as a ‘synthesis between modernism and post-colonialism’ (Bourriaud, p.12) Vermeulen and van den Akker challenge by stating that Bourriaud’s thesis... confuses epistemology and ontology...[and] never becomes wholly comprehensible let alone convincing’ (Vermeulen, van den Akker, 2017). Likewise, I have also challenged Vermeulen and van den Akker’s interpretation of ontology and epistemology. The main argument they support is, again, that metamodernism is a multiplicity of ontological, epistemological and historical interactions *with* postmodernism, *between* postmodernism and *after* postmodernism. Yet the main problem is that to assume such a theoretical relationship model *is* by its very nature, ontological. My point here is that if the Dutch and Nordic school’s interpretation of metamodernism assumes about a structure of feeling then this in itself, to quote Vermeulen and van den Akker also ‘never becomes wholly comprehensible let alone convincing’ (Vermeulen, van den Akker, 2017). The fact, then, that metamodern theory and its structure of feeling is considered an oscillation between, among, and with postmodernism, what is yet to be discussed or debated in metamodern scholarship is that the method by which this treatise derives such action is an ontological approach by holding all three aspects together. Therefore, this research identifies a discrepancy in the way both epistemological and ontological readings of metamodernism function through affect.

Locating this approach in the films sought to find knowledge through practice. Like the journey of trauma memory, I sought to find closure to the events of the car crash by trying to understand why I was impacted by these memories and what knowledge this presented. In response, the research enabled an intention to understand the knowledge that my memories were responding to, like philosophy's approach of epistemology in that it grows from an ontology, the films were crafted in much the same way. I had already confronted the search for my own being in context to the car crash through memories prior to starting the investigation in the early 2000s. By the time I started to make the films eight years after the event, I had moved into an epistemological state within myself in how I can make sense of these experiences through what is already recalled about reality. The journey of trauma memory, I argue, works in much the same way where the initial stages of recalling negatively impactful events are an ontological state that then can lead, if indeed the participant is capable of moving past this point or not, over time into an epistemological state. My own journey is what I now consider to be a linear approach from one to the other mapped against trauma memory. This, of course, does not speak to other people's same journeys, yet for the purposes of this research, the films are crafted based on my own perspectives of lived experience manifested within my studio practice.

When applied to the films, I note three mechanisms to be defined contextually as epistemological:

- The meta process of reconfiguring the German source paintings into the film's composition.
- The inclusion of the poses used as a mechanism of the reconfiguration of felt memory.
- The use of slowness based on the understanding of the car crash memories.

Yet the study of a metamodern affect as an epistemological idea has informed, and remains embodied in *The 51 Paintings Suite* beyond screen aesthetics to, rather, their conceptualisation of trauma memory I argue to be, through screen practice, metamodern. If slow cinema is a field of research presiding over the study of slow films, I wanted to probe the structural workings of the inaction of movement in slow films as an affectual experience by looking at slowness as a concept. Thus, I developed an interest in how trauma memory could be addressed between moving image practice and metamodernism. The suite of films therefore moves between slow cinema and metamodernism.

Yet this investigation prompted me to ask what defines slow films as metamodern? While slowness as a mechanism can be used in a variety of ways in films to convey deeper connections that move beyond entertainment, the act of slowing down natural speed brings with it an aesthetic and psychological state that differs from films which are not impacted or driven by slowness. A compelling aspect of slow films as located in much of the work of Tarr, for example, posits inaction as a mechanism to experience slowness as a cinematic depthiness in as much as it evokes a structure of feeling. His films become murky from what the director takes away from an audience and against the experiences of action and exposition. Yet this is not the work which identifies with the distrustful cynicism of postmodernism, the intertextuality of post-structuralism nor is it the fragmentation and self-reflexivity of modernist cinema. Its slowness, then, sits in between postmodern and modernist cinema as something else – a metamodernist film in the era of metamodern. It cannot be part of a postmodern cinema as there is no relativist cynicism and likewise, it cannot be modernist with an absence of industrial modernity. Slow films of the twenty first

century evoke a sincerity and immersion by its dwelt experience, distanced from what its twentieth century predecessors achieved through time and affect in different ways. Slow cinema in a broader context lacks irony, as its very nature is constructed by a tonality of sincerity foreshadowed by grief and trauma. Tarr's films in this regard do not use parody or recycle other films as meta references. They are, instead, a moral sincerity without the need for an audience to decode the ideological or the pastiche and, moreover, this was not a hallmark of modernist or postmodernist cinema. In this sense, my work does not enact a sense of irony in its condition or structure but rather, deploys sincerity from a conceptualisation of trauma memory.

In beginning this contextual statement, it is important to comprehend that academic research about metamodernism and film is still in its infancy. Jones (2024) claims his work *The Metamodern Slasher Film* 'is the first monograph to examine film in a sustained way using metamodernism...' (Jones, p.3). McDowell (2017) also points to film criticism and metamodernism in *The Metamodern, the Quirky and Film Criticism*, just as selected websites (e.g. *Notes on Metamodernism*) and limited amounts of journal articles (Beyer 2024) convey scant resources on metamodern film discourse. However, by the writing of this statement, there is, first, no current academic study into metamodernism, trauma memory and slow films; and second, that there are no current collections of stand-alone long-form epistemological slow films that address my field of research. A significance of this contextual statement then, is that *The 51 Paintings Suite* is the first known collection of published practice-based research to undertake such a topic. On the one hand, the scarcity of existing research in the field provides a clear pathway for arguing new knowledge yet on the other hand, the evidential lack of engagement in the field has made the contextualisation of this research a challenge to compile. Despite limitations, the findings of this project have strengthened my screen practice over its long-term journey about memory and from this, *The 51 Paintings Suite* represents a significant body of work that contributed to a new way to think about trauma and slowness through film.

## ADVANCING METAMODERNISM

Vermeulen and van den Akker approach to metamodernism, which is now universally acknowledged as the definitive theory, now forms the cornerstone of how the period is considered and defended, states that:

'Our description and interpretation of the metamodern sensibility is therefore essayistic rather than scientific, rhizomatic rather than linear, and open-ended instead of closed. It should be read as an invitation for debate rather than an extending of dogma.' (Vermeulen, van den Akker, 2017)

This research, then, responds to their claim of invitation for debate in such a way as to consider and extend the capabilities of metamodernism. Yet why did the research need to engage in debate?

Postmodern thought reacted to modernism through disenchantment from the changes in the socio-political, communication and technological eras preceding World War Two. During the Cold War, scholars such as Lyotard, Baudrillard, Jameson, Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze to name a few sceptically critiqued grand narratives of power structures, totalitarianism,

capitalism, and media consumption that the modernist era proliferated. That said, postmodernism arguably occurred as a reaction against traumatic events predating the Cold War era. Likewise, metamodernism became disenchanted with late postmodernism and consolidated its knowledge set during the crises of the 2000s. In both cases, this research acknowledges the way that slow and still moving image in cinema has engaged with trauma memory as an early warning system of sorts to the pending changes in both the transition to postmodernism (Kinoshita's *Twenty-Four Eyes* (1954) and in the mid 1990s (Tarr's *Santantango*) to metamodernism. Both films, for example, were not recognised at the time of release as either postmodern or metamodern, but through the passage of time and progression of both sets of literature, the act of looking back to the prelude of cultural change affords a new perspective on films that otherwise would not have been originally categorised by a movement not yet been recognised as existing. Slow films in this regard are an important part of cultural change yet are still undervalued as to their importance and influence.

As metamodernism pivoted throughout the cultural shift of the 2000s and 2010s, I began to question its logic and amplified these concerns through the production of the films. My intention was borne from a dissatisfaction with a structure of feeling as not providing a mechanism to best serve trauma memory in slow films just as postmodern scholars reacted with the same dissatisfaction concerning modernism. The main dilemma was the absence of reason in metamodern affect overshadowed by the dominance of the ontological.

*The 51 Paintings Suite* considers slow films beyond postmodernism. Likewise, it also defines metamodernism as a periodic evolution of modernity after postmodernism to be applied to the films in comprehending both the artefact and the body of knowledge that these films contribute as a collective group. As Vermeulen and van den Akker (2017) suggested a series of key points which characterise metamodernism, such perspectives were further explored and unpacked in my series of films to define a new way to comprehend slowness as a condition of affect. The mainstay of their arguments presented in the seminal *Notes on Metamodernism* (2017) states that 'epistemologically, the metamodern aligns itself with Kant's [negative] idealism', 'ontologically, metamodernism oscillates between the modern and the postmodern' and, periodically, that 'metamodernism should be situated epistemologically with (post) modernism, ontologically *between* (post) modernism, and historically *beyond* (post) modernism' (Vermeulen, van den Akker, 2017, p.5). Noting the word 'should' gives space for metamodernism to be redefined as it evolves through practice, I will challenge Vermeulen and van den Akker's take on metamodernism through my films by developing a way to intersect trauma in slow cinema epistemologically *through* affect and *by* reason.

Such a structure opens a way for allegorical overlays of trauma to be enveloped into a diaristic cinematic patchwork on screen. Furthermore, as traumatic memories are characterised by both voluntary and involuntary emotional responses to intrusive recollections, the emotions attached to these memories, particularly in my case regarding the car crash, are deeply intertwined together. However, my approach to dealing with these memories through my practice has largely disregarded the emotional aspect by trying to rationalise and present them in a detached way, completely disconnecting them from ontology. For example, *51 Paintings* (2012) plays with tableaux of crowds of slowed people akin to the car accident recollections as a starting point to build allegorical references back to, epistemologically, my own traumatic memories of that point in time. *The Tailor of Autumn* (2014) examines the compositional elements of characters located in the German plague paintings, as I will later expand on, to build a connection between paintings anchored to

Black Death trauma and their imprint into each video tableaux, and *Winter Orbit* (2020) documents the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic collective trauma by performing the same plague painting poses grafted through tableaux made in a pandemic lockdown. Initially, the meanings of these signals in the first film were purposely hidden from public explanation at the time of the gestation period of the first *51 Paintings* film as I did not wish to publicly divulge to third parties due to me being a private person who resists the mechanics of announcing my domestic life as a public confessional. Yet this action, as I have later learnt, was a classic trauma response (Wu et al) of hiding recollections about a traumatic event in a concealed manner. Making the films then became a private video diary by which to engage personal reflections without the need to rationalise such stories at the time in so far as I was interested in visualising segments of these memories not necessarily the story that they connect with or are about. In this sense, I considered narrative and storytelling to be an inconsequential if not irrelevant mechanism in my work. In justifying this position, I acknowledge its origin as symptomatic of a trauma response in denying components of the experience as per my overall personal dislike of narrative in film making.

Moreover, if these signals were considered by the viewer as a collective of visualised trauma recollections committed to video, then a wider dialogue about art and trauma invites further investigation from the practice of others who embedded the same conceptuality within their practice. Discussions about practitioners such as 'Tracey Emin, Marina Abramovic, Doris Salcedo, Anselm Kiefer, Gillian Wearing and Janine Antoni [who] have all dealt with the traumatic, affecting, deeply felt ways' (*The Age*, 2008) inform a wider discussion about trauma and art (Laub and Podel 1991, Bennett 2005) including specifically about art and mourning (Dreifuss-Kattan 2016, Ogden 2000, Horn 2018) and also trauma in cinema (Mai 2015, Meek 2017, Kaplan and Wang 2004, Kaplan 2008). Trauma studies, especially in the context of memory, are well established across the fields of fine arts, film philosophy, psychology, sociology, and ethnography to name a few. Where this investigation draws from, though, is through the philosophical in acknowledging how traumatic memories intersect affect within screen art that conveys a state of inquiry as metamodern to understand how it contributed to a critical debate about affectual states, not necessarily about trauma on or by its own. I will consider trauma memory as being *within* the subject but not *the* subject.

## SLOW MEMORY

A particular aspect about trauma memory relevant to this research (and represented in the films) is the unpredictability of the negative emotional responses triggered by voluntarily and involuntarily recalling of past traumatic events. And to reinforce this, the nature of the research is not to explore trauma, it is rather to explore trauma memory. A key concept in this regard is the embodiment of 'rethought memory'. Unlike other more mundane memories that pass through the hippocampus region of the brain which engages declarative memory, for example, a visit to the shops, a childhood birthday party, a school graduation, trauma memory is encoded, archived and accessed in the amygdala region of the brain associated with fear and heightened emotional activity. The nature of trauma memory is often focused on one or several parts of a traumatic event as if a kind of 'intense fragment'. This research has responded by considering rethought memory as specific to fragmentation from the amygdala region and represented it within the editing process of numerous short tableaux unique to the poses held by each recontextualised character.

I have considered these properties to define my use of rethought memory in the editing stage of making the films:

- Conceptualising trauma memory instead of reconstructing it as an historical account.
- Focus on fragments of a traumatic event (people standing still at the car crash site).
- Demonstrate a distorted sense of natural speed through slowness.

Rethought memory from this perspective was deployed as an editing technique throughout all of the films. Indeed, other filmmakers have also used rethought memory embodied within the editing process of their work including Nemes' *Son of Saul* (2015), Weerasethakul's *Uncle Boonmee Who Can Recall His Past Lives* (2010), *Cemetery of Splendour* (2015), *Memoria* (2021), Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012) and Wells *Aftersun* (2022). I note that the commonality between these films and the *51 Paintings Suite* is the tendency to partition the representation of memory as if experienced in fragments of time that circumvent traditional linear approaches of film making. When considering rethought memory in this regard, its deployment in my films is used to specifically address fragments of trauma memory and replicate a fractured state as signals often unrelated to one and another (Act 2 of *51 Paintings*), randomness (Act 3 of *The Tailor of Autumn*) and disruption (Act 3 of *The Black Period*).

This, of course, is present by turning to metamodernism as it developed throughout the 2010s alongside the production time of the developing films which amplified my interest in affect and the modelling of affectual states on screen within the artefacts of slow cinema. The production period of *The 51 Paintings Suite* films ran parallel to the expansion of metamodern scholarship in the 2010s where I actively contributed and advanced the field through my practice.

An objective, then, of the films is to develop and contextualise these signals through a critical structure that reflects a new way to consider metamodern affect in slow films. In doing so, these associated memories are traversed differently through my films than in the way that, say, Louise Bourgeois did throughout much of her work where trauma is at the core of an affectual experience (Driver, 2023). As Bourgeois trauma relates to adverse childhood experiences, the embodiment of these memories in her artwork was characterised by the relationship she had with an abusive father situating feelings of fear, anger, and the mourning of her mother's early death. Bourgeois then translated these experiences into two central characters – her mother, as represented in her spider sculptures, also as a self-representation of the artist and her father, as what the spider was protecting against. The spider then becomes pivotal in Bourgeois depictions of trauma 'standing as an anti-memoir of (the image of) her mother – i.e. the spider who sustains, protects and contains the child at great cost to her own agency' (Sheleg, p.280) in duality. Trauma, then, oscillates as an ontology between the polarity of her mother and father played out in the artwork as a full disclosure of events as presented through a metaphysics approach contrasted to my work framing trauma through reason.

As oscillation is a critical component of metamodern theory, this section will identify examples of oscillation within the films and discuss how I use the concept in relation to 'with/among' and 'between'. Over the stretch of the six films, I had employed five various ways to convey oscillation through 'shifts' embedded within the editing process. In defining each term, Vermeulen and van den Akker located with/among likened to 'the metamodern structure of feeling [s] situated with or among older and newer structures of feeling.'

(Vermeulen 2017, p.8) That is to say, a structure of feeling comprises two separate values oscillating without influence of one nor another as an affectual feeling: that of oscillating as a result of being with/among disparate forms. Whereas between is ‘characterised by an oscillating in-betweenness or, rather, a dialectical movement that identifies with and negates... conflicting positions, while never congruent with these positions’ (Vermeulen 2017, p.10).

I contextualise the films as having a set of references situated in these oscillations defined as with/among embodied changes of colour, recontextualising footage, and pacing, and as contrasts between live action and animated sequences, and use of sound. These are represented in Table 1.

Effect	Description	Key term	Film	Segment	Condition of Oscillation
1	Shift of colour and black and white	With/among	51 Paintings, Indigo Rising	51 Paintings: the BW middle act, Indigo Rising the shift to colour in the middle act	Slow
2	Shift of live action and animation	With/among	The Black Period, Northern Light, Everything	The second and third act oscillating between the	Stillness, slow
3	Shifts of pacing	With/among	The Tailor of Autumn, The Journey of Midnight		Stillness, slow
4	Motion effects	Between	The Tailor of Autumn, Indigo Rising, The Black Period, Northern Light, Everything		Slow
5	Shifts in sound	Between	The Black Period, Northern Light, Everything		Stillness and slow

Table 1. List of oscillations in *The 51 Paintings Suite* 2012-2024.

The second Act of *51 Paintings* oscillates between black and white and colour to demonstrate the affective switch before and after witnessing trauma. The second act opens with a shift to black and white where I started to experiment with ways by which I could visually explain the differences between an event leading up to witnessing trauma and during the fact. Yet for me this was more so a reflection of trauma memory looking back to the event not necessarily experiencing firsthand at the time of the car crash. As this shift, to which I later discuss in the companion article in relation to early silent cinema, moves through the gothic sequences to derive after the fact back to colour in the third act akin to being situated alongside

Vermeulen's and van den Akker's treatise on among (2010, 2017). This research considers the shift in colour to sit as with/among given that the memories I recall of the car crash when looking back situate themselves as interventions with a time period dramatically altered as 'being within' the car crash sense of time. These memories I recall sit within the event, among the emotions and experience such memories have used over the years since it first occurred and by shifting away from colour and into a black and white colour grading, not to mention the shift in other effects such as atmospheric digital snow, haze and foliage composited into the frames, dramatically differing between the shifts in first and third acts. As noted, other films use colour shifts for the same reason of oscillation between time, emotion, and memory. We see, for example, this when Dorothy finds Oz in Fleming's *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), the emotional changes of characters in Ross's *Pleasantville* (1998), timeline shifts in Nolan's *Memento* (2000), and the separation of memories and present time in Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2007).

Other examples are located through the shifts in pacing in the third act of *The Tailor of Autumn*, jolting the viewer out of witnessing slowed time back to natural time. As seen in the oscillation between the static nature of characters in the first and second acts leading into the jolt into live action of the astronaut scenes, the films have used pacing as a way to move in and out of oscillation much like how the recollections of trauma memory moves among differing states of recalled thought. Not unlike the altered pacing of dream sequences of Nolan's *Inception* (2010), the nature and memory scenes in Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011), and addictive states on Aronofsky's *Requiem for a Dream* (2000), the pacing shifts in especially *The Tailor of Autumn* are used both stylistically to jolt the viewer from a cathartic state experienced when experiencing slow durational sequences. In as much as jolting serves a structural purpose to illustrate with and among as it does the jolting between the past and the present in trauma memory, and most notably during the random involuntary moments extreme experiences can prompt PTSD from traumatic memories, the oscillation of and with pacing acknowledges the treatise of Vermeulen and van den Akker about with/among embedded within the films.

Likewise, a sense of between is represented within *Indigo Rising* by the additives of animated motion elements in *Indigo Rising*. These scenes, which also repeated in other films such as *Winter Orbit* and *The Black Period* were deployed as an 'in-between' live action and animation devices. Yet from an aesthetic point of view, I tied these motion elements as allegory to the unpredictability and randomness to my experiences of trauma memory. More so, what would trauma memory look like? For me, the linkage was its ability to float in and out uninvited; to pop up whether triggered or unprompted and move in fluid form where I wanted to create in the films a reference to the memories themselves as entities but not, in this case, what the memories revealed from the past. I wanted to know what a trauma memory actually looked like as it darted and weaved through a person's mind and body. I was interested in my own experiences of how trauma memory can cloud an otherwise clear view of reality and why these appearances occur.

Motion elements used in, especially, the memorial scenes of *Winter Orbit* are indicative of my ongoing interest in a two folded aesthetic of memory – what the memory depicts through its recalled subject and what the entity of the memory itself resembles by its action of movement. These motion effects visually represent in the scenes an oscillation of meta elements between the present and the past, perceptions and recollections, and of slowness and natural speed. And likewise, the shifts in sound from *The Black Period* between oscillations of audio shifts from scene to scene, for example, in the cross-dissolve scenes of the animated

roundels in act 2. At the start of act 3, a shift occurs between the description of the Dancing Mania accounts lead into the lead out sequence of an AI dance track correlating to the commentary about linkages between dancing and trauma. The audio drifts defined by shifts in between genres and tonalities unpin what the effect of between was attempting to achieve within the films in as much as the films themselves can be interpreted and comprehended as an exploration of with/among and between.

## MOVING SLOW WITH/AMONG/BETWEEN SCREEN AFFECT

These shifts also act allegorically with and among representations of trauma memory I argue to be as a screen-based connectivity. In the work of others, a connectivity between trauma and the subject has held numerous enquiries, notably Pozorski's (2024) discussions on trauma and modernity, Sabatini's (2007) reflections on trauma and Bourgeois, and Shiller's (2017) account of trauma and repatriation that contributes to an ongoing dialogue about human suffering through memory. Yet these writings fail to take into consideration the affectual state of the artwork through an epistemological structure that otherwise defaults in these writings to an ontological enquiry. For slow cinema, such a pretext changes the way that trauma memory is thought about through screen subjects, arguably removing the emotive transcendence of being to instead focus on a consideration of knowledge concerned with trauma as a concept not necessarily a personal narrative. Shifts with/among trauma and memory in film are inextricably linked together so much so that cinema has, since the early decades of cinematic production, especially *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) intertwined both in close proximity.

David Kelly's work (2023) on ontology and Andrei Tarkovsky's *Solaris* (1972) points to an ontological reading of Tarkovsky's slowness, notably through the lens of Heidegger's discussion of dasein. In contrast, Marvell (2015) discusses the same film as engaging a metapresence in an epistemological sense. Both readings are an example of how ontological and epistemological values can provide an analysis of the same film but comprehend them very differently. In terms of trauma, I argue that these types of readings are important to consider because the outcomes of this assessment contrast the self (the trauma reflects the impact on a person) and the formalism (the trauma is about the nature of the subject).

That said, the films I have made are undeniably *of* slowness in both their pretext and temporality of trauma yet to define them as primarily slow cinema alone would not, as I will argue, gain value in contextualising what is already known in the field about slow films. Seminal writings about slow cinema (De Luca and Jorge 2016, Caglayan 2018, Jaffe 2016) have predefined slowness in the context of film philosophy about slow films such as *The Turin Horse* (dir: Tarr, 2010); slow experimental cinema such as the *Cremaster* (dir: Barney, 1998); and slow video art such as *The Crossing* (dir: Viola, 1996), a field that my practice has historically been anchored within between the late 1990s and 2012. Yet these perspectives do not amplify slow films as being part of the metamodern but rather in a more prescriptive type of moving image and film philosophy context; most of which is associated with the postmodern. The *Cremaster Cycle* films, for example, 'challenges some of the basic assumptions of postmodernism' (Tumino) that's considered 'a major work of interregnum postmodernism' (McHale, 148). Likewise, *The Turin Horse* is argued that 'Tarr's horse comes from postmodern speciousness' (White 2012) or as being metaphysical responding to dialogue between Nietzsche and Heidegger (Rocamora, 2023).

In contrast, I will define the collection of films as, first, being slow, and second, within metamodernism. This distinction establishes that the films orient mechanically to slow cinema, but their affect is conceptually defined by the metamodern as, and within, a structure of reason. Its assessment will challenge conventional aspects of metamodernism in this contextual statement that otherwise function in art as an overarching ontology, amplified, for example, through much of Vermeulen, van den Akker and Storm's treatises. Likewise, I intend to define how my films broke away from a structure of feeling and towards a development of a structure of reason that makes this collection of research films unique and significant to the field.

I position that trauma memory is ever present in the films, taken in a Baudrillard sense as the signals which imbue affect through each moving frame centred around signals and grafting. As these signals impact affectual states in each film, the mechanics of such is what I argue to be important to this research and its subsequent artefacts. In this regard, the traumatic aspects became part of the aesthetics of the film's subject (what it depicted) and metamodernism informs the structure of how this aesthetic is interpreted from affect (how it showed). For example, Figure 1 illustrates the astronaut in *The Tailor of Autumn* (2014), conceived as a metaphor for the out of body immersion when confronted with a traumatic event. Figure 2 details *In the Journey of Midnight* (2021) connecting silent horror cinema as immersiveness in trauma where I later discuss the role of image and audio used to convey traumatic responses to witnessed events. Figure 3 illustrates the frequented pose of covered faces with clasped hands in *Indigo Rising* demonstrating symptomatic bodily reactions to emotive trauma. Figure 4 details *The Black Period* referencing the intentional silencing of trauma disclosure represented by the black shapes composited on the bodies of figures posing in frame. The investigation will recognise these signals as an historical point of origin through memory and critically engage with the mechanics of how these signals contribute to a framework governed as a structure of reason. It will further recognise the suite of films as a significant collection of moving image works, and from this, benchmarked as examples of metamodern affect.



Figure 1. Detail from *The Tailor of Autumn*, Shaun Wilson, 2014.



Figure 2. Detail from *In The Journey of Midnight*, Shaun Wilson, 2021

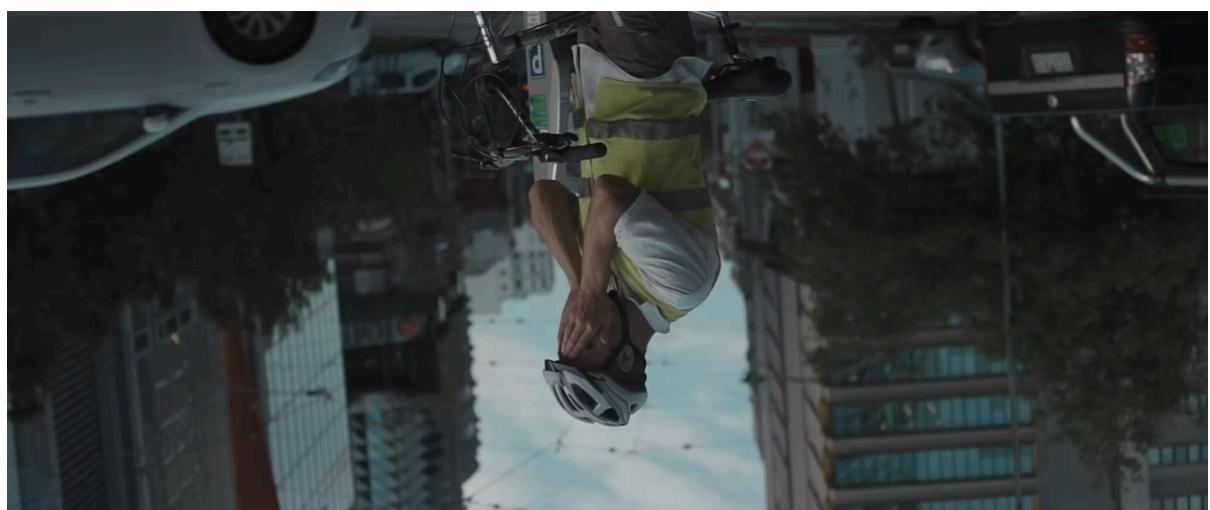


Figure 3. Detail from *Indigo Rising*, Shaun Wilson, 2017.

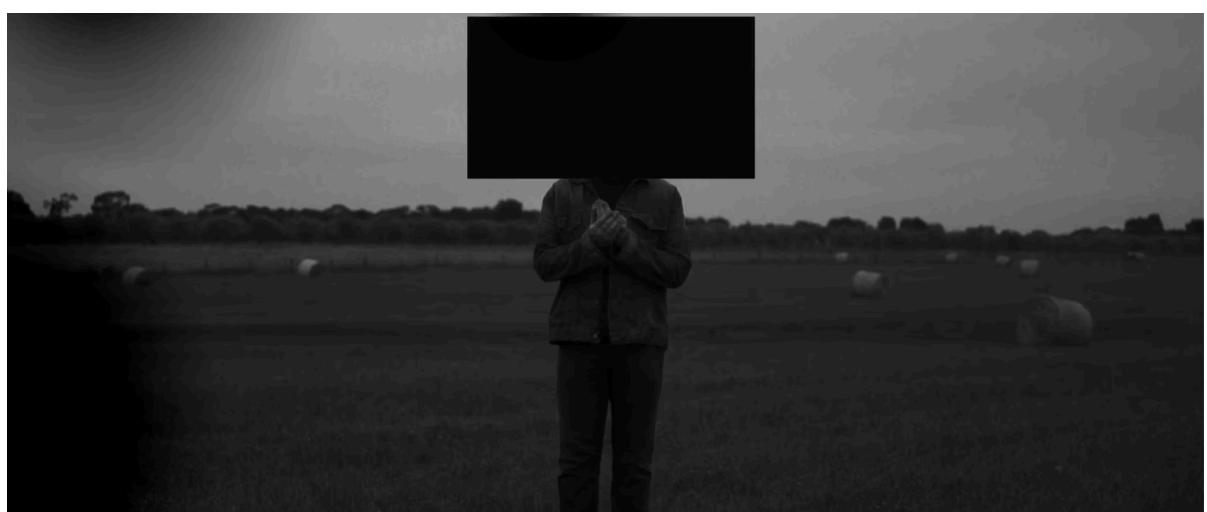


Figure 4. Detail from *The Black Period*, Shaun Wilson, 2022.



Figure 5. Detail from *51 Paintings*, Shaun Wilson, 2012.

Indeed, other fields connect ‘affect’ in similar ways. Psychology, for example, considers affect in both a state, being the condition of the affect, and a trait, the identifiable reactions of the state, where “‘affect’ is used to refer to the relatively brief feelings that are experienced in response to a particular stimulus or situation’ (Cheetham et al 2010, p.623). Proportionate to, say, philosophy’s terming of affect in the work of Baruch Spinoza who claimed ‘I understand affections of the body by which the body’s power of acting is increased or diminished, aided or restrained, and at the same time, the ideas of these affections’ (Spinoza, p.154), or linguistics use of affect by which the body elicits emotion through iterations of speech patterns through ‘lexicon choices’ (see Murphy 2003), the common denominator in these approaches to affect are centred on the interpretative modelling of an emotional response to stimulus regulated by the body through our senses of experience to *what* we comprehend as, ontologically, felt reactions and, epistemologically, known reactions. In trauma studies, especially centred around the nature of intrusive memories, affectual oscillations compound a way for traumatic memories to be dispersed by and from relived experiences known as ‘negative affect’, from recalled events. Metamodernism, then, prescribes a theory from the contrast of oscillations to think about, in this context, how slow cinema can locate both the state and trait of affect from traumatic memories regulated through the subject, as this project has discovered, in a structure of reason as demonstrated in Figure 6, an adapted version (inclusive of artefacts) based on a published diagram I authored in *M/C Journal* in 2023 (Wilson, 2023).

## AFFECT MODELING

Modelling this diagram was crucial in finding a way to consolidate the ideas raised by the film in order to clarify the structural mechanics of a structure of reason mapped against a structure of feeling. Despite the main staples of scholarship in the field I found that there was

no existing model to define how metamodernism worked. It was necessary then to produce my own diagram to draw examples of how affectual modelling can be established as a starting point in comprehending the nature of the films.

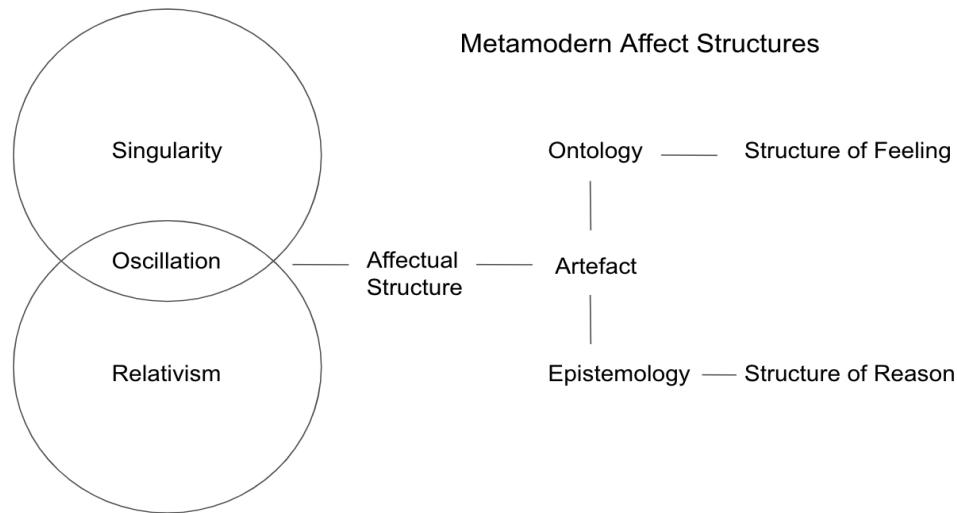


Figure 6. Metamodern affect structures. Image: Shaun Wilson

Where the singularity and relativism areas are concerned, these are modelled as contrasted opposites. For example, the singularity of modernism can be oscillated against the relativism of postmodernism or the same for irony (as the postmodern) and sincerity (the metamodern). That said, metamodernism is not defined nor should ever be assumed to be an oscillation between these two key aspects but rather, it has been used, and somewhat misinterpreted as being the main attachment of oscillation. As opposites we also could map against how memory is experienced between autobiographical memory and trauma memory, voluntary memory and involuntary memory, or even natural speed and slowness. Yet what an oscillation produces from an affectual structure rests in how the entities under examination through oscillation behave with/among and between each other, determined by the intention of analysis that will, affectually, either produce a structure of feeling or a structure of reason.

By applying these to the films, I developed the following understanding of each film's contextualisation of what it was oscillating and the nature of its structures.

### The Oscillations

- *51 Paintings* examined the form of slow films by oscillating between video art and cinema in its portrayal of trauma memory.
- *The Tailor of Autumn* examined the oscillation between time and reconstructed memory.
- *Indigo Rising* examined the oscillation between time and trauma memory.
- *Winter Orbit* examined the oscillation between memorial and trauma memory.

- *In the Journey of Midnight* examined the oscillation between characterisation and trauma.
- *The Black Period* examined the oscillation between trauma events and trauma memory.

### The Structures

- *51 Paintings* articulate the nature of reason in finding what is known about video art and cinema portraying trauma memories.
- *The Tailor of Autumn* articulates the nature of reason in finding what is known about time and reconstructed memory.
- *Indigo Rising* articulates the nature of reason in finding what is known about time and trauma memory.
- *Winter Orbit* articulates the nature of reason in finding what is known about memorialisation and trauma memory.
- *In the Journey of Midnight* articulates the nature of reason in finding what is known about characterisation and trauma memory.

*The Black Period* articulates the nature of reason in finding what is known about trauma events and trauma memory.

## THE GERMAN SOURCE PAINTINGS

In developing a visuality for the films, both the subjective aspects representing memory and the objective structures interrogating affect are the result of an accidental yet critical mishap occurring in 2006. I chaired the *1st International Conference on Film and Memorialisation* on 14-15 October 2006 at the Hochschule der Medien (University of Media) in the medieval town of Schwaebisch Hall, Germany. On arrival, my university credit card defaulted on money owed to pay for the conference dinner. After using my personal travel money to fund the deficit, I didn't eat for three days in the time remaining before making the trip back to London and then home to Australia. On the third day, I sat inside St Michaels Church (see Figure 7), an historic place of worship consecrated in 1156 and later used by Martin Luther as his southern headquarters during the German Reformation, to observe a series of medieval paintings and low relief sculptures originating from the Black Plague era to the fifteenth century hanging on the sidewalls, columns, and front altar which appeared to dance and move. After noting these hallucinatory character animations in a small sketchbook, I incrementally created the compositional formula of six main poses I would later develop through the films. Video participants would recreate these selected poses based on the characters featured in the artworks into a new location with background movement akin to the car crash memories.

Eight weeks later, in December 2006, I again departed Australia and returned to Schwaebisch Hall with a HD video camera to document a series of short sequences in proto stages represented in Figure 5, later appearing in the first act of *51 Paintings*. Originally framed as episodic tableaux in an umbrella series titled *Uber Memoria 1-30* (2007) composed of individual one-minute-long videos, a format to which Schonig (2022) refers to as 'shifts', were grouped and compiled in 2011 as an ongoing experiment, and later stitched together as three separate durational segments. It was not until late 2012 that these segments were

attached together that *51 Paintings* as a feature length artwork was then conceived. The contextual value in this event signposted what the aesthetic formalism in the films demonstrated in terms of cinematography and editing, especially the three-act structure used in the finished versions of all films thereafter. Noted in that the *Uber Memoria* stage of this development was a short-form exploration of slowness attached to each ‘painting’ it referenced, created as a video art tableau quite different to the groupings of multiple tableaux that later became three act feature films.

At the time of visiting the church, I was drawn to these key artworks later ordered into seven primary poses. Poses 1-4 are adapted from the main low relief panel and left and right-side panels affixed to the Hochaltar or high altar at the front of the church as featured in Figure 7. The Gothic installation, part paintings and part low relief sculptures of the Passion were completed by Netherlands artists at the Brabant workshop near 1460 remaining in place after a series of demolitions and extensions to the church throughout the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Pose 5 is located at the southern side aisle Grablegung depicting the burial of Christ, created in 1456 with additional figures later installed in 1510 and 1520. The pose is drawn from a combination of two medieval soldiers located under the main narrative each clasping their face with one hand, by which I later combined in the filming stage to create a pose with both left and right hands covering participants faces. Pose 6 references a 14<sup>th</sup> century fresco painted on a front column depicting a woman accompanying Mary and St John at the Man of Sorrows scene of the crucifixion of Christ. While it is known to be painted during the 14<sup>th</sup> century around the Black Death era and before the 15<sup>th</sup> century renovations, no known records exist of the artist who painted the image. Finally, Pose 7 is adapted from a 1590 epitaph located on a side wall of the church. These form a collection of numerous 16<sup>th</sup> century epitaphs referencing notable families who donated money to the church at the time.

Source Artwork	Character Descriptions	Pose Description	Location in the church	Relation to Trauma Memory
Hochaltar panels (c.1460) see Figure 8	Man with a red hat and green cloak	Pose 1: Grasping his hands and looking upwards	Far left panel on Hochaltar	Represents the action of trauma survivors recalling impactful experiences through a stoic sense of rethought memory
Hochaltar panels (c.1460)	Bearded man with light red hat and cloak	Pose 2: Standing upright looking outwards and away from the depicted scene with hands either in a pocket or	Second from left panel on Hochaltar	Developed from the initial experience of being at the car crash site and watching the crowd

		covered with material		who gathered around me appear frozen in time
Hochaltar panels (c.1460)	Naked male and female	Pose 3: Clenching hands in a prayer pose	Bottom Far right panel on Hochaltar	Represented the recalling of memory fixated, as if in a trancelike state, not unlike the process of being captured in the moment from the effects of trauma survivors experiencing moments of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
Hochaltar main panel (c.1460)	Low relief sculpture of a woman wearing a cream head garment, brown dress and gold material attached to bottom of the dress	Pose 4: Looking slight downwards holding right hand extended over the left	Bottom far right in the main Hochalter Passion	A derivative of pose 1 representing the action of trauma survivors recalling impactful experiences through a sense of rethought memory
Entombment of Christ (c.1456) in the southern side aisle Grablegung	Low relief sculptures of medieval soldiers	Pose 5: a combination of two separate figures with one hand covering each soldier's face pointing upwards	Far left and far right characters located under the bed of Christ in the side altar	Represented the horror of trauma survivors experiencing PTSD
Fresco (c.14th Century)	Woman accompanying Mary wearing a light gown	Pose 6: grasping hands with fingers open and pointed upwards	Left hand side of the fresco located on the sixth main column back from the Hochaltar in the centre aisle	A derivative of pose 1 representing the action of trauma survivors recalling impactful experiences through a sense of rethought memory

Am Markt, St Michael, Innen, Epitaph (c.1590)	Woman wearing a white head garment, olive green cloak and crimson dress	Pose 7: arms crossed over near shoulders	Right hand side women located bottom right of the second right hand side saint	Represented the sorrow of recollecting trauma memory
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Table 2. List of source artwork and its development in *The 51 Paintings Suite* 2012-2022.

The Hochaltar forms a large component of the different poses used throughout all of the films. A particular focus was drawn from the side panels of the altar concentrating on the two left panels and forth right panel, and the low relief sculpture of a mourning woman located in the bottom right corner of the main altarpiece. I was drawn to these figures at the time from the experience of hallucinating in the church as these figures later developed into the films literally vibrated and moved, capturing my attention to the documents and drawing each figure in detail. What strikes me here is that the main characters of Christ and marry were not part of these animated experiences but more so, the secondary characters in the paintings which have minor or supporting roles within the Hochalter's narrative. The ordinariness of many of these characters translated to the making of the films as I intentionally sought to be inclusive of everyday people including myself to replicate the humility found in the source artwork I documented and further developed in the research.



Figure 7. The Hochaltar at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany (Image courtesy of [Roman Eisele, CC BY-SA 3.0](#) <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall\\_-\\_Altstadt\\_-\\_St.\\_Michael\\_-\\_Chor\\_-\\_Hochaltar\\_\(1\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall_-_Altstadt_-_St._Michael_-_Chor_-_Hochaltar_(1).jpg)>)

## POSE 1



Figure 8. Detail panel from The Hochaltar at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany (Image courtesy of Rainer CC BY-SA 4.0)

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall-Am\\_Markt-St.\\_Michael-Hochaltar-WUS04563.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall-Am_Markt-St._Michael-Hochaltar-WUS04563.jpg)



Figure 9. Detail from *51 Paintings* reconfiguring pose 1, Shaun Wilson, 2012

## POSE 2



Figure 10. Detail panel from The Hochaltar at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany  
(Image courtesy of [Rainer / CC BY-SA 4.0](#))  
[<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall-Am\\_Markt-St.\\_Michael-Hochaltar-WUS04564.jpg>](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall-Am_Markt-St._Michael-Hochaltar-WUS04564.jpg)



Figure 11. Detail from *51 Paintings* reconfiguring pose 2, Shaun Wilson, 2012

## POSE 3



Figure 12. Detail panel from The Hochaltar at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany  
(Image courtesy of [Roman Eisele CC BY-SA 4.0](#)) <  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall-Am\\_Markt-St.\\_Michael-Hochaltar-WUS04567.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall-Am_Markt-St._Michael-Hochaltar-WUS04567.jpg)>



Figure 13. Detail from *The Tailor of Autumn* reconfiguring pose 3, Shaun Wilson, 2014

## POSE 4



Figure 14. Detail from the Hochaltar at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany (Image courtesy of [Roman Eisele CC BY-SA 4.0](#))  
<[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b9/Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall\\_-\\_Altstadt\\_-\\_St.\\_Michael\\_-\\_Chor\\_-\\_Hochaltar\\_%281%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b9/Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall_-_Altstadt_-_St._Michael_-_Chor_-_Hochaltar_%281%29.jpg)>



Figure 15. Detail from *The Black Period* reconfiguring pose 4, Shaun Wilson, 2022

## POSE 5

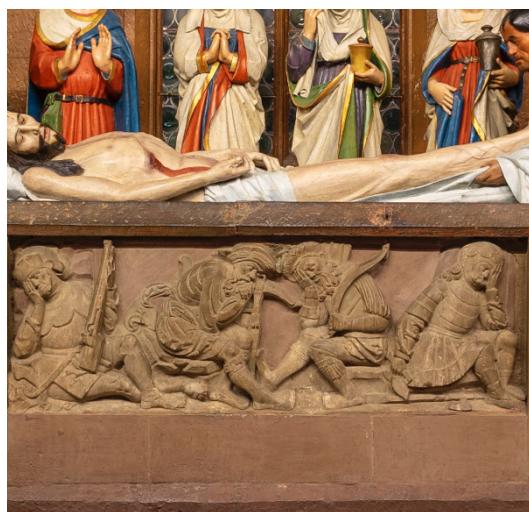


Figure 16. Detail of *Entombment of Christ* 1456 located in the Southern side aisle Grablegung at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany (Image courtesy of [Roman Eisele CC BY-SA 4.0](#)) <[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/15/Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall\\_-\\_Altstadt\\_-\\_St.\\_Michael\\_-\\_s%C3%BCdliches\\_Seitenschiff\\_-\\_Grablegung\\_%281%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/15/Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall_-_Altstadt_-_St._Michael_-_s%C3%BCdliches_Seitenschiff_-_Grablegung_%281%29.jpg)>



Figure 17. Detail from *Indigo Rising* reconfiguring pose 5, Shaun Wilson, 2017

## POSE 6



Figure 18. Detail of pilar fresco painting at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany (Image courtesy of [Roman Eisele](#) CC BY-SA 4.0)  
<[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/06/Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall\\_-\\_Altstadt\\_-\\_St.\\_Michael\\_-\\_Mittelschiff\\_-\\_Blick\\_zum\\_Hochaltar\\_%281%29.jpg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/06/Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall_-_Altstadt_-_St._Michael_-_Mittelschiff_-_Blick_zum_Hochaltar_%281%29.jpg)>

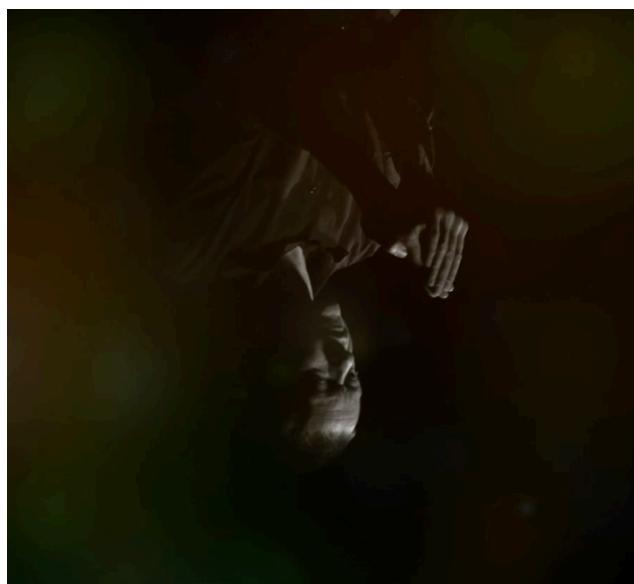


Figure 19. Detail from *Indigo Rising* reconfiguring pose 6, Shaun Wilson, 2017

## POSE 7

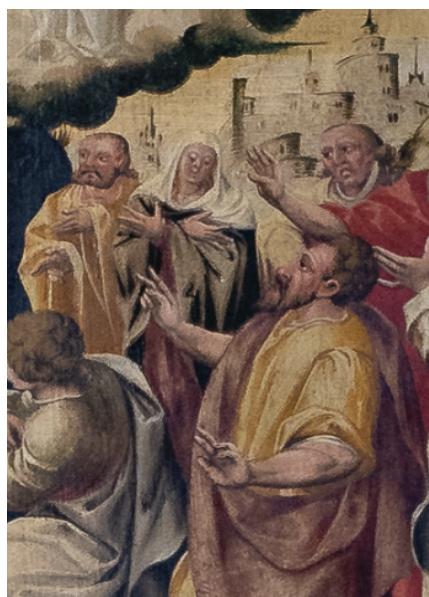


Figure 20. Detail of *Am Markt, St Michael Innen Epitaph* 1590 at St Michaels Church Schwaebisch Hall, Germany (Image courtesy of [Roman Eisele](#), CC BY\_SA 4.0)  
<[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/St.\\_Michael\\_%28Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall%29#/media/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch\\_Hall-Am\\_Markt-St.\\_Michael-Innen-WUS04556.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/St._Michael_%28Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall%29#/media/File:Schw%C3%A4bisch_Hall-Am_Markt-St._Michael-Innen-WUS04556.jpg)>\

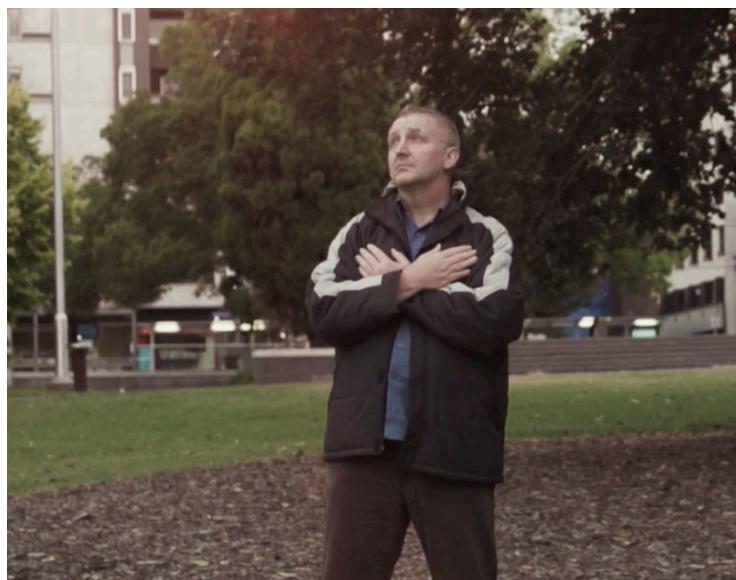


Figure 21. Detail from *The Tailor of Autumn* reconfiguring pose 7, Shaun Wilson, 2014

## DELIBERATIONS OF THE FILM

The assessment of each film will address contributions to the body of knowledge produced in this film series, and, more importantly, ask what makes such films hold significance as a unified collection of creative research? I argue that both states are formulated differently than, say, for example, Deleuze's perspective in *Cinema II* (1985) of passages of time-image later argued by Nagib that 'relies on a systematic disregard for chronology' (Nagib, p.25) or Bergson's distrust in duration as axiomatically explored in his *Duration and Simultaneity* (1999). These two treatises, 'well documented and duly invoked in many studies on slow cinema' (Luca, Jorge, p.8), are acknowledged as a point of origin in screen affect in the framing and then connected to metamodernism as a set of debates outside of film theory, with the intention of considering slow films as part of a metamodern affect. This poses a dilemma for any discussion of slow cinema where, historically, ownership of debate has been characterised by aspects of film philosophy prescribing slow images with cinematographic actions defined by, though, or being in 'undramaticness' (Flanagan), opposition, and movement. Just as Tarkovsky's use of slowness in his films centred on passages of time pointing back to a perception of time moving cinematically, 'Deleuze characterises perception, action, and affection-images in precisely the same terms in which Bergson chooses to characterise the cinematographic illusion' (Thomas, p.128). This, though, seems odd to me in the perception of slow cinema as a formalism presiding over a durational affect kept within the cinematic.

Bergson, especially, compounds that 'reflective perception [from memory], is a circuit, in which all the elements, including the perceived object itself, hold each other in a state of mutual tension... it must always find its way back to the object, whence it proceeds' (Bergson, p.127). While he considered that objects – in this case, the subject of the film – are actually 'mind-dependent abstractions from an underlying, ongoing, processual reality' (Fischer, p.55), the debate he presented was fashioned to involve an ontological assessment whereby the object in his thinking was a secondary part of a transmission prompted by a response from, and back to, reality. The issue for metamodern affect, though, is that for assessments in a structure of reason, the ontological nature of such a secondary transmission doesn't work, primarily because epistemological reading of metamodern oscillation is gated into an affectual state of the epistemological governed by a philosophical perspective.

Moreover, Bergson's view, for example, oscillates between an epistemology (the transmission) and ontology (what the transmission goes back to) towards reality. In turn, this assessment oscillates between relativism and singularity but neither land, in Bergson's view of reality, as a fixed affectual structure or is inclusive of an affectual state that moves away from an ontology altogether. The same can be said of Deleuze's perception in film, which is often linked near or together from Bergson, which also lands back to oscillations of being, especially through his notion of the time-image regarding the pastness and presentness of a cinematic shot. These considerations, though, are about cinema and not relative to metamodernism which, in itself, are a set of theories located *beyond* cinema yet capable of being inclusive of oscillating within it.

To differentiate Bergsonian memory from metamodern memory on screen, this research argues that Bergson's ideas are aligned with an absolute idealism in metaphysic purity whereas metamodern memory is concerned with plurality. Moreover, metamodernism rejects metaphysical purity altogether as distinct from Bergson's treatise on pure memory. Likewise, Deleuzian memory is also contrasted with its attention to habit and pure memory following a

Bergsonian viewpoint, contrasted with metamodern memory informed by the positions of sincerity, constructed presence, and trauma as influenced as an historicity after postmodernism.

This contextual statement considers that *The 51 Paintings Suite* films are very much a part of a slowed cinema primarily attentive to the exploration of memory yet the ways by which assessment of slow films can be thought of is not necessarily restricted to ideas *about* film nor, for, say, Deleuze and Bergson, cinema. Slow films are, on the one hand, very much crafted by the principles of the moving image through defining time and movement. On the other hand, slow films can be assessed and thought about using ideas outside of cinema to gauge a comprehension of the subject. Just as, say, Marxism, for example, critiques cinema as a political mechanism of capital using theories outside of cinema to contextualise a political film, or ethnography critiquing cinema unpacked in the social sciences, or even design using methods of analysis through design thinking, and so on, I have used metamodernism in a similar way to comprehend the suite of films outside of what slow cinema quintessentially is explained through in film theory.

Frequently, slow cinema's protest of cinema from its dual expectations of narrational comprehension and economic viability is contained in debates for and against the moving image as a cinematic formalism. Yet both the Nordic and Dutch schools of metamodernism consider that 'affect, as it is conceived in contemporary Affect Theory... is ontological rather than situational (as in Jameson's view) and thus already disconnected from subjective experience' (Gibbons, p.84). Herein begins an argument where definitions of the *51 Paintings Suite* films as an epistemological structure shift the readings of slow films away from a state of being in cinema as characterised by Quaranta's (2020, 2024) discussions about Heidegger and cinematic time – as in the quality of an existence (Heidegger, Hegel) – and into a state of knowledge, something that is, by and large, absent in the way slow cinema has been thought of, at least for the past twenty five years in and out of the cinematic. This explains why I define metamodern considerations through a structure of reason closer to a comprehension of affective modality (Gibbons 2017). Whether this is systematic of the need by audiences for sincerity and hope throughout the counter action of moving images made in the 2010s, these considerations evolved at the start of the decade (Jaffe, Luca, Orban) through the interest of seminal slow films such as Tarr's *The Turin Horse* (2011) and Tsai Ming-Liang's *Stray Dogs* (2013). Other slow movements proliferated, for example, slow media (Rauch) and slow gaming (Alexander) which, like slow cinema, sought to attend to meaningfulness through long durational segments not unlike the affectual aesthetics of signals referenced in the films. In this sense, *The 51 Paintings Suite* contributed to the cultural momentum of the 2010s from a periodic perspective representing a questioning of fast-paced segments across numerous critical disciplines. Embedded within this consideration is a two-folded attentiveness to a key term of 'deep time' (Marvell, p.77) employed hereafter as both a subjective mechanism of the films (the relational elements within a frame) and an objective mechanism to investigate affect (the impact outside the frame and through time on screen).

Reflecting on 'metamodernist affect' (Vermeulen 2013) where Vermeulen states that 'the irony and distrust of the '80s and '90s are met by a sudden sense of hope, where typically postmodern cynicism intersects with a decidedly unpostmodern empathy and earnestness' (Vermeulen 2013), the romanticist notions taken as signals revealed hope as an emotive trope within the affectual object. Postmodern cynicism through film, such as Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) explores a metafiction not unlike Van Sant's *Last Days* (2005) embodied in the

collapse of meaning and failures of postmodern society notably identity, fame, and anti-consumerism. Yet both films and others distinctively postmodern, notably, for example, Rodrigues' *O Fantasma* (2000) are lacking in the sincerity of metamodern film to the likes of what, say, what slow cinema defines in Wei-liang and You-qiao's *Mongrel* (2024). More so, the film carves out a definitive characteristic of metamodern film embodied in its way that the presentation of trauma lingers. On this point, metamodern film's way to become immersed in trauma rather than reconstructing it (as in postmodern films) by lingering; and this very experience is synonymous with metamodern affect about trauma. The residue of trauma, in particular, lingers throughout these kinds of films in a way that postmodern films did not. To bring this back to the German source paintings I observed at St Michael's church, such tropes are reminiscent of the German school of landscape painting of the early 1800s, and in particular the work of the Nazarenes School and the lingering residue of hope and melancholia. Perspectives of the cohort were uniquely similar to the metamodern ethos of seeking sincerity (Gibbons, p.126) as an indicator of oscillation, with, say, irony framed by its relational qualities in close proximities to an extension of contemporary romanticism (Wilson, 2023, van den Akker, Vermeulen, 2017). If, say, slow cinema is examined in the same way, the postmodern cynicism of Tarr's *Santantango* (1994) compared to the metamodern sincerity of Tsai Ming Laing's *The Deserted* (2017) are vastly different films, even though they both identify to audiences as pertaining to formalising trauma in slow cinema. Yet from a film theory assessment moving away from oscillation, they are not (see Hwee Lim, 2022). Tarr's work is by definition metamodern, but also plays with an oscillation of cynicism *between* postmodernism and metamodernism. *The Deserted* remains absent of cynicism as its oscillation is bound between material decay and what I argue to be a metaphysical presence, foregrounding trauma memory as a healing process. Tarr on the other hand held no healing, or hope, throughout all of his films so much so that the sincerity of observation from the characters abandons sincerity altogether yet instead, constructs a cynicism bound (and exacerbated) by inaction. For example, the ghosts in *The Departed* are not horror-based phantoms used allegorically as to what Tarr's characters of similar oddities represent; the horse, the dead cat, or a herd of cows. Both sets of creatures serve a purpose in the design of each director's films but for conflicting reasons. There is an abounding tenderness in the characters of *The Departed* that treats the sincerity of metamodernism in a completely polar opposite way as the bleak, nihilistic mundanity of slowed trauma from Tarr.

To this end, *The 51 Paintings Suite* will be argued to traverse traits of romanticism in a metamodern sense, and, especially, pointing to the German romanticism through painting, also reflecting again the inaction of slowness on screen mimicking the same inaction of static paintings.

Defining the differences between the deliberations of the research:

- Philosophical deliberation is critical of ontological readings of the films.
- Cinematic deliberation posits slowness as an affective model in response to trauma memory.
- Theoretical deliberation challenges metamodernism as only being a structure of feeling by proposing a structure of reason.

## Defining the approaches of the deliberations

- Applies a practice-based methodology to investigate trauma memory through slow metamodern films.
- Applies the Dutch and Nordic approaches to metamodernism but reorientates these epistemologically by seeking knowledge instead of being.
- Develops an epistemological affectual model to consider trauma memory as fragmented and rethought thus applied to the cinematography and editing process of the films.
- Employs visual and aural oscillations through slowness to engage with trauma memory through a metamodern lens.

## How have these approaches been conceptualised in the films?

- Theoretical transposition from a structure of feeling to a structure of reason to enable a comprehension of affect grounded in trauma memory.
- Personal reflections encoded through the German source paintings that introduce trauma memory as an affectual personal narrative.
- References German medieval paintings and epitaphs as the frameworks located in translating accounts of trauma memory from personal narratives.
- Recontextualises trauma memory as an editing strategy within the films.

## How does the project contribute to these deliberations?

- Conceptual innovation defines a structure of reason as an original and new way to comprehend trauma memory through slow metamodern films.
- Identifying gaps in research between practice-led approaches in trauma memory, slow cinema and metamodernism.
- Methodological advancement of metamodern research into slow films about trauma memory.
- Expands an understanding of metamodernism and how it can be deployed through slow film making.
- A unique and first of its kind suite of slow films to apply and challenge metamodernism through a trauma-memory focus that proposed an epistemologically framed contextualisation of affect.

## MOVING AWAY FROM AN AUDIENCE AND TRAUMA MEMORY

The motivation of the films throughout the production were distinctively made to not have an audience; rather, they were made, respectfully, in despite of an audience. While their development led to privilege a cinema environment so as to project the films within a darkened, enclosed space, their intent was also to deprioritise spectatorship in favour of a private set of films made in solemn inquiry with an audience located at the periphery. They are further made to intentionally resist and refuse to be a part of the demands of what a contemporary screen audience expects from an experience. As such, an audience during the

production of the films was not considered to be a contributing factor in determining content and development.

While the approach of making films without an audience in mind is a point of conflict among film makers, scholars, and audiences alike, a body of work exists which debates the topic. There are numerous historical examples of disruption to spectatorship in film I divide into three categories being the disruption of narrative as located in the work of Tarr, the disorientation to spectatorship especially in the work of Michael Haneke's intention to make audiences uncomfortable, and at its most extreme, the redundancy of spectatorship. Slow cinema directors have described their dislike of spectatorship. In an interview with *cinemascope*, director Albert Serra claimed 'I don't care about an audience' (*Cinema Scope*, nd) and that 'I always think that my films, and some other films, are unfuckable because they are beyond criticism' (*Cinema Scope*).

As spectatorship in film and cinema is both constructed and problematised, I note debates leading across modernism, postmodernism, and metamodernism. For modernism, a premise argued that a film audience is required to think about its form and ideology contributes to the work of Eisenstein (1942, 1949) (on dialectical thinking and constructing meaning), Goddard (1972) (the dependence on critical spectatorship) and Wollen (1969) (the necessity for textual interpretation). For postmodernism, Hutcheon (1988) (the audience as a reader of meanings) also supports the need for spectatorship however the work of Baudrillard (1981) (meaning is irrelevant, confided in simulation) and Mulvey (1975) (spectatorship is ideological oppressive) provide ambivalent contrast. Yet it is the problematising of spectatorship that defines *The 51 Paintings Suite* in similarity to other film directors approaches in their work.

The problematising of an audience's role in my films also connects to trauma memory. As much of my experiences in confronting the car crash memories evoked a sense of masking, I quickly developed an avoidance in talking about, or even admitting that it occurred through day-to-day conversation. In my practice, the nature of what the films addressed was mostly kept secret, only to be disclosed to those around me and not for public knowledge. The same can be said about the films. I didn't want to screen the films to an audience if it meant explaining what the project was about. This made screening the works internationally at galleries and festivals quite appealing given that I wasn't able to attend the screenings due to financial restraints nor interact with audiences experiencing the sessions. After the initial screenings of *51 Paintings* at the RMIT Cinema in January 2013 and *The Tailor of Autumn* in October 2014, I purposely would not invite an audience to see any future screenings of the work outright thereafter due to my avoidance. The Federation Square screenings, for example, were purposely not advertised, nor were the publications in journals out of fear that I would need to disclose their meaning. Scholarship on trauma memory coping strategies and avoidance, which I will later discuss the companion article regarding *The Black Period*, are symptomatic of the effects of trauma memory particularly associated with PTSD where 'avoidant coping strategies [such as not showing my films to an audience] may interfere with natural recovery from traumatic events.... [and] that avoidance would be more detrimental for individuals who are relatively more reactive to trauma memory' (Pineles et al, p.243). Yet I found that while conducting this research, my avoidance of discussing the event greatly diminished as to what I now understand as natural recovery unfolding. Even the tenants of slow cinema changed by their deployment in the films, from slow motion to the inaction of boredom. The films in the later installments relied less on slow motion video by encompassing more compositions of stillness filmed in real time. I therefore conclude that my problematising of film audiences was symptomatic to the effects of trauma recovery.

Locating this in metamodernism, though, points to the sincerity of the work embodied as a discussion about trauma memory that by oscillation intersects romanticism, both cinematically and conceptually.

Moreover, if the effect of romanticism in art is assessed by the metamodern in slow cinema, comparative similarities emerge in the suite of films noted in two ways. First, the poses of characters represented are directly referenced from characters in the 14th century source paintings located at St Michael's Church. Second, that German medieval painting of the time was in any sense, sincere in depictions of characters loosely framed around religious devotion connected to seeking hope and salvation in the afterlife. Affectually, hope and sincerity find equal measure, with hope reflecting the aforementioned narrational signals, and sincerity framed as the honesty of the films in their intention of private disclosures of the aforementioned signals. I will argue that both oscillate together, by which affect draws these signals using deep time to frame the subjective and objective mechanisms in unison that, for a large part, imbue memory as the centrepiece of the series. This begs the question, are the films moving image paintings or moving images about paintings?

In discussion on the affectual signals located in the public exhibition of the published films which are argued as an integral part of metamodern affect, I define their meanings in what Timmer reflects as a 'defencelessness' for the subject and a 'risky uncovering of oneself, in sincerity with the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter' (Levinas, p.48 and Timmer, p.112). The exhibition of the published works is inextricably connected to signals and sayings as the projected films in its affectuality is undeniably defenceless, and its experience of such is preordained through the need to be affectual.

More recent slow cinema films such as Hu Bo's *An Elephant Sitting Still* (2018) do precisely this by integrating an exploration of trauma through a defencelessness in the same way as the relationships that 'Michael Elm, Kobi Kabalek and Julia B Köhne argue [in] that film has been closely linked to traumatic events since cinema's inception' (Mai, p.60). From an historicity perspective, trauma cinema as a specific film genre has crossed over into the poetics of slow cinema. Whether these be cognitive issues of post-traumatic stress disorder (*Werkmeister Harmonies*), depression (*The Turin Horse*), isolation (Tsai's *The Hole*), or anxiety (Jia's *Still Life*) to name a few, the long-reaching effects of trauma have been well explored in slow cinema.

Slow cinema more so extends away from postmodernism's nihilism and cynicism to be profoundly invested in sincerity. Tarr's work for instance avoids the depiction of trauma as a documentary of events, that is to say, films constructing narrative around a documented account, and instead embody a sensed memory of trauma through cinematic form. They are, as Sylvie Rollet considers Tarr to be, 'meta-modern' (Rollet, p.102) While the elements of cinematography, sound, temporality and texture point to quintessential qualities of slow cinema's genre, what this research has found helpful is examining how Tarr's work among others provides context for the *51 Paintings Suite* in a critical synthesis I note where these films were historically placed in retrospect to be an intentional departure away from the postmodern. This drifting I observe as a 'condition' of metamodern practice at the time of filming, and indeed as symptomatic of what was thought at the time as being 'post postmodern'. Botz-Bornstein argues for Tarr and Krasznahorkai who wrote the novels which *Satantango* and *The Turin Horse* were adapted from, 'that they remain "modern" in the sense of not giving into "postmodern" impulses' (Botz-Bornstein, p.77) and the same can be said of my practice once I began moving image works in 2000. For example, the drifting away from postmodernism in Tarr's work, whether it be *Werkmeister Harmonies* or *The Turin Horse*,

create an affectual state brought about by their investment of trauma and obliteration between and among sincerity in the films. Likewise, *Still Life* and *The Hole* act in much the same way so as to manifest a murkiness in the immersive values away from the postmodern guided by distancing relativism and away from cynicism; something that postmodern film couldn't do in the same mechanics due to its reliance on irony and cynicism. Tarr's work is certainly absent in this regard to be aligned with metamodern film especially when, in also the case of *Santantango*, both films echo the same condition revealed in Krasznahorkai's novels which 'are very much about decay...as something aesthetically and even spiritually elevating' (Botz-Bornstein, p.16).

Yet a problem with metamodernism has, historically, been concerned 'as a way of understanding what is happening in contemporary literature and culture' (AHRC 2024) and an awareness of global crisis (van Tuinen 2017, van den Akker, Vermeulen, 2017, Vesely 2024, Jordan, 2024). These writings do not address trauma per se yet are more engaged as critical echo chambers about society in trauma (Greaney 2024, Storm 2021). In this context, the exploration of trauma in metamodernism has focused on published commentary about classifiable crises as a macro-ontology – ecological crisis, economic and financial crisis, displacement crisis, inequality crisis – but not, first, trauma as an individualised affect outside of a social collective and second, relative to a micro level. This is where *The 51 Paintings Suite*, like Tarr, develops beyond the ontological and into an epistemology at a micro level that otherwise would be limited to, say, early interpretations of metamodernism especially by Vermeulen and van den Akker, who considered at the time that 'affect at its zenith is the unmediated experience of difference *in itself*' (Vermeulen, van den Akker 2011). Trauma posits quite a different approach through epistemological interpretations of slow cinema because it holds knowledge in the subject as a relational context towards voluntarily and involuntary recalled memories articulated with the present.

Hodgkin's 'mourning work' correlates to an affectual relationship between the audience and the subject as much of the last thirty years of slow cinema across the field has afforded trauma to be a contemplative poetics imbued within affect yet limited within the confines of, first, a state of being and second, comprehended as 'a film'. Armstrong's take on mourning cinema, for example, makes the claim that 'what characterizes death in the mourning film is a kind of formal excess of image and sound in which the film reaches for a way of expressing the unbearable and the uncontrollable' (Armstrong, p.39). Mourning, however embedded in film, has seldom been used through slow cinema as a metamodern device through epistemology in a state once removed 'from film'. Even the work of Hu and Diaz that gathers comparisons between self and time posits their work through the framework of ontological 'films', yet the structure of this falls back to an approach intersecting the film theorising of slow cinema. In contrast, *The 51 Paintings Suite* posits mourning affectually within the subject. In both serving as a compass of how trauma has informed the artefacts, and a measurement of significance in the later publication of the artefacts, mourning then intersects to explore sub contexts of, at one end, inaction and, at the other, boredom. Ostensibly, mourning and boredom in context to trauma is inherent in thinking about what each instance each film conveys. It then further deliberates Armstrong's take that "the nineteenth-century melodramatic ideal of reducing dialogue in favour of music and pictorial mise-en-scene" (Glenhill 1997, p.169) echoes across the cinema of mourning' (Armstrong, p.46) just as it does in, say, other slow films such as the opening five-minute single shot scene from *The Turin Horse*.

## STILLNESS AND MOVING IMAGES

Stillness in slowness is more noticeable as ‘being slow’ when an audience contrasts its depiction to natural speed or the films that move within that space. Yet for my films where an audience exists periphery, the stillness in moving images allowed me to construct the films as a way to experiment with altered time. As much of the early slow cinema works evolved from the 1990s onwards, it’s important to note that slow cinema as a genre has no starting date. Instead, it represents a description of the nature of works that employ slowness as a device for altering affect. By design, the nature of cinema is slow even in the first glimpse of early silent cinema, but stylistically the term became popularised in the 1990s when debates about the genre emerged through the institution when Douglas Gordon’s *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) screened the Hitchcock film over a 24-hour period in a continuous screening. Video art experimented with slow time in the 1960s through early works of Nam June Paik after his *Zen for TV* (1963-4) experimented with disrupting temporal flow. Even earlier Jean Epstein and Germaine Dulac’s *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1928) loosely based on Edgar Allan Poe’s story experimented with slow motion montage sequences as part of an experimental aspect of cinema using slow motion through the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet when other examples of slowed segments in film especially in the slowed pillow fight scene of Jean Vigo’s *Zero de conduit* (1933), slowness in film was considered a cinematic effect used as a spectacle due to the absence of theorising about slowness in the moving image. Even though time as a concept had been of discussion in philosophy especially through Bergon and Bazin, once Deleuze developed a time image, although never actually using the term ‘slow cinema’ in his movement and time image writings, stillness in the moving image as a ‘slow cinema’ has, conceptually, evolved during the end of postmodernism whereas stillness in an image goes back to Bergson’s concept of ‘thickened moments’.

Yet stillness and slowness are two separate entities for the moving image. Slow is the experience of reduction in natural time whereas stillness is the experience of inaction in natural time. Much of the films I have made display both. For example, the slow-motion sequences I deployed in all of the films were the culmination of slow motion, whereas the live action sequences, especially in *The Journey of Midnight*, were still. In comparing still and slow, this research has deployed the oscillation of both in the films yet comprehended the affectual experience as between slow and still.

To focus on the condition of slow, Jaffe’s *All Movie Talk* podcast in December 2006 notes that ‘many times the word “slow” is used as a synonym for dull or boring... we want to make a case for movies that work without speeding from one plot point to another’ (Jaffe p.1). The term ‘boring’ has been intentionally included as a significant part of a metamodern affect in *The 51 Paintings Suite* to challenge conceptually the state of stamina in watching durational sequences in an era of restless attention. As even the word ‘slow’ can be applied to different aspects of time-based media in art and cinema, from the implications of plot to single use durational shots, ‘boring’ (Çağlayan, 2018) is a measurement of endurance through ‘the public’s desire for spectacle with a type of entertainment’ (Belting, p.99). First, as a displeasing moment for the lack of motion response in a moving scene, and second, as the absence of aesthetic stimulus otherwise desired to be captivating from distractions of stillness, or the barriers of access to what Storm defines as an order of ‘social kinds’ in terms of ‘dynamic [social] clusters of powers’ (Storm, p.111). As separated between concepts and kinds – concepts being ‘mental representations’ (ibid) and kinds ‘as the entities to which concepts refer’ (ibid) – the personal tolerances for spectators about slowness has greatly impacted on how audiences can cope with watching a slow film without the experience of

rapid tedium. Boredom (Loht, 2017, Tronconi 2023) in this respect is a much wider field of research drawn from the counter arguments against neoliberal film deliberations. Yet for *The 51 Paintings Suite*, and specifically *Winter Orbit*, the essence of long shots uninterrupted by movement or intentional cutting is used as an observation to refer to prompts of boredom that other fields such as psychology consider as a trauma response known as ‘emotional dysregulation’ (Bambrah, 2023). Pandemic trauma, and also collective trauma, as a specified area of enquiry in trauma studies is of particular interest in unpacking *Winter Orbit* to reconcile the affective prompts of boredom amongst the numerous single takes used in the film.

Integrated into this discussion will be a focus on stimulus in the moving image. Where stillness exists on screen comes a sense of immersion, that conflicts with contemporary cinema's aim of rushing through a story to finish it as soon as possible in order to move on to the next hit of motion, and so forth. Quaranta's work, for example, on cinema and boredom centres on the traversing between metaphysics boredom and cinematic boredom in much the same way yet dissects stillness to a heightened state of anti-entertainment as a ‘cinema of deadly boredom’ (Quaranta). Jarmusch's films in particular compound stillness, which on the one hand are banal (Daly, 2013) and on the other, dislocative (Newman, 2011). Both observations prevail in my discussions about *The 51 Paintings Suite* films where I will unpack the themes of emptiness (the sense of loss) and vacantness (the dulling of responsiveness) as a temporality identified in slow cinema scholarship. This especially relates to allegorical aspects of embodied trauma situated in other slow cinema films that can be further observed including *Songs from the Second Floor* (2000) and *Absence* (2018). I observe that the directors have purposely aligned stillness much like I have used in my films within the emotive agency of the characters that in their case, life has slowed down to a mundane search of being. This oscillates, ontologically, between an affectual context to a structure of feeling, and epistemologically, within the nature of long durations.

Yet moving on from ontology and, indeed, from a structure of feeling, stillness in slow cinema, as I will later propose, is at odds with the epistemological simply because cinema has harboured an ontological perspective of slowness manifested within a search for being since it first was displayed by the Lumiere brothers in 1895; whether it be in the film itself or the reactions of audiences watching it. If, say, a reading of *Dead Man* was placed in an epistemological context, it would then open up a completely different perspective of how to gauge and find meaning through the subject in slow cinema once the emotiveness of being is removed or simply ignored altogether for the sake of knowledge. Yet, what would the purpose of slow cinema be if the emotive values in the search for being were not inextricably tied together within and outside of an ontology, or, at least, as symbiotes *between* being and slowness? *The 51 Painting Suite* intentionally moved away from a sense of being encapsulated through slowness or as identifying in a Derridean sense, as a post-structuralism. I developed my methodological perspective to define reason to be present in the film's editing and cinematographic formalism, harking back to a referential heritage to the original source paintings. Closer examination reveals an episteme in, and especially, about the Black Plague era paintings. Where I respond to contextual details about these effacements, it becomes apparent that pacing and stillness within the frame forms a large part of the film's capacity to address trauma memory through inaction. Even at the time of the initial filming period across the summer of 2006 and 2007 and, in particular, the first tableau from the opening sequence of *51 Paintings*, the aesthetics of duration were prioritised by an intention to illustrate the memories of the slowed traffic on the freeway when I looked around at the site of the car accident. Duration in this sense is conceived to be an allegorical device of trauma pointing

back to the imprint of what I recall from that time. In so far as the outcome of these films was concerned, I had considered slow motion as a mechanical aspect that prompted a dialogue about the way I recalled trauma memory. That is not to say that the works themselves were contextualised without acknowledging feelings. In relation to the signals I had imprinted into each frame, for example, the astronaut costume in *The Tailor of Autumn*, the character poses in *51 Paintings*, the face masks in *Winter Orbit*, was noticeably attentive to purposely *not* finding meaning in the subject in the same way as, say, *The Cremaster Cycle* did through the ontology of postmodern signals.

This is precisely one of the problems for slow films interpreted through the ontological. From a production and filmmaking point of view, it poses limited questions about the cinematic language framed by a sense of being, yet not necessarily around a sense of knowledge, or, moreover, an episteme. When making a comparison between Caruth and LaCapra's *Unclaimed Experience* these discussions also bring together a resolution for the dossier films to progress a substantiation for stillness and ubiquitous inaction, much further than what many interpretations of slow cinema have anointed in the past. Much of this discussion will also be central to the notion of signals representing emptiness through the slow akin to, for example, Tarr and Jarmusch, with Tarr's characters experiencing numbness and Jarmusch's characters experiencing emptiness. Through these films, slowness plays out a series of signals that form counter barriers to contemporary cinema perpendicular to the films of *The 51 Paintings Suite*.

## PRIORITISING SLOW FILMS

Returning to the discussion about the differences between art and film specified by Goya and Tarr, the tenants of slow films, as I have argued, define a unique way to embody discussion about trauma memory. Static artwork conveys a sense of a frozen moment in time whereas slow cinema captures temporal reading. Trauma memory reacts in the same way of recalling fragments linked to emotive responses yet does so in conjunction with a sense of temporal time. Slow films then embrace trauma memory by, first, replicating the temporality of how trauma memory is recalled, accessed, and experienced through fractured time, second, by capturing and mimicking the effects and states of trauma after the fact, and third, allowing its creators to use editing tools to recreate the actions of dissociation, flashbacks, repetitions and delay through temporal edits. Film and video editing then plays an important part in crafting a temporal version of trauma memory states in addition to cinematography crafting the visualities and residue of memory by lens-based techniques. Time-based art also affords ways to embody the same technical aspects used in slow films whether this be through duration, aesthetics or theoretical discourse.

I note these qualities of slow films which enable a stronger way to embody trauma memory:

- Slow films mimic the temporal distortion of memory through screen
- Slow films deploy durational silence and stillness that can replicate the states of trauma memory
- Slow films afford the opportunity to be witnessed and static art only permits to be viewed
- Slow films create atmosphere from its affectual qualities to include repetition, inaction, and boredom

- Slow films embody the experience of trauma not the image of trauma
- Slow films can evoke the hidden and the avoided by what is not heard or seen

Andy Warhol's 1963 *Silver Car Crash (Double Disaster)* painting graphically depicts a screen-printed image of a mangled car crash and corpse. It represents a commentary by Warhol on the desensitisation of death and 'the reification and obliteration of death in contemporary Western culture (Botescu-Sireteanu, p. 93). Its graphic portrayal of a car crash illustrates a single moment captured in time where the immersive denseness pertains to the confronting nature of the corpse in a stark depiction of the carnage car crash events convey. It centres primarily on the event of the car crash but speaks nothing to the nature of trauma memory leading after the event. Whereas slow cinema can depict graphic images and depictions of, say, car crashes but also extends to the denseness of recalling the memory through recall or triggering. Slow cinema is capable of capturing the essence or the sensing of fragmented memory in ways the Warhol painting cannot. The painting, however, could very well trigger trauma memory in people who face PTSD or a relapse of a traumatic event. A slow cinema version could in turn focus on the temporality and nature of recollection, providing much more scope and sincerity for a trauma memory investigation to embody through practice, and especially through the context of metamodernism as a dwelt experience.

By contrast, Rúnar Rúnarsson's 2024 *When the Light Breaks* depicts the aftermath of a fatal car crash and its impact after the event. The film depicts several slow cinema qualities of long takes, minimal dialogue, and slowed pace, but it's in the delivery of trauma surrounding a car crash that when compared with Warhol's *Silver Car Crash (Double Disaster)* surmounts a far more impactful density to the ongoing effects of trauma rather than the shock value of Warhol's painting. One reason is the lingering aspect felt through the depiction of people in shock and trauma grappling with the event which has just unfolded. In essence, the film presents the beginnings of trauma memory associated with an impactful event structured as, first, the event and second, the aftermath impacting on people connected with its tragedy. As much as the film centres on the beginnings of the event it shows the intimate effect of traumatic memory as the single day unfolds. Characters change their emotional responses to the impact as the recent memory moves forward in time much the same as, although on a much longer timeline, how this research has mapped the same types of negative emotions into the films. *When the Light Breaks* is a clear example of how car crash trauma is more heightened by the use of slow films than static images lending, conceptually, to the sincerity of the metamodern and absent from the postmodern cynicism evident in Warhol's painting.

In summarising this article, a fundamental part of this research has observed two key points. First, that the production of the films developed a new way to think about metamodern affect in slow cinema by challenging existing discussions about metamodernism; and second, that the films hold a significance in how I applied this development to each film, its volume of work contained in the series, and its contributions to reassess slow cinema through metamodernism. In the next article I will expand on these reflections with a contextualisation of the film study, especially examining the nature and causality of the films and the theoretical modelling engaged through practice.

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