

## New Media's Presentness and the Question of History: Craigie Horsfield's *Broadway* Installation

### Les arts médiatiques, le présent et la question de l'histoire : l'installation *Broadway* de Craigie Horsfield

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Résumé de l'article

Depuis les trois ou quatre dernières décennies, les arts médiatiques (autant dans leur forme analogique que numérique) ont été systématiquement défendus pour leur supposée capacité, selon les mots du critique d'art Jean-Christophe Royoux, à « donner corps à ce qui, par principe, disparaît du temps cinématographique : le temps présent ». Il importe toutefois de se questionner sur la nature du présent ainsi produit et, plus encore, sur la capacité du passé et du futur à demeurer des catégories temporelles significatives, tout particulièrement dans les oeuvres qui privilégient le présent. En effet, privilégier le présent peut s'avérer plus problématique qu'il n'apparaît de prime abord. C'est à tout le moins ce qui ressort de l'étude de l'historien François Hartog, qui maintient que le régime d'historicité qui prévaut aujourd'hui ne constitue pas un accès libérateur au présent, mais incarne plutôt une forme de *présentisme*, qui se manifeste par la transformation du présent en une valeur absolue, ce qui implique une véritable déconnexion entre le passé et le futur. Dans un tel régime, c'est vraisemblablement la possibilité même de l'Histoire qui est menacée de disparaître. Le présent article examine l'incompatibilité apparente entre l'inclination présentiste des arts médiatiques et le sens de l'Histoire. Pour étudier cette tension, il apparaît impératif de se pencher sur les oeuvres qui explorent un des principaux défis d'une culture obsédée par le présent : la mise en place de conditions de possibilité de l'Histoire. L'auteure maintient ici que le travail de Craigie Horsfield représente une contribution originale à cette problématique. Une attention particulière est accordée aux trois principales stratégies esthétiques à l'oeuvre dans l'installation vidéo *Broadway* (2006) : la sollicitation de l'attention, la temporalisation de la ligne d'horizon et la convergence de deux points de vue — celui du spectateur et celui du témoin.

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## RÉSUMÉ

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# New Media's Presentness and the Question of History: Craigie Horsfield's *Broadway* Installation

Christine Ross

## ABSTRACT

In the last three decades, media art (in both its analogue and digital forms) has been consistently defended in its alleged ability to, in the words of art critic Jean-Christophe Royoux, to “give concrete form to what, as a rule, vanishes from cinematographic time: the present.” Questions emerge, however, as to what exactly constitutes the present and, more importantly—in works that privilege presentness—how can the past and the future can still be productive categories of time? Indeed, such a privileging might be more problematic than initially thought. This, at least, is what comes out from a study by historian François Hartog who maintains that the prevailing regime of historicity today is not liberating access to the present but *presentism*: the turning of the present into an absolute value, whose absoluteness means a real disconnection from the past and the future. In such a regime, it is the possibility of history which is threatened with disappearance. This article seeks to examine the apparent incompatibility between new media art's presentist inclination and the sense of history. To investigate this tension, it is imperative to look at artworks that address one of the main challenges of a culture obsessed with the present—the setting of the conditions of the possibility of history. I propose that Craigie Horsfield's work is an original contribution to this line of investigation. Special attention is given here to the three main aesthetic strategies constitutive of the video installation *Broadway* (2006): the solicitation of attention, the temporalization of the horizon line and the convergence of two viewing positions—those of the spectator and the witness.

## Preamble

In an article entitled “Toward Zero Time,” art critic Jean-Christophe Royoux (2003, p. 176) maintains that the critical strength of Melik Ohanian’s recent media work lies in its capacity to address this unique question: “How to embody the experience of the present—the ‘empty’ time of the here and now?” Ohanian’s experimentation with film and video, which includes the spatialization of the image, motionless cinema, and multi-screen projections, embraces cinema but only to “give concrete form to what, as a rule, vanishes from cinematographic time: the present.” In a similar vein, philosopher Mark Hansen, in his *New Philosophy for New Media* (2004, p. 265), celebrates Bill Viola’s *Passions* series (2000-02) as “the exemplar of the medial revolution” which is “the movement of new media art beyond cinema.” This revolution is manifested in the series’ ability to open the “now” of digital technologies (their quasi-instantaneous access to data) not to the past (which is what cinema does through *diegesis*) but to an “enlarged now,” a now literally overloaded with stimuli, the present itself. Exploiting cinema’s technical capacity to shoot at high speed and then converting the images to digital video so as to stretch them temporally, Viola has produced recordings of different emotions (sadness, anger, joy) imperceptible to the naked eye and, in so doing, has managed—this is Hansen’s main claim—to “invert [the] ‘intentionality’ [of film] as a temporal object such that rather than taking the viewer through an experience of the past, it brings her face-to-face with the temporal [affective] dynamics underlying the emergence of the present.” Already in the 1970s, video artists and critics stressed the importance of experimenting with a technology which enabled them to shoot and project images simultaneously, a unique feature which was seen as a means to expand the limits of film by making possible the live co-presence of image and referent. Art critic and curator Bruce Kurtz (1976, pp. 234-235), for instance, argued that:

The most powerful aspect of the medium is its ability to transform even the events of ancient history into the flowing present, whether or not what is being telecast, or what appears on the monitor, is actually live, taped, or filmed. . . . Newness,

intimacy, immediacy, involvement, and a sense of the present tense are all characteristics of the medium. Even in prerecorded programming on commercial television, the present tense prevails in the idiosyncrasies of our sets, in the “disturbances” which constantly occur in the image, in the intrusion of daily life into the programming, in the interjected comments by local stations, in the dancing dots, and in the constantly changing image. Film, with its twenty-four complete still frames per second, is an illusion of movement, while television, with its constantly changing configuration of dots of light, is an illusion of stillness.

These are just but a few examples of how, in the last decades, media art has been powerfully defended because of its alleged ability to go beyond cinema’s absorption of the spectator into the successive unfolding of the narrative, notably through aesthetic strategies which include the viewer’s environment in the image or embody his or her experience of the work. While this preoccupation can and must be seen as a critique of modernity’s disavowal of the present for the sake of the future—what anthropologist of science Bruno Latour (2004, p. 211) has designated as the time of time, “the time of stages that outmoded and completed each other”—as well as a need to counter modern conventions of time based, notably, on teleology, progress, chronology and succession, it leaves many important questions unaddressed, such as: What, in fact, is the present? How does it occur in the experience of the artwork? Why is it so important? More pivotally, how can the past and the future still be productive categories of time? Being attentive to the present might even not be as heuristic a gesture as initially thought. This, at least, is what comes out of a recent study by French historian François Hartog, who has convincingly postulated that the prevailing regime of historicity characteristic of our times is not liberating access to the present but *presentism*: the withdrawal into the present, the turning of the present into an absolute value, whose absoluteness now means a real disconnection from the past (perceived as lost) and the future (perceived as increasingly uncertain). In such a regime, it is in fact the possibility of history which seems to be on the threshold of being lost. This article is part of a larger research project which aims to examine this

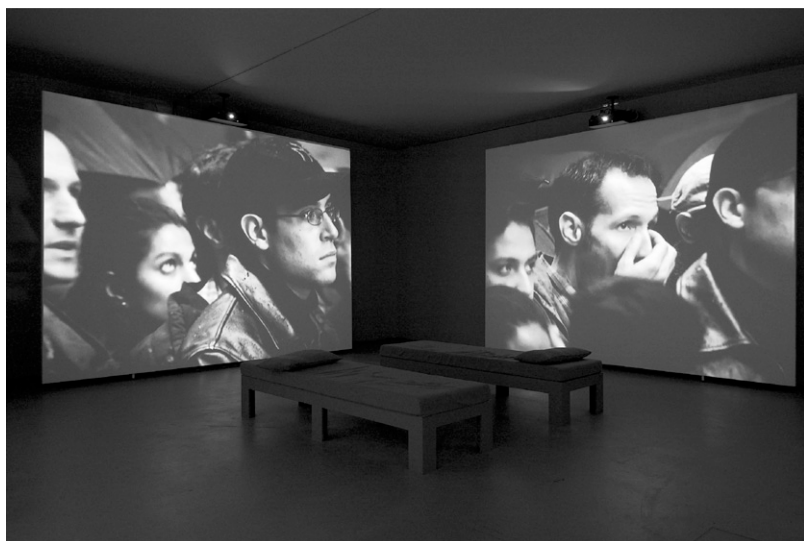
apparent incompatibility between new media art's presentist inclination and the sense of history. To start to address this incompatibility—one that is less irreconcilable than it seems—it is crucial to be attentive to artworks which, in their concern for the present, do attempt to meet one of the main challenges of a culture obsessed with the present—the setting of the conditions of the possibility of history. I propose here that British artist Craigie Horsfield's work is an original contribution to this line of investigation.

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In a recent interview, British artist Craigie Horsfield (2006) spoke in these terms about the temporality that he seeks to convey with his latest video installations, *El Hierro Conversation* (2002) and *Broadway* (2006):

I think that [in my work] almost always there's duration. But I would be deeply careful here, because I'm much attached to this notion—that may appear odd in context—what I would call the duration of the present. . . . [In] fact the duration is not the nine hours or five hours [of the work], or whatever, I mean you lose track of that. It really ceases to signify a great deal. . . . [It's] like being on an interminable car journey; you don't know where you're going. . . . As I say, I'm wary to press that too far, because I think more significant is this notion of attempting to find or inhabit a present, which so often is elsewhere. . . . [It] is very easy to live either toward what you are aiming for—you've got an appointment or finishing a job or whatever—or to live in a kind of . . . sentimentality or attachment to the past or thinking about stuff you've done. [It is] very difficult actually to articulate the present, as we know, and much of modernity appeared to separate us from the present. So . . . notions of duration . . . of the present having something which I would call duration, which you can consciously inhabit, be aware of inhabiting, give attention to, seem to me important.

It is with this statement in mind—Horsfield's description of his attempt to situate the spectator in a present that is intrinsically durational—that I want to discuss the artist's latest video installation and show how the durational, while not necessarily



*Broadway*, Craigie Horsfield, © 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

in itself a temporality leading to an awareness of historical time, can in fact be (as is the case here) an exploration of presentness as a condition of the possibility of history.

*Broadway* is a four-screen video installation, shot in mini DV and played back on multiple hard drives, whose screens are displayed perpendicularly to one another to form a square in which the spectator is invited to circulate, providing an image-sound environment for spectators who find themselves surrounded by the screens in a closed, unlit room. Confirming this effect of “surroundedness,” the installation has eight sound sources from which emerges a surround sound—abstract sonorities of background city noise and sporadic contact between metallic beams—that envelop the viewer. On the screens are projected close-up and slowed-down images of crowd fragments, more specifically crowds composed of individuals looking out (often through their cameras) at something which is located outside the frame, invisible to the viewers in the installation but intensely visible to the viewers in the image, to the extent that their sole activity consists in this very act of looking out. These are crowds but without the “oneness” of Gustave Le Bon’s (2006, p. 9) late nineteenth-century description of the psychological crowd as a “soul” shaped by the “law of mental unity.”

Indeed, while they share the act of looking at a scene which remains invisible to us, each individual comes, stays and goes, is endowed with his or her own emotions, his or her own movements. In most scenes, there is no communication between the observers, engaged as they are in the act of looking. And while communication does sometimes occur (either between two individuals or through the use of a mobile phone), it is reduced to the minimum to make room for the act of silent looking. This individuality from within the crowd is emphasized by the joint use of close-up and slow motion, which work together to highlight the heterogeneity of the faces' emotional expressions. This element is, I believe, crucial to the installation: Horsfield has depicted a being-together but one that is not about merger. There is no real unity or unification but rather a commonality defined by a common object outside the screen, a temporary community whose changing existence is shaped by the coming and going of the always varied individuals that compose it.

A last point about the structure of the installation, upon which it is important to insist: these images unfold quasi-panoramically. As within the nineteenth-century pictorial panorama or cyclorama, *Broadway* brings together diverse temporal segments of the same event but breaks with the single tableau effect typical of this apparatus. The presence of gaps between screens and the absence of linear temporality—images are projected on one screen then to be re-projected in a tighter framing on the next or previous screen a few seconds later—means that the world depicted by the images cannot be perceived as a whole. Yet, the horizontal and surround deployment typical of the cyclorama allows spectators of the installation to observe more attentively the images that have just passed or the images he or she has just missed; it requires a certain mobility from the spectators to observe the images as such, but also a pause, the non-necessity of constant circulation from the part of the viewer because of the relative sameness of the images. Hence, inserted in this four-screen organization, the public in the space is made to be like the public in the image: observing, moving, standing still, mostly silent but also talking with co-visitors, made out of sometimes more, sometimes less meditative

individuals who share, despite and within their differences, a main activity: looking out, looking at. But, *a contrario*, and I will return to this below, the spectators of the installation are also *not* like the observers in the picture: they are certainly more removed, more detached, less emotionally involved. The screens and the framing of the scene not only keep the object of sight out of sight for the spectators but also insert ruptures and openings between the screens; they are there to mediate the reception of the traumatic event and to intertwine the fictional space of the images with the physical space of the spectators. The installation is five hours and thirty minutes long and will keep unfolding, observing crowds and establishing, in this near-repetition of the same, a sense of relative un-eventfulness and predictability. No *telos* or *dénouement* here, no sudden rupture in the story, only observed observers observing something we can't see. We will never see what they are seeing, while the title does suggest a recent site, following from an event which may well have changed the world order: Ground Zero in New York City, the ruins of 9/11 resulting from the terrorist attack against the U.S. which led to the collapse of the twin towers of the World Trade Center.

By examining the claim outlined above—that Horsfield's work, while it seems to be somewhat stuck in the reiteration of present observations, can and must be seen as an investigation of the conditions of the possibility of history—this article will investigate *Broadway's* three main aesthetic strategies: the solicitation of attention, the temporalization of the horizon line and the convergence of two viewing positions—those of the spectator and the witness. I will isolate these three strategies here for the sake of examination, but they blend in the installation and are set into play as prerequisites for historical cognizance. In the work, all of these conditions are set into play to affirm the presentness of observation, yet they also activate, from this present, what must be called a renewed sense of *longue durée*. I suggest, in short, that *Broadway's* aesthetic strategies partake of the French Annalists' study of long-term quasi-immobile social structures. But they do so less to disclose the primary causal forces of historical events than to focus on the recent past and to

produce an observer (in and out of the picture) whose here-and-now attentional, perceptual and interpretative act lengthens, extends and slows down as it were the temporality of the event. This act is not only disclosed as a prerequisite for futurity, it is also tied to a specific understanding of the media image as time, relay, screen and means of historical thought. In contrast to François Hartog's definition of presentism as a temporal category that absorbs the past and the future, the present, *Broadway* argues, is their condition of possibility. This is where lie the installation's crucial redefinition of presentism and its deployment of historical time lie.

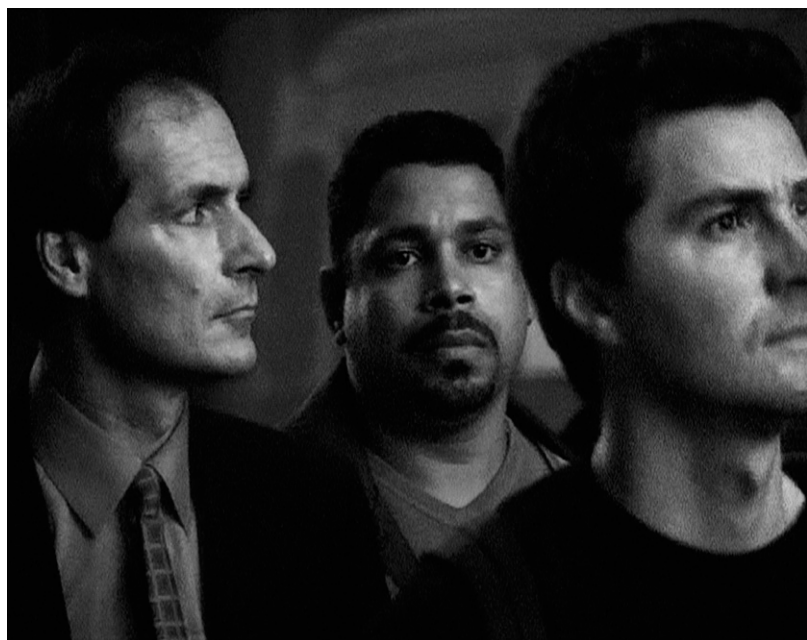
### The Solicitation of Attention

Recent neuroscience generally agrees, and I quote here cognitive neuroscientists Kevin Ochsner and Stephen Kosslyn (1999, p. 327), "that attention is the selective aspect of information processing. This function allows us to focus on some information at the expense of other information." When we interact with the environment, the visual field always contains much more information than can be processed by the observer, whereby some information will be selected over others so that attention may allow for further processing in the brain. What is equally acknowledged is that there does not seem to be a unitary attentional system. In other words, separate mechanisms are involved in attention. Posner and Petersen (1990) have identified three main attentional processes: disengagement of attention from a stimulus; shifting of attention from one stimulus to another; and engagement of attention on a new stimulus (Eysenk and Keane 2002, p. 393). They also offer three general conclusions about attention which strongly suggest that information processing in the brain is far from being a linear and unidirectional affair: "(a) the attention system is neurally distinct from, but interacts with, other processing systems of the brain; (b) this system consists of a network of different brain areas; and (c) each area carries out different computations that can be specified in cognitive terms" (Ochsner and Kosslyn 1999, p. 328). According to Ochsner and Kosslyn, the outputs from these systems

are sent to a long-term associative memory structure. If the set of information reaching associative memory is not consistent with the properties of a single object, the best matching description in associative memory is treated as a hypothesis. This hypothesis in turn guides a top-down search for a distinctive part or characteristic, which will either confirm or reject the hypothesis. (p. 339)

In short, there is no attention without perception, information processing and associative memory.

I make this detour through neuroscience because it is precisely this conception of attention that is staged in *Broadway*. Referring explicitly to the *Broadway* installation as an “environment,” Horsfield (2006a) stipulates that “it is mostly a condition for attention.” This condition has many layers: the attention of the filmed subjects; the attention of the camera operator; the attention of the artist towards the construction of the installation; and the audience’s attention in relation to the images. What is crucial here, however, is not so much the fact that such an activity is taking place but rather the function of that activity. For it is attention, more than mere observation, which is the key cognitive process that anchors all observers (within and around the images) in the here and now of their environment as they select information from that environment. *Broadway* keeps presenting images of observers whose attention is disclosed by the joint use of close-up, slow motion and the slow horizontal travelling of the camera. These observers are manifestly engaged with a stimulus and when they disengage they do so only to immediately reengage with the stimulus or to leave room for another attentive viewer in a continuous relay between viewers. It is, to be more precise, attention (as engagement, disengagement and reengagement) that affirms and reaffirms the presentness of observation. Attention, as it were, *presents* observation, anchors it to the here-and-now of a specific site. This presentness is repeatedly confirmed by the images as they continuously frame observations being initiated, renewed, replayed or relayed.



*Broadway*, Craigie Horsfield, © 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

In *Broadway*, however, attention also has another property which is not without complication for this first function of presentness. For attention, especially if we are to focus on the public of the installation, inscribes the spectator's attention in duration. This is set into play by the ways in which *Broadway* solicits attention from the spectators by increasingly yet inconsistently exposing them to dark images that are often difficult to read, to slowed-down images of repetitive, uneventful actions filmed in such extreme close-ups that are framed so close that representation switches into a deployment of electronic pixels, and to images in which there is nothing to see except the repeated, predictable yet more or less imperceptible act of seeing itself. These are, in many ways, empty images, images of time, time-images. As I mentioned above, Horsfield has a neuroscientific, cognitive understanding of attention. Emptying the images enables him to activate what current neuroscience and cognitive psychology see as one of the most significant effect of time-images: extended time.

Of particular relevance here are the studies made in the area of *experienced duration*, which corresponds to the experience of time-in-passing in contrast to retrospective duration, for example, which concerns remembered duration. Research has predominantly supported the finding that when "a person attends to the passage of time," as in experienced or prospective duration, "this kind of attentional deployment lengthens duration experience" (Block 1990, p. 22). In other words, when an observer allocates more attentional resources to processing time-related information, by attending time or by being aware of time, as is the case with the viewing situation of Horsfield's *Broadway*, duration judgment increases (Block 2003, p. 49). Cognitive science attributes this finding—that the perception of time *increases* with the heightened temporal awareness and *shortens* with attention to non-temporal information processing—to the mental effort required by the processing of temporal information (Schiffman 2001, p. 495 and Zakay 1990, p. 61). When an observer is exposed to empty time intervals containing no other significant stimuli than the time between two bounding signals, the interval is estimated to be longer than

filled intervals because “experiencing an empty interval of time . . . increases the awareness of the passage of time and correspondingly lengthens time experience” (Schiffman 2001, p. 495). This lengthening is exactly what is being represented in the screens which ensure the continuous relay of observations, their continuance in time. I am proposing here that extended time is not only represented but also activated in the spectators of the installation. Put bluntly, the repetitive, redundant and sometimes pixellated imagery of *Broadway* should be seen as a strategy of time extension, a time extension that operates through attention acts. This is a pivotal function of the image: its ability to solicit attention which both affirms the present and ensures its durationality.

### Questioning Presentism

What I am contending here is that while *Broadway* keeps reiterating the present—producing and reproducing attentive observers tied to the here-and-now of their environment through acts of information selection—this presentness has a durational dimension whose effect is to extend the present, to enable its extendedness and to make manifest its repetition or relay in time. The questions then become: How can this be seen as a condition of possibility for history? Isn't the stretching of the present still a withdrawal into the present? François Hartog sees presentism as an exacerbation of that asymmetry. His conceptualization of presentism is based on the work of intellectual historian Reinhart Koselleck (2004), who postulates that modernity—more precisely the temporalizing of the experience of history, historical time per se, which came about in modernity—is produced by the distancing, tension and asymmetry between the field of experience and the horizon of expectation, sees presentism as an exacerbation of that asymmetry. Modernity apprehends time as novelty, progress, constant perfecting and acceleration, an apprehension that depreciates the past for the sake of the future, obliterating what philosopher Paul Ricoeur (2003, p. 397) has called “the debt contemporaries feel in relation to their predecessors.” Since the 1960s, Hartog argues (2003, pp. 125-26), the interplay of different factors—

notably consumerism, mass media and tourism—has lead to a greater devaluing of the past and an increased attempt to pull the future closer and closer to the present, creating a growing disequilibrium between experience and expectation that is now “at the breaking point:”

It is as though there was only present time. . . . The growing dissociation between the field of experience and the horizon of expectation provokes the splitting of the present between a lost past and a future which appears to be more and more uncertain. The rise of the present—presentism—signals a new relationship to time, a new regime of historicity . . . the invasion of the horizon by a present which is more and more blown up, hypertrophied . . . In short, the present has become the horizon.

To extend the present as *Broadway* does is not without confirming the present as an absolute value—although the present may well be stretched it remains the main category around which time is being deployed. But while extendedness doesn't guarantee the possibility of a future distinct from the present, it still must be acknowledged as a means to think duration, to think continuance in time and to link observation with associative memory. The relaying of observers signals a preoccupation for continuity. It deploys the present as an imperative for any form of continuance or change in time. To truly measure the productivity of such a duration one must attend to the two remaining aesthetic strategies of duration whose function is precisely to orient this durational dimension towards the possibility of history: temporalizing of the horizon line and the junction of two viewing positions—that of the spectator and the witness.

### The Temporalization of the Horizon Line

In *Broadway*, not only does the image cease to be a pseudo-Albertian window through which one observes the world—that world is, for us at least, stubbornly located outside the image-screen—its depth structure also ceases to be organized according to the horizon line, the implied or actual horizontal line located at eye level representing the place in nature where the sky appears to meet the land or water plane. In linear perspective or any perspectival rendering of depth, the horizon plays at least two crucial

spatial functions: first, it locates, grounds as it were, the vanishing point where two parallel lines appear to converge. It is the line by which illusionist depth, perspective, is constructed in an image. Second, its placement determines the observer's point of observation (the vanishing point being in a symmetrical relationship with the viewpoint). In *Broadway*, the lack of depth caused by the close-up, the pixellation of the surface and the expulsion of the horizon line outside the screen (the line which the observers are looking at but which we can't see) projects the depth structure in front of the screen into the space of the spectators. This depth projection is confirmed by the installation's continual representation of the looking activity, disclosing our own looking space as an extension of the image. Such a projection, however, does not mean that there is no horizon line but rather that *Broadway* articulates a temporalization of the horizon line. The horizon is the temporal line that leads the spectators from one screen to the another, as images continually prefigure or follow images on other screens. This shift from a spatial understanding of the horizon line towards its temporalization is crucial in that it institutes duration in relation to the past and the future. It does so, however, in a special way, by making them co-exist with the present. Such a co-existence is affirmed by the four-screen quasi-panoramic structure that transmits simultaneously the present in the making, the present as it passes and the present of the *will be*. The present is disclosed through attention but also as what needs to pass and to become, in order to exist. By articulating a display of screens that makes images co-exist with what they just were and what they will soon become, by calling on us to look back and forth at these temporal co-existences, a more profound sense of duration sets in, one in which the present is both continuously affirmed and opened up by a past and a future but only inasmuch as these two temporal categories are simultaneous to the presentness of their manifestation. The productivity of *Broadway* is to assume the future and the past outside the modern tropes of progress and nostalgia. The future ceases to be the horizon towards which one walks or the motivation that draws away from the present; and the past ceases to be promoted as a golden age to go back to or to be



*Broadway*, Craigie Horsfield, © 2006. Courtesy of the artist.

disposed of as an obsolescence. They are presents themselves in that it is usually impossible to figure out which screen, in its imagery, anticipates, announces, follows or continues the other. Yet, from all these possible presents, a past present and a future present take shape.

### The Witness

When I say that *Broadway* represents observing observers, I do omit something of the representation of the observers' experience, for there is an emotion of loss and grief that colours most of these observing individuals, who should more precisely be called witnesses in a state of mourning. *Broadway* imbricates the position of the observer with that of the witness. The viewers in the image are witnesses of an act of destruction, a man-made political catastrophe, death per se, while the viewers of the installation are witnesses of these witnesses. Yet the former are special types of witnesses whose testimony we will not hear. The content of their experience will not be disclosed. Hence, if *Broadway* makes the positions of the observer and the witness

coincide, it does so in a way that removes the authority of the latter. The installation goes with the silence and the attentional activity of the witness. As such, it must be seen as countering the contemporary mass media economy of the witness as bearer of truth and authenticity (Hartog 2005, pp. 196-97). What is emphasized here, what is being disclosed as essential to history, is not the testimony of the witness but the act of witnessing itself, a witnessing whose mourning is productive only inasmuch as it lets death (what Ricoeur sees at the core of history and what Jacques Rancière [1992, p. 135] calls the founding narrative of history) be not a *bygone* event but a *non-erasable* event, an event that can be recalled, re-observed, reinterpreted and made significant because of this relay. Death, Ricoeur observes (2003, pp. 470 and 496), is always a threat coming from the perspective of the future, an “Other” that moves towards me, a form of assassination; while the historian cannot undo that death its meaning is not fixed once and for all. The positioning of the spectator as a grieving witness is a key aesthetic strategy, for it is there that the possibility of history is embodied and made more tangible. Ground Zero, any death or destruction, is both a past to mourn and a future to fear. So if the role of the witness here is to observe attentively and to grieve, it is also, through that attentive activity, to acknowledge responsibility in the present for past actions in light of the future to foresee. Hans Jonas’s *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1979) is not far here, more precisely in its formulation of an ethics of the future according to which the survival of humanity relies on our reiterated efforts to care for the planet in the present so as to ensure its futurity. By staging the constant relaying of attentive observers in states of mourning, by defining the spectator in these very terms, *Broadway* proposes the image itself as a relay and as a mediating screen which makes the traumatic object absent for us, a responsible act by which the past exists not as over but as what must be re-observed and reinterpreted for a different future. Attentive observation in the present, one that institutes duration not only by lengthening time and enabling the continuance of attention but also by grieving loss, is the keystone of Horsfield’s sense of history.

### *Longue durée*

Craigie Horsfield's work has often been associated with Fernand Braudel's *longue durée*. Horsfield is a reader of Braudel and has acknowledged his interest in the work of the French historian. For Braudel, one of the major figures of the renewal of the *Annales* during the post-WWII period, *longue durée*, or the long perspective, is a social historical time that embraces large periods of time and geographical amplitudes to disclose the duration of a civilization, that is civilization as "a reality which exceeds in longevity all the other collective realities," (Revel 1999, p. 21) a reality that evolves only slowly yet is never inert, surviving only through re-adaptations, cycles, and repetitions that the historian must identify and quantify. It is the movement by which societies, at each instant of the present, take stock of their experiences, authorize the return of techniques and gestures of production and allow the past to be there again (Perrot 1999, p. 173). Attempting to counter a form of history based on the individual, the national hero, mere chronology and the succession of events, Braudel continuously insists on the need to move beyond the event, what he calls short time, to produce historical time. In "Histoire et sciences sociales: la longue durée," he states:

In contrast, in opposition to event history and the instantaneous, a new economic and social history has put at the forefront of its research the history of *longue durée*, the event being what belongs to the *courte durée* (abusive smoke). . . . Because, indeed, in all forms of life, exist the economic, political, geographical, social, literary short times of a fire, a crime, price of wheat, etc. This mass does not constitute the whole reality, all the thickness of history. Short time is the most misleading of durations . . . It is (only) in relation to the layers of slow history that the totality of the history can be rethought, as tough from an infrastructure. All the levels, all the thousands of levels, all the thousands of bursts of the time of history are understood from this depth, this semi-immobility; everything gravitates around it (Braudel 1969, pp. 44-46 and 54).

*Broadway*, as I have argued, re-inscribes the *longue durée* through its main aesthetic strategies—the deployment of time-

images which extend time through attention acts, the temporalization of the horizon line as a means of making the past, present and future co-exist and the convergence of the positions of observer and witness which make it possible to envisage the reinterpretation of events—in order to think about the conditions in which historical time is possible. In this, it may well favour attentional presentness. It also defies presentism by opening the present to long-term structures. As Jean-Claude Perrot has argued about Braudel's duration, *longue durée* has a collective origin which needs to be acknowledged by the historian: every society takes its complexity from its longevity and asks from the historian the recognition that duration doesn't exist as mere data but as a problem for societies (Perrot 1999, p. 173). Yet, as it enacts long duration, *Broadway* challenges some of the limits of Braudel's approach, especially its devaluation of eventfulness and human agency. In the installation, the event is out of sight but is still pivotal as a trigger of historical consciousness because of the sense of loss and need for meaning it imparts. The observers of the remains, as much as the observers of the represented observers, act through observations; this is where lies some possibility for social change. To paraphrase what historian Gabrielle M. Spiegel (2005, pp. 13 and 20) has said about new forms of history writing:

Recent literature on the topic of self and agency has been sharply critical of the fracturing, decentering effects of structuralist and poststructuralist formulations. . . . [It] is precisely by focusing on the question of how subjects effect change that the rehabilitation of agency—of “human intentionality and forms of empowerment to act”—has centered. . . . Historical investigation, from this perspective, would take practices (not structure) as the starting point of social analysis, since practice emerges here as the space in which a meaningful intersection between discursive constitution and individual initiative occurs.

Although *Broadway* shows observers in their ongoing reformulation of what they see, it makes manifest to the spectator of the installation how this reformulation (as a practice that enables the interactive co-existence of past, present and future) can only come about in long duration—through representations that

activate an extended time and a temporalization of the horizon line, images that function as relays and screens. It is through this specific conception of the image that *longue durée* is indeed rethought for us.

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