

## EXTRACT: MICHAEL HAMPTON

*The tension refuses to subside...*

In the next screening room she enters, a large number of disconnected images flash up, far too quickly, far too randomly for comfort. It looks quite impossible to sit through, like that brainwashing scene in *The Parallax View* or Michael Caine's ordeal in *The Ipcress File*. As we watch with her, the narrative is continued in voice-over by the protagonist; she is there but not there, in the present or is it the future, looking back on a past. The narration, her narrative, is concerned with the idea of simultaneity and of narrative itself, the diegesis, specifically how it is only vaguely apparent what the word narrative means in terms of films or stories (essentially, the structure and what keeps you watching, what keeps you turning the pages) but, the voice asks, how does that work in terms of visual art? I mean, it says, when everything is laid out simultaneously, say, in a painting? The narrator then talks about a personal memory of having to tell her parents she no longer wanted to learn the piano. She was worried they would contrive to somehow *force* her to learn, as adults sometimes did and so she had spent all one morning preparing her arguments. She had made the case to herself that it was too hard for her, too boring and she could no longer be bothered to learn her scales. She would never be a Glenn Gould. She had sat quietly at the piano, the voice-over says, gazing down at the keys, beginning to rehearse her explanations and arguments and at that same moment she had suddenly and quite inexplicably experienced a huge cognitive jolt, a kind of mass overload of imagery as, of its own accord, her brain had begun to visualise the complexities of every possible ramification of her broaching the subject before she had even mentioned it: her father being called in to arbitrate, further enquiries being made as to the nature of her decision, her stepmother intimating obliquely but ominously that it was her friends who were to blame, the scene that would have occurred when they came up against the ramparts of her obstinacy, the slamming of the piano lid, her stomping up to her room, the inevitable tears, the uncomfortable atmosphere that evening, the next

day, her father's frustration, her stepmother's anger, every possible narrative shift, every imaginable development had come upon her at once at exactly that moment. It was like a seizure or a stroke says the voice and indeed, afterwards, it says, she felt so drained and shaky it took all the energy she had to hoist herself off the piano stool and slump down onto the sofa. Years later, the voice over continued, many years after the incident at the piano a similar event had occurred whilst she was walking around an exhibition of contemporary art. This time, says the voice, the endless implications of every single art work in the gallery had suddenly born down upon her mind in the same way but this time arriving as compulsive words rather than images. Her only recourse, the only way she could exorcise the words was to whisper them in a disjointed, Joycean staccato as they arrived in her mind: *"Pit stop. Past tense. Life story. Respite cure. Fecal lumps. Sinnlos. Babypink. Prussian blue. Mint cream. Jugendstil gold. Chrome orange. Vomit. Scarecrows in evening dress. Pince-nez. Mabuse/Freud. Graphite stalkers. Forms abounding. Upturned. Mindless. Overwhelming reason. Black silhouettes. Railway arches for vampire critics. Clumsy: Sausage string gut. Crib. Prow. Dug-out. Anvil. Spike. Crud. Nipples. Rug. Freud/Mabuse"* and so they continued to come, says the voice, *"Uruguay blue. Mustard yellow. Severed foot. Cardboard. Gauze. Scraps. Fodder. Telephone book papier-mâché. Nails. Viennoiserie. Psalm 101..."* refused to stop, and they continued to completely overwhelm her as though the world entire, the mad rush of the universe in all its terrifying simultaneity had somehow caused a fundamental rewiring of every neuronal network in her brain. The voice ends and yet the character continues to sit in the screening room, refracted light from the flashing imagery lightening and then darkening her face.