Sydney College of the Arts
The University of Sydney

MASTER OF FINE ARTS
RESEARCH PAPER

Between SUITCASES and SKYWRITING

by
Hong An James Nguyen

June 2015

TITLE

Between SUITCASES and SKYWRITING: Performance Art Documentation and the Cinematic Apparatus.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How can the documentation of performance-based practice be destabilised to establish a more generative relationship with the very performance that it documents? Utilising the moving image as a cinematic extension for the practice of performance-based art, I will be investigating how historic and contemporary interventions with the camera have developed practical approaches to interrogate the relationship between performance art and its documentation.

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 10. Wim Wenders, *PINA 3D by Wim Wenders - Making of 1/2,* 2011. Screenshot from an online excerpt by (colour, sound) 1:11 min. Parada Film, https://vimeo.com/28150085 (accessed May 3, 2015).

Fig. 11. James Nguyen, *THE SUITCASE (version.2, channel 1 of 2),* 2014. Screenshot of moving image performance documentation (black and white, sound recording), 6:35 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 12a. James Nguyen, *THE SUITCASE (version.2, channel 2 of 2) (uncropped),* 2014. Screenshot of moving image performance documentation (black and white, sound recording), 6:35 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 12b. James Nguyen, *THE SUITCASE (version 2, channel 2 of 2) (cropped),* 2014. Screenshot of moving image performance documentation (black and white, sound recording), 6:00 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 13. Harun Farocki, *An Image,* 1983. Screenshot of moving image, (colour, stereo sound) 25:21 min. VideoDataBank, http://www.vdb.org/titles/image (accessed May 2, 2015).

Fig. 14. Gustave Courbet, *The Artist's Studio, a real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life*, 1854-1855. Oil on canvas, 361 x 598 cm. RMN-Grand Palais (RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) (accessed May 02, 2015).

Fig. 15. James Nguyen, *THE SUPERMAN (version 1),* 2014. Screenshot of single channel moving image performance documentation (black and white, sound recording), 6:00 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 16. Philippe Pareno, *Zidane A 21st Century Portrait,* 2006. Screenshot from DVD recording (colour, stereo sound), 91:00 min. Available from SCA library Rozelle, Arte France cinéma, Canal +, CinéCinéma & Centre national de la cinématographie.

Fig. 17. James Nguyen, *Storyboard Sample for THE SUPERMAN (version 2),* 2014. Scanned image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 18. James Nguyen, *THE SUPERMAN (version 2, channel 1 of 2),* 2014. Screenshot of two-channel moving image performance documentation (black and white, stereo sound), 7:02 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 19. James Nguyen, *THE SUPERMAN (version 2, channel 2 of 2),* 2014. Screenshot of two-channel moving image performance documentation (black and white, stereo sound), 7:02 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 20. James Nguyen, *Overhead Manual Pivot,* 2014. Installation view at Archive_Space. Image courtesy of the artist.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The motivation for this research project was to dissect my art practice - primarily focused on performing in front of the camera - to understand the relationship between the performance and its documentation. As this project developed, I looked towards the conventions established by early performance art and the basic language of cinematography. This enabled me to consider how I might reframe the role of documentation in my work and develop a series of questions to investigate what constitutes documentation, and what responses might be developed to address the document in relation to my work.

My research question explores how cinematic interventions might affect the process of documentation in order to destabilise and offset the very performance that is being documented. Through interventions that attempt to complexify the relationship between performance art and its documentation, I hope to discover new ways of working with performance-based practice and its documentation in a more generative way.

Firstly, I will establish some historic context for the early documentation of performance art and look at an example of early Soviet cinema to examine an alternative application of documentary material; that is, through a cinematic perspective. Already from these early stages both filmmakers and performance artists had begun to experiment with the gap between the viewer's assumed expectations of the completeness of documentation, and the material impossibility of the document to meet these expectations. From here, I will begin to look at what it means to perform in front of the camera, and the complicity of the camera in performative practice itself.

The second chapter will open with *THE SUITCASE*, an early example of my work that demonstrates my rudimentary approach to performance

documentation. I will compare this with the practice of contemporary artists, such as Rachael Rakena, Brian Fuata and Klara Lidén who use the single perspective of the camera in a variety of ways to more clearly reflect and articulate the performance that is being documented. Following on from these early investigations, I will look at how the gradual incorporation of complex cinematic gestures into new versions of my performances began to open up my practice. These significantly include the recruitment of camera assistants to realise these recordings, and the development of cinematic solutions observed from the films of Harun Farocki, Wim Wenders and Philippe Pareno whose practices had until then been beyond the scope of my research.

Chapter three investigates how the installation of discreet units of cinematic documentation of performance evolved in a variety of settings and combinations. The introduction of the document into the viewer's space, and the ability of these discrete units act as modular reconfigurations that can be repurposed and reframed endlessly became an important way of engaging with the document away from the live performance. This expands the document into a generative and even performative function within the prism of exhibition and installation.

In the final chapter, I will re-consider the questions and challenges that have been posed throughout the project through the example of *THE SKYWRITING* piece. Challenging my practice and pushing it to function within new limits of delegation and detachment, this work evolved into a logical methodology for practising within the performative medium. It also developed to find workable exhibition solutions to deal with the relationship between the work of performance and the work of performance documentation.

Fig. 1. Bruce Nauman, *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around The Studio*. 1967-8, 16mm film transferred to video (black and white, sound), 10:00 min. MoMA, http://www.moma.org (accessed April 30, 2015).

There are about ten minutes of 16mm black and white film left for recording. The camera has been fixed in position, framing the centre of the studio. Adjusting the focus, the artist then presses record and begins to perform walking around the studio and playing a sustained harmonic chord on the violin.

Viewing the documentation of Bruce Neumann's 1967-8 performance, *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around The Studio* (Fig.1), two things become apparent. First, the artist moves and performs outside the frame of the camera. Although we know the performance occurs inside the artist's studio, the camera is set up to capture only a portion of the performance from a single and limited perspective. As the artist moves in and out of frame, the pulsing harmonic chord on the violin forms the only continuous and sustained element of the recording. As viewers, we draw the logical link between the chords with the presence of the artist even when Nauman is absent from the screen.[1] By not tracking the action of the performer, the static camera forms a document that leads us to think of what is beyond the visual limits of the frame we are watching. Finally, if we persevere and continue to stay until the last few minutes of the recording, the sound of the harmonics prematurely ends, as Nauman continues to pace around the studio still apparently playing the violin. This disruption is slightly disturbing; as it undermines the logical assumptions we had formed when

---

[1] Armin Schäfer, Armin. 2013. "The Audiovisual Field in Bruce Nauman's Videos". *Osiris* 28 (1) p.147.

linking the sound with the image. Nauman's technical failure to correctly synchronise the image and sound reiterates to the viewer the porous relationship between a document and a performance.

An early example of performance art documentation, *Playing a Note…*[2] is characterised by a particular use of the camera. The various technical gaps found in examples of early performance documentation (be they intentional or an inadvertent failure to anticipate and "correct" the framing and sound), establish a series of questions around the limitations of documentation. What is happening just outside the frame of the camera? Who or what is actually behind the camera directing the point of view that will later be occupied by the viewer? Whose perspective does the viewer replace? What are the implications of having this technical element present in the actual performance itself?

As a mechanical apparatus that passively records what is immediately in front of it, the camera acts as an expedient, inconspicuous and seemingly unbiased witness to an event. Overtime, the integration of image based documentation within the canon of performance practice developed away from ideas of "liveness" replaces by the characteristics inherent in reproducible media extending into mechanisms of inscription, recording, repetition and editing. [3]

Similarly, early cinema also began by using the camera in a pragmatic and direct way, often exploiting the apparatus as a means to an end to document and subsequently show other art forms (theatre, dance, vaudeville and circus) to a wider audience. The camera was again a device capable of disseminating and extending the reach of live events. To distinguish themselves from mere reproducers of artistic content, early filmmakers and theorists such as Hugo

---

[2] Bruce Nauman, *Playing a Note on the Violin While I Walk Around The Studio [title].*
[3] Liz Kotz, 2005. "Language Between Performance and Photography". *October* 111, p.21.

Munsterberg began to identify and discuss the various cinematic innovations of film as an independent practice, and art form in itself.[4] Exploring the psychological implications of new techniques such as flashbacks, close-ups, cuts, edits, montages, the camera was dislodged from the static mantle of passive objectivity, developing a new technical language and way to express its evolution beyond mechanical reproduction.[5]

---

[4] Donald Laurence Fredericksen, *The Aesthetic of Isolation in Film Theory--Hugo Münsterberg*. 1977. P.29.
[5] Ibid, p.27.

Fig. 2. Dziga Vertov (director) and Elizaveta Svilova (editor), T*he Man with a Movie Camera.* 1928, screenshot of online moving image (black and white, no sound), 66:50 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO7RdsgqIFs (accessed April 30, 2015).

A cropped double exposure

A camera is set up on another camera

Cut to clouds passing over the roofline of a church

Cut back to the camera being taken down

Cut to clouds passing over a street light

The camera is taken backstage behind heavy curtains

Cut to a movie theatre filled with empty seats

Close up of a wall light in the theatre, then its entrance

Then another close up of a velvet rope barrier

Shot of a movie projector

A movie reel is unpacked

A curtain is drawn

Cutback to the movie reel being inserted into the projector

Close up of the film leader, as it is fed into the projector

A row of seats unfolds

Cut to a closer detail of the movie reel

The rope barrier is taken off its latch

Crowds enter the theatre

Multiple exposure of rows upon rows of theatre seats unfolding

The theatre fills to capacity

The lights are dimmed...

The rapid-fire edits described here make up the opening sequences of *The Man with a Movie Camera* (1928) (Fig.2), an early example of Soviet experimental documentary film, directed by Dziga Vertov and edited by Elizaveta Svilova. Depicting the loading of a film reel and a movie theatre filling up with patrons, the film is able to situate the real-world audience (within a few short edits) into the tactile and psychological space of the movie theatre.[6] The sequence reiterates to the audience the actual cognitive and sensory experience of watching and experiencing film. Throughout the rest of the movie, a variety of techniques such as rapid montage, the camera in motion, acceleration, deceleration, close-ups and multiple exposures create a richly textured experience for the audience as they are taken through a day in the life of a city (a composite of Moscow, Odessa, and Kiev) recorded over three years. Thus moving beyond the "pure" documentation of everyday life.

Vertov and Svilova present the camera as an instrument that not only records, but also is actually embedded into the fragmented experience of reality. Vertov had also set up candid situations and artificially constructed scenes specifically *for* the camera. This treated the camera as a recording apparatus that not only accompanied, but also was complicit in activating and affecting the very life it was depicting. Vertov's camera was therefore not an objective and distant instrument of documentation. Rather, it was embedded and conscious of its role in constructing what the viewer saw.[7]

As a counterpoint to the movement and presence of the camera, Svilova's contribution to editing and post-production was also radically incorporated into the fabric of the film (Fig.3). In its entirety, *The Man with a Movie Camera* encapsulates the multiplicity of cinema. Alongside the representation of real

---

[6] Malcolm Turvey, *Can the Camera See? Mimesis in Man with a Movie Camera. October* (1999): p.48-49.
[7] Jonathan Beller. *Dziga Vertov and the Film of Money*. boundary 2 26, no. 3 (1999): p175.

life, the work also explicitly presents the multiple processes around filmmaking that encompass the technical, collaborative production and distribution of cinema. Included are the multiple camera operators, assistants, film editors, film distributors and the actual movie theatre. Swept up by new cinematic techniques and innovations for the camera, the film attempts to activate the role of the audience, shifting from mere passive observers to audiences who themselves are reflected and absorbed into the very cinematic processes they are watching.

This fusion between the viewer and the cinematic apparatus has been described as the "kino-eye" by Dziga Vertov and Jonathan Beller.[8,9] Seen as the reconciliation of the documented image with the lived experience that spectatorship represents, the "kino eye" is "... a suturing of human and machine, of corporeality and industrialised perception. The organicity of machines, as well as the mechinic organisation of human beings…rendered in and as cinema." [10] By bringing the viewer into a more expanded cinematic experience, film can be seen as ultimately dissolving and complexifying temporality. For the person watching the film, the experience is instant, immediate and immersive; this is ultimately conveyed through the retroactive processing and editing of pre-recorded footage.

---

[8] Thomas W. Sheehan, *Wittgenstein and Vertov: Aspectuality and Anarchy*. Discourse 24, no. 3 (2003): p.102.
[9] Jonathan Beller. *Dziga Vertov and the Film of Money*, p175.
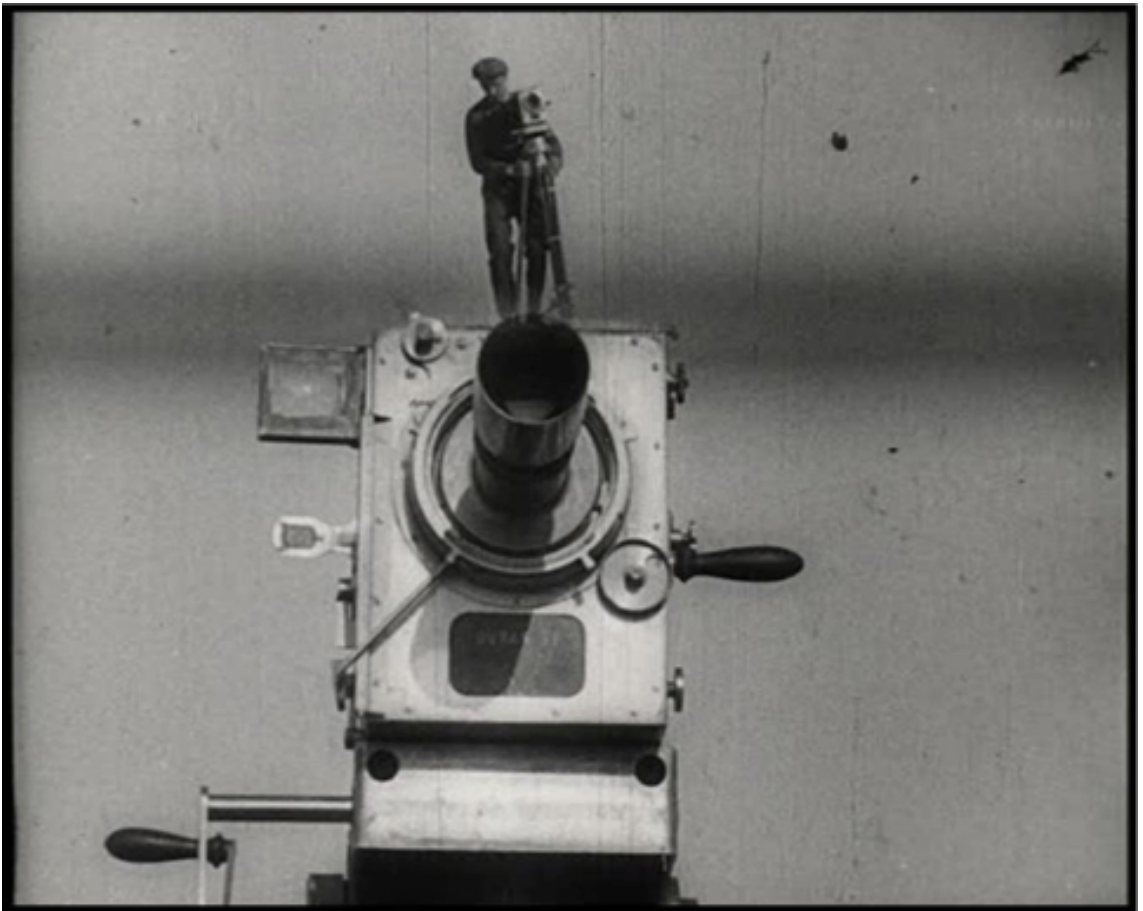[10] Ibid, p.152 (Jonathan Beller).

Fig. 3. Dziga Vertov (director) and Elizaveta Svilova (editor), T*he Man with a Movie Camera.* 1928. Screenshot of online moving image (black and white, no sound), 66:50 min. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QO7RdsgqIFs (accessed April 30, 2015).

Like the concept of the kino-eye, the complexity of documentation and its relationship to lived human experiences established new possibilities and questions not only from the context of film and cinema, but also for performance artists approaching the document through mediation and embodiment. Reflecting on this, some artists began to engage more critically with the implications of the relationship between the performance and its documentation. Performance artists even began to consider how documentation could indeed be a kind of performance in itself. An early experimental work questioning this relationship was Vito Acconci's *Blinks, Nov 23,1969; afternoon, Photo-Piece.* [11] (Fig.4). The simple descriptor accompanying this banal series of black and white photographs of Greenwich Street New York City reads:

"Holding a camera, aimed away from me and ready to shoot,

while walking a continuous line down a city street. Try not to blink.

Each time I blink: snap a photo."

---

[11] Phillip Auslander, *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*. PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 28, no. 3 (2006): p.3.

Fig. 4. Vito Acconci. *Blinks, Nov 23,1969; afternoon*. Photo-Piece, Greenwich Street, NYC; Kodak Instamatic 124 (black and white photographs). http://aleph-arts.org/art/lsa/lsa39/eng/1969.htm (accessed April 30, 2015).

By pointing the camera away from the performing body to represent what the artists sees Acconci inverts the role of the camera and therefore the perspective of the audience. Shifting from the position of an aloof observer, the viewer comes to share the same privileged perspective as the artist, as the document occupies and activates a performance. In fact, by coordinating the machine with the corporeal need to blink, the viewer only sees the moments not seen by the artist. The document in this instant becomes a mechanical extension of the artist. The camera photographs and literally situates the performance, it provides the photographic evidence and also supplements and accounts for the biological state of blinking. Not only does the document supplement Acconci's temporary blindness each time he blinks, but it is also integrated into the performance itself.[12] In this work, Acconci's performance and the photographic documentation cannot exist without the other. The individual and collective components of performance, text descriptor and photographs, all move toward providing a comprehensive account of the work. These "components" work to supplement one another to different capacities, and in so doing they question and challenge the definitions that attempt to distinguish between performance, its documentation and the viewers' experience of the performance through the document.[13]

As described through these three examples, artists have been aware of the instabilities of the document and transmutable eye of the camera. It is from these historic points of reference that my research project begins. From here, I will attempt to identify and re-evaluate contemporary responses to the persistent crossovers between performance, documentation, the cinematographic experience and the implications for the viewer.

---

[12] Phillip Auslander, *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*. PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 28, no. 3 (2006): p.4.
[13] ibid, p.84.
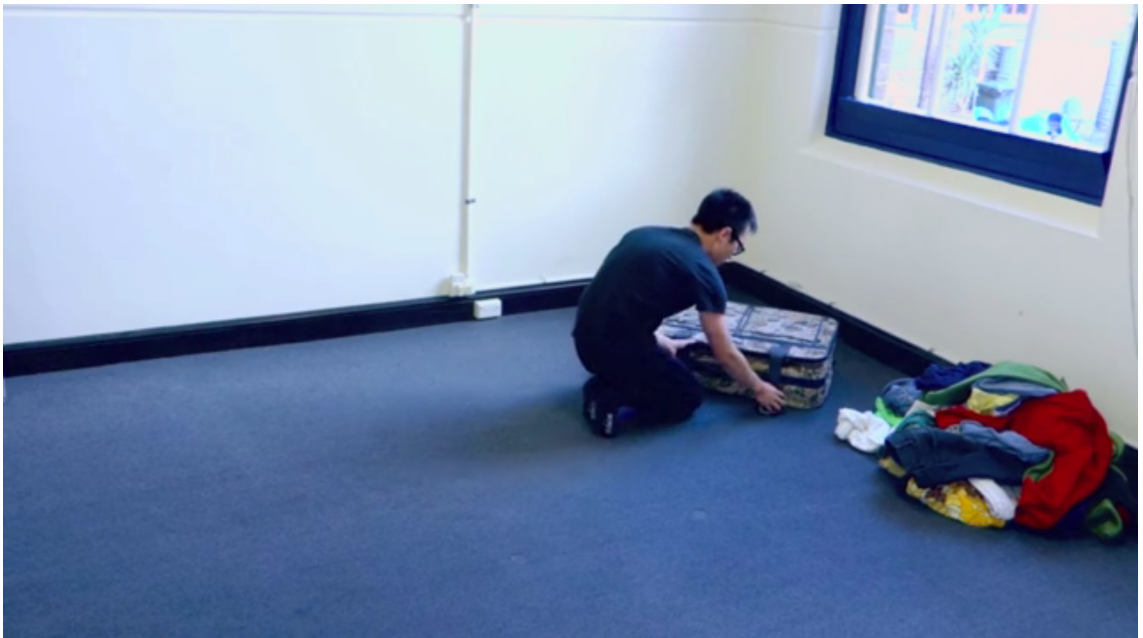
Fig. 5. James Nguyen, *THE SUITCASE (Version.1).* 2014. Screenshot of moving image performance documentation (colour and sound recording) 4:57 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

A suitcase sits in the corner of a studio, the camera is positioned on a tripod, framing a corner of the room. The artist turns on the camera, and approaches the suitcase from outside the frame of the camera. After unpacking the suitcase, the artist proceeds to climb into it and struggles to pull close the zipper from within.

Taking less than five minutes, *THE SUITCASE (Version.1)* (Fig.5) marks my first attempt at responding to the political rhetoric around boat arrivals prior to the Australian 2013 federal elections. I wanted to counter the antagonistic momentum of public debate around this issue with a performance. The gesture to physically withdraw into a suitcase was an act of political resistance.

Contemporary precedents to this type of politically reactive performance include examples by Rachael Rakena, Fez Fa'anana and Brian Fuata's collaborative work *Pacific Wash Up (2003-2004)* (Fig6). Performed on Bondi beach, the work is a single channel hand-held video that captures a group of people of Maori and Pacific Island descent, as they struggle on shore in cheap plaid plastic travel bags. The tongue-in-cheek performance aims to illustrate the economic evaluation of Pacific immigrants as flotsam and jetsam that continuously wash onto the Australian shoreline[14]. The video records the

---

[14] Laboral. *Pacific Wash Up (2003-2004).* Last modified January 29, 2015
http://www.laboralcentrodearte.org/en/recursos/obras/pacific-wash-up-2003-2004.
Laboral Centro de Arte y Creacion Industrial, Accessed April15, 2015.

confrontation of the performance with unsuspecting local beach-goers and joggers who witness the group's unfolding action. Unlike my own performance, which was made in a private space and recorded from a static position on a tripod, the action in *Pacific Wash Up* was documented with an unsteady camera that was hand-operated and physically tracked the group of performers as they engaged in this public performance.

Fig. 6. Rachael Rakena, Fez Fa'anana and Brian Fuata, *Pacific Wash Up*. 2003-2004. Photographic documentation of single channel moving image recording (colour and sound recording) 5:47 min. Laboral, http://www.laboralcentrodearte.org/en/recursos/obras/pacific-wash-up-2003-2004 (accessed April 30, 2015).

Although these two works share political motives and symbolic manifestations of the migrant/refugee experience (suitcases and travel bags), the distinct treatment of the camera to document the performances significantly differentiate the logic and viewer experience of the two pieces of performance. Both the private and public actions are heightened by the position of the camera and the style of documentation. The decision to mount the camera on a stationary tripod or to track the performance on a handheld camera alters the viewer's experience, one stable and remote, the other complicit and integrated into the action. The different approaches to documenting performance illustrates how the camera can alter and provide artists with multiple options in exploring and presenting political concepts to the viewer. Rakena, Fa'anana and Fuata's recording also captures the reactions of the audience at Bondi, allowing the recording to give insight into the confrontational aspect of the work.

Beyond the border politics of Australia, it is also interesting to note that the proliferation of images of bodies smuggled in suitcases remains globally topical and evocative of the desperation of migrants and refugees. The X-ray scanned image of a child smuggled from the Ivory Coast to the Spanish border at Priego de Cordoba (Fig.7) quickly became an internet sensation. I had received the image on a Facebook feed and then decided to drag this image into Google image search to ascertain whether this was a hoax or an incredible document of human trafficking [15]. The scepticism around such images have significantly influenced how contemporary audiences engage with documentation [16] and how they think about the production and dissemination of information more broadly.

---

[15] Helena Cavendish, *Boy found in suitcase at Spanish Border.* CNN International edition.
      May 8, 2015. http://edition.cnn.com/2015/05/08/world/boy-in-suitcase-spain/
[16] Florian Mundhenke, A*uthenticity Vs. Artifice: The Hybrid Cinematic Approach of Ulrich
      Seidl*. Austrian Studies 19 (2011): p.125.

Fig.7. Author unknown, *this x-ray scanned image shows an eight-year-old boy hiding in a suitcase according to Spanish officials*. REUTERS/MINISTERIO DEL INTERIOR.https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10153316172129294&set=a.119987309293.100444.537254293&type=1&theater (accessed May 9, 2015).

Many contemporary artists who work with the camera to document their performance rely on a wide spectrum of techniques to shape the purpose and position of the camera. This varies according to concept, site and how the artist wants to frame the experience of the audience to the material. Klara Lidén is a contemporary artist whose varied approaches to the documenting camera allow her to work on the multilayered explorations of the urban and human infrastructure of the city.

Lidén's works range from static to handheld applications of the camera. In *Toujours Être Ailleurs (Always To Be Elsewhere)* (2010) (Fig.8), Lidén is seen at a desk in the studio with her back turned to the camera. The camera is set on a tripod against the opposite far wall of the studio, framing the performance from afar. This distance emphasises the separation between the camera and the unfolding performance, and in turn the distance between the viewer and artist: both physically and in time through the static detachment of the document. Alternatively in *Paralysed* (2003) (Fig.9), Lidén does an aggressive and uninhibited striptease inside a train carriage. Emphasising the disturbing and disruptive nature of this performance, the camera in this instance is handheld by an unacknowledged accomplice. As Lidén violently thrusts her body around the carriage, the camera seems to retract away from Lidén, as do the other commuters. The shaky motion of the camera not only documents, but also begins to acknowledge the uneasy position of the viewer who happens upon this unusual event. Trapped by the physical indiscretion of the artist and the confines of the train carriage, the camera and viewer become paralysed, placed in a situation that precedes the response to spontaneously record aggressive behaviour in public space. In this work, the only options left for the bystander is to get out of the way or pull out their phones to document. Defensively placing the camera between the aggressor and themselves.
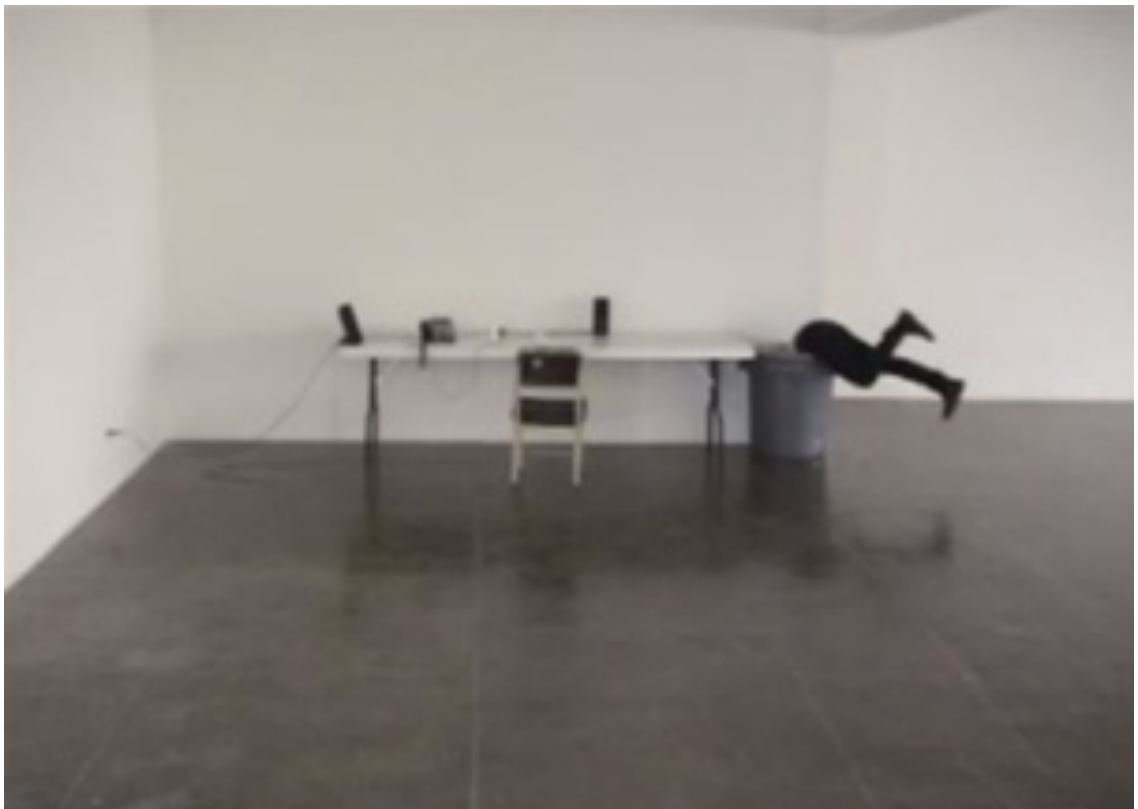
Fig.8. Klara Lidén, *Toujours Être Ailleurs (Always To Be Elsewhere),* 2010. Screenshot of moving image documentation (black and white, sound), duration unknown. Serpentine Galleries, www.youtube.com/watch?v=1dIez4Z8QdY http://www.reenaspaulings.com/images3/Serpentine.layout.pdf (accessed April 30, 2015).

Fig. 9. Klara Lidén, *Paralyzed,* 2003. Still from moving image documentation (colour, sound), DVD 3:05 min. Serpentine Galleries,
http://www.reenaspaulings.com/images3/Serpentine.layout.pdf (accessed April 30, 2015).

The potential for the camera to progress beyond static and removed documentation and become more actively integrated into the movement and choreography of a performance becomes conceptually pertinent. If the camera was going to be part of the practice of performance, as described by Abramovic, why not conceptually integrate it into the performance itself? Can the camera and process of recording be integrated into the performance as a holistic endeavour? Ruminating on these questions, I was introduced to Wim Wender's documentary film *Pina* (2011) (Fig.10). In this work Wenders worked over many years with Pina Bausch (before her death in 2009) to synthesise and design cinematography around Bausch's seminal dance works. Wenders used new 3D-recording technology to embed and place the audience inside the space of the dancers. Describing the new technological apparatus of filming in 3D, Wenders states that filming began by

> *... shooting very conservatively, in front of the stage. Only then did we slowly allow ourselves to move on to the stage. Our equipment was still very heavy - this huge techno-crane - but we learned how to move it and slowly the point of view got closer to the dancers. When we started to move the camera and to fly it over and into the stage I discovered a whole different architecture to the [dance] pieces. I had seen 'Cafe Müller' countless times, but I did not know how perfectly it was constructed - it had an interior logic that I hadn't really grasped before. I became more and more in awe of Pina's gift. That was the privilege of 3D: you could take the viewer to these positions from where you're not usually allowed to watch.* [17]

---

[17] James, Nick. "MOTION PICTURES." Sight and Sound, 05, (2011): p.21-24. http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/871366291? accountid=14757.

To achieve this, the placement and synchronisation between the dancer and the camera had to also be carefully choreographed. Wenders cinematic methodology therefore had to match the complexity of Bausch's choreography, leading the filmmaker, and in turn the viewer, to gain a better understanding of the movement being simultaneously performed and recorded.

It is interesting to note that there is still lingering uneasiness about Wenders' use of documentary film to represent another art form. In a review by Sophie Mayer questioned the legitimacy of a document that ultimately alters and manipulates the experience of dance:

> *The question of film's relation to theatre, which vexed early critics such as Hugo Münsterberg, arises again here, complicated by the fact that Bausch was an anti-illusionistic choreographer, committed to fracturing narrative and space.*
>
> *Dance film has been involved in technological innovations since the early years of cinema, as Loie Fuller, Mary Wigman, Maya Deren and Busby Berkeley developed choreographic and cinematic techniques in tandem, something that has arguably continued in the work of video-makers and artists such as Spike Jonze and Sam Taylor Wood. Bausch's stage work was not conceived, or reconceived for film (and unlike many contemporary choreographers, she didn't use film on stage), so in some ways Pina feels obsolete: conceived outside the history of dance film, and without the innovations that mark it.* [18]

---

[18] Mayer, Sophie. "Film Reviews: Pina." Sight and Sound, 05 (2011) p.67-68. http://ezproxy.library.usyd.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/8713648 6? accountid=14757

Fig. 10. Wim Wenders, *PINA 3D by Wim Wenders - Making of 1/2,* 2011. Screenshot from an online excerpt by (colour, sound) 1:11 min. Parada Film, https://vimeo.com/28150085 (accessed May 3, 2015).

The persistence of the uncertainties around Wenders' cinematic intervention, by introducing 3D technologies to complete the film, complicates the collaboration between dancer and filmmaker. This technology is seen by critics to undermine the relationship and ultimately intrude on Bausch's original choreography and somehow compromise the reproduction of her works. Wenders' use of 3D technologies in the completion of the project however, creates a space between "pure" documentation of another art form, and the independent cinematic interpretation of Bausch's choreography. Documentary based film has the ability to shift between multiple roles and functions, and it could be argued that *all* recordings are by definition "documentary", be they covert recordings of life or constructed interventions. [19] Indeed, the inability to reduce the camera to a purely objective instrument of documentation establishes a state both unstable and full of potential for experimentation.

By looking at the oscillation between documentation and cinematography, I began to think of the camera as something performative. With this in mind, I proceeded to re-evaluate my initial recording and approach *THE SUITCASE (Version.1)* (Fig.5), by processing the performance gesture through the movement and choreography of the "kino-eye" rather than just focusing on the dynamics of the human body in performance. [20]

In the second version of *THE SUITCASE (Version.2)* (Fig.11), I decided that the camera should best be positioned from above the performance to capture the circular movement of the body as it is squeezed into the suitcase. This perspective captured a more comprehensive survey of the movement of the body, as compared to the more conventional position of the camera on a floor-mounted tripod in the original version. To further accentuate the

---

[19] Darrell Varga, *John Walker's Passage*. Vol. 9: University of Toronto Press (2012): p.49-50.
[20] Thomas W. Sheehan, *Wittgenstein and Vertov: Aspectuality and Anarchy*. Discourse 24, no. 3 (2003): p.101-103.

camera's role in surveying and tracking movement, the camera was mounted on a turntable, slowly spinning on an axis to smoothly track the movement of the body. The synchronisation between the body and the camera dislodges the inherent passivity and detachment in the previous version of *THE SUITCASE (Version.1)* (Fig.5). By mounting the camera from above, the point of view of the viewer becomes less grounded and is transported into a quasi-impossible position (hovering above the action), as opposed to observing the action at eye level from a distance. Additionally by tracking the movement of the performing body, the camera begins to collude with the physical compression and dislocation of both the performing body and the viewer. The camera therefore contributes to the cinematic and physical experience of work. Having only ever used the static camera on a tripod to self-record performances in the studio, this attempt to re-perform and re-film *THE SUITCASE* was a significant development. Inadvertently, these simple alterations set off a chain of events that I had up until then not considered.

Fig. 11. James Nguyen, *THE SUITCASE (version.2, channel 1 of 2),* 2014. Screenshot of moving image performance documentation (black and white, sound recording), 6:35 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Firstly, by choreographing the movement of the camera and the movement of the body, I had to employ the services of a camera assistant. This task was delegated to my father. I could no longer just work independently with a camera, which was now taken off the tripod and placed onto a manual rig. Employing a camera assistant also required me to direct and articulate how I wanted the camera to be rotated as I performed.

As the process became more elaborate, I decided to mount a second camera to capture the entire scene to review and instruct my father. This "instructional" camera was to help both of us evaluate and work to improve subsequent performance attempts. This second camera was therefore an expedient tool and contingency measure that produced material not intended to be presented to the public. Upon reviewing the footage from this camera, what became apparent was that the camera assistant had interpreted my instructions in a completely unpredicted way. In the process of operating the camera, instead of standing on a ladder to pull the rig, my father had decided to hop onto the windowsill, and preceded to push the rig to track my performance with a stick he found in the studio. This spontaneous and unforeseen action became just as compelling as the original performance, and immediately opened up the potential for looking at the recording process as performance itself.[21] In this case, creating instructions for the handling of the camera to trigger a cascade of performative actions around the human interactions with the recording apparatus.

---

[21] Philip Auslander, *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*. PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 28, no. 3 (2006): p.5.

Fig. 12a. James Nguyen, *THE SUITCASE (version.2, channel 2 of 2) (uncropped),*
Screenshot of moving image performance documentation (black and white, sound
recording), 6:35 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 12b. James Nguyen, *THE SUITCASE (version.2, channel 2 of 2) (cropped),* 2014.

Fig. 13. Harun Farocki, *An Image,* 1983. Screenshot of moving image, (colour, stereo sound) 25:21 min. VideoDataBank, http://www.vdb.org/titles/image (accessed May 2, 2015).

Fig. 14. Gustave Courbet, *The Artist's Studio, a real allegory summing up seven years of my artistic and moral life*, 1854-1855. Oil on canvas, 361 x 598 cm. RMN-Grand Palais (RMN-Grand Palais (Musée d'Orsay) (accessed May 02, 2015).

The idea of pulling the camera back a further step to review the actions behind the action made me reflect on Harun Farocki's *An Image* (1983) (Fig.13). Here, the twenty-five minute film takes as its subject a Playboy centrefold photo-shoot. Challenging the viewer's relationship to the centrefold, Farocki focuses on the action *around* photographing the nude model, and not the nude model herself. Perhaps a twentieth century version of Gustave Courbet's *The Painter's Studio* (1855) (Fig.14), it is the human and mechanical architecture around the centrefold that activates Farocki's camera. [22] By revealing the coordinated effort around the work and intervention of personnel who build the set, adjust the lighting, advise on costume, directs and photograph the image, Farocki effectively demystifies and reveals the centrefold as a complex process of industrial production.

The human effort and collaboration around the production of an image is particularly pertinent to film and photography, where industrial processes do involve the coordination of many tasks and actions to generate a cinematic experience. As previously mentioned in the development of my work, I became increasingly drawn collaboration and garner the effort of those around me, to not only produce the documentation, but to actually perform increasingly complex actions with the camera, as I proceeded to perform in front of it.

---

[22] Laura Rascaroli, *The essay film: Problems, definitions, textual commitments*. Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media 49:2 (2008): p.24-47.

Fig. 15 James Nguyen, *THE SUPERMAN (version 1),* 2014. Screenshot of single channel moving image performance documentation (black and white, sound recording), 6:00 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

The developmental stages of *THE SUPERMAN* began by moving the camera stunt outside of the studio. Again with the straightforward use of a camera on a tripod for the initial recording, this work aimed to evaluate the possibility of suspending the human body as if in mid-flight on a crane. Positioned to capture the entirety of the action and site, the camera functioned to survey and allow me to analyse and review the work back in the studio. What became particularly apparent was the synergism between the human and mechanical effort required to control the spin and torsion of the body as the crane lifted it up. To coordinate and direct the movement of the body, the performance required the collective effort of a crane operator (again my father) and rope handler (my mother) whose job was to pull against the momentum of the body as it twisted against the crane manoeuvres.

This movement differed from that in *THE SUITCASE* primarily through its dispersive and outward momentum, requiring multiple interconnected actions and reactions. Thematically, unlike *THE SUITCASE, which* was a deliberately personal response to the politics of "people smuggling", *THE SUPERMAN* was an exploration of the migrant family working within the Australian landscape. The distant camera frames the activity around the crane within a quintessentially Australian setting: eucalypts, clear skies, corrugated iron and bush detritus. Inadvertently, by absorbing my parents who were Vietnamese refugees into the work, the personal and political tension around filial dependence, diaspora and assimilation, becomes intrinsically drawn into this single performance gesture.

Despite coordinating the action between the human, the landscape and the mechanical, I decided to fragment the work through multiple cinematic interventions. The work that most informed my thinking about how to rework *THE SUPERMAN* was Douglas Gordon and Philippe Pareno's *Zidane A 21st Century Portrait,* (2006) (Fig.16).

Fig. 16. Philippe Pareno, *Zidane A 21st Century Portrait,* 2006. Screenshot from DVD recording (colour, stereo sound), 91:00 min. Available from SCA library Rozelle, Arte France cinéma, Canal +, CinéCinéma & Centre national de la cinématographie.

This film pushed the idea of cinematic contingency and ubiquity with seventeen cameras simultaneously tracking Zinedine Zidane for an entire game between Real Madrid and Villarreal in 2005.[23] A range of lenses, focal points and cinematic techniques, including pans, tracking shots and close-ups were employed to create an exhaustive catalogue of camera movements and angles fixated on the soccer player. Through editing and post-production, these multiple versions were cut and assembled to create a composite portrait of Zidane over 90 minutes. Visualised as independent fragments, each camera documented very little of the overall game, undermining the tactical gamesmanship of more conventional camera angles used in sports coverage. These fragments were instead tangential and abstracted meditations on the reactions and introspections of just one individual player within the duration of one soccer game. Although seemingly comprehensive, with such a large array of cameras focused on Zidane, the work instead dissolves and fragments the subject, rather than attempts to tackle the impossible task of comprehensive documentation.

Inspired by Gordon and Pareno's approach, I set up more cameras in preparation for a new version of THE SUPERMAN (Fig.18 & 19). Prior to the performance, I developed a storyboard to illustrate the multiple perspectives that I wanted to record of the performance (Fig.17) whilst I was suspended from the crane. Incorporating a variety of lenses and different techniques to explore multiple tracking shots and close-ups, I deliberately wanted to abstract movement and divert the camera away from the artist's performing body. Leaving the "Superman" character *outside* of the frame of the camera.

---

[23] Richard T. Kelly, 2006. *Zidane-A 21st century portrait*. Sight and Sound, British Film Institute 21 October (2006): p.43.

Panel annotations (left column, top to bottom):
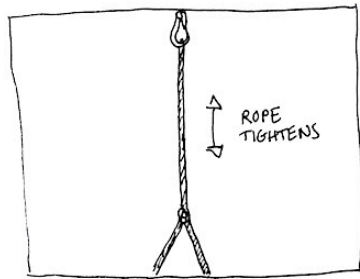
ROPE TIGHTENS

as rope tightens, camera TRACKS vertically up to slowly capture hook & then crane.

↑ ROPE LIFTS

↑ camera tracks up

↑ camera tracks / pans vertically

Panel annotations (right column, top to bottom):

camera pulls out !!!
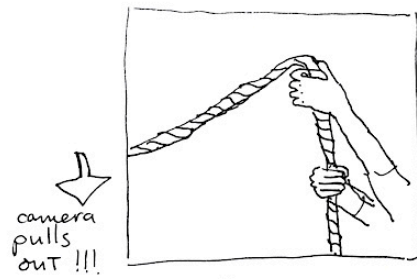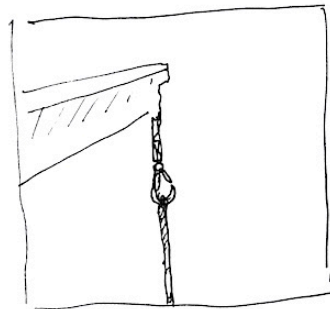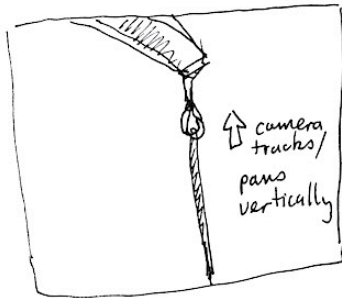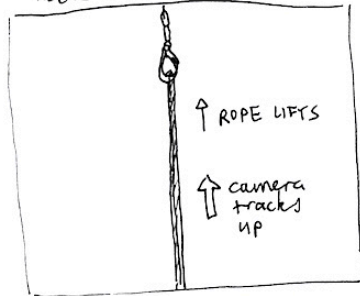
HAND HELD ROPE IS SLACK MUMS HANDS PICKS UP ROPE
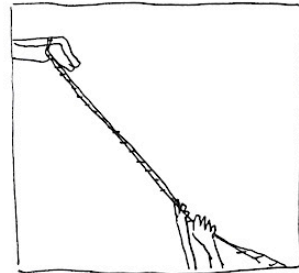
PULL BACK TO CAPTURE FEET CONNECTED TO MUMS HANDS
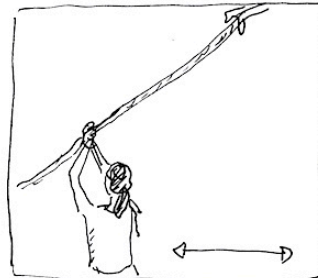
PANNING SHOT FOLLOWS & PULLS OUT TO FOCUS ON MUM

PULLS OUT COMPLETELY To reveal landscape + FULL BODY OF ROPE PULLER.

Fig. 17. James Nguyen, *Storyboard Sample for THE SUPERMAN (version 2),* 2014. Scanned image courtesy of the artist.

The work became about the constructed document rather than a document of the performance itself. Documentation could therefore be used to imply what could be happening rather than account for the entire performance. In this work, the incidentals such as the shadow and the movement of the assistants on the edge of the frame imply that the focus has shifted to outside the frame of the camera, beyond the technical field of the mechanical apparatus. What can be seen is just as important as what cannot be seen. For example, the oppositional forces between the crane and the rope are not illustrated in the footage. Rather, it is inferred by the taught spin of the overhead crane-shot and the rope being pulled by my mother below. The presence of the two camera operators is as integral to the choreography as the cinematic panning shot of my mother moving across the screen. By deliberately working with omissions, and providing the viewer with incomplete fragments of actions and reactions around the crane-shot, the document avoids pretending to be something didactic, stable or comprehensive. The document instead shifts towards something porous and tangential that allows room for the viewer to cognitively inhabit the cinematic space. Providing only a range of interconnected reference points, the idea of multiple camera angles and perspectives requires the viewer to make the connections to "complete the picture" so to speak.

The second version of *THE SUPERMAN* also explores the relationship between body and machine. Suspended from the crane and holding onto the camera, the artist's body becomes assimilated into the mechanical recording apparatus. By shifting between the interstitial connections between the camera and the crane, the body moves from being the subject of documentation to becoming part of the biomechanical pivot that makes up the documentation process.

Fig. 18. James Nguyen, *THE SUPERMAN (version 2, channel 1 of 2),* 2014. Screenshot of two-channel moving image performance documentation (black and white, stereo sound), 7:02 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 19. James Nguyen, *THE SUPERMAN (version 2, channel 2 of 2),* 2014. Screenshot of two-channel moving image performance documentation (black and white, stereo sound), 7:02 min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Because this biomechanical unit is further connected to two human bodies, one that operates the crane (my father) and another (my mother) that pulls on the rope below to counter the spin set off by the crane, the camera is itself embodied and controlled by multiple human actions. This tight collaborative choreography of the camera is ultimately experienced by the viewer who inhabits this suspended "kino-eye" and is directly engaged in one of the most recognisable cinematic of gestures: the overhead crane-shot.

By breaking up the multiple components of the performance into discrete cinematic gestures - the crane shot, the tracking shot, the zoom etc. - the work interrogates what it means to perform and document, and how this impacts on the viewer's experience and reading of a work. The cameras are not only multiplied, but also treated in different ways. This leads to a more complex tableau of movement and momentum, which would usually be conventionally cut, edited and sequenced to compose a more logical narrative arc similar to Gordon and Pareno's *Zidane A 21st Century Portrait*. However, being simultaneously filmed and installed within the gallery, these fragmentary documents begin to construct a new viewing experience that would have been impossible if only one dominant camera had been used to document the entire event. The original performance gesture could further be stretched and complicated by these multiple documents that seem to simultaneously support and undermine each other. Potentially, these multiple documents of the same event could be used to recreate and destabilise a new space for the viewer.

CHAPTER 3. SPEECH ACTS THROUGH INSTALLATION

Installing the work and situating the document at different spaces and sites, has allowed me to reframe and alter the interaction between the document, the performance and the viewer.

Looking at underlying role of documentation as an interaction between constative and performative functions through the essay "You Are Here: Moving Image + Performative Acts + Documentary Paradigm"[24] by John Di Stefano. Constatives are quantifiable statements making claim to a truth/falsehood, whereas the performative is assessed by other means: the performative compels actions beyond the statement.[25, 26] Because these distinctions are fluid and slippery, one could consider the function of performance documentation as a process of reinterpreting and re-evaluating how the constative and performative is realised through the viewer.

I installed *THE SUITCASE (Version.2)* (Fig.11, 12b) *and THE SUPERMAN (Version.2)* (Fig.18, 19) at various art spaces to test these ideas and determine how space and installation might modulate meaning for these works. The first presentation of *THE SUITCASE* (version.2) was at Archive_Space [27] (Fig.20, 21,22,23) the exhibition was focused on the physical and effective interpretation of the document in a physical gallery space. The two video components were differentiated by scale, orientation, colour and screen-type.

---

[24] Di Stefano, John "You Are Here: Moving Image + Performative Acts + Documentary Paradigm". Copenhagen University Press, 2008.

[25] To paraphrase the linguistic theorist John Langshaw Austin, the underlying role of documentation could be divided into constative and performative utterances in his organisation of Speech Acts.

[26] Philip Auslander, *The Performativity of Performance Documentation*. PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art 28, no. 3 (2006): p.5.

[27] Archive_Space exhibition was in Sydney, *Overhead Manual Pivot_SUITCASE_Attempt_No.3,* February (2014). http://www.archivespace.net/2108666-019-overhead-manual-pivot

The colour performance documentation of the body squeezing into the suitcase was projected onto the ceiling of the gallery. The projection of the floral suitcase was directly superimposed onto the ornamental pressed ceilings of this ex-library space by a short-throw projector, creating a visual echo between institutional Federation architecture, performance, the passing of time, and the history of colonialism. The ubiquitous architectural patterns of Federation decorative motifs, with Liberty textiles on the suitcase establish a constative referent, which affirms the institutional and material products of British colonisation (Fig.22). Acting against these material indicators is the uncomfortable contortion of the body as it squeezes into the suitcase. The spinning cinematography, and ceiling projection are performative installation tactics that invert the image, spatially dislocating the viewer and prompting physical discomfort and disorientation in the viewer inside the gallery.

Beyond this main image on the ceiling, the other components of the installation were also designed to mark out the space and engage with the act of viewing the cinematic document. Occupying the centre of the room, a line of four concrete chairs was installed, functioning as both objects and theatre seats that the audience could sit on to watch the videos (Fig.21). The ambiguous nature of these objects (existing between art object and furniture), called for a decision from the spectator, who had to choose to either break conventional gallery etiquette and sit on these objects, or stand and watch the work in order to respect gallery protocol of not touching the artwork. If and when they chose to take a seat, the images they saw from their seated position were somewhat awkward as the image was not orientated towards the ceiling. The moving image was projected onto the ceiling, too high to be viewed comfortably for a long period of time. Additionally, the monitors on the other side of the room were installed on the floor and therefore slightly too low and small to be clearly viewed whilst sitting on the

chairs. In contrast to the single large projection on the ceiling, the second part of the performance document was duplicated on four small five-inch CRT monitors (Fig.20). The scale and lower quality of these surveillance monitors compelled the spectator to move closer and even crouch down to watch the cropped black and white image of a man pushing something just beyond the screen. In this position, the viewer assumed the crouching posture of the very figure they were seeing. These contrasts in scale, screen/projection-type, colour, position, image-resolution, and texture of the components of this exhibition were designed to prompt the spectator to engage with the moving image through a range of prescriptive variations, in order to create discomfort and disorientation around their occupation and experience of the exhibition.

By deliberately integrating these devices into the installation, the disorientation of the viewer within the gallery was an attempt to challenge the singular perspective of the performance document in a physical way. The intention with this fist presentation of the work was to shift documentation into a more ambiguous and questionable situation where the viewer had to approach and physically participate with the performance documentation in an unconventional manner.

Fig. 20. James Nguyen, *Overhead Manual Pivot,* 2014. Installation view at Archive_Space. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 21. James Nguyen, *Overhead Manual Pivot,* 2014. Installation view at Archive_Space. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 22. James Nguyen, *Overhead Manual Pivot,* 2014. Installation view at Archive_Space. Image courtesy of the artist.

**ARCHIVESPACE
EXHIBITION LAYOUT**

STACK OF FOUR CRT MONITORS

DOOR

FOUR CONCRETE SEATS

UPWARDLY TURNING PROJECTOR

WINDOW

CURTAIN

ENTRY

BAR

AREA PROJECTED ONTO CEILING WITH PROJECTOR SITTING ON FLOOR & POINTING UPWARD TO CEILING
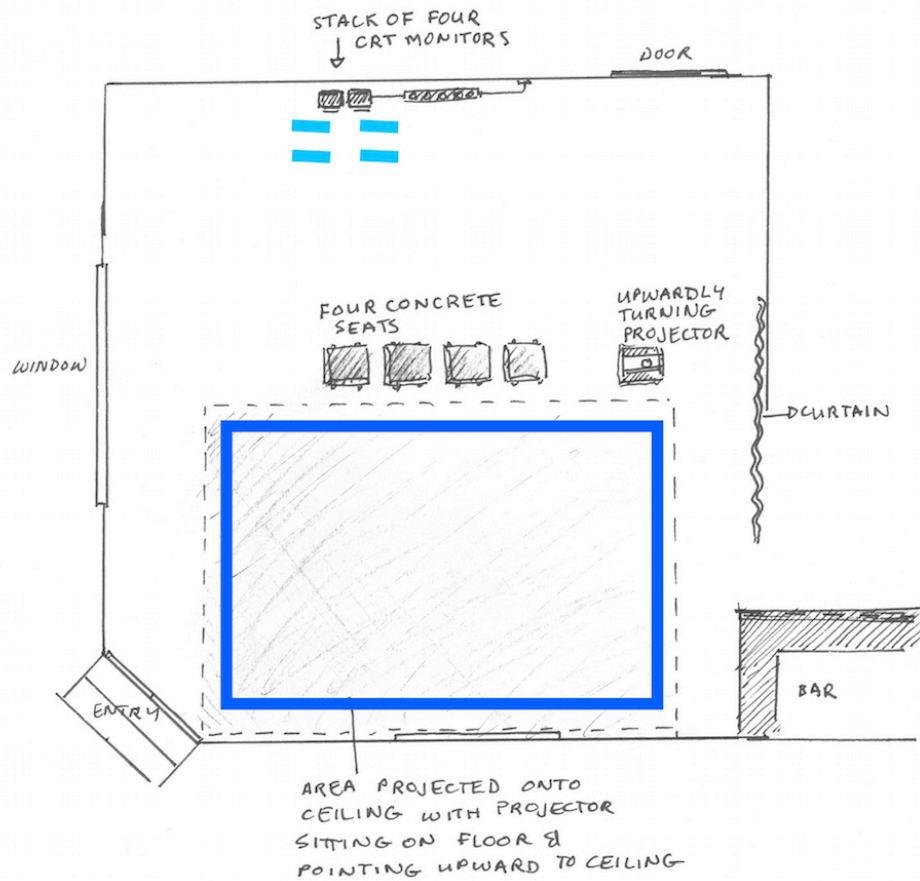
Fig. 23. James Nguyen, *Floor plan for Overhead Manual Pivot, Archive_Space,* 2014. Scanned image courtesy of the artist.

The feedback I received from this exhibition however, tended to focus on the incongruity of the two moving image components. It was difficult for the audience to make the connection between the two pieces of documentation. Perhaps I had separated, and abstracted the two pieces of performance documentation to such an extent that the audience couldn't link the two documents to the same performance. Preoccupied with trying to link and make sense of the two moving image components of the installation, the viewer was distracted from observing the multiple camera angles and thinking beyond the document around the actual performative act of viewing inside the gallery space.

Thus, I looked at *THE SUITCASE (Version.2)* more closely, especially the incidental footage of my dad pushing the camera. By cropping the footage (Fig12a and Fig.12b), I had focused primarily on his action and removed the extraneous props, materials and parts of the studio that the initial footage had captured. Cropping therefore erased the studio context around my dad's gesture as if his operation of the camera was something independent altogether. Because this gesture was so abstracted, I thought it might be useful to reposition the performances more closely. That is, to install the work in a manner that recreated the physical positioning of the bodies more reminiscent of the original performance.

In the subsequent re-staging of this work at SCA Postgraduate Gallery (*The Man With the Movie Camera*) [28] and at the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art (*The Man With the Movie Camera*) [29] the two moving image components were shown in alternative configurations. First, both components were shown on

---

[28] SCA Graduate School Gallery. *The Man With the Movie Camera,* April 2014.
http://sydney.edu.au/sca/galleries-events/archives/index.shtml

[29] Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art, The Art Museum GAFA group exhibition of Sydney College of Arts and Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art students, *I Want To Change The World*, September 2014.

similar sized screens, and not multiplied over a set of screens, thus avoiding any reference to surveillance monitoring. Secondly, the only furniture constructed was a simple mount on the floor for the monitor. This slightly lifted the monitor off the ground and it's scale referred to the proportions of a suitcase.

By more directly dealing with the link between the two pieces of performance documentation, I was able to succinctly relate to the physical relationship of the two coordinated camera angles. The visible camera pushed by the camera operator points directly down onto the very performance it is recording, seen on the screen below. This sculptural strategy allows the spectator to quickly recreate the structure of the filming process and focus on watching the two pieces of documentation as interlinked. The simplicity of this configuration is less focused on the actual site and the idiosyncratic layering of projection, performance and architecture. Instead, this alternative installation becomes more "flat-packed", transportable and evocative of the original conceptual critique around the cross-border movement of peoples and ideas, reinforcing a different layer of meaning in the work. By experimenting with multiple approaches to installing the same pieces of video documentation, I slowly began to think about how these could be framed and considered as constative components that were ultimately supplemented by the performative physical installation and its reconfiguration in different gallery spaces and situations. The installation and repurposing of the documents was just as significant to the reading and understanding of the work as the documentation itself.

Fig. 24. James Nguyen, *The ~~Man~~ With the Movie Camera,* 2014. Installation view at SCA Graduate School Gallery. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 25. James Nguyen, *The ~~Man~~ With the Movie Camera,* 2014. Installation view at Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art. Image courtesy of the artist.

Continuing to explore the concept of installation as a performative intervention that supplemented and pushed at the constative function of the document, I began to think about how to re-present and re-exhibit other works such as *THE SUPERMAN*. Although I had used five different cameras to capture and document multiple aspects of the *THE SUPERMAN (Version.2),* I decided to only present and exhibit two of the five documents used in previous installations. The binary experience of the performance, as expressed through two clearly articulated cinematic techniques (the panning shot of my mother pulling on the ropes and the overhead crane shot) was enough to illustrate the cinematic and performative imperative of the work. The absent performer, allows the viewer to focus primarily on the mechanical and manual operation of the camera. By de-saturating both the recordings, the work made further reference to the idea of early historical performance documentation as well as to the early aesthetic of the cinema. Through simple editing, the sense of experiencing the performative momentum of the body as it moves in unison with the camera was heightened.

For the first presentation at SCA Graduate Galleries, both pieces of performance documentation for *THE SUPERMAN (Version.2)* were projected and enlarged to fill two walls at the far end of the gallery (Fig.26). In this installation it was evident that the contrasting motion of the works would emphasised if the two projections were aligned to meet at right angles and grounded to the gallery floor (Fig.26, 27). By fitting into the architectural markers of the space: walls, corner and floor, the viewer was able to physically approach the work and occupy the space of the projection. By grounding the screen, the viewer could feel as if they were more physically participating in the space as the documentation, almost occupying the position of the absent camera operator, becoming a direct witness through the "kino-eye".
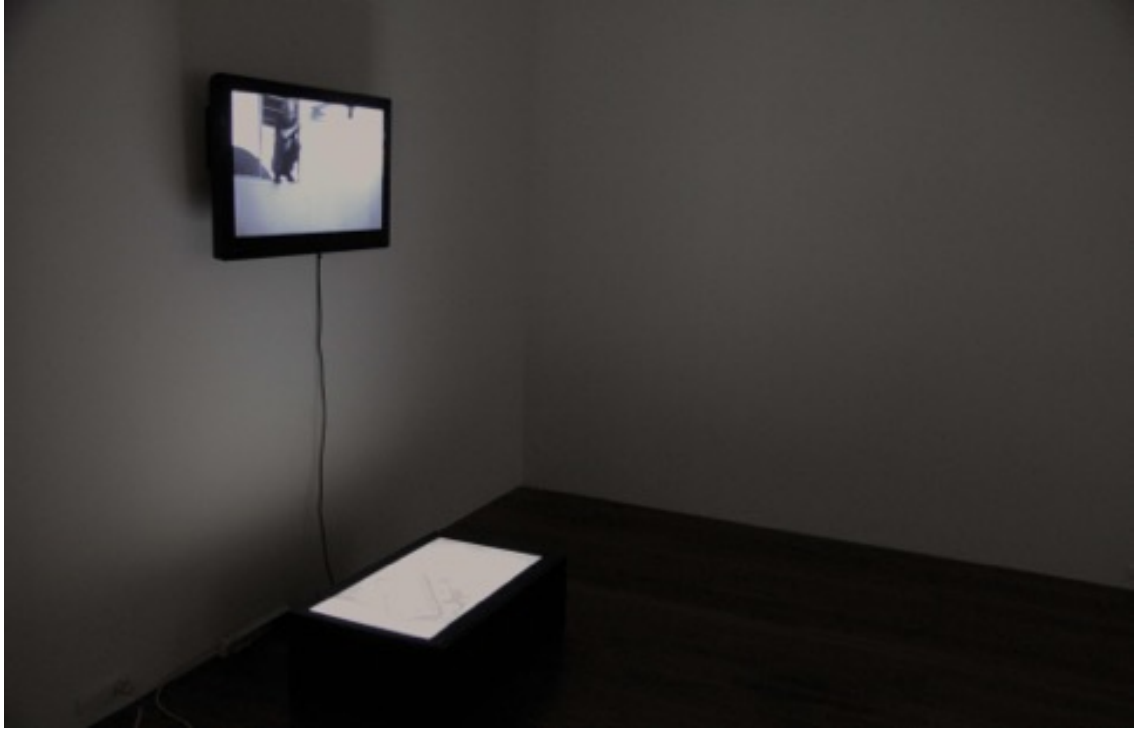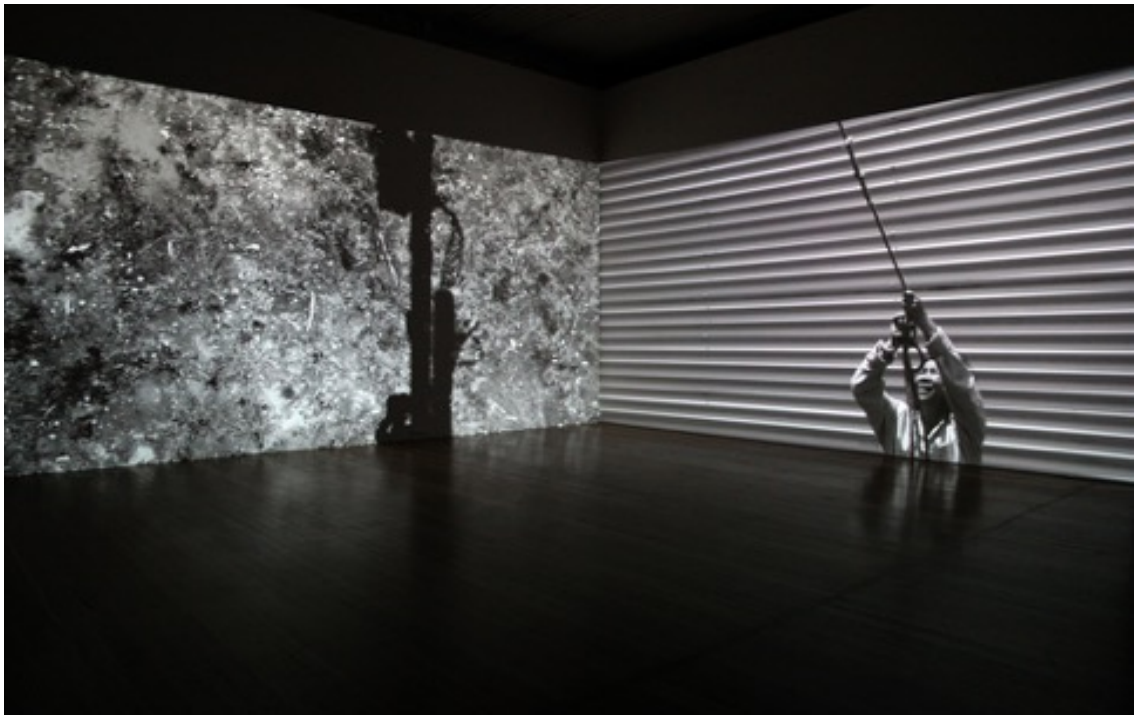
Fig. 26. James Nguyen, *The ~~Man~~ With the Movie Camera,* 2014. Installation view at SCA Graduate School Gallery. Image courtesy of the artist.

**SCA GRADUATE SCHOOL
GALLERY
EXHIBTION LAYOUT**

THE SUPERMAN v.2 Chanel ①

THE SUPERMAN v.2 Channel ②

suspended blinds
THE VIOLIN channel ①

THE VIOLIN Channel ②
suspended Blinds

THE BACKSEAT single channel MONITOR

FLOOR MOUNTED.

THE SUITCASE

WALL MOUNTED
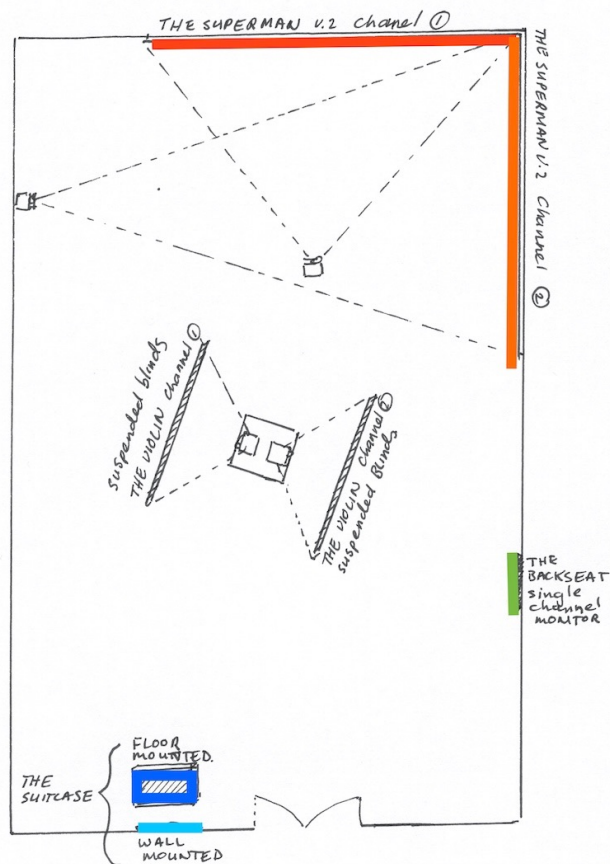
Fig. 27. James Nguyen, *Installation Floor plan for The ~~Man~~ With A Movie Camera, SCA Graduate School Gallery,* 2014. Scanned image courtesy of the artist.

Although describing significant parts of the original performance on the crane, the documentation when installed inside the gallery was not intended to establish a particular position or comprehensive point of view for the viewer. Rather, the installation offers two simultaneously competing and incomplete experiences of the event documented. Instead of being edited and cut into a single constative narrative, the installation of these two components remains oppositional, tangential and open, in effect revealing itself as fluid and performative.

The flexibility of having multiple pieces of documentation allows for multiple versions of the work to be presented in response to the space and equipment available, as separate components can be reorganised and reconfigured. By avoiding the production of a single-channel and more unilateral document akin to the film *Zidane A 21st Century Portrait* for example, these discrete documents of performance remain quite flexible and open to the possibility of generating alternatives. An example of this was the second presentation of *THE SUPERMAN* at FELTSpace in Adelaide. [30] Because the front space for the gallery was a retail shop with large display windows, I had to devise a way to block out the light. As a practical solution, I decided to build a room out of black and silver vinyl, which was designed and installed as a curtain. The audience had to enter this dark barrier via a front slit and emerge through a back slit into the exhibition space. The intention was to divide and compress the room, creating a more theatrical zone that transformed and heightened the experience of physically entering the installation. By entering into this room, the viewer became even more physically involved, prior to seeing the pieces of performance documentation. In this version, I decided to play the panning shot of my mother on a small monitor next to the curtain as a device that continues the sense of compression and intimacy established by the

---

[30] FELSTSpace Adelaide, *The ~~Man~~ With the Movie Camera*, April 2014.

curtain space. This small screen was in direct contrast to the gyrating camera work of the crane shot which was projected across the far wall. These decisions were intended to allow the viewer the space and time to experience the work through separate and alternative elements rather than as a simultaneous cinematic confluence as previously presented at SCA Graduate School Galleries.
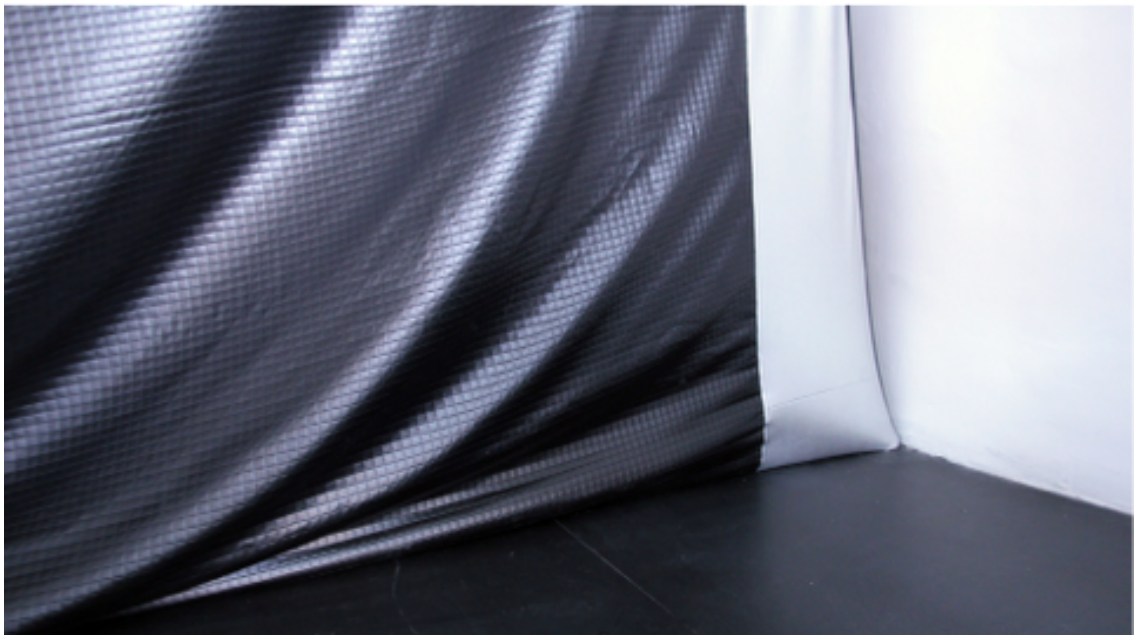
Fig. 28. James Nguyen, *The ~~Man~~ With the Movie Camera,* 2014. Installation details at FELTSpace Adelaide. Image courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 29. James Nguyen, *The ~~Man~~ With the Movie Camera,* 2014. Installation view at FELTSpace Adelaide. Image courtesy of the artist.

FELTSPACE
EXHIBITION LAYOUT

THE SUPERMAN v.2 chanel ①
projection on wall

THE SUPERMAN
V.2.
channel
② monitor
on wall

entry
slit

BLACK
FABRIC
CURTAIN
ROOM

entry
slit

Front shop window
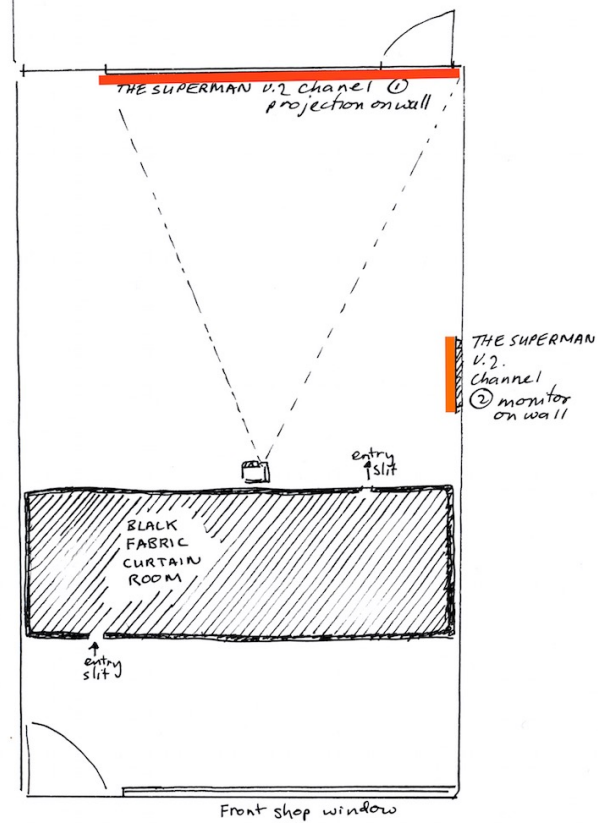
Fig. 30. James Nguyen, *Floor plan for The ~~Man~~ With A Movie Camera, FELTSpace Adelaide,* 2014. Scanned image courtesy of the artist.

By opening up the possibilities of reconfiguration through installation, and allowing these works to continue to develop after the initial performance event, the role of performance documentation is able to encompass and occupy both constative and performative functions. Through simple interventions such as introducing another camera position into the documentation process, the single document is challenged in its position as the authoritative statement standing in for an event. Rather, the document exists as part of a collection of fragments and alternate, incomplete, and often contrasting cinematic versions of the same event. The instability of the document, coupled with its continued transformation and reconfiguration in the exhibition space pulls at the constative definitions of performance documentation. The performative potential of the document is realised not only through its reintroduction into the gallery space, but seems to begin at the very point of recording. By letting others handle multiple cameras, the process of documentation is complicated and no longer simply captures what is happening in front of the camera. The document therefore is the performative material that produces reverberations beyond the initial gesture. Through installation, revision and editing, the document could be endlessly repurposed and reconfigured to form multiple and varied readings, perspectives and responses in the viewer.

The camera produces a record and thus a constative function. However, the camera also has the potential to abstract and dissolve the constative, generating a cascade of performative potentials that destabilises the authority of documentation. In these situations, the camera itself performs to generate actions for its own sake. These distinct roles can be reversed and inverted so that even John Langshaw Austin (the very person who first described the constative and performative speech act) fails to clearly separate the constative and performative in his functional analysis of language, leading him to amend his theory of Speech Acts: [31] To paraphrase, the function of Speech Acts in society is dependent on the shared relationship between the performative and the constative. One is not intended to replace the other, or act as a binary to dominate or exclude the other. The linguistic distinctions between the constative and performative is often theoretical. In practice, the function of these linguistic and conceptual devices are often shifting as they supplement and occasionally contradict each other in the world.

The idea of supplementation is pertinent to the understanding of performance and its documentation. It is reasonable for an artist to give priority to one over the other. However, it is more useful to find new ways to approach the relationship between performance and its documentation as dynamic and generative rather than reductive and predetermined.

In an attempt to dissolve the constative and to merge the performance with its documentation, I began to deliberately develop works that not only shifted the task of performing in front of the camera, but also aimed to absorb the additional interventions of my camera assistants into the performance documentation.

---

[31] Guy Longworth. *John Langshaw Austin*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy Online (2012). http://stanford.library.usyd.edu.au/entries/austin-jl/ (last accessed May 19, 2015).

Fig. 31. James Nguyen, *THE BACKSEAT*, 2014. Screenshots of single channel moving image performance documentation (black and white, stereo sound), 5:53min. Image courtesy of the artist.

Unlike the centrality of the performance artist (be direct or indirect) in *THE SUITCASE* and *THE SUPERMAN*, I began to give my camera assistants more creative freedom and the ability to spontaneously intervene and choreograph the movement of the camera in-situ.

In the work *THE BACKSEAT* (Fig.31), my brother and I drove two cars around a car park at Costco Crossroads Liverpool (Fig.32). We slowly overtook each other; so that the four camera assistants in the backseat could pass the camera between the cars in a continuous handheld tracking shot that replicated the backseat cinematography of car heist movies. In this work, the role of passing and securing the camera from one backseat person to another was more critical to the work than the drivers. Handling of the camera was the motivation for the performance, and the choreographic nature of this act was specifically predicated on not dropping the camera as it was passed from person to person and between the two cars.

The resulting footage had the camera pointing at the windscreen over the shoulders of the two drivers. Occasionally, the faces of the drivers and backseat camera operators were reflected in the rear view mirrors, referencing the cinematic trope of filming from the backseat. After reviewing the first take, the camera operators decided to change the focus and framing of the shot, improving on my initial settings. The handlers also dictated the pacing of the camera pass. It was the car drivers, who had to time and coordinate overtaking to the camera as it was passed between the cars from one operator to another. This performance required the coordination of six individuals, each with a specific role in undertaking the continuous manual tracking shot.

The performance was about producing documentation. The collaborative operation of the camera and its cinematic recording could not be separated

from one another. It would have been possible to mount external cameras onto the cars, but this would have been too static, undermining the suspended sense of dislocation in the manual tracking shot that I was thematically interested in. I had also considered passing two cameras between the two cars, but this proved to be too technically difficult for the performers, and came from an unnecessary imperative to compulsively set up a contingent camera to simultaneously capture the process from both cars. The simplicity of recording and presenting just one singular continuous manual tracking shot integrated both document and performance. This single take was a succinct representation of the collaborative and performative event, which integrated the camera into the performance.

With *THE BACKSEAT,* the idea of handing over the camera, and to trusting the judgement of another person became an important part of my work. Pushing this idea further, I began to work more collaboratively with the camera operators to share and take turns in working both in front of, and behind the camera. Although I came up with an initial idea, throughout the duration of each performance, I merely functioned as another participant, sharing equal time performing and operating the camera with my collaborators.
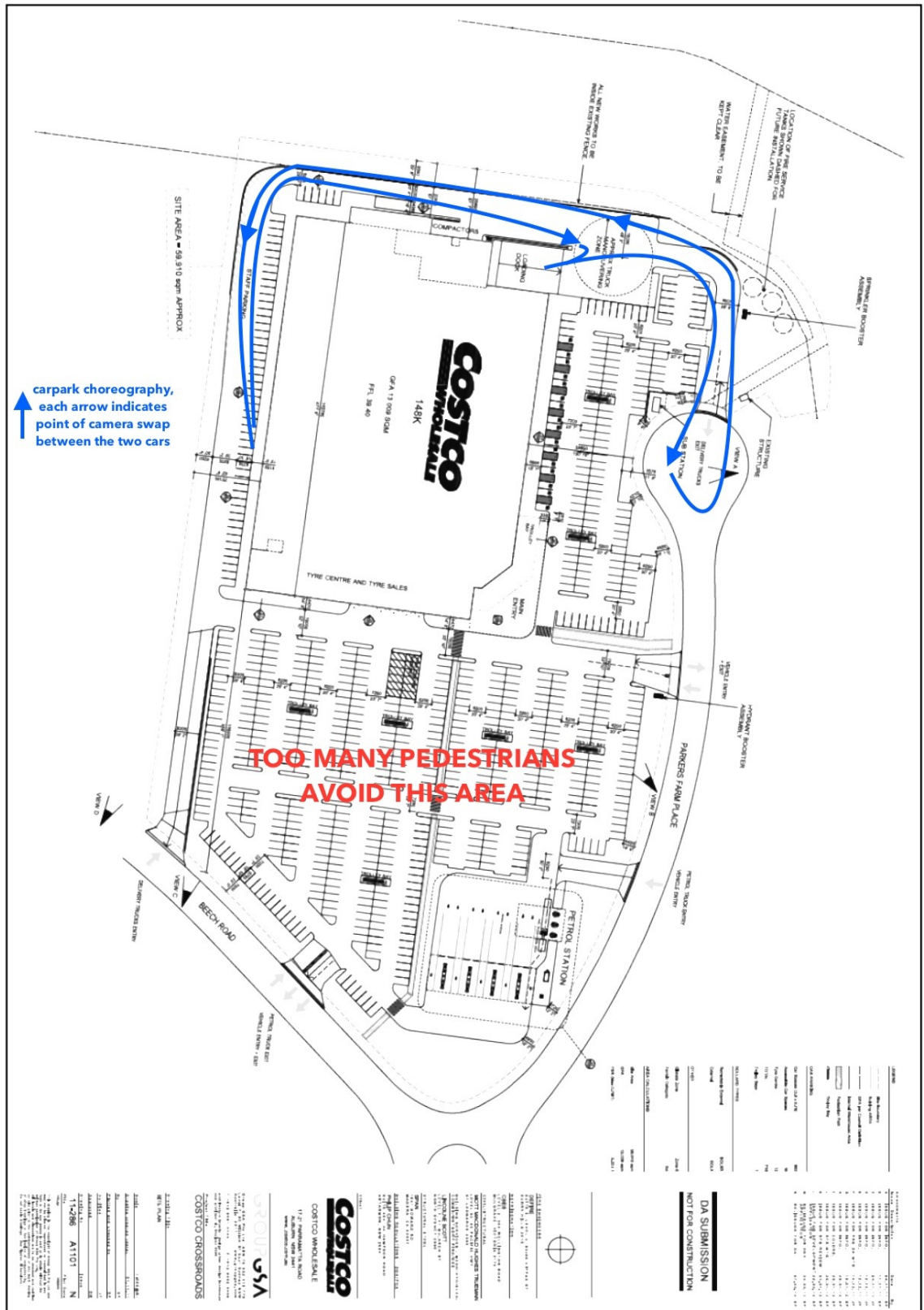
Fig. 32. James Nguyen, *Camera map for THE BACKSEAT, Costco Car park Liverpool,* 2014. Scanned image courtesy of the artist.
http://www.liverpool.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/9149/JRPP-Report-for-DA-968-2012-Costco-JRPP-Ref-2012SYW062-as-of-28-February-2012.pdf

In the performance *THE BOX* (Fig.34), I used the camera rig I had previously used for other projects with Joey Nguyen (my brother). Here, the camera was mounted to an arm built onto a lazy Susan, for filming smooth 360-degree tracking shots in the studio (Fig.33). For this collaborative performance, a large cardboard box was placed onto the rig as the camera made a circular track around the object. Behind the camera, one person would push the camera rig, and control the pace of the 360-degree arc. In front of the camera, the other person would proceed to climb into the cardboard box, close the lid and exit from the bottom of the box. This would continually repeat as the performer and camera operator would swap places and take turns performing in front of, and behind the camera. This cyclical motion, repeated by both the participants and the motion of the camera, could be endlessly repeated, with the motion of the camera constantly adjusted to match the pace of the unfolding performance.

Exchanging roles and participating as both the "documenter" and the "documented" diminishes the identity of the artist, especially when being constantly replaced by another figure (who in this case bares a physical resemblance to the artist). It is the idea of endless supplementation and substitution that becomes the constant. By focusing on the actual process of physical exchange and of pacing the camera, the content of the recording (in this instance, the performance of a person coming in and out of a box) becomes almost inconsequential.   Almost any self-contained action or gesture could have replaced he act of entering the box. Especially relevant to this approach in *THE BOX* are ideas deriving from Structuralist Film, where content becomes secondary to the "materiality" of the document, or in this instance, the actual process of making the document.[32] It is the notion of

---

[32] Jonathan Whalley, *Identity Crisis: Experimental Film and Artistic Expansion ∗. October, Summer, No.137 (2011): p.26-30.*

performance documentation embodied in the manual handling of the camera that becomes the primary concern.

Fig33. James Nguyen *360-DEGREE ARC CAMERA RIG* 2014. Rig mounted on Lazy Suzan mechanism and plywood and steel platform.

Fig. 34. Patrick Carroll (Sound) and James Nguyen & Joey Nguyen (Moving Image), *THE BOX (MARS////ADRIFT)*, 2014. Screenshots of single channel moving image (black and white, stereo sound), 7:57 min. Image courtesy of the artists.

To further strengthen the position of the document as a material that could be altered and manipulated, I collaborated with sound artist Patrick Carroll [33] to create an audio track for the project. The audio track was completed before the moving image was recorded. In post-production, it was the performance document that was cut and spliced to match the soundtrack, rather than the sound being created to accompany the moving image. Ultimately, this process added an additional layer of complexity to the work and fragmented the performance captured by the camera. In this instance, sound not only supplemented the performance, but it set off a process of post-production and editing that reconfigured the document transforming any claim it may have had to being immutable and constative. It opened the work up to another performance intervention, that is, the collaborative processes of cutting in the editing suite. Here again, influences from the tradition of Structuralist film are apparent.

The exhibition *Of Objects or Sounds* (Fig.35) by Gabriella and Silvana [34] resonates with *THE BOX* beyond the motif of sibling duplication and mirroring that was also relevant to my performance collaborations with my brother. The installation presented in *Of Objects or Sound* focused on the percussive tensions between the body and the object. Arising from a residency in New York, the artists scoured the streets to find and collect objects from the city. These items were then brought back into the studio where the artists would explore the potential movement and sound that could be extracted from manipulating these objects.

---

[33] Patrick Carroll and I were paired together through an initiative with Space Bears Collective. This project aimed to introduce students from SCA with the Sydney Conservatorium.

[34] Silvana Mangano and Gabriella Mangano, *Of Objects or Sounds*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney, 2014.
http://www.annaschwartzgallery.com/works/artist_exhibitions?artist=104&year=2014&work=14093&exhibition=432&page=1&c=s

Fig. 35. Gabriella Mangano & Silvana Mangano. *Of Objects or Sound*. 2014, Installation view, Anna Schwartz Gallery, http://www.annaschwartzgallery.com/works/artist_exhibitions?artist=104&year=2014&work=14093&exhibition=432&page=1&c=s (accessed May 4, 2015).

Using found objects as performative prompts, the artists then documented their interactions and actions in front of the camera. Focused around the collection and interaction between objects, actions and documentation, the exhibition presented this process in a series of frontal recordings.

The installation presented a series of large-scale projections that depicted the artists physically walking together in a tight circle, holding the items collected from the streets. Directly opposite was a series of small monitors that focused simply on the hands of the artists striking the objects against a surface to generate a suite of percussive sounds. Filmed as discrete actions and interactions, these recordings were serialised and presented as a sample of various components. Because each component had the potential to be reorganised and reconfigured within the series, the documentation referenced a Structuralist approach to production and presentation. These discrete interactions are only momentary fragments of an overall process. Both the performance with the objects and its documentation seems peripheral, rather than something comprehensive and edifying. In this instance, documentation only hints at the experience of moving through the urban landscape scavenging for playthings, and by orchestrating these pieces of documentation into an immersive sound work, Gabriella and Silvana Mangano situate the viewer into a performative construct.

Moving through the space and lingering on specific fragments, the overall composition and experience of the sounds change according to the viewer's position within the gallery. Not only can the viewer decide what components they choose to watch and focus on, they can also choreograph their movement within the space to change and alter their auditory experience. The sound is thus "spatialised".[35] Although the artists have employed the

---

[35] Karen Collins, Bill Kapralos, and Holly Tessler. *The Oxford Handbook of Interactive Audio*. Oxford University Press (2014): p.220-221.

camera in a frontal way to document this piece, it is ultimately the installation of the various elements that provides an underlying structure for the documentary fragments, capable of generating new performative responses in the viewer.

Another work that is also relevant to the idea of the fragmentation of performance document is Shaun Gladwell's *Double Field/Viewfinder (Tarin Kowt),* (2009-2010) (Fig.36). This dual-channel, synchronised work shows two soldiers operating two cameras in a way that mirrors and records the other. The choreography of the camera becomes both a survey of the landscape and a portrait of the camera operator, who in this situation is captured in full sight by their counterpart. By setting up this slow handheld oppositional tracking action, Gladwell generates a bifurcated document, that when presented together, combines to create a "complete" picture. Installed on opposite walls, the viewer becomes caught in the middle of this dance, disrupting the cinematic field. Inside the gallery, the viewer becomes physically and psychologically caught up in an endless and detached moment of military surveillance.

As demonstrated by these examples, the camera has the capacity to be utilised and repositioned in an almost endless variety of ways within performance-based video. Despite this versatility, the camera as an object often has physical limitations such as weight, manoeuvrability, length of recording, stability etc. Increasingly, these limitations have been mitigated by new technologies. Digital technology has embedded cameras into mobile devices, extreme sports recorders and drones. This apparatus has exponentially enabled the ubiquity of accessible video documentation, and the ability to perform and record increasingly complex cinematic manoeuvres.

Fig. 36. Shaun Gladwell. *Double Field/Viewfinder (Tarin Kowt).* 2009-2010, Screenshot of two channel synchronised moving image (colour, stereo sound) 18:39 min. Art Gallery of NSW, http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection/works/296.2012/ (accessed May 4, 2015).

Outside of the studio and in the public sphere, the pervasive digital recording has transformed the human relationship to video (moving image) documentation and revolutionised the ability of the public to participate in social surveillance and documentation. As an adjunct to the surveillance of public space by law enforcement agencies and the state, the mobile device has evolved into a fluid counter-measure that is complicit in supplementing and also challenging the institutional surveillance apparatus. The ability to document at any given time is potentially empowering. To use the camera as a contingent safety measure, and as a tool for asserting visibility ranges from situations as frivolous as a selfie or video confession shared with friends, to the public exposure of violence and racism on social media. The performative capacity of resistance through digital documentation, and the collective verification of these documents has given voice to social confrontations that in the past would have simply been impossible. This contemporary phenomenon integrates the digital with the organic experience of public confrontation. The conceptual integration of human-machine to the experience of events (in this case through documentation and the mobile phone camera) was described by Jacques Derrida in 1998 in his essay *Typewriter Ribbon:*

> *[Will we] one day be able to, and in a single gesture, join the thinking of the event to the thinking of the machine? Will we be able to think, what is called thinking, at one and the same time, both what is happening (we call that an event) and the calculable programming of an automatic repetition (we call that a machine). For that, it would be necessary in the future (but there will be no future except on this*

condition) to think both the event and the machine as two compatible or even in-dissociable concepts. [36]

Performance therefore is no longer relegated to the idea of physical and organic actions of bodies; it is now increasingly accompanied by the digital life of recordings through such avenues as social networks. Mimes such as "Penis-mapping" (Fig.37) become covert opportunities for people to stake a digital claim to their local neighbourhoods and assert trans-local presence online without having to deal with the real-life and public consequences of this joke. Beyond these interventions, there is now a new capacity for otherwise marginalised people to find ways to engage and occupy online space: the materialisation of Michael Foucault's description that *"We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed."* [37] The proliferation of online media has generated tangible heterotopic experiences online and in the real world. Downloading and using the Hyperlapse phone app., my collaborator Yin-Lan Soon (a dancer) and I decided to document our movements through our neighbourhood. The technological innovation of the phone, combined with the image stabilisation app allowed for smooth handheld and spontaneous recordings not dependent on complex and cumbersome rigging and tracking setups.

This resulted in a new work titled *CALL and RESPONSE* (Fig.38, 39), which involved the movement of a performance artist and dancer as they took turns performing and recording tracking shots of each other; crossing roads, clapping inside tunnels and spontaneously performing on roundabouts. This intervention and occupation of public space uses the camera to embed and

---

[36] Jacques Derrida, *Without Alibi*. Stanford University Press (2000): p.72.

[37] Michel Foucault , *Of Other Spaces*. *diacritics* (1986): p.22.

document actions in the real world. Through handling digital technology we had equal participation in the process of generating both action and documentation. The exchange and manual handling of the camera between artist and dancer becomes a personal and public dialogue between each collaborator. In a way referencing Gladwell's self-reflexive gesture in *Double Field/Viewfinder*. *CALL and RESPONSE* also addresses issues around the redistribution of labour by establishing equal creative input into the work. Synchronising these performative and recording activities with the self-affirming practice of performative documentation in a digital ecosystem. Participating in the proliferation and integration of the digital image and camera in what Derrida and Foucault saw for this "new epoch".

Fig. 37. Kieron Broadhurst. *Oh and this #perthart*. 2015, Screenshot of online blog entry. http://kieron-broadhurst.tumblr.com/ (accessed May 4, 2015).

Fig. 38. James Nguyen & Yin-Lan Soon, *CALL////RESPONSE*, 2014. Screenshot of part 1 of 2, two channel moving image performance documentation (colour, stereo sound), 7:42 min. Image courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 39. James Nguyen & Yin-Lin Soon, *CALL////RESPONSE*, 2014. Screenshot of part 2 of 2, two channel moving image performance documentation (colour, stereo sound), 12:26 min. Image courtesy of the artists.

CHAPTER 5. SKYWRITING

A constant impulse throughout the development of my work has been the contribution of family, friends and colleagues in my practice. The idea of delegating part of the documentation process, and eventually the performance itself has allowed me to approach making work in an increasingly open manner. Emerging out of a practical necessity to find external help when setting up multiple cameras in the staging and documentation of my performances, and then slowly integrating complex movement into the handling of the shot, I had to pass the responsibility of the documentation process onto multiple parties. Naturally within this process, my contributors and I would engage feedback and discussion as we reviewed and revised the documentary material and performances. Triggered by an idea I had initially proposed, the works tended to evolve and integrate the input and response of multiple contributors who came into the production of the work. Allowing for some openness on this process, the contributors often interpreted my instructions in unexpected ways to both challenge and enrich the outcome of the work.

The opportunity to further push and escalate this method of working emerged through the development of a new work for Sculpture by the Sea (Bondi-Tamarama) 2014. The project proposed, titled, *THE SKYWRITING* required me to completely dissociate myself as the artist from both performance and its documentation. Severing any previous affinity to the camera-artist relationship, the project demanded that I assume the role of producer, establishing the conditions for the work to be made, but ultimately handing the performance and its documentation to the skywriter and to a professional photographer. It was the organisational aspects of the project: through research, financing, coordinating multiple stakeholders and hiring personnel was my main contribution as the artist. Having submitted the

original proposal, the artist initiated the project, but the actual performance was ultimately delegated and further dispersed through a raft of participators - from the supporting arts organisations (Sculpture By The Sea and funding contributions from NAVA), the ground crew, media, the professional photographer-video recordist, to the camera-phone-wielding public - whose coordinated convergence ultimately performs, documents and realises a work that could not possibly have been solely achieved by the artist. Bringing multiple aspects of my previous research to a focussed point, this work demonstrated how the dispersive and collective interventions of multiple contributors has opened up and radically changed my approach to performance and documentation-based art practice.

In this work, the aeroplane becomes an integrated apparatus that simultaneously performs and broadcasts a message to audiences below. The ability of the pilot to manoeuvre difficult aerial acrobatics becomes the principle performance. For *THE SKYWRITING* (Fig.40), attached to the tail of the plane and recording the emissions trail is an on board Go-Pro camera. The skywriting apparatus therefore is modified to become a fusion between aeroplane, camera and pilot. Conceptually, I conceived the apparatus (both human and mechanical) to become the articulation of its own documentation. Mounting the Go-Pro to the back of the plane also makes a direct reference to the very earliest of cinematic gestures; the "phantom ride",[38] where the camera was strapped to the front or rear of a train to capture the smooth and endless disappearance or emergence of the landscape on film. Similarly, the footage from the aeroplane embodies the very experience of moving in a smooth tracking shot, floating over the landscape and documenting the disappearing skywriting emissions. Strapped to the aeroplane, the "kino-eye"

---

[38] Mark Cousins, Timo Langer, John Archer, and TV Enhance. *The Story of Film: An Odyssey*. Music Box Films (2012): p.25-36.

is actually floating and is in itself the apparition; the camera captures and embodies the actual movement as the performance unfolds in the air.

From the ground, the perspective is completely different. It is the slowly unfolding inscription that appears above the viewer. There is a physical distance between the skywriter and the people on the ground; however, these two perspectives share the event and moment. The multiple camera angles of documentation by a professional film recordist and a photographer (Fig.41), is further multiplied through social media (Fig.42), generating a fragmented and widely textured field of documentation. The simultaneity of the documentation - from aeroplane Go-Pro, to mobile devices of the general public and the professional photographer - gives the impression of saturation and comprehensive coverage. However the multiple camera points-of-view produce fragments of documentation that is only discrete accounts for an incomplete portion of the performance. The idea of contrasting experiences through the spatiality of the image and its' production became important considerations in later presentation of the work.

Having deferred and delegated both performance and documentation, I began to think about how I could work with this material in a meaningful way once I had gathered and collated all the documentary fragments together. The spectrum and diversity of sourced documentation (both private and public) generates a potentially new space full of gaps and opportunities for the artist to adjust and reframe the public skywriting piece for another set of viewers inside the exhibition space.

On close analysis, the variously sourced documentation (collected from the pilot, the video recordist and the public) varied in quality and style. The idiosyncrasies that accounted for the different documentary experiences of *THE SKYWRITING* performance were quite unexpected. I felt it important to

retain some of these unexpected inclusions, possibly even to emphasise the inconsistencies that materialised outside of my control. For instance, the footage handed over to me by the skywriter was framed as expected, but had been edited to cut and delete any illegal aerial manoeuvres that may have had to be performed to execute the shapes that I had proposed. Further, in an effort to make the file more appealing, the skywriter also overlaid the recording with the pop ballad *Take My Breath Away*, originally performed by Berlin for the movie *Top Gun* in 1986. The incongruity of the sound track and the edits revealed the risk and vulnerability of documentation when it is entrusted to someone else. I could never have visualised or even considered this type of documentation, but ultimately, the pilot's version had an aesthetic that accurately represents the conventional formatting for this type of memento video documentation.

In the spirit of engagement, I decided to retain this footage as source material. This ready-made version was itself a complete piece of documentation that could be simply presented to the audience. However, having completely delegated the entire process of performance and its documentation to the pilot, I wanted to reclaim the work by further editing this version. By retaining the soundtrack, and severely cutting and reorganising the document, the editing process became an intervention that not only further degraded the primary reference material, but also repurposed the documentation for an alternative reading; what Vertov describes as a "new visual equation" possible with rapid montage.[39] Inside the gallery space, this edited documentation would be projected in large scale from inside a self-inflating screen. This screen component is a physicallisation of the moving image. The projector when inserted into a large

---

[39] Thomas W. Sheehan, *Wittgenstein and Vertov: Aspectuality and Anarchy*. Discourse 24, no. 3 (2003): p.98.

plastic bag both projects and gradually inflates the bag with the mechanical heat expended. The accumulated heat and energy performs and maintains the physical pressure of the projected surface (Fig.43).

In a similar fashion, I also reproduced the digital photographic image in a three dimensional form. Rather than using the entire series of photographs captured by the photographer or images taken by the public via social media, I decided to select just a single image taken professionally to represent the performance event. This image although singular, was ultimately replicated and reproduced and shared during the exhibition to imitate the posting and sharing of the image by the public during the *Sculpture by the Sea*. On one side of the paper I decided to print a photograph of a deteriorating sky-written shape, with the instructional drawings I had created for the pilot printed on reverse of the paper. In effect, this double printed document succinctly encompasses the process behind the work. Essentially two static forms of documentation (the instructional drawing and the photograph) when combined on the same sheet of paper, become performative – a comparative measure of time (from the moment of proposing a project to its public delivery) and the often larger distance between expectation and realisation. By producing a large print-run of these works on paper to form a solid stack of prints (Fig.44) , I wanted to give the viewer the opportunity to take a copy. The motivation for these printed documents goes beyond simply presenting multiple perspectives of *THE SKYWRITING* to the gallery audience. Rather, the installation is designed to change and expand on captured fragments of performance documentation. The installation encourages a performative response from the viewer, to move around the projection and then take home a variant of the documentation, further taking this document beyond the exhibition and again, outside of the hands of the artist.

The final two components presented for exhibition: the projection and the two-sided print (reproduced to form a stack), are premised upon the instability and multiplicity of the document. Edited and reproduced in bulk, these fragments of performance documentation are modified copies (or versions) of copies of other fragments. It is precisely this point of incompleteness and variance that makes many pieces of performance documentation generative. Presentation of the two types of documentation (moving image and the photograph) was deliberately reconfigured as physical forms occupying the actual space of the viewer. This physical relationship and the spatiality between the viewer, the moving and the photograph act to create a spatial tension for the viewer to move through and reconsider the performativity of documentation. Because it is impossible to produce complete and definitive documentation for performance, the gaps and inconsistencies that inevitably emerge, reveal how documentation operates as both constative and performative, functioning to physically and conceptually supplement and work as a companion in the multiplicity of documentation.

The potential gaps in any piece of performance documentation prompts the viewer to respond and question its reliability, purpose and function. In these instances, documentation becomes a spatial and performative site of contention, a site that has the potential to generate its own sequence of interventions and performative responses.

Fig. 40. James Nguyen & Robert Vance (Skywriter), *THE SKYWRITING,* 2014. Screenshot of edited single channel moving image of skywriting performance documentation captured from inflight Go-Pro (colour, stereo sound), 3:46 min. Image courtesy of the artists.

Fig. 41. James Nguyen & Robert Vance (Skywriter), *THE SKYWRITING,* 2014. Professional digital photographic documentation of skywriting performance, 7:06 min. Image courtesy of Stephen Burstow.

Fig. 42. James Nguyen & Robert Vance (Skywriter), *THE SKYWRITING,* 2014. Social media digital photographic documentation of skywriting performance. Image courtesy of Jessamine Chen, posted on Facebook and Whatsapp.

Fig. 43. James Nguyen & Robert Vance (Skywriter), *THE SKYWRITING,* 2014. Installation view (inflatable screen), multiple dimensions.

Fig. 44. James Nguyen & Robert Vance (Skywriter), *THE SKYWRITING,* 2014.
Installation view, (stack of double0sided offset prints), multiple dimensions.

CONCLUSION

By looking to the conventions of early performance documentation and the development of film and the language of cinematography, my research began at the point of performing in front of the camera. These early moments in my research adopted a single perspective of a tripod-mounted camera to capture performances inside the studio. The footage and documentation that resulted from these experiments was not intended for exhibition or public presentation, but was purely for my own reference. In these early stages, documentation proved a useful tool for review and self-analysis. Separating myself from the physical act of the performance through the documentation permitted a level of objectivity and distance that enabled me to reconsider my approach to performing in front of the camera and the process of recording with the camera.

Focusing my research around seminal pieces of documentation including works by Bruce Nauman and Dziga Vertov & Elizaveta Svilova, I became conscious of the many technical limitations, interventions and endless cuts and edits, that could actively undermine and transform a piece of documentation. Through simple interventions with the camera, its manual handling and coordinating its movement in response to what it documents, I began to incorporate basic cinematographic techniques into the process of performance documentation. For example, by simply taking the camera off the tripod, and mounting the camera onto a manual rig, the objective and constative account for the live performance could be dislodged from a stable and detached position. These small interventions with the camera expanded my practice from performing for the camera, towards the active process of making documentation. Not only would the document support and transform how I would perform, but to also be performative. As the distinctions between the performance and its documentation began to merge, the

camera moved away from a static and distant device to be embedded into the action and momentum of the very performance that it was documenting. By framing performance documentation through the cinematic gesture, the camera became part of a coordinated apparatus that generated an alternative model for performance documentation, one that was inherently unstable, responsive and malleable.

As I became more focused on the handling and choreography of the camera, it became apparent that from a practical perspective, I had to change my approach to producing documentation whilst still performing for the camera. The decision to introduce multiple cameras with increasingly complex cinematic movement into the production of these performances created new questions and problems that had to be considered. In order to achieve and account for this development, I found it necessary to enlist the help of a number of camera operators and assistants to the documentary process.

By delegating a large portion of the manual and technical tasks to friends, family and professional recordists, I had to factor in the variety and extent of external input involved. In an effort to absorb and consider the individual inputs that inevitably emerged. I chose to open up my practice and allow my assistants to make constructive contributions whilst still satisfying the artist's brief. These interactions, though remaining outside of the understanding of collaborative practice or equal creative exchange, expanded documentation into a process of exchange that is responsive and shifting. As each contributor makes minor adjustments and decisions during the course of the performance and its documentation, the constative authority of the document becomes contestable and fluid. Ultimately idiosyncratic and individual, the cumulative push and pull of these individual decisions in relation to the artist produces a site of exchange with the potential to transform the work and push it in unexpected directions.

When multiple cameras are inserted into the documentation of an event, and when each of these cameras in turn are controlled and handled by multiple camera operators and assistants, the singular viewpoint accounting for the documentation of a work of performance becomes fractured, expanded and multiplied. Capturing an event from a multitude of perspectives deceptively gives the impression that producing a comprehensive and complete document to account for the entirety of a work of performance is possible. However, much like the ubiquity of online image-production, the multiplicity and replication of cinematic documentation generates an overwhelming volume of material that ultimately becomes impossible to reconstruct and describe a performance in its entirety. Much like *THE SKYWRITING* project, it would be near impossible to collate and bring together all the documentary information generated by not only the on-board Go-Pro camera and the footage recorded by the photographer and recordist, but also by the mass-generation of images on peoples' mobile devices. What emerges, is that the greater the volume and multiple perspectives captured, the greater is the awareness of what is missing and what failed to be documented. Multiplicity in this instance only serves to highlight and create hyper-awareness around the gaps and contradictions that do not logically play out in front of the camera.

Conceptually, the single perspective of a camera captures what is in front of and contained in the frame of the camera, while the unseen forces that operate behind the camera remain invisible. This duality establishes a relationship between what is seen and what is unseen. When multiplied, what is seen by the camera or the 'kino-eye' is indeed expanded upon, but so too is the unrecorded activity behind the camera. The relationship between the seen and unseen becomes even unstable as the matrix of what is not captured by the camera begins to coalesce to form a disturbing void of

missing gaps and glimpses just outside the range of the camera. Therefore, instead of increasing the validation and consolidating that account for the performance event recorded, the introduction of multiple camera angles and perspectives inevitably creates spatial tensions that complexifies and destabilises the process of documentation. As demonstrated through my continued investigation into the expansion of the documentary imperative, the destabilisation of the document through multiple cinematic interventions is neither negative nor positive. It is, however, a useful approach to challenge and discover the performative potential that exists within the gaps and porous interstitial spaces that lie within the expanded document.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arijon, Daniel. *Grammar of the Film Language*. London: Focal Press, 1976.

Arnheim, Rudolf. *Film as Art*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006.

Auslander, Philip. "The Performativity of Performance Documentation." *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* 28, no. 3 (2006): 1-10.

Badovinac, Zdenka. *Body and the East: From the 1960s to the Present: Moderna Galerija Ljubljana-Museum of Modern Art*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1999.

Beller, Jonathan. "Dziga Vertov and the Film of Money - Boundary 2 26:3." - Boundary 2 26:3. Accessed March 12, 2015. https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/boundary/v026/26.3beller.html.

Collins, Karen, Bill Kapralos, and Holly Tessler. *The Oxford Handbook of Interactive Audio*. London: Oxford University Press.

Colman, Felicity. *Film, Theory and Philosophy: The Key Thinkers*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2009.

Cousins, Mark. *The Story of Film*. London: Pavilion, 2011.

Darke, Chris. *Lightreadings: Film Criticism and Screen Arts*. London: Wallflower, 2000.

Derrida, Jacques, and Peggy Kamuf. *Without Alibi*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002.

Di Stefano, John "You Are Here: Moving Image + Performative Acts + Documentary Paradigm". *Performance: Design*. Eds. D. Hannah & O. Harsløf. Museum Tusculanum Press–Copenhagen University Press, Copenhagen, DK 2008.

Flusser, Vilem. "The Photograph as Post-Industrial Object: An Essay on the Ontological Standing of Photographs." *Leonardo* 19, no. 4 (1986): 329.

Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 22-27.

Fredericksen, Donald. *The Aesthetic of Isolation in Film Theory--Hugo Münsterberg*. New York: Arno Press, 1977.

Glahn, Philip. "Brechtian Journeys : Yvonne Rainer's Film as Counterpublic Art." *Art Journal* 68, no. 2 (2009): 76-93.

Kelly, Richard T. "Zidane-A 21st century portrait". *Sight and Sound*, British Film Institute October (2006):42-43.

Kotz, Liz. 2005. "Language Between Performance and Photography". *October* 111. The MIT Press: 3–21. http://www.jstor.org/stable/3397669 (last viewed 13/05/2015).

Ingold, Tim. "Materials against Materiality." *ARD Archaeological Dialogues* 14, no. 01 (2007): 1-16.

Krauss, Rosalind. "Video: The Aesthetics of Narcissism." *October* 1 (1976): 50-64.

"Pacific Wash Up (2003-2004)." – LABoral Centro De Arte Y Creación Industrial. Accessed March 12, 2015. http://www.laboralcentrodearte.org/en/recursos/obras/pacific-wash-up-2003-2004.

Lambert, Carrie. "Moving Still: Mediating Yvonne Rainer's "Trio A"" *October* 89 (1999): 87.

Longworth, Guy. "John Langshaw Austin." Stanford University. 2012. Accessed March 12, 2015. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/austin-jl/.

Mondloch, Kate. *Screens: Viewing media installation art*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press. 2010. Vol. 30.

Mundhenke, Florian. "Authenticity vs. Artifice: The Hybrid Cinematic Approach of Ulrich Seidl." *Austrian Studies* 19 (2011): 113-25.

Pressplay: Contemporary Artists in Conversation. [Molly Nesbitt and Hans Haacke] London: Phaidon, 2005.

O'dell, Kathy. "Displacing the Haptic: Performance Art, the Photographic Document, and the 1970s." *Performance Research* 2, no. 1 (1997): 73-81.

Rascaroli, Laura. "The Essay Film: Problems, Definitions, Textual Commitments." *Framework: The Journal of Cinema and Media* 49, no. 2 (2008): 24-47.

Roberts, Graham. *The Man with the Movie Camera*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2000.

Rosen, Philip. *Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.

Ryan, Marie-Laure. "Fiction, Cognition, and Non-Verbal Media." *Intermediality and Storytelling*. Berlin: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2010.

Sack, Daniel. *Stages of Conception: Potentiality and Performance in Contemporary Live Art*. 2010.

Schäfer, Armin. 2013. "The Audiovisual Field in Bruce Nauman's Videos". *Osiris* 28 (1). [Saint Catherines Press, University of Chicago Press, History of Science Society]: 146–61.

Schwartz, Louis-Georges. 2006. "Cinema and the Meaning of" Life"." *Discourse* 28 (2):7-27.

Sheehan, Thomas W. "Wittgenstein and Vertov: Aspectuality and Anarchy." *Discourse* 24, no. 3 (2002): 95-113.

Stiles, Kristine, and Peter Howard Selz. *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art: A Sourcebook of Artists' Writings*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996.

Tegelberg, Matthew. "John Walker's Passage." *Canadian Journal of Communication*, vol.38, no.3 (2013): 141.

Turvey, Malcolm. "Can the Camera See? Mimesis in "Man with a Movie Camera"" *October* 89 (1999): 25.

Walley, Jonathan. "Identity Crisis: Experimental Film and Artistic Expansion ∗." *October* 137 (2011): 23-50.

Wartenberg, Thomas. "Philosophy of Film." Stanford University. 2004. Accessed March 12, 2015. http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/film/.