

Perennial

by

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Abstract

The adjective “perennial” suggests something enduring or perpetually renewing. The spirit of the perennial can be found in many traditional Chinese families. Despite illnesses, hardships and separations, being perennial means that one will always find the means to re-root and persevere.

Perennial (2020) arrives in two parts. The frontal part interlaces spoken memories of the artist’s grandmother with gestures of returning home captured in Super 8 and 35mm stills and processed digitally. The back of the work weaves together a fictitious narrative using writings found or made on the backs of the photographs, providing the work with an alternative ending.

Keywords: Analogue filmmaking; Found Object; Memory, Migration; Translingual Poetics; Spirit

For wanderers who drift in the water and find home wherever the current takes you.

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Defence Statement

Project Overview - A Journey of Becoming Perennial

The project was exhibited in the Audain Gallery, Vancouver between November 26 to December 12, 2020. *Perennial* – front is a short film of 15 minutes in duration, which was projected on a suspended, 108” x 60.75” screen and accompanied with two-channel sound. *Perennial* – back took up the wall space behind the projection and was consisted of 38 found photographs. Arranged in a loose linear fashion, the installation can be delivered in various dimensions. The back installation shown in the Audain gallery was approximately 344.5” in length.

The origin of the title, *Perennial*, comes from my grandmother’s name. Her name can be translated in English as two sets of meanings - “Phoenix”, and “Celery”. In those two words, I see resuscitation taking place both in extreme turbulences and in the quietness of the everyday - phoenix reborns in fire and celery grows silently in the backyard. Unattended, it germinates year after year. Both are resilient, but in different temperaments. I observe the eternal cycle of renewal and reincarnation within my grandmother’s body, both in the form of fighting physical discomforts and surviving traumatic political events and in the calmness with which she carries out her days. With it, *Perennial* stems beyond preservation and looks for renewal - renewal of analogue technologies as well as renewal of memories.

I began contemplating the idea of resisting mortality using film as a medium through the making of *Perennial*, an idea tied closely with Andre Bazin’s early notion of cinematic impulse to preserve and to embalm. “The film is no longer content to preserve the object, enshrouded as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact, out of the distant past, in amber. The film delivers baroque art from its convulsive catalepsy. Now, for the first time, the image of things is likewise the image of their duration, change mummified as it

were.”¹ From there, I tried to work retrospectively and to understand the urges behind this resonance I was feeling with Bazin’s text; and I found it has most to do with my familial connection and lived experiences. Two years of staying in Canada, I have begun to feel that the distance between my home country and my current location is slowly gauging a hole in my daily life. Edging toward the end of 2020, in the midst of the global pandemic, I have been waking up with dreams of family members dying, falling sick, falling from tall places, or going missing. These dreams stem from real places of concern - I had learned, in the past two years, that my paternal grandmother (who is the interviewee in my film) and my mother have been diagnosed with cancer. Moreover, my mother’s safety is being threatened by the ongoing political entanglement in China. All the while I was enjoying my stay in Canada as a privileged immigrant. The sensations of worry consumed me to a point where I felt like I needed to address these psychological burdens and put them somewhere so they become tangible, palpable, and digestible for me to coexist with them.

I took the opportunity of film as a means to mummify, as Bazin suggests, seizing every opportunity I could to reach out to and connect with my family. At the very core of this project, lies a deep yearning of preservation. I would consider the poem that I had written as a literary point of departure for this project. It was once the basis of *Perennial*, as it speaks bluntly the pain of not being able to be close to my family and to care for them.

*My mother and I are treating each other’s wounds,
My father and I are trying to heal her.
One grandmother and I are plucking feathers off of each other’s shoulders,
One grandmother is holding me high in the wind with both thin arms.
One grandfather is choking in tears at the sight of me,
One grandfather and I will never speak.*

¹ André Bazin and Hugh Gray, ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’, *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1210183>.

Filmmaking in Analogue Format: A Debate on Cinematic Mortality

The desire to preserve was earnest in this project, and I would like to consider it further in parallel to the agency of analogue film. To elaborate, the nature of film to perpetuate a particular moment in time works both for and against *Perennial's* desire of preservation. Both outcomes are subject to analogue film's ability to live in two separate spacetimes which are marked by the process of digitization.

In its raw form, I do not simply see analogue film as a recording device at my disposal. Analogue film stands out to me for its tangible materiality and its robust autonomy. Through my past hands-on experiences in working with analogue equipment, I understood analogue film as a living organism that grows and expands as humans change its photochemical makeup. To co-create with film also means to go against the current of time in some ways - in 2020, film is relatively expensive to acquire and to work with. The super 8mm film, despite being a popular format for home movies in the 1970s in North America and has undergone a resurgence in contemporary visual art and expanded cinema practices, to a larger extent, is considered *obsolete*. I learnt, as a student filmmaker, shooting with analogue film is an enduring process with noticeable financial repercussions. From ordering, to shooting, to processing, I experienced something that I could tangibly describe as the birth of a film. The scarcity of the material, the lack of knowing in whether or not the film will turn out to be correctly exposed, and the slowness in its arrival - all contributed to my regarding the film as a living entity.

Here, I would like to point out that the very notion of obsolescence is heavily contested in Kim Knowles' book, *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices*. In it, Knowles cautions us to both examine the obsolete as defined in contrast to consumerism and capitalistic notion of progress, and the rabbit hole of retro-fetishism in which the old is considered more desirable than the new for its

social and cultural values.² In *Perennial*, I bypass this discursive practice by incorporating what is coined by Svetlana Boym as the reflective nostalgia, summarized by Knowles as “a process of deconstruction, ‘calling into doubt’ the certainties of the past and acknowledging the complexities of our relationship to the past in the present.”³ The framework of reflective nostalgia helps to connect the nature of analogue film not as a given certainty, but as a nodal point from which one may further investigate its ontological repercussions in artmaking today.

In the same breath, In the same breath, I am not an analogue purist and still consider digitization as a means to help test the limit of analogue film. For example, I noticed that I can stretch and compress the digitized image almost infinitely in editing software, which is more laborious when working with the analogue format. I also observed that even when digitized, analogue film still maintains its photochemical nature to a certain extent. In *Perennial*, the film perforation is left uncropped on purpose. With each throbbing, it co-creates a dance with the images onscreen. Each speck of dust and scratch signifies the vitality of film as time passes through the camera. In a sense, the film is still alive even after its death.

The digitized file holds also a stance, one that speaks profoundly to the time which we live in. It is undeniable that my work will reach the largest audience and travel the farthest distance living as what Hito Steyerl would call a “poor image”⁴ - a ghost of its former self, a circulatable reproduction, and “a copy in motion”.⁵ And the digital file will continue to live on and preserves its own materiality, one that has a completely different temporality compared to its

² Kim Knowles, *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), 33.

³ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia / Svetlana Boym*. (Basic Books, 2001), xvi. Quoted in Kim Knowles, *Experimental Film and Photochemical Practices* (Cham: Springer International Publishing AG, 2020), 35.

⁴ Hito Steyerl, ‘In Defense of the Poor Image’, accessed 18 December 2020, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/10/61362/in-defense-of-the-poor-image/>.

⁵ Ibid

analogue former self. Additionally, working in a digital timeline also allowed me to work with sound in a very precise way and with a whole array of tools and techniques to process the material and transform the meaning of the film.

Additionally, working in a digital timeline also allowed me to work with sound and editing in a very precise way and with a whole array of tools and techniques to process the material and transform the meaning of the film. I was able to flexibly insert other digitized archival images and footage shot on DSLR cameras as well as arrange sound components to serve in parallel and in contrapuntal to the visual component.

In embracing the journey which the digitized file would embark on, I am also reshaping my relationship with the archive. The archive, and here I mean specifically the images from the Ko family, had its former archival truth as constituted by an institution. The films have been carefully examined, evaluated, labeled, and made public. What impact does my work have on such an order? In interrupting the archival images' habitat and write on top of it a new story, am I performing a surgery that problematizes the idea of permanence and removes partial truth the films have gained living as a permanent collection? What happens if my film is circulated or dissected when used as yet another material of historical importance?

Moving forward, I would consider experimenting with the analogue format to further explore its physicality, run analogue films in real time, confront their nature to fade and fray, and potentially accompany my experiments with live performance as well. In doing so, I am hoping to compare the various trajectories different materials can take and further investigate in the notions of permanence associated with archival materials.

Memories of Mine and that of Others

How to care for memories that are not inherently mine? This question stands in the center of my research. I have been taking interest in understanding

the construction of memory through found objects since the beginning of my MFA program. It all started when sound artist Joey Zurrini and I delved into random alleyways and into the Craigslist site to find materials for realizing our collaboration, *Found/Unfounded*, a performance piece utilizing soundscape and gestures that explores the “thing power” brought forth by theorist Jane Bennett⁶. In gathering and rearranging objects collected from unexpected places, we yielded space for nonhuman objects to unfold and allowed them to animate the human-nonhuman relationship from an autonomous stance.

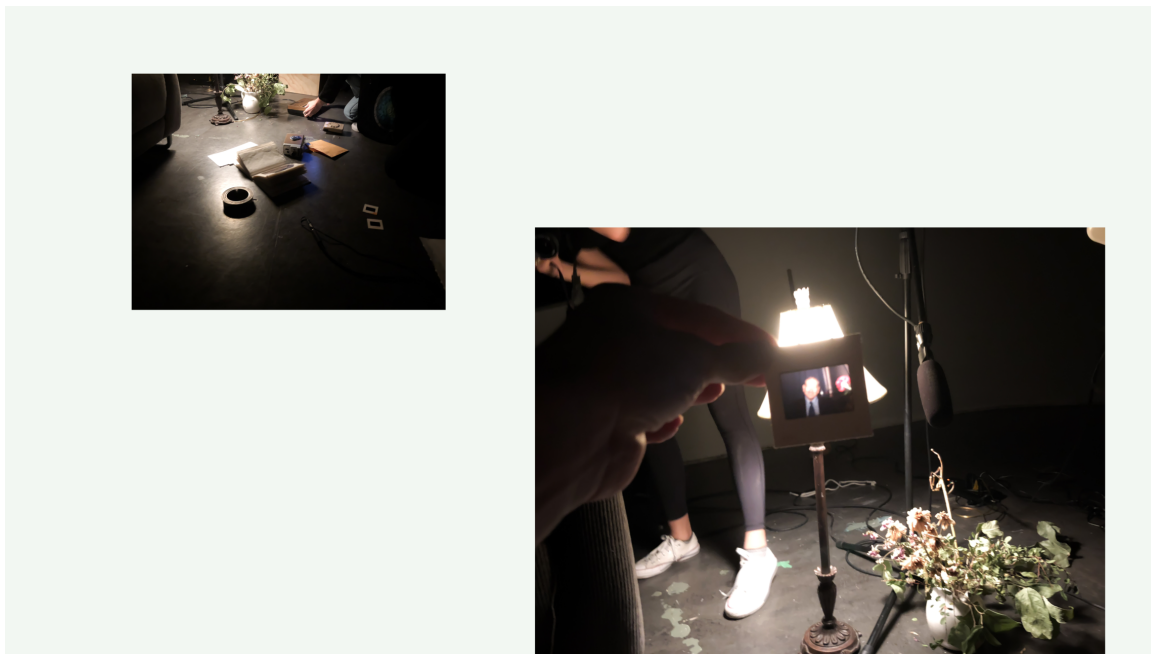


Figure 1. Photo collage by Xinyue Liu

Continuing my endeavour, I took interest in exploring ways in which artists can interact with found objects' agency and incorporate them as actors that play parts in the reception and constitution of historic narratives. Another significant project that contemplated such a notion is the collaboration with composer and musician Casper Leerink. The project *Conductivity*, shown under a group multimodal installation titled *Experiments in Art and Ethnography*, was a part of *Changing Climates*, the 2019 Canadian Anthropology Society and American

⁶ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2009), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822391623>.

Anthropological Association conference. I was inspired to make this work upon being given a stack of old photographs for free in a thrift store. These photographs were taken by a local Vancouver citizen Rod Logan⁷. I was immediately struck by the meticulously handwritten text on the backs of the photos, indicating the time and place in which they were taken. Thanks to all the information provided on the back, we were able to revisit all the places, some 20 years later. In doing so, we bore witness to the drastic changes that have taken place in Vancouver in comparison to the still bodies of the photographic images.

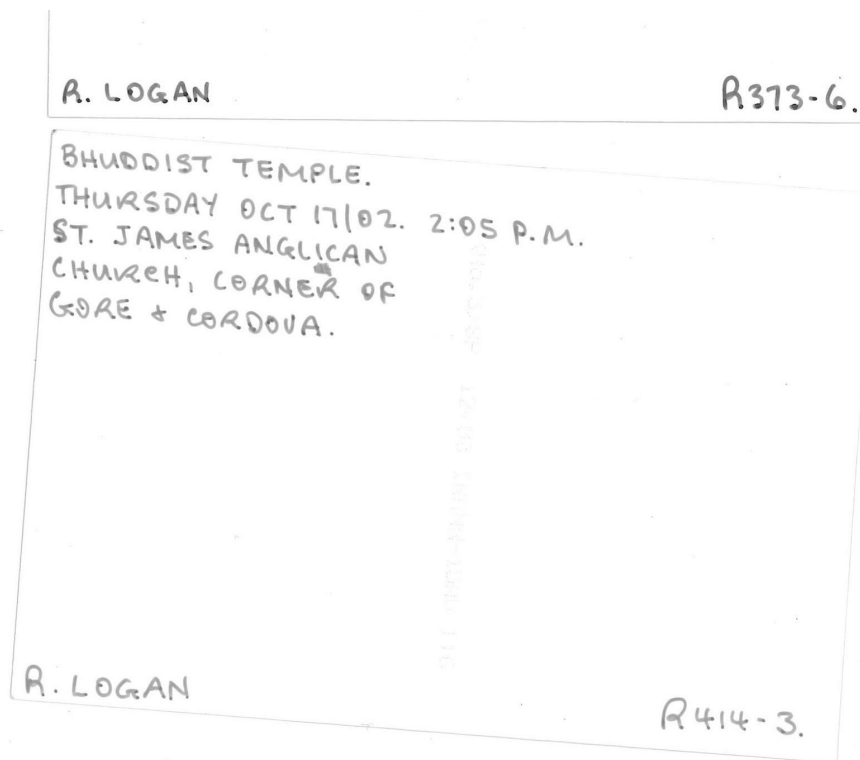


Figure 2. Scanned photo (back) by Rod Logan.

These two previous projects, amongst other art projects I created during my MFA study, informed the birth of *Perennial*, using primarily found objects as a medium and exploring the formation of memory as animated via interactions with

⁷ Coincidentally, I realized later I was not the only person who wanted to explore his amazing photo collection. The Polygon Gallery held a project titled *10000 ships* which contained Logan's photographic archive of 10,000 ships.

the objects. *Conductivity*, in particular, finds itself renewed as I draw from it to continue the study of using the back of the photographs as a mnemonic device.

Additionally, I have been considering found objects as placeholders for unfinished stories and transient memories, a temporary harbour for giving displacement a place to reside in. Such are ideas that I further elaborated in my Graduating Thesis, *Loving an Absent Body: A Study of Film Projection on Found Objects* (see appendix). In my thesis, I was primarily concerned with projecting images onto found objects as an art form. In *Perennial*, however, I tried a different approach, leading me to incorporate found footage directly within the moving image.

I stumbled across Mathew Ko's 16mm film collection, containing family videos shot by Ko between late 1930s and early 1950s and quickly turned it into the main inspiration for *Perennial*. I find this collection of film resonating with me in the sense that it comes directly from the perspective of a second generation Chinese immigrant, a man who took passionate interests in film and photography, who executed his agency in documenting and supporting significant cultural and social events for the Chinese-Canadian community when he himself did not have the right to vote.⁸ Ko and his family are the epitome of the *Perennial* spirit, not only surviving but thriving on a land far away from their ancestors. Mathew Ko's film collection was donated by his daughter, Valerie Ko to the University of Victoria for archival and academic purposes⁹. I reached out to the University of Victoria's Special Collections & University Archivist Lara Wilson, who then contacted Valerie Ko to give me permission to use this collection in my film. I am thankful for their generosity and felt the responsibility to not abuse such precious documentation of their memories.

⁸ 'The Mathew Ko Colour Films: Victoria's Chinatown and Region, c.1939-c.1950 - University of Victoria', accessed 25 November 2020, <https://www.uvic.ca/library/featured/collections/about/Mathew-Ko-Colour-Films.php>.

⁹ Ibid

In an effort of honouring their trust, I looked through Ko's films with discerning consideration, finding parts that resonate with the nature of *Perennial* and recomposing it slightly, with notions of care, via two major methods - translingual poetics and fictionalization.

I. Poetic realm and translingual poetics.

To introduce the concept of translingual poetics, I feel the urge to first elaborate on the notion of poetry in this work. Namely, I am trying to grapple with a Chinese term commonly used in poetic practices, written as 意境, translated roughly as the "poetic realm", composed using diasporic motifs and elusive languages. It is a place of the felt, emphasizing the fleeting sensation as one's eyes lay upon the scenery and take into heart the feelings that generate directly from what one senses. 意境 (poetic realm) is an empty space in a literal sense, meaning that it concerns very little with the materialistic world or the physical definition of time and space. One can even say it is a place for self-inflicted banishment and in the banishment, metamorphosed is an infra-political engagement that shifts the focus inward, to the self.

Perennial seeks to return to such a poetic realm, isolating momentarily sensors for political and historical connotations, and focusing solely on the phenomenological *affect*. Being immersed in the poetic realm does not merit a forfeiture of the author's right to understand the scenery through a sociopolitical lense, but to say, for as long as one lingers the poetic realm, the language which they use addresses primarily the emotions and their focus predominantly be on the inner subjectivity. In retreating into a transient poetic realm, *Perennial* calls forth dialogues and not arguments.

With that said, the poetic realm which *Perennial* embodies simultaneously speaks to a critical concept brought forth by writer and poet Sarah Dowling - *translingual poetics*, which focuses on translingualism's capacity to resist the dichotomy of settler monolingualism and, in turn, sees language as dependent on cultural contexts. She writes:

Translingual poetics refers to poetry that is self-consciously situated between languages and that attends to the complex processes of domination and refusal that can be observed and interpreted from the discursive context of each.¹⁰

Acknowledging translingual politics is to say that differences exist between various forms of thinking cross-culturally. Translingual poetics are a form of attention for the ones who resist or have difficulties blending in. Even when the words are written in English as I am living in an area where English is the primary language, I give space for thoughts to appear unapologetically foreign (relevant to English) and seemingly unbelonged. It is in the negotiation between different systems of thought that one is able to recognize the “out-of-placeness” of the language which one uses to signify feelings.

The language used in *Perennial* employs translingual poetic strategies and embraces well that language is something written across but not inscribed in - across a few generations of being and across a few cultures that clash when being encapsulated together in material forms. *Perennial* does not make a claim as to understand a different context fully, nor does it claim authority over the right of knowing and understanding of something that is not mine. Instead, the language relinquishes control and acknowledges the unknowable by morphing rational thinking into murmurs of the subconscious - a fragmented paradigm of storytelling. Till this day, after researching various materials and resources, I still do not and may never understand Ko and his family’s stories fully. Nor will they mine. I am hoping that my poetic language, albeit inevitably changes the way Mathew Ko’s footage is perceived, still leaves space for the affect to be read across, and between.

¹⁰ Sarah Dowling, *Translingual Poetics: Writing Personhood Under Settler Colonialism*, Contemporary North American Poetry Series (University of Iowa Press, 2018), 6.

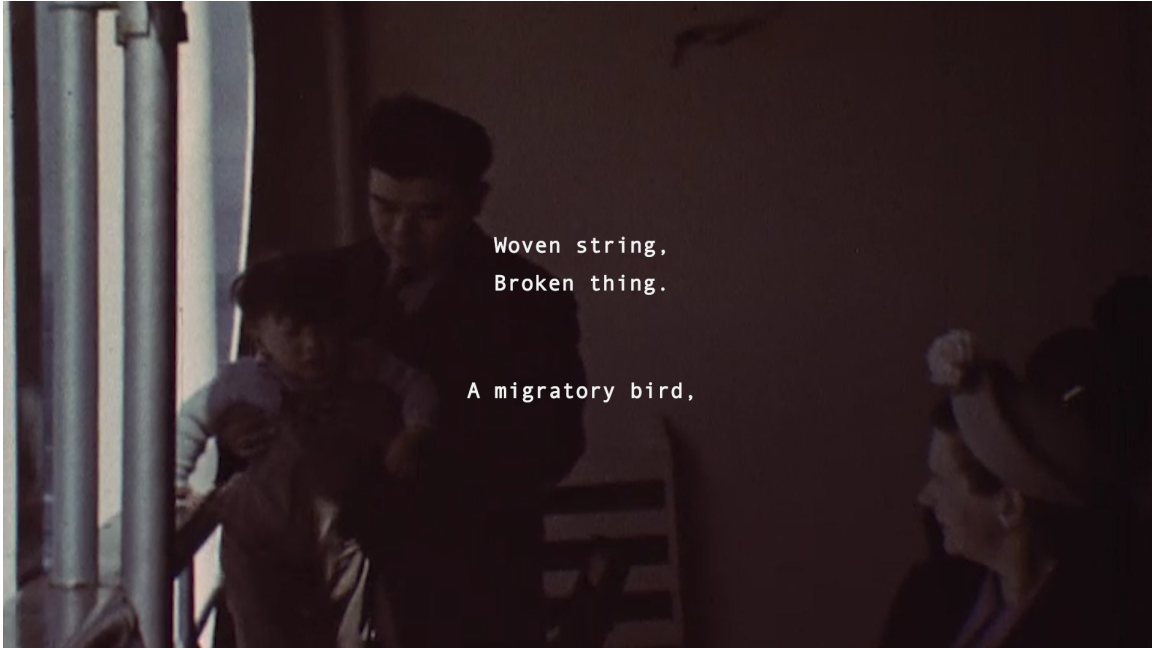


Figure 3. Film still: *Perennial* - Front. Photo by Xinyue Liu.

II. Blurring the boundary between fact and fiction.

The use of fiction is embodied in both the front and back components of *Perennial*. While the former is concerned with a departure that implies a fable in which the main character transforms to a bird, the latter fabricates a half-true, half-false story of my grandmother's life with a soft landing.

The alternative, fictionalized ending to the film sees a manifestation in the juxtaposition of text on the back component of *Perennial*. About one third of the photographs are authentic, meaning I left the texts on the back of the photos as when they were found. The rest is manufactured based on my grandmother's stories and words and phrases I have seen written on other photographs. Specifically, it is the text on one of the photos that reads "Reunited in Canada" that indicates the alternativity. With it, I was suggesting a reunion between my grandmother and I, one that I have been yearning during this time. It has been my wish all along to bring her to Canada, where I believe she could receive better medication. Naturally, it is very unlikely to happen. I am aware that her body is too weak for any kind of long distance traveling. So perhaps it is in that

wishful thinking that I see an alternative spacetime, one in which no one will be separated from whom they love.

I see the use of fiction as a creative strategy, especially when cocomposing with found materials. The enchantment of fiction, I would argue, has two layers. The first layer appears at the formal level, probing new understandings of history through artistic gestures. Only upon closer examination can the extraordinary be spotted from the ordinary, the unusual from the mundane. The second layer of enchantment takes place at the epistemological level and may attract questions about the surroundings which prevent the fiction from coming to real life (such as political or economic restrictions). In this sense, the fiction that belies the underpinning structural order of reality is also exposed and made vulnerable. In suggesting an alternative ending, I am interested in reimagining the world we live in and breathe hope into what we can become next.

Overall, the fictionalization within this work is gestured subtly. Neither the front nor the back suggests blatantly that a fictitious framework is at play. It is mostly through comparison and close examination that one may notice how the two sides of the work create a dialogue between each other. The form in which the photo installation takes resembles the interface of a non-linear editing software. Only through comparing the film's timeline with that of the installation can one notice that the film exits as the dancer leaves the screen with a final gesture. And that is where the back component picks up what is left unfinished by the front. The bird indeed had a direction.

A Reflection on Photographic Referentiality

Photographs, especially before the era of digital technology, are a mnemonic device. They help one to remember a certain place, event, or person by crystallizing a particular moment and embalming it into a tangible, material form. Roland Barthes entertained the idea that "a specific photograph, in effect, is

never distinguished from its referent (from what it represents).”¹¹ My intention was to peel the referent further away, leaving but a form that suggests but not explicitly reveals the existence of what the photographs ought to represent. In doing so, I am hoping to give potency to imagination and curiosity, coaxing questions such as, where are the fronts of the photographs? And, who wrote the texts and who are those texts addressed to?

The decision behind seeing the video work and the installation as a back-to-back unity takes into consideration the lack of the referent in both works. Never once does the audience see who is speaking the entire time, nor will they see a photographic representation of the speaker. However, they both gesture toward each other using poetic language. I am interested in exploring the obscurification that bridges two entities of diverse materialities and pushing the boundary of designating a specific protagonist to a story, a common strategy used in narrative filmmaking and literature.

During my installation in the Audain Gallery, I was met with a daunting reality. The writings on the photographs are small and tiny, as they were meant to be read from a short distance which induces intimacy. I am aware that they become almost unreadable from the street side, and it originally was by design. My intention was to lure curiosity from the unintelligibility of the installation and thus invite the audience to come inside and be with it in a close setting. However, I was informed shortly before the opening that the Audain Gallery would not allow non-SFU visitors coming in, leaving the photos, in my opinion, stranded behind shiny glass panels of an institution. The work requires a revision which could at the same time protect its intimacy-oriented setup and become more accessible for the general public. In the meantime, I am not discouraged by the fact that this work is operating on a different mode of access and still am curious to continue my artistic endeavors learning from this experiment. The work has led me to ponder the meaning of creating intimacy in a public space and my responsibility

¹¹ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* / Roland Barthes ; Translated by Richard Howard., 1st American ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 5.

as an artist to create inclusion. For now, the photographs are out of sight but, hopefully, not out of the minds of the passersby. As Barthes puts it, “Ultimately - or at the limit - in order to see a photograph well, it is best to look away or close your eyes.”¹²



Figure 4. Installation view: *Perennial - back*. Photo by Rachel Topham.

Sound Work and Improvisation

Perennial is an interdisciplinary, collaborative project. Violinist and composer Kourosh Ghamsari-Esfahani contributed significantly to this project in forms of composing live scores to the film and sourcing, collecting, and redistributing earlier compositional pieces to areas of the film where we saw fit. The process was often intuitive – I would arrive in the studio with a version of the film and a handful of descriptions for us to depart from. Without having a background in music, the

¹² Barthes, 53.

descriptions I gave often fell into two categories. First, words and phrases that describe a certain emotion. And second, a sensation associated with my creative process. An example would be for me to describe the music I wanted for the ending sequence to be “gently descending from the sky as if suddenly lost the ability to fly midway”. In a way, I compensated my lack of knowledge in music theory with our common sensibilities to feel. Story exchanges were also of great significance. We learned about each other’s family histories, emotional journeys during the pandemic, joy, and heartbreaks and worked them into the music score for *Perennial*.

Ghamsari-Esfahani would often perform responsively to the descriptions I gave and according to the visual cues presented in the moving images. We would then listen back to his playing together, noticing and observing the nuances surfaced during his improvisation and making request to attempt again or moving on. We also experimented with objects found in the studio and that included our bodies. The gentle caressing sound in the middle section of the film came from my suggesting him touching the violin as if preparing to play. The minimal and inconsequential gesture, in turn, gave a promise of music in motion but without the full range of musical potential, which echoed with the image of flowers undulating in a body of water, swaying, without any directions to go.

Our collaborative effort mitigated my role as a director in calling every decision and yielded space for creative executions to flow. I frequently referred to this film as not “mine”, but “our” film, for I truly believe my collaborator in his autonomy to feel along with the production gave much more than just musical life to the film.

Field recordings, as well as soundscapes collected from internet archives also held significance to the film. I used mostly environmental sounds to emphasize the verisimilitude of a transient space. Such a space speaks to the journey which *Perennial* takes, echoing elements of the invisible and the felt, leading the audience to a departure hall that stems beyond the cinematic site. Sounds such as an airplane taking off, a steamboat leaving the shipyard, and the wind passing through a contact microphone contributed greatly to a sensation of being exposed in an open space and brought forth an element of such spaciousness. Conversations captured at the very location where the footage was shot was blended in with other soundscapes, blurring the boundary between the heard and the imagined.

Delegating Authorship - On the Identity of the Dancer

It is worth pondering the identity of the dancer. Is she an embodiment of “me”, the filmmaker, or an embodiment of my grandmother, the narrator? Or is she the granddaughter? It is difficult to navigate her role as there is also an absence of the dancer on the back part of the project. To clarify, I would argue that the dancer is an entrusted delegatee of affect.

The dancer in the film, Tomoyo Yamada, is a choreographer and dancer whose work focuses heavily on gestural movements of the everyday. In researching her works and interests, I stumbled upon Erin Manning’s theory on major and minor gestures. While major gestures are more prominent and noticeable, minor gestures “nonetheless course through all events; that the challenge is to invent techniques that resist immediate capture by the major.”¹³ Yamada in her research also explores untranslatable minor gestures that lose meaning while crossing borders to enter another region or nation. She once mentioned to me that she noticed that certain movements cannot be imitated, even by the most skilled dancers, unless the dancers possess certain cultural knowledge that derives from the everyday living from which the movements were created.

Both first-generation immigrants, Yamada from Japan and I China, we shared in the past two years many experiences that are relatable to our upbringings and our cultural backgrounds. We often find echo in ways we navigate ourselves and in our effort in making roots in Canada. In creating gestures for *Perennial*, I did not ask Yamada to choreograph a highly rehearsed set of movements. Instead, I described to her feelings of missing home, of wanting to be in two places at the same time, and of longing for something to arrive at the horizon. I also mentioned two motifs that I deemed essential for

¹³ Erin Manning author, *The Minor Gesture / Erin Manning.*, Thought in the Act (Duke University Press, 2016).

creating the poetic realm in this work: a kite and a bird. No further instructions beyond that, and we simply let the minor gestures unfold.

In delegating movements to someone of a close relationship, I also noticed a bond beyond this specific artistic project. And that is the reconciliation of the Japanese and Chinese relationship through our friendship. As two nations, we waged wars and inflicted pain on each other for centuries. But when we were standing on the same river bank looking homeward, we realized that our motherlands are in the same direction. Paying tribute to this connection, I also threw in an “Easter egg” in the back section of the work. There was one photograph with the text, “Sue Sada was there” on it. It is a title of a video installation work by artist Cindy Mochizuki, also of Japanese heritage. In it, she explores the life story of Muriel Kitagawa (Sue Sada’s real name), a Japanese Canadian citizen whose life was impacted by the unfair treatment of the Canadian government back in 1942. Mochizuki’s works have made a great impact on my journey of research-creation at SFU. And in this small way, I would like to imagine that Sue Sada indeed came to visit.



Figure 5. Film still: *Perennial* - Front. Photo by Xinyue Liu.

Water Ceremony and the Return of the Spirit

Halfway into the making of the project, I had another encounter which led me to write this paragraph and was planning to use it in the film:

*Filming by the Fraser River,
I saw a group of people performing a water ceremony -
tossing flowers into the ocean as an act of commemorating
a lost family member.
I remember having the realization that
people can indeed feel joy within profound grief.
And I thought of the bird in my pocket I never set free.
And I let go.
It took off,
Following the petals on the river.

It headed home.*

And although I had to remove it in the end for the purpose of bettering the overall flow of the film, I decided to leave it here as a reminder of the sensations I felt witnessing this event. It was coincidental that on the day that I chose to film my video, there was a family hosting a water ceremony along the river bank. As a person who stated in the project proposal that this project relies on chance operations and contingencies, I found myself deeply fascinated by this coincidence. The exchange of energy on site was intricate. As I was fumbling to find a way to convey the yearning of returning home, some individuals were performing a ritual to pay tribute to a deceased person who was dear to them and, in the most endearing way, setting them free.

I also realized later that my microphone captured parts of their dialogue while collecting the surrounding soundscape. When I replayed my audio recording from that day, I heard they were saying they bought the wrong kind of flower and that lost family member would not appreciate that colour. I felt one of

my biggest fears - the loss of a family member - was confronted in the process, and, in a way, I felt relieved to discover that the underlying tone of universal emotional expressions such as grief, loss, and empathy can become interwoven in ways unexpected. And that thought was inexplicably comforting.

As mentioned above, the prevailing discombobulation of Covid-19 made the journey back home almost unimaginable. And this is not just an experience regarding myself. I remember looking around and seeing other people suffering the consequences of this pandemic in ways similar. With the desire of providing comfort in these difficult times, I asked myself if there is a way to address this lack of physical traveling and look instead at ways in which we can return to a certain palace/time spiritually.

In regards to spirituality, I find my research on the subject of the ghost for my Curatorial Studies course taught by Melanie O'Brian, titled "*Resuscitating Ghost Dwellings: On Curating Historic Narratives in Lived Sites*" making a comeback in *Perennial*. In that essay, I drew from the thinking of sociologist Michael Mayerfeld Bell, who defined the ghost as 'the sense of the presence of those who are not physically there'.¹⁴ I further explored this concept as a framework to argue that the institutional constitution of truth in the context of contemporary art making needs to take into consideration the presence of the invisible, making inclusive a space for spiritual returning - by which I mean the restoration and reconciliation of the invisible presence specific to a site. The essay was written from the point of view of a curator, and in this project, I decided to achieve what I was arguing from a theoretical standpoint and actually attempt at creating a safe harbor for the spiritual connection.

In connecting with a sense of presence that is not physically there, I find my interactions with my grandmother particularly rewarding. In almost all of our conversations, she talked about the presence of spirits and how she genuinely

¹⁴Michael Mayerfeld Bell, 'The Ghosts of Place', *Theory and Society* 26, no. 6 (1997): 813, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006888230610>.

conceives them as real. What I initially suspected as a defense mechanism against past traumatic events turned out to be a genuine belief that she holds. Contrary to the popular western belief which prioritizes science as well as rational thinking, my grandmother's viewpoint on spirituality can be read as a dormant system of knowledge¹⁵ that advocates phenomenological engagements beyond the physical cycle of life. My grandmother's story also provides a safe place for weaving together the geographical location of which the gestures of *Perennial* took place - along the bank of Fraser River near Shady Island, Richmond with the cinematic location that saw Ko and his family set sail on a ferry 60 years ago - near Johnson Street Bridge in Victoria. The movements in *Perennial*, in their constant pushing and pulling, bridge the visible with the invisible and beckon the lost connections in ancestry to return.

Drawing from Catherine Russel's thinking, *Perennial* is essentially "concerned with a cinema in which death and ending come together with difficulty."¹⁶ In adhering to a viewpoint that resists the notion of physical death as the ending, *Perennial* embraces death not as a final form and refuses to see the literal ending of a film as the grand finale. For as long as the gesture of beckoning is performed, the journey of returning is interminable.

¹⁵ Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Magical Interpretations, Material Realities: Modernity, Witchcraft, and the Occult in Postcolonial Africa* / Edited by Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders., ed. Henrietta L. Moore and Todd Sanders (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001), <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sfu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=180629>.

¹⁶ Catherine Russell, *Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure, and New Wave Cinemas* (Minneapolis, UNITED STATES: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 2, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/sfu-ebooks/detail.action?docID=310304>.

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Appendix A.

Loving an Absent Body: A Study of Film Projection on Found Objects

“Amorous absence functions in a single direction, expressed by the one who stays, never by the one who leaves: an always present I is constituted only by confrontation with an always absent you. To speak this absence is from the start to propose that the subject’s place and the other’s place cannot permute; it is to say: “I am loved less than I love.”¹

“Many people believe that there exists in the world’s coordinate system a perfect point where time and space reach an agreement. This may even be why these people travel, leaving their homes behind, hoping that even by moving around in a chaotic fashion they will increase their likelihood of happening upon this point.”²

¹ Roland Barthes, *A Lover’s Discourse: Fragments*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 13.

² Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights*, trans. Jennifer Croft (Fitzcarraldo Editions, 2017), 85.

This essay argues the relationship between film projection and found objects is one that manifests displacement. Respectively, both the found objects and film projection create a universe that displaces one's understanding of places of origin and destination, presence and absence. Through the scope of contemporary visual artworks, this essay argues the combination of the two art forms can be used as a metaphor for examining one's position in an age of globalization and mobility.

There are three main sections in this essay. The first one examines found objects' efficacy in inviting curiosity and imagination by exposing their states of dislocation and brokenness, focusing on Sophie Joidoin's artwork *Toi que jamais je ne termine*. With a brief review in film theory, the second half of this essay investigates the journey of film projection. Taking a close look at Michael Naimark's *Displacement*, I argue that film projection has been and will continue displacing our temporal unity, making unhomey our bodily sensations. Finally, the last chapter explains how we can associate the grounding of displacement and dislocation to the landing of film projection on found objects.

The Objects

Material objects allow the spectator to catch a glimpse of existing conditions. "In millions of kitchens, living rooms, and baths, little pieces of plastic bear their objecthoods as the signs of the good life."³ What, then, does a found object tell us? What happens when an object leaves the warm womb of a domestic household, the good life?

I find Jane Bennet's story of found object most telling. Upon encountering a debris of deserted objects on an ordinary morning, Bennet saw in them the transformation, "that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics."⁴ This autonomy of the objects - "thing-power"⁵ - is felt to be of great significance. Found objects may be

³ Thomas L. Dumm, *A Politics of the Ordinary* (New York: University, 1999), 2.

⁴ Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Duke University Press, 2009), 4.

⁵ Bennett, 4

the materials lost, but just as Joseph Brodsky suggests, “our artifacts tell more about ourselves than our confessions.”⁶ Much can be learned from the disjointed fragments.

I would argue that found objects hold in their bodies a life lived elsewhere. Their dislocation from original habitats invite questions of curiosity. Upon unveiling the curiosity, we might start by asking, “what happened to you?” This simple question leads to the quest for origin, the missing events, and a turbulent journey. Weaving a tapestry of similar interests, artworks such as *Slipper Spoon* by André Breton, *The Most Beautiful Thing I Have Ever Seen* by Tony Oursler, and Joseph Cornell’s shadow boxes can be seen as examples for utilizing found objects to create new meanings.

Not only do found objects open dialogues with the present moment, their dislocation also animates the past. In Freeman, Nienass, and Daniell’s words, “The past often serves as a screen on which we project our present ambitions and future aspirations.”⁷ Bringing into our mind this dislocation and the relationship between human and non-human to the present moment, we might also direct the question, “what happened to you?” to an already gone, missing human body. A body, similar to a marginal object, that has been chiseled away from the foundation of the good life and left adrift. In this regard, found objects can initiate what Iversen suggests, encounters of traumatic effect.⁸ Many artists have been using found materials as a way to silhouette past traumatic events. To name a few, *The REDress Project*⁹ uses donated red dresses to symbolize the missing or murdered indigenous women across Canada. As part of the Yanköşe Project, Vahit Tuna’s artwork *untitled*¹⁰ is a public installation piece where 440 pairs of high heels vertically hang on the outside of a building. “Each pair represents a woman in Turkey that was killed by her partner in 2018.”¹¹

⁶ Joseph Brodsky, *Watermark / Joseph Brodsky*. (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1992), 61.

⁷ Lindsey A. Freeman, Benjamin Nienass, and Rachel Daniell, *Silence, Screen, and Spectacle: Rethinking Social Memory in the Age of Information*, 1st ed. (Berghahn Books, 15), 2.

⁸ Margaret Iversen, "Readymade, Found Object, Photograph", *Art Journal* 63, no. 2 (2004): 50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043249.2004.10791125>.

⁹ “The REDress project,” <http://www.redressproject.org/>

¹⁰ “Yanköşe Project” <https://www.unlimiteddrag.com/single-post/2019/11/21/260-square-meters>

¹¹ Jessica Stewart, “440 High Heels Installed on Giant Wall to Honor Female Victims of Domestic Violence,” <https://mymodernmet.com/vahit-tuna-femicide-art-installation/>



Figure A1. Photo of red dresses encountered in downtown Vancouver, 2019. Photo taken by Xinyue Liu.



Figure A2. Installation view of Vahit Tuna's *untitled* in Yanköşe Project, 2019. Image by Flufoto.¹²

Here, as Irit Rogoff states, “a marking of the body for the signification of identity would take the form of attributes such as clothes or tools or ethnographically marked objects.”¹³ The objects, missing the pillar of a human body, become marked ones. By exposing their incomplete carcasses, the found objects welcome the viewers to see through them, and to emphasize with absent bodies from different timelines.

Found objects' displacement, between the marked, present location and the ambiguous, past ones, bears resemblance to the souvenir in Susan Stewart's *On Longing*. Here, the souvenir is seen as emblematic of nostalgia, the longing for its place

¹² Ecem Arslanay, '260 square meters', mixed media, artunlimited, Yanköşe Project, 21 November 2019, <https://www.unlimitedrag.com/post/2019/11/21/260-square-meters>.

¹³ Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2000), 144.

of origin.¹⁴ As Stewart suggests, “The nostalgia of the souvenir plays in the distance between the present and an imagined, prelapsarian experience, experience as it might be ‘directly lived’.”¹⁵ This connection to an un-lived, imagined life is best manifested in an installation artwork named *Toi que jamais je ne termine*. In it, Sophie Jodoin laid down 116 books gathered from second-hand sources. With each book opened to its title page, 116 words and phrases overlap and co-present “a portrait of the feminine—a feminine that can never be completed, or is even impossible”¹⁶. Translated from French, some of the titles continuously read, “...dangerous, insatiable, irresistible, the devil himself...”, and “...the insurgent, the rebel, the terrorist, the woman to kill, guilty...”.

This work demonstrates vividly how found object can translate immobility to mobile emotions. These objects are nothing but still, albeit lying immobile on a plinth. The mobility, I argue, comes from the mind of a viewer. The “impossible feminine” described in the artwork holds no physical form, but for that, she also has infinite bodies. With each visit, she fleshes out and redefines. From the point of view of the audience, each time we exercise our imagination, a narrative is generated. This narrative possesses the capability to “generate significant objects and hence to both generate and engender a significant other”¹⁷.

The existence residing in the physical remains is a fickle one. As Rebecca Schneider states, “Disappearance is not antithetical to remains,”¹⁸ rather, it “clings to remains – absent flesh ghost bones.”¹⁹ In a similar fashion, Roland Barthes describes a body being captured by a film camera. Being separated from the original subject, the image being documented on the photograph is the figure of inauthenticity²⁰, bearing

¹⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), xii.

¹⁵ Stewart, 139

¹⁶ Sophie Jodoin, “Toi que jamais je ne termine,” <https://www.sophiejodoin.com/#/toi-que-jamais-je-ne-termine-1/>

¹⁷ Stewart, xi.

¹⁸ Rebecca Schneider, ‘Performance Remains’, *Performance Research* 6, no. 2 (2001): 104, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2001.10871792>.

¹⁹ Schneider, 104

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 13.

resemblance to its original form yet utterly different, “a ghost of referentiality.”²¹ Bounces ceaselessly back and forth between the body of imagination and oneself, the viewer’s wrestling sensations cling tightly to the found objects.

Found objects protrude as solid matters against the beating currents in the river of time. Their material nature permits the objects relatively longer lifespans. Traveling in time, they are used as tokens for the viewers to beckon images that sometimes do not belong to the current time and space. The found objects neither deny their existence, nor have the intention to confess what has gone missing. Their power left us infinite space to imagine and to project.



Figure A3. Installation view of Sophie Jodoin’s *Toi que jamais je ne termine*, Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, Québec, 2019.²²

As such, found objects with their physical bodies hold in place the permeating, intriguing absence. What happens when we purposefully try to salvage the absence? In

²¹ Iversen, 50.

²² Sophie Jodoin, ‘Toi que jamais je ne termine’, mixed media, Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal, Québec, accessed 11 December 2019, <https://www.sophiejodoin.com>.

other words, can the “ghost of referentiality” in found objects ever be exorcized when it is endowed with new meaning?

The Journey

Unlike an immobile object, the traditional filmic projection does not shy away from drawing attention to itself. It is not too hard to achieve when the area that needs to be looked at is the one lit up. The binary of brightness and darkness in film projection creates a desirable condition for illusions and spectacles to take place. The dimmed environment invites the audiences to stay immersed, and to a certain level, forget for a moment their own selves. The audience then become the passive witnesses of the spectacles – spectators.²³

“During the screening of the film, the audience is present, and aware of the actor, but the actor is absent, and unaware of the audience.”²⁴ This way of seeing is enhanced in the film apparatus theory, as the audience who sits in the darkened room is seen as a voyeur. The voyeur gains what feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey articulated as “visual pleasure”²⁵ from viewing and identifying, without fearing to be looked back. But this static position is no longer safe. As D. R. Young suggests, “today’s spectator (now more properly thought of as a user/consumer) is increasingly in direct bodily contact with the screen and, moreover, just as frequently transformed into spectacle himself.”²⁶

In the 1970s, experiments of avant-garde and expanded cinema radically challenged the relationship between the spectators and the cinema spectacle. Artists began to question the composition of film apparatuses, dissecting them, magicians seeing through their own hats. The audience was invited to walk through the façade of the screen, to be in close contact with the scenes behind. As examples, in both artworks

²³ Tom Gunning, “The Long and the Short of It: Centuries of Projecting Shadows, from Natural Magic to the Avant-garde,” in *Art of Projection*, eds. Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 32

²⁴ Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema: The Imaginary Signifier*, Trans. Celia Britton [and Others]., Language, Discourse, Society (London: Macmillan, 1982), 95.

²⁵ Laura Mulvey, ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’, in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, ed. Laura Mulvey, Language, Discourse, Society (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1989), 14.

²⁶ D. R. Young, ‘The Vicarious Look, or, Andy Warhol’s Apparatus Theory’, *Film Criticism* 39, no. 2 (2 March 2015): 26.

- *Light music* by Lis Rhodes, and *the machine* by Steve Ferrer - the viewers became part of the moving images, and was able to look at the projector in its barest form. The spatial relationship between the audience and the projection space has thus been reshaped.



Figure A4. Installation view of *Displacement* by Michael Naimark. Image published in 'Two Unusual Projection Spaces', *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual environments*.²⁷

To further elaborate, in 1977, driven by the question, “why movie cameras move and movie projectors do not.”²⁸ Michael Naimark created the artwork named *displacement*. He first set up a stereotypical-looking living room composed of furniture from thrift stores. Then he recorded actors within the space with an analogue film camera on a rotating turntable. The furniture in the living room are painted white to be used as a screen. Later, a film projector with similar lens replaced the camera on the same turntable, and played back the film in the same, rotating manner.²⁹ This project is

²⁷ Michael Naimark, 'Two Unusual Projection Spaces', *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments* 14, no. 5 (2005): 597–605, <https://doi.org/10.1162/pres.2005.14.5.597>.

²⁸ Michael Naimark, 'Two Unusual Projection Spaces', *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments* 14, no. 5 (2005): 598, <https://doi.org/10.1162/pres.2005.14.5.597>.

²⁹ Naimark, 598.

later considered to be the first case of projection augmented model, also known as PA model.³⁰

Naimark's *displacement*, as its name suggests, demonstrates the time displaced by the camera and later restored by the projector. The present moment did not augment with the past; it simply is displaced. The projector with its circular movement did not fix this unsalvageable time difference, but illuminated the mesmerizing in-between-ness of the present and the past.

Building on this observation, I would argue that today, with digital projection, we will continuously be haunted by the temporal displacement between the image and the screen.

To begin with, where is the image located? Is it in the beam of light which projector throws? Between the projector and the projected, dances solitarily the beam of light that carries the encrypted information. Here, Erin Manning's concept of thought in motion might be useful. Before the light touches down, its existence is perpetually suspended, well illuminated, yet in its incognito. A phantom, a "prearticulation"³¹ that awaits patiently in its primitive form. The projection image takes a ghostly trajectory, disappearing in the middle and reappearing in the end.

Or is the image located in the midst of transmission? Unlike the film reels from the past, the digital memory is now portable and in many occasions intangible. One no longer needs a camera to produce images. Computer-generated imagery and graphic animation open windows to numerous wonders and extravaganzas. The wireless transmission has made the image bodiless. Seemingly, time can finally be constructed, processed, and "mummified"³² to resist the inevitable decadence. Unlike a material object that takes up certain physical space, once the film is made, it becomes

³⁰ Emily Bennett and Brett Stevens, 'The Effect That the Visual and Haptic Problems Associated with Touching a Projection Augmented Model Have on Object-Presence', *PRESENCE: Teleoperators and Virtual Environments* 15, no. 4 (2006): 420, <https://doi.org/10.1162/pres.15.4.419>.

³¹ Erin Manning, 'Conclusion: Propositions for Thought in Motion' (The MIT Press, 2009), 216.

³² André Bazin and Hugh Gray, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 8, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1210183>.

transportable, and can be played at different locations concurrently. Digital image seems to have become immortal.

The phenomena of new technology's bodilessness has not gone unnoticed. In Mary Ann Doane's view, not only does digital projection violate the ontological materialization of archive - "the digital archive is either everywhere or nowhere,"³³ it further disrupts one's sense of geographical orientation - "dematerializes location, undoes solidity, and destabilizes the spectator's assurance of position."³⁴ For Freeman, Nienass, and Daniell, "What these technologies often screen is absence or silence, becoming fecund spaces that open up possibilities for critical thinking in the vein of John Cage's provocative 4'33" recording."³⁵

In the maze of the digital landscape, I propose that we return to the found objects as a way of anchoring displacement. By doing so, we might be able to create narratives "as a structure of desire, a structure that both invents and distances its object and thereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified that is the place of generation for the symbolic."³⁶ By assigning intangible thoughts to a physical body, one might be able to rest their emotions in a harbor, where the body of water soothes its surface from the turbulent journey of returning home.

This notion resonates with Fiona Tan's video film installation *Island*³⁷. In this film, the consecutive, black and white images of trees and landscape from an island unravel in a tranquil manner. There are no actors nor visible human activities. The only audible sound is the soliloquy of the narrator, creating to a dreamlike universe. The stark digital image transformed the landscape to become a found object which is then inscribed by the voice over and over again. Lingering aimlessly with the undulating narrative, the viewers may momentarily find themselves slowly becoming the islands. Thus, the projected image is close to what Tim Ingold's describes, "An imagined landscape... a

³³ Mary Ann Doane, "The Location of the Image: Cinematic Projection and Scale in Modernity," in *Art of Projection*, eds. Stan Douglas & Christopher Eamon (Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 152

³⁴ Doane, 161

³⁵ Freeman, Nienass, and Daniell, 7

³⁶ Stewart, ix

³⁷ Fiona Tan, "ISLAND," <https://fionatan.nl/project/island/>

landscape not of being but of becoming: a composition not of objects and surfaces but of movements and stillness, not there to be surveyed but cast in the current of time.”³⁸



Figure A5. Still from HD video installation *Island* by Fiona Tan, 15', black & white, ADAGP, Paris, 2008.³⁹

The Travelers

The weightless image becomes heavy upon landing. The journey between the departure (projector) and the arrival (object) is made complex by the two mediums from both ends. Once “the interception of a beam of light by a surface, which is totally foreign to the image”⁴⁰ takes place, the light begins to shapeshift, caressing the skin of the objects which support its presence. The objects being touched, on the other side, find themselves to be rife with exotic, strange new meanings.

Being put amongst the distant yet lucid landscape which the light formulates, one might feel a certain degree of self-loss. This sense of lost and disorientation perhaps should not strike as a surprise to the twenty-first century audience, especially when taking into consideration the ongoing and unstoppable state of globalization. The rapid

³⁸ Monica Janowski and Tim Ingold, *Imagining Landscapes Past, Present and Future / Edited by Monica Janowski, Tim Ingold.*, Anthropological Studies of Creativity and Perception (Farnham, Surrey, England ; Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate PubLtd, 2012), 10.

³⁹ Fiona Tan, 'Island'. 'Fiona Tan', AWARE Women artists / Femmes artistes, accessed 22 December 2020, <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/fiona-tan/>.

⁴⁰ Doane, 155

expansion of global mobility calls forth a reconsideration of our physical, as well as geopolitical position.

Our vision and our bodily sensations are affected by, whether consciously and unconsciously, the constant shifting picture of our surroundings. Irit Rogoff argues that we need to rewrite the relations between the geography and one's identity in order to reflect contemporary conditions.⁴¹ Hito Steyerl in a similar vein states the advancement of technology, such as aircrafts, surveillance systems, and Global Positioning System accelerates a destabilized, aerial vision.⁴² She states, "Many contemporary philosophers have pointed out that the present moment is distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness."⁴³

However, as T.J. Demos points out, it is noteworthy that "the term globalization calls up notorious ambiguity, representing an empty signifier nearly meaningless today, much like the word freedom, if used without further qualification."⁴⁴ To alleviate some of the ambiguity brought inevitably by the term, here I focus on the displacement engaged with the advancement of transportation technology, and examine how does projection on found objects can be read as a metaphor when it comes to the interpretation of one's geographical dislocation under the spell of global mobility.

Modern transportation technologies promise a network of connection. In a heartbeat, one can be anywhere, anytime. During a commute riding the Skytrain in Vancouver, I once encountered an advertisement campaign by transport2050.ca, stating, "In 2050, flying passenger drones could save road congestion." And providing two answers to its readers: A, "Great! It's probably way faster than driving", or B, "No thanks. I'm already scared of heights." This perhaps could serve as an insight for a tendency, a general desire for moving further, faster. Even when sitting underground, our vision is called to rise above our living plane. "Mobility is reality"⁴⁵ has become a

⁴¹ Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2000), 2

⁴² Hito Steyerl, "In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective," in *The Wretched of the Screen / Hito Steyerl* ; [Introduction by Franco 'Bifo' Berardi], E-Flux Journal (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 23.

⁴³ Steyerl, 13

⁴⁴ T. J. Demos, 'Moving Images of Globalization', *Grey Room* 37, no. 37 (2009): 7, <https://doi.org/10.1162/grey.2009.1.37.6>.

⁴⁵ Tokarczuk, 234

slogan, an everyday necessity, summoning our generation to give rise to a collective refusal to stillness. This refusal even whispers into the ears of those who are already on the move. Caught in this high flow of traffic, perhaps it is safe to say our way of seeing or even knowing is no longer grounded.

When we start to move with such a high velocity, our visions can become distorted, no longer mapped to the correct location. For the ones who travel across the borders, traversing various foreign lands, not even their bodily senses can be trusted. Between places, the travelers are entities with no identities. Olga Tokarczuk's portrays the temporarily loss of existence as such:

I think there are a lot of people like me. Who aren't around, who've disappeared. They show up all of a sudden in the arrivals terminal and start to exist when the immigrations officers stamp their passport, or when the polite receptionist at whatever hotel hands over their key. By now they must have become aware of their own instability and dependence upon places, times of day, on language or on a city and its atmosphere.⁴⁶

Situating at the nerve endings of the grid of transportation are the places where shadows yield to illumination, where travelers suddenly appear. With this metaphor, geographical places can be read as found objects, intercepting the shifting beam of light that is the shifting global geopolitical condition. To project on found objects is to gently suggest a landing plane for one to harbor their turbulent experiences with a vessel of the past, that alludes familiarity, a place both lost and found. Perhaps a place that can be called home.

Domestic space has become one of the significant motifs commonly used in contemporary visual artworks concerning found objects and projection. Ghinwa Yassine's *Home, suspended* is an immersive video installation where six pieces of found furniture are suspended from the ceiling. Under the bed Yassine projects an animated film of her family disappearing and reappearing rhythmically. To her, the images are "The leftovers of an identity that is constantly morphing every time it faces change."⁴⁷ The work speaks beautifully to her experiences of relocating home in a foreign country. *STENOP.ES* is another film installation art piece where digital projection is used by Romain Alary and Antoine Levi in a domestic surrounding. Only this time, the room

⁴⁶ Tokarczuk, 58.

⁴⁷ Ghinwa Yassine, <https://www.ghinwayassine.com/home-suspended>

stayed still and the projection was manipulated to mimic the technique of camera obscura.⁴⁸ The landscape appeared to be upside down, perplexing the spatial perception of this otherwise ordinary room. Both of the two works grapple with the creation and disruption of domesticity and intimacy. The digital projections were saturated, making unhomely the domestic spaces. Here, film projection on found objects portrays the condition of losing touch with previous dwellings. Each time we depart, a part of the past is gone. As Mati Diop says in her film *A Thousand Suns (Mille Soleils)*, “You don’t have a home until you leave it and then, when you have left it, you never can go back.”⁴⁹

In both pieces, the space destabilizes, falls apart, suspended then in its own its explosion. Gravity seems to have lost its credibility, discombobulating viewers in a space full of uncertainties. This perhaps can be explained with Steyerl’s notion of groundlessness, “Objects will stay suspended if you let go of them.”⁵⁰ An individual’s loss of position resulted in the objects’ weightlessness. When gravity stops working, there are no more orientations, but a perpetual fluidity.

⁴⁸ STENOP. ES, <http://stenop.es/about/>

⁴⁹ James Williams, ‘A Thousand Suns: Traversing the Archive and Transforming Documentary in Mati Diop’s *Mille Soleils*’, *Film Quarterly*, 2016, 85.

⁵⁰ Steyerl, 13



Figure A6. Installation view of *STENOP.ES*.⁵¹

Where might this metaphor lead us? Perhaps as Steyerl suggests, “falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a certainty of falling into place.”⁵² The metaphor concerning film projection on found objects is one that evokes curiosity and affection. It calls for the viewer to be more aware of their surroundings. And in the midst of displacement, to be more considerate towards the current statuses as well as the past events. The metaphor should not be caught in the vortex of infinite nostalgia, but with notions of care and affection, to be more in tune with future possibilities. In this way, as Tim Ingold suggests, film projection on found objects could be “a way that would reunite perception and imagination while yet acknowledging the human condition.”⁵³

⁵¹ STENOP.ES, “India – Ghat”. STENOP.ES’, accessed 22 December 2020, <http://stenop.es/india-ghat/>.

⁵² Steyerl, 29

⁵³ Janowski and Ingold, 3.

Conclusion

In the midst of the sweeping movement of globalization, we see video and film work often utilizing archival image and objects, and speak to the formations of individual and collective identity shaped by the global culture.⁵⁴ Using projection on found objects is a way of creating narratives that seek belonging. Combining film projection with found objects together, our visions stands a chance of being grounded.

Our identities are made complex by the territories we stand on. The presence of absence, dwelling in both film projection and found objects, invite a conversation of curiosity and imagination. The story of film projection and found objects is one that concerns with our physical and geopolitical positions. We are made to think not only of those who stayed but also those who left. While materiality functions as a nodal point that promises certain stability, be that an object or a geographical place, projection recreates the illusion of motion, corresponding to the unsteady, shifting political landscape.

To project an ephemeral beam of light onto a material found object is to find a location for displacement to reside, sheltering absence with presence, replacing dislocation with a place. It means not to resolve the sense of displacement, but to home it, to keep the longing of the places of origin at bay, in the arms of materiality, at least temporarily.

⁵⁴ Fiona Tan, *Rise and Fall: Fiona Tan / with Contributions from Bruce Grenville [and Others]*. (Vancouver: Art Gallery, 2009), 17.

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Appendix B.

Video Documentation

Creator/Director: Xinyue Liu

Editor: Xinyue Liu

Composer: Kourosh Ghamsari-Esfahani

Choreographer: Tomoyo Yamada

Description:

Perennial – Front full length video in HD format.

File Name:

Perennial.mp4