RMIT UNIVERSITY

**Halfway to Paradise: Documenting people and place, fictional constructs
and considerations for post-documentary**

A project submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Keith Deverell

Master of Design (Communication Design), RMIT University

School of Art

College of Design and Social Context

RMIT University

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgment has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or part to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the exegesis/project is the result of the work that has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved program; and any editorial work paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged.

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Introduction

This research focuses on the field of video art practice, of which I am an active participant. My video works bridge the fields of sound art, documentary film, and performance. I believe video art is a rich and diverse art form that examines the real world as found and existing. Historically, video art has developed as a political and self-reflexive medium that has often sought to turn its critical gaze on mainstream media, and the technologies it uses as its foundation. From this perspective, it plays a significant role in how we understand the world.

As an art form with unlimited formal boundaries, it has pushed the medium of moving image far beyond the boundaries of traditional television and film. With its roots in self-reflexivity and the growing expansion of documentary works within the art world, video art is playing an important role in redefining documentary practice. This research considers the potential for video art to move past documentary and into post-documentary. This consideration has developed from John Corner's propositional paper 'Documentary in a Post-Documentary Culture? A Note on Forms and their Functions' (1999).

In 'Documentary in a Post-Documentary Culture? A Note on Forms and their Functions', Corner responds to the growth and diversity of reality television programs by asking if "'documentary' is now an unhelpful category with which to assess current changes occurring in factual television" (Corner 1999, p.126).In doing so he outlines a case for documentary to be considered as an adjective rather than a noun. He proposes that it is more useful to ask 'is this a documentary project?' rather than 'is this film a documentary? (Corner 1999, p.126). From this critical perspective, Corner developed four functions of documentary: 'The project of democratic civics'; 'Documentary as journalistic inquiry and exposition'; 'Documentary as radical interrogation and alternative perspective', and 'Documentary as diversion'.

In another paper, 'What can we say about 'Documentary'?' Corner concludes by saying "there is a very real sense in which we are moving into the 'post-documentary' era" (2000, p.687). He outlines this step as: not being the result of documentary's collapse under the pressure of postmodern doubt or of digital image technology but, by contrast, as a result of the widespread dispersal (and, in part, perhaps dissipation) of documentarist energies and appeals across a much larger area of audio-visual culture (Corner 2000, p.688).

The dispersal and dissipation across a much larger area of audio-visual culture, sees documentary projects appearing outside of the traditional domains of television and film, and includes, amongst others, media, video, sound, installation and performance art. Through this dispersion, it is understandable that established conventions in documentary practice are being contested and expanded.

As is the case with reality television, many art-based documentary projects blur the boundaries between what is factual and what is fiction, reality and non-reality. This blurring places a potential strain on Bill Nichols's argument that "documentary is a discourse of sobriety". For Nichols, the discourse of sobriety includes "the ways we have of speaking directly about social and historical reality such as science, economics, medicine, military strategy, foreign policy, and educational policy" (Nichols 2001, p.89). Nichols makes the case that discourses of sobriety "are seldom receptive to whim or fantasy, to "make-believe" characters or imaginary worlds"(Nichols 2001,p .89). He also makes the case that as "an image-based medium, documentaries lack essential qualities of spoken and written discourse, such as the immediacy and spontaneity of dialogue or the rigorous logic of the written essay" (Nichols 2001, p.89). He does, however, claim "documentary still upholds the traditions of sobriety in its determination to make a difference in how we regard the world and proceed within it" (Nichols 2001, p.89).

Conducted through a practice-led research model, this research, draws upon Corner's proposition that we can regard the present period as 'post-documentary' to examine the possibilities of post-documentary forms and functions within video art practices and their outcomes. This research focuses on how radical interrogation and alternate perspectives manifest within the realm of art-based documentary projects and practices.

Document structure

This dissertation has been written in a non-linear format which presents a collection of thoughts and reflections rather than a single linear argument. The four texts that make up this dissertation reflect upon contentions which arise when we consider practices of art and documentary. In each text, a trajectory is drawn through the complex space of critical theory surrounding documentary form and practice. This research considers this milieu of critical discourse and how it relates to video art. In doing so, consideration

is given to peer artworks, as well as video works made during this research, to examine where alignments and contentions arise between art and documentary.

The texts have been intentionally written in a non-linear form so as to engage with a fundamental politic and method of making that has evolved in my art practice through this candidature. Historically I have sought restraint in offering conclusions and polemics in my work. As an artist, I have long been interested in the open-ended space of speculation and reflection. I am interested in how poetics, through metaphors and analogies, and sensory reactions, through sound, light and space, can inform or enable possibilities for narratives that lie beyond the initial scope of the subject enquiry. What I mean by this is that in my art practice I engage strongly with my subject. However, the way I present my thoughts, findings, feelings of a subject, is done in such a way as to present the context of the subject, rather drawing a conclusion about it. I find myself resistant to make a case, or argue for something. This goes against the traditions of rhetoric, often used as a primary function within a documentary practice. What has revealed itself through this candidature is how video works of various forms can mediate contradictions. The process of reaching this understanding in my practice has developed through an interest in mythology as an initial reaction to history. The concept of mediation is unpacked in the chapter 'Singing with the sirens'.

In the chapter 'Shifting spatial and temporal registers', the focus turns to material considerations of video art, including the re-temporisation of an image by sound, extreme durations, slow motion, and spatial configuration of multiple channels of video. These formal aspects of video art have been considered alongside Henry Bergson's concept of switching temporal registers and the critical theories of affect as developed by such theorists as Alan Badiou, Bergson and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. My preoccupation with this area of critical thought is summed up somewhat by Simon O'Sullivan when he says:

> Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced. (O'Sullivan 2001, p.81).

Conversely, I would also argue that we gain knowledge through experience, and hence, why I feel a need to conjoin the materialistic and the metaphorical. The materialist/realist and the correlationist opposition are furthered examined in the chapter 'Running aground on the sandbanks of sobriety'. I consider traditional problems and discourses in documentary making. Of interest is Nichols's argument that text in some form –interview, narration, conversation– is required, as text enables the rigour needed in creating an argument on a particular topic. In opposition to Nichols's requirement for text, I have for a long time mediated images with sound to evoke a sense of argument or sensation that pertains to the subject that I am investigating. The addition of text used as a voice of authority seems to undermine the poetic and aesthetic through my visual sonic investigations of subjects, people and places. This position of not using text, and exploring such things as direct observation, intervention, and sound design, has led me to consider the various and expanded forms a work of documentary can take. The very first work made for this research, *Hidden in the Shadow of Lovers*, has been used to consider this question. This work introduces the chapter 'The Mirror of Identity' which builds upon the question, how far is too far for a video work to be considered a documentary? This text also examines how we perceive truths, realities and where the bias lies in images and historical accounts, all critical concerns that plague documentary and art practice.

As with many of the critical positions and arguments that surround documentary and art, and in particular ones that concern themselves with notions of truth and reality, idealism and realism, the space for absolutism is limited. With this in mind, I conclude that a significant function of post-documentary is its potential for mediation rather than persuasion. This perspective and offering of new knowledge, alongside other reflections on video art's role in determining what might be post-documentary practice, forms and functions are summarised in the conclusion.

HIDDEN IN THE SHADOW OF LOVERS, HD VIDEO, 2012

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1. Running aground on the sand banks of sobriety

This chapter starts with the making of *The Flat Earth Society*, a single channel video I made with the condition of it being a documentary, although the work was not to be bound by traditional concepts or styles of documentary precepts. Examination of this work will seek to define forms and functions of documentary practice, and where they conflict with the formal attributes of the work. During the initial examination of *The Flat Earth Society*, I will introduce aspects of my past practice, in particular, *The Hawker's Song* and the *Grace Note* editions. These projects — including *Grace Note IV*, made during this candidature — have specific documentary attributes, but like *The Flat Earth Society*, they house potential conflicts with established definitions of documentary. By demonstrating and highlighting these conflicts, I will position my practice as an art practice concerned with post-documentary form and storytelling.

The intention with *The Flat Earth Society* was to create a disruption in my practice. This disruption was made by defining the work, at the outset, as a documentary. It should be acknowledged that I was not interested in creating a traditional documentary film—if there is such a thing. Instead, I was interested in exploring what might constitute a documentary work using my personal style of video production and storytelling. In particular, slow motion video, performative structures, sound design without narration, and poetic connections between subjects. I was interested to see how far I could push traditional expectations of documentary form and subject.

The subject of *The Flat Earth Society* focused on the history of dystopian novels. I was interested in the lineage of writing that forged the genre. This interest in dystopia centres on its ability, much like science fiction, to comment and contest current socio-political trajectories through the hyperrealisation of them. As the research into the subject developed, I was also drawn to the plight of female characters, and the lack of women writers in the field, even though a few such as Ursula K. Le Guin and Margaret Attwood have written seminal books in the field.

Early in the research, I wrote a script, which is the first time I had done so, to inform the work's development. In the past, I had written Cage-like rule systems, which defined the boundaries of activities that could be adhered to or not. These rule-based works were geared to performative structures and live performance. This poetic script helped forge some performative strategies to explore particular threads and commonalities found in many

of the books researched, and later led to the development of a shot list. The performative elements, discussed in more detail later, were intercut with historical references and found footage. These indexical elements were used to create links between themes discovered in the books and current events and their imagined trajectories happening globally.

It would be fair to say *The Flat Earth Society* treads a thin line between being a piece of fictional dystopia and a documentary. This blurriness of form highlights the problematic of, or slippage between, fiction and non-fiction, as well potential differences between art and documentary, and the rules afforded to each.

For American film critic and theorist Bill Nichols, a documentary must focus on the world (Nichols 1991). Conversely, a film that creates a world, or focuses on other worlds, renders as fiction or cinema (Nichols 1991), an immediate problem with calling *The Flat Earth Society* a documentary. This distinction between fact and fiction in film is blurry at best. If we also consider Nichols's observation that documentary is governed by institution, and institutions in part determine the rules of production, documentary made within art practice enables rules, styles and voices more commonly associated with art (Nichols 1991). Bringing documentary into art further conflates this fuzziness. The fuzziness created by bringing documentary into art extends to subject, form and medium.

We can also consider Carl Plantinga's reading of Nicholas Wolterstorff's theory of projected worlds. Plantinga argues that through every representational work of art, an agent projects a world, or state of affairs. When a writer or filmmaker takes an assertive stance toward the world projected through the work, he or she asserts that the state of affairs making up that projected world holds or occurs in the actual world. The assertive stance can thus be extended to artists regardless of medium (Plantinga 2005).

Nichols argues that documentary is a discipline of sobriety (1991), which is an acknowledgement of a discipline's inherent realism, 'the real world as found or existing'. At this point, we need to ask what is the world we know? This is where we find the naturalism-realism debate. Whilst naturalism seeks to represent the world of appearances, realism takes the position that the world exists external to and independent of thought and language.

Realism can arguably take in the world of inner experience. A problem with naturalism is that simply showing the world of appearances does not always convey all that we may need or wish to represent.

The real unobtainable

The big question, which I feel we cannot draw an absolute answer to, is what is the real world? What is found or existing? On one hand, we have Meillassoux and his Correlationism, developed through a passage of critical thinking that has included key thinkers such as Derrida, Zizek, Barthes and Meillassoux (see Cox 2015). In Correlationism the objective and the subjective cannot be separated as things do not exist outside of human cognition and perception. On the other hand, realism argues the opposite, that objects exist outside of the human world of thought and language. Scientific evidence of events such as The Big Bang theory, points to a world prior to human consciousness which deflates the idea that nothing exists outside of human perception. But we must escape the double bind that reduces science to just one more set of subjective perceptions. In Meillassoux's criticism of correlationism, he asks the correlationist "what is it that happened 4.56 billion years ago? Did the accretion of the earth happen, yes or no?" (Meillassoux 2008). He argues that we are left with a rather extraordinary claim:

> the ancestral statement is a true statement, in that it is objective, but one whose referent cannot possibly have actually existed in the way this truth describes it. It is a true statement, but what it describes as real is an impossible event; it is an 'objective' statement, but it has no conceivable object (Meillassoux 2008).

Art's mooring to post-structuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis, the dominant critical theory of the last half century, casts a shadow on claims that art focuses on the world; that unlike documentary, art is not inherently realist. Again, Nichols argues, the pain felt from the lion's attack is real (2001). However, my contention is that we are talking about the recording, recounting and representation of stories, things, and events. If nothing exists outside of text, as claimed by Derrida, and text is constructed, what is the point where something is something said to be real? (Cox 2015). If, as argued, we cannot separate the objective and the subjective, then everything that is deemed real, is also in degrees unreal or synthetic. Slavoj Zizek

highlights this by saying 'The pre-synthetic Real is, stricto sensu, impossible: a level that must be retroactively presupposed, but can never actually be encountered' (cited in Cox 2015, p. 108).

In contrast to the dominant views of post-structuralism, deconstruction, and psychoanalysis, the recent interest in materialism and realism has bought back into contention the existence of objects that sit outside of text. Critical theory stemming from the position of Realism Materialism Art (RMA) argues against Meillassoux's correlationism (Cox 2015). For the correlationist, the world is only ever the world for thought or the experience of a subject. "The existence of things in themselves, independent of their relationship to the thinking or experiencing subject, is either bracketed as inaccessible or dismissed as action" (Cox 2015, p.108).

RMA highlights and problematises attempts in philosophy and conceptual thought "to capture and represent the real", through alignment with prominent alternative thinkers such as Alain Badiou and François Laruelle (see Cox 2015). Laruelle, whose thinking is grounded in realism, offers the perspective that philosophy and conceptual thought "are already a part of the Real and thus cannot project themselves outside of the Real in order to capture its totality" (Cox 2015, p19). This ongoing and complex critical discussion positions this research within a fundamental problem that highlights a contention between practices of art and documentary. If we are to claim that documentary is inherently realist and art is not, then do we assume that documentary is not a subset of art? If we separate documentary from art and enable an either/or scenario, where does it leave artists such as Santiago Sierra, or artworks such as Tracey Emin's *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*? If documentary is to be considered a subset, genre or voice of art, and a voice that can be both objective and subjective, observational and poetic, can or does documentary lose its inherent realism? If this is the case, is this where we find post-documentary?

The problem is that documentary's role with, law, science, and history are concerned with deciphering and shaping the real world. This real world is represented through the recording of histories, the collection and representation of data, descriptions of matter, and the writing of laws, all of which can be considered abstractions of the human mind. When an experience becomes a record, we leave the real and enter the psychoanalytical and the subjective. The real is only obtainable in the moment of experience before it's written into dreams, histories, books of law, objects in art galleries and projections in cinemas.

Are dreams less real than the earth we walk on? Do self-reflexive works have less realism than explorations of the pain of others? The abstraction of matter to algorithms, images to molecules and data, all reside in the realm of the recorded, and the abstracted. Representations that purport to be realistic are always an interpretation and an account of an experience, be it first or third hand. Our observation of objects, natural and manmade, are done so through devices and modes of looking and interpretation which brings us back to the complication of the real, of fact and fiction, conscious and unconscious experience, the mythical and the historical. For humans it is hard not to project symbolic value onto objects, meanings that might account for a particular perspective or person. In the end, the maker has little control of the receiver, we encode and they decode.

Style and form

Nichols states, documentary is "a discourse of sobriety, that style is second to content; content is what counts—the real world as found or existing" (Nichols 2001, p.89), which poses a particular problem for artists, as it does for documentary makers. The problem in this statement is the acknowledgement of style as significant in documentary filmmaking, clearly defining documentary as relating to a particular style of storytelling. The style or voice of documentaries reveals a distinct form of engagement with the historical world, whereas, fictional style conveys a distinct, imaginary world (Nichols 2001, p.89).

In *The Flat Earth Society*, there is a clear stylistic intention. It is shot in slow motion and graded to black and white, with an embedded film grain. It uses performance to encapsulate its subject. The use of found footage is also a stylistic choice. *The Flat Earth Society's* voice is engaged with the historical world, even though it appears imaginary. In this sense we can compare Zizek's 'impossible' to materialist concepts espoused by Badiou, "that truth … begins with a decision. The decision to say that the event has taken place" (Badiou 2001). For Badiou, a "truth appears, in its newness, because an eventful supplement interrupts repetition" (Badiou 2001). Badiou argues that, this event "has taken place, which I can neither calculate, nor demonstrate, but to which I shall be faithful" (Badiou 2001).

It can be argued that the decision belongs to the imagination, as in, the act of informing new ideas. This decision, which happens posthumously, sets the scene to tell the story of the event. Through the story of the event, the event becomes real. In this sense, the event itself is subsequently beholden to the bias of storytelling. Stuart Hall illustrates this within a televisual discourse when he says "an event must become a 'story' before it can become a communicative event" (Hall 1993). He continues to say: "the moment when a historical event passes under the sign of discourse, it is subject to all the complex formal 'rules' by which language signifies" (Hall 1993).

Meillassouxs discourse of mathematics falls under this light. In his essay 'After Finitude' (2008), Meillassoux asks the question "What is it that permits mathematical discourse to bring to light experiments whose material informs us about a world anterior to experience?" His question brings to light contradictions within Correlationism, but in answering the question, we need to consider the formal rules of mathematics — as we do with any given form of storytelling — and what this enables or not is the process of enquiry and the subsequent telling of its story.

The found footage in *The Flat Earth Society* was sourced from public domain archives, which adds to the stylistic voice of the film. This was a political decision. Whilst the whole world it seems, is available on youTube, the public domain is limited to those who desire to share, in turn limiting narrative possibilities. A consequence of this limitation was the removal of accusations against particular organisations, peoples and governments. The found footage acted as symbols, referencing the milieu of the subject, rather than detailing the individual's role. In this sense, the work aimed to explore the greater contradictions and consequences of globalisation and the war economy.

The Hawker's Song, an investigation into the lives of street hawkers in an ever changing environment of substantial development in Phnom Penh, plays with style by using two different mediums to capture its subject: HD Video, in the style of run and gun journalism, and Standard 8 film. Both mediums were used to comment stylistically on the subject. Standard 8 film was used to engage with the historical aspect of the story, the lineage of trades and the social history of street hawkers. In contrast, the HD footage sought to contemporise the subject matter: the inherent problems street

hawkers are currently facing, and the nature of cultural change that is happening as the country rebuilds after a long war. Other stylistic aspects of this project included the use of journalistic style videography, observational footage, and artistic interventions, in particular with Sokhorn Meas performing the role of a street hawker.

As this chapter progresses, and possibilities of post-documentary are discussed, the use of style to comment on the subject is revealed as a principle form of my practice. I also propose style is used by many artists, in particular, video artists to examine their subject. Style, for example, can render itself in the choice of camera, the use of hand-held videography or not, and the spatial configuration of the work. To demote style is in itself a style, a tactic used in documentary and video art practices. Documentaries such as Simone Britton's *The Wall* are purposeful in not over treating the video image, leaving it authentic to the scene captured through the camera. Many video artists, including early works by Bill Viola and Christian Marclay's *Guitar Drag* utilise similar production and post-production aesthetics. These aesthetics differ from many films of cinema. However, films such as Peter Watkins *Punishment Park*, and Abbas Kiarostami's *Close-Up* purposely use documentary style, the use of which, can be argued, highlights the requirement for style within documentary film and practice.

A stylistic difference between art and documentary that presents a possible place of crisis is the idea of authenticity. Documentary often strives for authenticity and uses styles and modes of production to reduce the visibility of the author, director, videographer. Art doesn't require authenticity, as it sits outside sober disciplines. This notion of authenticity plays a role in documentary's claims to inherent realism.

From here I will examine some of the stylistic treatments in *The Flat Earth Society* and their connection to the video's subject. For example, the work opens with the quote *Sous les paves, la plage* from the French riots of 1968, a pioneering statement of the period. The use of this quote proposes political intent and an examination of historical, political dissent or rebellion— depending on which side a person sits.

The structure of the film uses three central vignettes, which consider and enact prophecies found in dystopian fictions. The vignettes are intercut with found documents, presented as objects of historical fact, to consider the

prophecies within a contemporary societal perspective. Scenes of a solitary man sitting in a hallway separate the three vignettes. The man appears to control the sequence of events through his interaction with a TV. The work ends at the beginning, a claustrophobic Moebius loop, itself a dystopian theme. Importantly there is no attempt to explain in black and white the work's subject through a conclusion or other means of exposition.

Now, I would like to consider some of the problematics in claiming *The Flat Earth Society* as a documentary film or video work. These reflections will be considered against Nichols's observation that "discourses of sobriety' … are the ways we have of speaking directly about social and historical reality" (Nichols 200, p.89). I claim *The Flat Earth Society's* principle intention is to comment on social and historical realities. The style of the work, an abstract and performative narrative, should not deprive it of a documentary status. However, this hinges on how we define realism. Does the real exist outside of the human mind, or is it contained solely within it? Is it evaluated or speculative? The other question is, do we as artists want or need to be considered as disciples of sobriety?

In Hal Foster's 'The Return of the Real' he discusses the works of Andy Warhol, and asks "Can we read the 'Death in America' images as referential and simulacra, connected and disconnected, affective and affectless, critical and complacent?" A question he answers by proposing to "read them in a third way, in terms of traumatic realism" (Foster 1996). Traumatic realism renders the real as a schism, or a pause, in the repetitions of life. Foster argues that "repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic. But this very need also points to the real, and at this point the real ruptures the screen of repetition" (Foster 1996). He highlights this rupture as on the subject more so than the world—'between the perception and the consciousness of a subject touched by an image' (Foster 1996). In this definition of the real, art plays an integral role, not in providing an evaluative outcome of fact, but rather in creating ruptures in subjects and representations. Ruptures that can break the pretence of reality and truth espoused by agencies and institutions who lay claim to them. In our post 9/11 world, the claim of truth, of what's right, is being fought by extreme ideologies that excel in media production, and the fabrication of realities.

Is this where we need to consider post-documentary? Does the acceptance of contradictions regarding what is real or not, determine a principal function in post-documentary practice? Can it offer a way out of the potential crises within practices which fall outside of the given and established functions of documentaries that sit between art and documentary? This questioning is not to eradicate or replace documentary and the debates that surround it, but rather expose stepping stones that lead to alternate explorations of a subject, informed, but not restricted by documentary and its rich critical history.

Requirements for text

I would like to consider Bill Nichols's assertion that documentary requires some form of text, which "arguments call for a logic that words are better able to convey than are images" (Nichols 2001, p.89). This assertion presents a considerable problem for my practice due to its lack of textual narrative. In contrast to Nichols, there is a tradition of documentary film that doesn't use textual narrative. In Phil Niblock's *The Movement of People Working* (2003), observational images of people engaged in their work are accompanied by a minimalist sound composition, often performed as live score to an audience. Niblock offers no narration or explanation. However, the edit and the temporalisation of the images present a contemplative space to observe the rhythms of working life. The use of observational footage and sound design resonates with many aspects of my practice, in particular, the relationship between images and the sound—musical or noise, not speech. In both Niblock's work and my own, the sound design does not incorporate sounds from the video or which are understood or purported to be from the visual scene, what is known as diegetic sound. I will consider this relationship in greater detail in Chapter 3.

There is a long-standing discussion regarding the degree of argument needed within a work of documentary, in particular, the use of observational footage, and the requirements for some form of authorship. Authorship is evident within Niblock's work, in both the editing, composition across multiple screens, framing of each scene, and in the sound design. Media critics such as Gregory Currie sit within a school of documentary theory that privileges observational images over others (Currie 1999). In contrast, there are schools of documentary which privilege a persuasive argument over pure observation. The public discussion between Currie and Noël Carroll highlights the continued debates in documentary theory. A significant point established within Carroll and Currie's critical exchanges is that even purely observational works require some form of editing and authorship.

In considering the missing properties of textual narrative within *The Flat Earth Society*, can we question Nichols's requirement for text within the establishment and logical consideration of an argument? There is no doubt that words are fundamental in our society, and that words, spoken and written, have both concrete and poetic properties, as do images. In *The Flat Earth Society* scenes of milk pouring into a glass, and subsequently flowing over onto a table, and finally onto the floor, show, especially in the close-up shots, the material nature of milk. The shots of flowing milk, filmed in slow motion, reveal milk's viscosity through movement. At this point my lens was concerned with materiality, behind the camera the physical form of milk consumed me. The macro lens and the slow motion video opened a door onto a scene that lies beyond our natural field of view. Concurrently, the sequence of milk, overflowing from the glass, references Anthony Burgess's novel *A Clockwork Orange* (1962). A novel that considers totalitarian states through a dystopian lens, with milk being the vehicle for violence. Its fatty proteins provide the energy and state of mind for unconditional violence and civil disobedience. In the film's outcome, this violence is transferred from the intolerance of youth to the upholders of the law.

In *The Flat Earth Society* television advertisements from the US, for products such as chocolate bars, petrol and perfume, and scenes from the current war in Syria, are intercut with these shots of milk. The intention was to create linkages between concepts and critiques of political systems and ideologies, divulged in books such as *A Clock Work Orange*, and those currently being played out in the current global crisis. The use of symbolism and metaphor, coupled with the material investigations of milk, presents opportunities for the work to oscillate between a subjective world and a material world, with each enriching the other.

We can consider Niblock's *The Movement of People Working* to sit within the realist/materialist school of representation and critique. It observes the rhythms and mechanics of working life, without resorting to rhetoric, a traditional function of documentary, making a case and arguing for something. However, to simply look or record is political, and within my works there are political views even though they often avoid exposition. When we view the work, the contrast of our lives with the lives on screen enables or creates the potential for narratives to be formed. These narratives, prompted by sound design, are built by each viewer, and how

they receive, or decode, the images and sounds they are seeing and hearing. The sequencing of images and their modulation by sound, encodes the images, which is subsequently decoded by the audience. According to Stuart Hall, "this decoding can take different forms, which depends on mitigating factors such as age, culture, mood when viewing, knowledge of the subject, etc." (Hall 1993).

In *The Flat Earth Society*, I was interested in moving past the purely observational works I had been making. While still intrigued in the silence of observational works, I have become drawn to works that engage in more complex arguments, and that mediate on life's contradictions. Without resorting to didactic and evaluative forms of narrative and exposition of the subject, the use of metaphor and allegory developed as a key tactic in the work. The development of allegory and metaphor in my work has lead to an increase in complexity of meaning and ambiguity of subject. The increase of complexity and the use of unexplained references, for instance in *The Acidtrophic Lake*, does potentially reduce the ability for people to read the works. Conversely, we can also argue within our hyper-connected and mobile world, our ability to research or query the unknown, provides the artist or the documentary maker, opportunities to write multilayered narratives that asks audiences to research within the time-space of viewing the work.

Feedback from people who viewed *The Flat Earth Society*, did express some concerns resulting from its ambiguous and complex nature. However, it was also expressed that the same ambiguity, coupled with the richness of the images, and the movement between the material, for instance the shots of milk, and the metaphorical, the act of pouring the milk, added to the work's intrigue.

Multilayered storytelling is, of course, possible in text, more often in fiction than in non-fiction. Mixing fiction and non-fiction can create a wealth of opportunity as demonstrated in Umberto Eco's book *The Prague Cemetery* (2011). In *The Prague Cemetery*, Eco puts a voice to a character, who is otherwise unobtainable in a purely non-fiction historical text. This character embodies a concept rather than an actual person, who, according to Eco, is the most cynical and disagreeable character in all the history of literature. Through this character, he develops a narrative of European history, cruelty, lies, and hoaxes that have administered the oppression of the Jewish people.

I am working towards the argument which states aural-visual forms can be used to make complex arguments without resorting to words. Through montage, spatial composition, analogies and metaphors, as well as the use of observational and found footage, and techniques such as slow motion video and macro shots, testimony can be written. However, these arguments often conceal some of their knowledge often through abstraction and metaphor. The decoding of them, it could be argued has added complexity due to the need to understand and read images and how they relate to one another. While this is still the case with works that incorporate voice and narration, the difference lies in the priorities given to images. In textual works of moving-image, the text often assumes an authoritative role which establishes the connotative meaning in the images. The priority of text positions images as being supplementary, but which provide authenticity to the argument.

Montage enables compositional narratives unobtainable in a text. The footage of milk flowing over the table in *The Flat Earth Society* offers an initial description of milk's material nature. The footage of the girl pouring milk, until it overflows raises potential questions, not of milk's physical nature, but of the action itself. Is it accidental or on purpose? Why is the response of the person pouring the milk continuing to pour as the glass overflows? Within the context of footage of nuclear programs, advertisements of luxury goods, and war, this action has the potential for further meaning or, rather, decoding. To describe in text the viscosity of milk and its effect on how it flows, while also discussing the relationship between war and ideology, would be complex and potentially disjointed. Hito Steyerl observes that montage is a "perfect device for destabilizing the observer's perspective and breaking down linear time" (Steyerl 2012b, p.22). Dinh Q. Le (Le, 2006), in his three screen video work *The Farmers and Helicopters*, uses montage across three screen to juxtapose interviews with Mr. Tran Quoc Hai, a farmer who built a working helicopter out of farming equipment, news footage shot during the Vietnam War and footage from Hollywood films featuring the war. The juxtaposition of the three video sources, enables a narrative to by the movement and placement of the video images. The indices between the images enable narrative to be written within spatial and temporal syntaxes.

This significant aspect of video and film, further expanded by multichannel installations, is its ability to combine multiple threads within a single spatial field. This dimensionality enables the combining of subject matter, where the

interstices that lie between images, text and sound, develop a complexity of argument underwritten by proximities. Of course, the counter argument suggests texts provide a granularity and depth of topic, unobtainable within a structure of symbolic visual relationship experienced in works such as *The Flat Earth Society*.

The point for consideration is literacy. A strong emphasis is placed on textual literacy, as observed in Nichols's statement regarding the logic of arguments. Maybe words have diminished our ability to read images? Or perhaps images and their assurance of representing the real have pulled a veil over our eyes, only lifted by words. There is no denying the power of words; I would argue, however, that the power of images to convey complex arguments should be considered as equally important.

One question we can ask is: do we need a logical conclusion? And, what is the requirement for objectivity and authority as a principle guiding force in the development or consideration of an argument? In his book *Semiotics for Beginners* (2009), Daniel Chandler states that semiotics, the study of signs and their interpretation, "is important because it can help us not to take 'reality' for granted as something having a purely objective existence which is independent of human interpretation. It teaches us that reality is a system of signs" (Chandler 2009, p.10).

The importance of this is that signs, regardless of their form, be they images, words, sounds, patterns, etc., are all equally important in creating or representing the realities of life. These realities are constructed through a multitude of techniques and styles which are governed by their author, and as such, are subject to interpretation, and are inherently subjective.

Narratives operating without text or words can, and do, function as documentary. This research is concerned with the potential of, or the framing of post-documentary works that have a significant metaphorical style, works that might be better considered as post-documentaries. In this style of storytelling there is no requirement for an objective and coherent conclusion. There is no veil of authority and objectivity.

Indexicality, traces and testimonies

According to Nichols (2009, p.89), an assumption we bring to documentary is that individual shots and sounds, perhaps even scenes and sequences will bear a highly indexical relationship to the events they represent but that the film as a whole will stand back from being a pure document or transcription of these events to make a comment on them or to offer a perspective on them.

Critical arguments on the indexical nature of images, both photochemical and digital, reason that images are independent of belief, or at least present an illusion of independence. Gregory Currie (1999) makes the claim that images are independent from belief due to their indexical nature. Tom Gunning claims that "historically and institutionally, images, in order to tell the truth, must be subjected to a series of discourses" (Gunning 2004, p.42). Gunning argues for what he calls the truth claim of images, that truth in images is not inherent rather "a claim made for it" (Gunning 2004, p.42).

Semiotician Daniel Chandler summarises indexicality as "being generated through a mode in which the signifier is not arbitrary but is directly connected in some way (physically or causally) to the signified. This link he says can be observed or inferred" (Chandler 2009, p.17). In critical theory, the index of photography is linked to the mechanical process of celluloid cameras. Founded through the physical connection of light and the photochemical surface of film, as the actual light from the actual object creates the impression on the photo-sensitive surface, thus they are physically linked. The image indicates the presence of its object. This differs from the icon or sign, which resembles or imitates its object. The icon unlike the index is analogous. Chandler describes the icon "as being a mode in which the signifier is perceived as resembling or imitating the signified" (Chandler 2009, p.17).

A contemporary argument of indexicality centres on digital images. I believe it is also appropriate to place video here as well. Whereas film renders an image within its materiality, digital images (still and moving) are less indexical as their base form requires interpretation to render their image(s). In this sense, digital images are representations, like paintings. The RAW camera format encapsulates the raw data from a camera's sensor. This format hosts abilities to alter the image, including exposure and white balance, at the point of opening the file. The RAW format's ability to change parameters

previously set at the point of capture furthers the argument that digital images differ from their analogue cousins, as the resulting image can be claimed to be a representation of the data, rather than having direct physical connection to its object. Regardless, the attributes that make an image appear to tell the truth, are held, I believe, within both digital and analogue images. Instead of relying upon an indexicality of an image, Gunning's concept of image's truth claim through testimony seems more pertinent to contemporary image production and consumption (Gunning 2004).

Images create an illusion of the real; they re-present the material world that lay before the camera. The image thus veils its contradiction, that images, acting as traces, are independent of belief (Currie 1999). In contrast, Baudrillard points out "that we have spontaneous confidence in their realism" (Baudrillard 1987). Baudrillard's observation dissolves images independent from belief. Instead, it presents the possibility that images might in fact lie. For Gunning, the ability to lie is a fundamental property of images and a requirement for them to be able to claim a truth (see Gunning 2004, p.42). In today's media-rich, digitally enhanced world, many images still encourage confidence in their realism. However, we are more discerning in understanding the possibility that a particular image, still or moving, might have been constructed, manipulated and changed. Questioning the realism of an image, in conjunction with a growing awareness of image manipulation, in my mind, doesn't disempower them. To some extent we could argue it empowers them. Gunning suggests that "photograph can only tell the truth if it is also capable of telling a lie" and "the truth implies the possibility of lying and vice versa" (Gunning 2004, p.42). For Gunning, photographs in most instances "strive to present a contradiction, an oxymoron, an impossible presence, invoking photographic accuracy or truth even while contradicting it" (Gunning 2004, p.45).

In *The Shrine of Triticum Durum*, the 3D animation of the Earth is spinning on its opposing axis, while also being rendered upside down. This animation, built from textures generated from satellite images—known as tiles—flaunts or contradicts the common perception of the world's physical nature. The intention was not to contradict our understanding of Earth's physics, but to propose a consideration of the politics of representation and the contradictions within belief systems. The lie encountered, thus prompts us to think about, the truths—or otherwise—generated in images, and the role images play as mediators and couriers of realities as presented in various systems of belief.

The image of the Earth, regardless of arguments that digital media—and even more so CGI—have lost their indexical nature, acts as a trace, as does the various pieces of found footage in *The Flat Earth Society*. I am classifying CGI and digital images as being different classes of representation. I would assert that CGI does not need to start with any form of record of the material world; it can be drawn entirely within the computer, often within a 3D space. I am classifying digital images as those being images recorded with a digital camera, which has captured a view from the material world. Of course there is a scale of grey that lies between these two.

Both Currie and Nichols consider the use of traces or elements that have an indexical quality as a requirement of a documentary (Nichols 1991). For Currie, a documentary must only contain images that have an indexical quality (Currie 1999). He outlines "two functions of images" in his paper, 'Visible Traces: Documentary and the Contents of Photographs', (Currie 1999). The first is "the representation of things as they are, image as a trace of its event"; the second "is the subjecting of an image to a narrative, images in this function present to us fictions and recreations" (Currie 1999). Currie's requirement of documentary as containing only images that function as traces has been debated between himself and Noël Carroll through a series of letters published in the The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism (Carroll 2000, p.136). Broadly, Currie's concepts of documentary present numerous problems in considering documentary and its functions; these problems are exacerbated when we consider documentary within the context of art. The rules afforded the artist differ from those of the documentary filmmaker, and it's contentious, and potentially damaging to art, to consider it a discipline of sobriety.

In respect of Currie's considerations for the classification of a documentary, *The Flat Earth Society* would most certainly fail any test of documentary authenticity, regardless of the fact that it does contain traces in the form of found footage. As outlined, the contentions surrounding the classification of documentaries reside in our position of the real, and what is inherently realist. If realism is to be considered purely of the material world where does it leave dreams and mythologies? Both of which connect not to fictional lands beyond any meaning, but to fictional lands directly related to our material and experiential worlds. Or, is documentary's inherent realism a particular style of storytelling that dictates specific modes of image production, which also outlines what may or may not be considered

a trace. The found footage in *The Flat Earth Society* are traces; they act as documents of history. Their testimony is constructed through their placement within a montage of the performative sequences.

We can also consider the problematics of taxonomy and in particular the instability of concepts. We can argue, especially within a Correlationist framework, all taxonomies are constructed. To this end documentary is a constructed concept which claims to focus on the real, the truth and reality.

A greater problem in the radicalisation of image and documentary making is the source of footage. Works of fiction and non-fiction are utilising digital cameras, screen recordings, CGI and platforms such as second life. This diversity of source footage poses a problem for elements being considered as traces, in particular when the trace value of an object is inherently connected to the indexicality of image, if we assume indexicality is strictly linked to the materiality of film. In The Art of Pointing: On Peirce, Indexicality, and Photographic Images (2011), Lefebvre states that "since any worldly thing whatsoever—whether it be a photograph, a film, a painting, or a CGI—is dyadically connected to the world (or reality) in a potentially limitless number of ways, each one of them can form the basis for an indexical function" (Lefebvre 2011, p.110). In this sense, the parameters of indexicality need to be considered and altered to encompass the range of mediums available to today's image makers. If not, the requirement for traces in a documentary will need to be reassessed, as only images captured on film will be able to be used in documentary filmmaking. The absurdity of this is that documentary filmmaking, in alignment with video art, has long embraced the democratisation of moving image facilitated through analogue and digital video.

Conclusion

I have professed my initial desires for the *The Flat Earth Society* to be a documentary. In doing so, I engaged with a number of forms, in particular the use of found footage as traces. Carl Plantinga makes use of Nicholas Wolterstorff's 'theory of projected worlds' to argue that "a nonfiction film is a film in which a filmmaker takes an assertive stance (as opposed to a fictive stance) toward the world projected by the film" (Plantinga 2005, p.107). This proposition of assertive stance provides an opportunity to make video and film works which consider the world as found and existing,

which do not have to conform to established documentary styles. In this sense post-documentary takes an assertive stance, but one that uses stylistic conventions such as performativity to project the view of the world encapsulated within the work. I would argue, or at least, propose, that *The Flat Earth Society*, is such a work.

For all intents and purposes, a fictional film can also use found footage, or more often archival footage, to add a voice of authenticity to its story. However, this doesn't change its fictive stance. If this argument can be made for fiction film, the counter can be made for non-fiction. The stance the filmmaker takes, assertive or fiction, underlines the form of storytelling, even when forms collide, as is seen in Yeal Bartana's *And Europe will be Stunned* (2012). Bartana bases her trilogy on a semi-fictional organisation that calls for the Jews to return to Poland. The videos combine real-life people with real-life views, performative interventions, and elaborated fictional constructs, which are all projected form an assertive stance. There is no pretense made of the work being a documentary, just as there is no pretense to it being a fiction.

If the digital image is argued to have lost its indexicality, has it also lost its ability to be a trace? If so, what does this mean for the truth claim of digital images and more importantly the use of digital images as traces within a documentary video? If we are living in a post-celluloid world and hence all images are not real and have lost their relationship with truth as they are interpretations, do we need to consider that we are at the end of documentary, or at the dawn of post-documentary? The hard line of pictorial indexicality, being beyond painting and beyond the digital, proffers the opinion that documentary can only survive within the realm of film. Taking Currie's 'Documentary as Indexical Record' (Plantinga 2005) to its logical conclusion seems unhelpful, yet, it highlights the complications and problems that critical commentators place upon documentary practice, forms and functions.
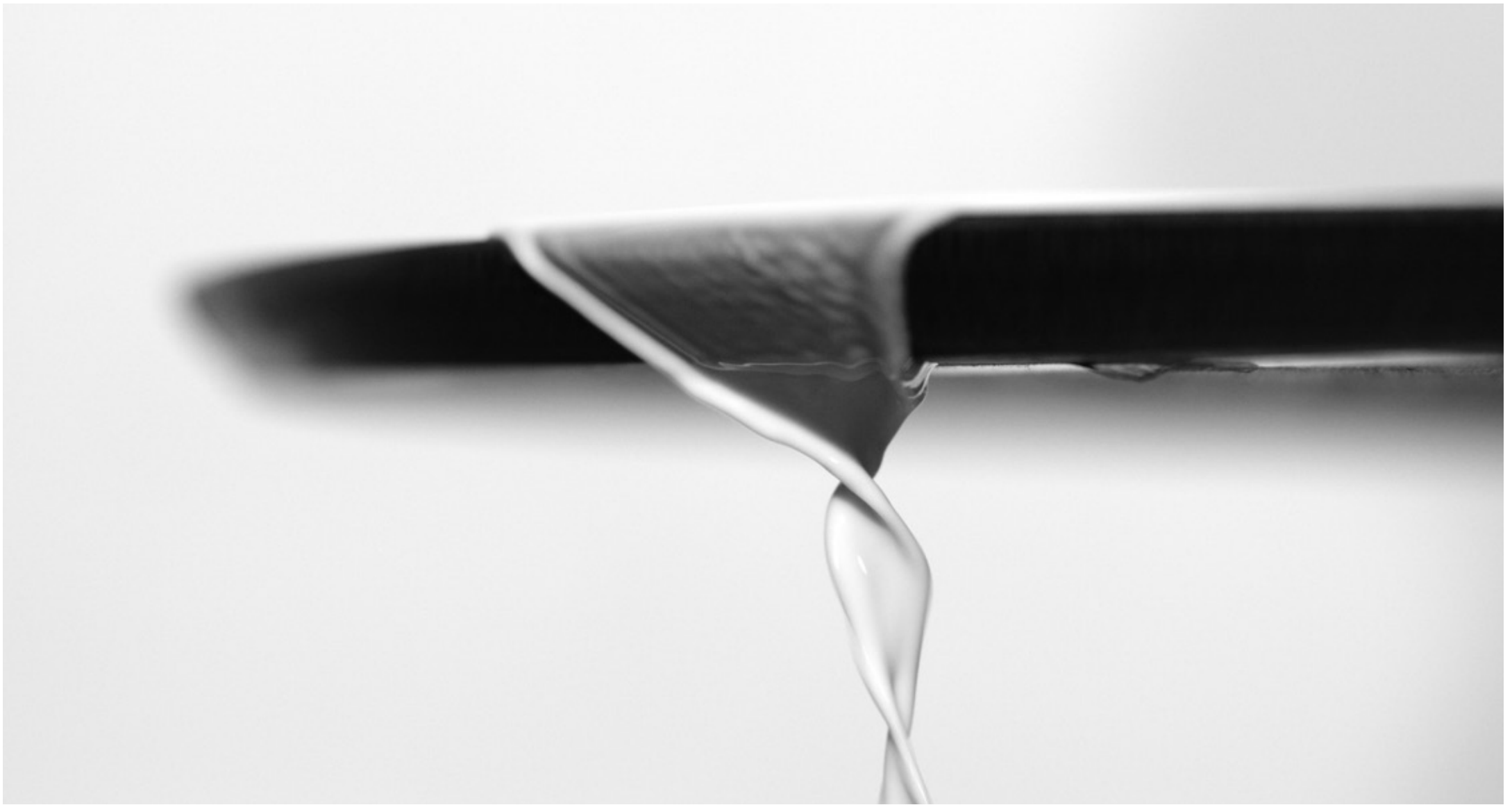

THE FLAT EARTH SOCIETY, 2K VIDEO, 2014

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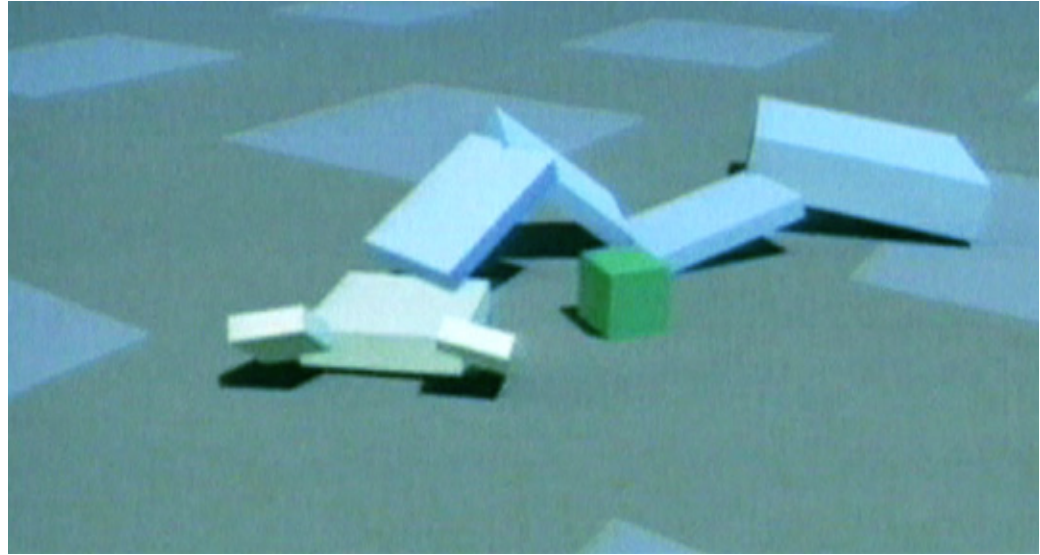
THE FLAT EARTH SOCIETY, 2K VIDEO, 2014

2. The Mirror of Identity

To start this chapter I would like to rewind the tape and consider the first work produced during this candidature, a single channel video titled *Hidden in the Shadow of Lovers*. The video paints a portrait of the now deceased local writer and artist Adrian. This work proposes a significant complexity when considering the fine line between fiction and non-fiction. The video also provides a place to consider the role of performance and the performativity of identities. *The Acidtrophic Lake*, will also be discussed in terms of performance, and identity.

In *The Flat Earth Society*, fictional constructs are highly visible: the performative vignettes and the man sitting at the table hold distinct fictional intent. *Hidden in the Shadow of Lovers* differs as the observational footage of Adrian is carefully balanced between non-fiction and fiction. The video places Adrian in the Docklands of Melbourne, where he is estranged from his surrounds. We find him sitting, walking and smoking. Around him, members of the corporate sector engage in contracted exercise, whilst others make their way to work. Adrian is appropriately cast as a societal outsider. The composition of the image and the pace of the editing places an emphasis on drifting. The image lingers on its subject with subtle focusing. Its form and pace suggest an endlessness—a journey of no definite objective, duration or conclusion. There is a narrative logic whereby Adrian plays the role of the flaneur, the inconspicuous and unseen well-dressed drifter observing urban life.

Hidden in the Shadow of Lovers is a critique of urbanism and the manifestation of corporate development. To engage with urbanism, the work draws its influence from the Situationists. Of particular importance is Ivan Chtcheglov's poetic essay *Formulary for a New Urbanism* (1953). In the video, we discover a highly constructed part of Melbourne Docklands, a new suburb designed and built to a master plan; it is not a place that has evolved and adjusted to a history of dwelling. The master plan and the conception of the docklands have been driven from a corporate prospectus, made up of high-rise buildings and limited street frontage. Intersecting different buildings are small parks, public artworks and walkways. The positioning of Adrian within this constructed environment was a provocation, as this was not a place that he would frequent. In that sense, Adrian becomes an investigator, a foreigner looking into the construction of the land and the politics of its form. The placement of Adrian enables him to transform from a real person to a character—a character with links to the flaneur, which references the use

of drifting as an artistic intervention developed by The Situationists (Debord, 1958)[1].

The fiction/non-fiction line becomes blurred through the intention to make a work of portraiture, what Nichols might call a 'Personal Portrait Documentary' (Nichols 2001, p.166), whilst also creating a context for observation that differed from Adrian's usual haunts. In this sense, a great deal of authorship was imposed upon Adrian, through which I projected an alternate narrative. The sense of portraiture is realised as Adrian's actual character manifests through his mannerisms and bodily reactions. The intention was to have Adrian represent himself, to the degree that directorial intervention happened only when it became apparent that Adrian was acting. The personal shots of Adrian reflecting on his surrounds and his increasing emotional stress are communicated via body language. This creates a sense of a real-life existence, a place beyond that of the actor reciting their script and the emotions constrained within it. Instead of an actor living the life of a marginalised person, moving from one temporary abode to another to gain an experience of a character, the character evoked the life experiences ingrained in Adrian.

While Adrian smokes his way through the film, he moves from one landscape to another, finally coming to rest in a contrived forest. Here young pine trees line up in singular forms on a simple grid. Encircled by roads, this woodland sits within the confines of the Docklands; a plastic fabrication

1   Charles Baudelaire presented the flaneur as the artist-poet of the modern metropolis. He wrote 'The crowd is his element, as the air is that of birds and water of fishes. His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world—impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define. The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito. The lover of life makes the whole world his family, just like the lover of the fair sex who builds up his family from all the beautiful women that he has ever found, or that are or are not—to be found; or the lover of pictures who lives in a magical society of dreams painted on canvas. Thus the lover of universal life enters into the crowd as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy. Or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.' Baudelaire, C. 1964 [1863] *The Painter of Modern Life* Da Capo Press, New York. The Situationists, who formed in the late 1950s took an anti-bourgeois approach to their art. The Situationists fought against the reduction of the authentic social life as outlined in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967). A key practice of The Situationists was drifting, or derive—a practice of walking the streets in a conscious and unconsciousness state, so as to see new things within the familiar and the repetitious.

that echoes the manicured hillsides and architectural façades that also lie within its designated boundaries. On reflection, this forest has been a place of inspiration for me. Being within this place, that is so obviously manmade, enabled me to see the industrial nature of the forest I used as a location in both *The Flat Earth Society* and later, *The Acidtrophic Lake*. In this final place, Adrian locates a book which when open is empty. The action of opening the book ends the film without resolution.

Leading up to this highly cinematic sequence of images, graded to a filmic black and white, is a conversation between two people. The quality of the audio is far removed from the pristine images that follow. As the short conversation unfolds, it becomes apparent it is, in fact, a police officer questioning a suspect regarding a petty crime. The suspect is Adrian, arrested for stealing seven dollars worth of food. The finale of the voice over is a question regarding honesty, and whether Adrian's actions were honest. Here Adrian responds with a wry smile in his voice 'Isn't that an oxymoron?' and comments on the situation of honesty in regards to capitalism, 'in terms of confrontation I was honest, but in terms of paying for things in a capitalistic world, I suppose I was not'.

In this exchange of words, we find evidence of social confrontation and the administration of societal contracts. The relationship between this audio and the following image sequence confounds the reality of each one. The highly composed but observational footage, and the coarse nature of the audio recording positions the video as both a document of factual account and one of fiction. There was a deliberate intention when making *Hidden in the Shadow of Lovers* to investigate, or at least start an investigation, into the cinematic form and the thin line between documentary and fiction; to play with intervention and place, to create contexts for observation.

Performance

Judith Butler has defined a critical discourse on performativity through her work on gender and identity, in particular, her major work 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution' (1988). Butler argues that "the body is not a 'mute facticity', it is not a fact of nature, the body is developed through cultural inscription" (Salih 2007, p.55), which "becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time" (Butler 1988, p.523). In this sense gender is always enacted, it "is

not just a process, but it is a particular type of process," a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame"' (Salih 2007, p.55). In 'On Judith Butler and Performativity', Sara Salih highlights Butler's view that "such re-inscriptions constitute the subject's agency within the law, in other words, the possibilities of subverting the law against itself" (Salih 2007, p.55). Salih emphasises Butler's key point that "gender is not something one is, it is something one does, an act, or more precisely, a sequence of acts, a verb rather than a noun, a "doing" rather than a "being"' (Salih, 2007, p.55).

From this concept of performativity, defined through Butler's theories on gender, identity can be both stable and unstable, borrowing from de Certeau's concepts of space and place, tactics and strategies (Certeau 1984). Performative strategies can expose the contradictions and oppressions housed within identities; they can be used against themselves. When the performance of identity proclaims itself as being subversive, there is an intention to challenge the rules and signs that have been inscribed upon the body.

Talking from a phenomenological perspective, Bernadette Flynn suggests that "knowledge about the past arises from the material conditions of the body" (Flynn 2011, p.2). For Flynn, phenomenology "explores the relationship between embodied action and meaning, thus co-joining the experience of being in the world with the practices of interpretation" (Flynn 2011, p.2). This co-joining of experience of being in the world with practices of interpretation offers an interesting opportunity for performativity. Spanish artist Santiago Sierra uses performance, and the subsequent recording of it, to highlight the extreme outcomes of particular actions, such as tattooing prisoners in Mexico. He directs his attention to a particular situation of the world, from which he enacts a critique through performative gestures which is formed from the hyper extension of his subject.

In *Hidden in the Shadow of Lovers*, Adrian's figure as both a fictional and non-fictional character is developed through his personal identity, and the cultural inscriptions on his body. His character, the actual Adrian, is seen through his doing, being present and active within the context of the video. The context the video developed was a situation where Adrian could (and this was always speculative) subvert himself by playing an outsider. His peformative actions, his outsider tendencies, and how he identified as an outsider, have the potential to reveal to us his personal rejection of identities, in particular ones that are bound to capitalist economies.

The Acidtrophic Lake features a man sitting in a forest watching a television, a scene that defies common sense, which was built with the intention to critique the generic Western male identity. I was interested in the construction of a scene whereby I could subvert the inscriptions upon his body, and ask, was he happy to be there or not? Was he laboured and constricted by the values and rules of an external force? Working with Nathan Moore, who played the man, furthered this line of enquiry due to his joint Aboriginal and European heritage. In fact, without Nathan having a dual heritage, and one fraught with historical trauma, this contradiction of identity was not possible.

In contrast, the scenes of the woman walking through different landscapes are played out in the day. She is awake and lucid; she sees the world for what it is. Her dress denotes that she has freed herself from being within this patriarchal place. Her identity doesn't assume a new set of rules; her proposition is that of a messenger, one who has walked the trajectories of history. The intention with the references that adorn her body was to point to the bias of history. Biases which, regardless of intent, cannot be avoided. Biases can make the telling of histories potentially debatable.

Rather than being a work about struggle or opposition, I was interested in exploring a potential for a post-patriarchal society. I wanted the passiveness of the woman's walk to convey an awakening from the signifiers and referents that have throughout Western history confined women to being second to men. As the Amazonian queen in Greek mythology, Penthesilea declared:

> Not in strength are we inferior to men; the same our eyes, our limbs the same; one common light we see, one air we breathe; nor different is the food we eat. What then denied to us hath heaven on man bestowed? (Penthesilea quoted in Wikipeadia 2013).

In *The Flat Earth Society*, the girl holding the glass placard with the anatomical drawing of a pregnant woman signifies a call to help, a way of saying 'my lips are sewn, and this is where my destiny lies'. Conceptually, this referenced Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). She is held within a man's world not of her want or accord. There were many concepts and references I was interested in exploring in *The Acidtrophic Lake*. The meeting of the man and the woman in the

forest served to end the man's formal agreement with the contracts that have consigned him to the night. I was interested in giving the position of power and control to the woman. Naively, there was an embedded desire that in doing so, contracts and social norms valued by patriarchal societies might be absolved, hence the woman cutting the suit from the man with the suit being an analogy for the shackles of society and conformity that have devalued people based on race, gender, and sexual orientation.

For the woman, she has freed herself through the acknowledgement of alternate histories and stories, gathered through a looking glass that focuses on women, not men. Though the historical Western man is always present, his fate is consigned to the death of borders and the reduction of power in his signs and symbols. These are all considered through performative gestures that comment on the construction of identities, and the cultural inscriptions that help form them. Whether an identity is subversive or not, they are constructed within the rules and signs of society, its histories, mythologies and its laws. As Butler points out, "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time —an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 1988, p.519).

Regarding post-documentary, the use of performative structures and gestures offers a route between the problems of fact and fiction. If identity is performative, and we perform our identities every day, is the everyday constructed and fictional? The question to consider is whether Baudrillard's simulation and simulacra is the formation of reality, or instead is there something else that lies beyond the human? Another consideration, exposed by Merleau-Ponty, and highlighted by Butler, is that the body is 'an historical idea' rather than 'a natural species' (Butler 1988). The consideration that the body is an historical idea, proposes the possibility of history as imaginary, constructed and biased. Subsequently, identities as historical ideas inherit history's biases, rendering them not as facts, but as expressions of ideologies.

Histories and simulations

Claims for truth have been much problematised over the past century. Writers such as Walter Benjamin remind us that history is always at the service of the present. Benjamin sees history as posthumous, built from

a time of now. Histories, accordingly, are an outcome of connecting and reconnecting moments in time. In doing so, "history draws connections that enable causal relationships between points, no fact that is a cause is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years" (Benjamin et al. 1969). Benjamin argues that historians who understand the posthumous nature of history stop telling sequences of events like the beads of a rosary. These constellations of events are made within a conception of the present as the 'time of the now' (Benjamin et al. 1969). The 'time of the now' offers opportunities to develop relationships between events in a multitude of dimensions, languages and forms.

Baudrillard argues that histories will not come to an end, that they are indefinitely recyclable. He argues "since the leftovers, all the leftovers – the Church, communism, ethnic group, conflicts, ideologies –are indefinitely recyclable…History has only wrenched itself from cyclical time to fall into the order of the recyclable" (Mendoza 2010, p.57). It is here that we can see the ongoing effect of simulation and simulacra. According to this proclamation, the writing of histories, and history's role in the determination of place, is there to be written for eternity. It says that histories will forever form another mirror whose reflections are known. Hal Foster's assertions that the real is the interruption of the repetition is in contrast to Baudrillard's views. While both speak from a place of signification and repetition, Foster views "Rather, repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic. But this very need also points to the real, and at this point the real ruptures the screen of repetition. It is a rapture less in the world than in a subject— between the perception and the consciousness of a subject touched by an image". (Foster 1996, p.132). These two differing opinions highlight how and where art fits within contemporary culture, whereas we could argue that mainstream media and advertising seek to affirm consensus through image production, the recreating and recycling of symbols. In its drive to stop the repetition, art can be considered a practice of cultural critique.

Baudrillard claims there is no such thing as a reality, just images. He sees the world as a series of simulations and simulacrums, continually reflecting itself upon us through multiple streams of images (Baudrillard 1994). This claim for a world contained entirely within human thought and language is in opposition to philosophical Realism. For Robert Smith, Baudrillard's simulacrum is "the pure actuality of representation (where everything is immanent, hyper-visible,

and obscene) where the inside is out, and the outside is in" (Smith 2005). Smith provokes us to consider the possibility that "representations are the world" (Smith 2005). Whereas Derrida famously claimed that "nothing exists outside the text" (cited in Cox et al. et al. 2015, p.16) .

Nichols highlights the argument the pain of the world is real (Nichols 1991). The bullets of poverty are harsh, their intention direct and destructive. While I agree with Nichols, we have to observe that he is still writing from the perspective of image maker and storyteller. It seems conclusive that the passing of knowledge which governs events, global and local, is constructed, cropped, montaged, framed and edited. The issue is not that the lion will eat us, it is the way in which we watch ourselves and others get eaten.

Baudrillard builds on Marx's concepts of the commodity to consider the possibility of the commodity as a vehicle for communication (Mendoza 2010). For Baudrillard, commodities are signs. In his analysis of commodity he also argues that production, a critical concern and the bedrock of history for Marx, should be reconsidered. Baudrillard inverts Marx's argument that commodities are based on production. He argues that the analysis of the commodity in contemporary societies should focus on consumption, not production (Mendoza 2010).

Consumption, according to Baudrillard and his anticipation of a communication age, is not based on needs. In an information society, consumption relies on what a sign means and how a signs use positions a consumer within the system or society (Mendoza 2010). Baudrillard's inversion of key Marxist ideas sees him marry Marxism with Semiology. This marriage makes needs subjective, as they are no longer intrinsic to survival.

Baudrillard argues that culture, consumption and signs must be analysed as ideology, which he says is not achieved by banishing them, or expelling them to an outer field, but, on the contrary, by integrating them into the very structures of political economy (Mendoza 2010). He argues the interchange of values, where economic value, sign value and symbolic value transfuse according to the rules of the game, can be considered as an ideological matrix—one of the shrines of the political economy of the sign (Mendoza 2010).

The danger, excitement, and complexities inherent in documentary belong to its relationship with what we deem to be the real, and the fictionalisation of the real through making. In *The Hawker's Song*, one of the works is a single shot of an ice cream seller removing his bell and selling it to us. During this process, the ice cream seller reveals his bell is like his brother and has accompanied him on the streets of Phnom Penh for ten years. The question of whether or not he would sell the bell to us was complicated, yet determined by the sum of money we offered. In turn, this highlights an important aspect of street hawkers in Cambodia. In a country where there is no safety net, no dole or social benefits, the need to earn through plying a trade is paramount. In the end, the necessity for money to survive outstrips personal and emotional attachments to the bell. It also highlights possible corruptions within the development of urban areas, regardless of country or city. The example serves as a reminder of how the act of making has implications for its subject, and how as image makers, even if we stand aside, we potentially alter behaviours and perspectives. In Baudrillard's words, "the image is interesting not only in its role as reflection, mirror, representation of, or counterpart to, the real, but also when it begins to contaminate reality and to model it, when it only conforms to reality the better to distort it" (Baudrillard 1987, p.16). Our intervention, the buying of the ice cream seller's bell, was fraught within the context of documentaries' traditional values. Conversely, the actions enabled an insight into a person's life otherwise unobtainable. The question this intervention raises, is, what does it mean to intervene in a cultural fabric that is increasingly made of interruptions, in the drive to the instantaneous?

The example of the ice cream seller also provides an insight into the need for fabrication or intervention within the filmmaking process. In Simone Bitton's *Wall* (2004), a documentary film made on both sides of the wall separating Israel and Palestine, the structure of the documentary enables a conversational engagement with people who live within the wall's vicinity. At times, people ask questions of the film crew. The questions are raised by individuals who are interested in the crew's intentions. Why are they filming? For what purpose? The conversations that developed between people who live in the wall's vicinity and the filmmaker differs from the traditional overlay of the narrator and the authoritarian questions of the interviewer. The playing field is levelled. People who interact with the movie crew have the same authority to ask questions as the filmmakers. The film is conversational rather than dialectical. It also enables a natural and respectful

process of selecting participants, or social actors within the work. Intercut with the conversations is extended footage of the wall's construction. David Brancaleone draws attention to the silent nature of Bitton's Wall. He says "there is no need for too many words, since Bitton finds the way to say more with the moving image, but exceeds the rules of documentary in the length of sequences, thus reaching the symbolic, the poetic level of metonymn" (Brancaleone 2011).

The power of the documentary is to make available for consideration the space between the historical reality of death and its representation. This space, referred to by Jonathan Kahanna, situates "documentary as a transitional medium" (Kahana 2008, p.2). For Kahanna, documentary carries "fragments of social reality from one place or one group or one time to another, and in transporting them, translates them from a local dialect to a lingua franca" (Kahana 2008, p.2). The Wall, like *The Hawker's Song*, moves the social realities of its subject from the locality whence they exist and presents them in broader contexts. They become part of the growing encyclopaedia of audio-visual history. Documentary according to Kahana is transitional as it "collects the evidence of experience in the most far-flung precincts, in coal mines, cornfields, cell blocks, convention halls, corporate board- rooms, and city slums. Then it delivers these social facts to a broader public, where they can be used for a variety of ideological ends" (Kahana 2008, p.2).

Kahanna also positions documentary as an abstract form, which he admits sounds counterintuitive as is the genre of film that we most associate with "the local, the particular, and experience" (Kahana 2008, p.2). Kahanna attributes the abstract nature of documentary to documentaries political force depending upon "its ability to make an experience available for interpretation by an array of institutions and organizations, from government agencies and corporations to political movements and community groups" (Kahana 2008, p.2).

The process of framing, recording, and editing innately abstracts the field of view. The elements of scene, place or person, that we wish to transition from one place to another is effected and manipulated, regardless of intention, through the process of media production. It is here where documentary becomes problematic and has the potential to contradict its own admissions of rationality, reality and truth. Khannna highlights this problematic by saying "none engages the concept of publicness on all levels—conditions of production, textual structures, spaces and practices of circulation, contexts of reception—so thoroughly, or in such fraught and complex ways, as the documentary" (Kahana 2008, p.3).

Constelllations and tapestries

Michael de Certeau (1984) suggests that narrative structures have the status of spatial syntax. He suggests stories and narrative structures "traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories" (de Certeau 1984, p.115) He argues that "space is composed of intersections of mobile elements. It is in a sense actuated by the ensemble of movements deployed within it" (de Certeau 1984, p.117). For de Certeau, space "occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities" (de Certeau 1984, p.117). In which case, he argues, "space, in relation to place, is like a word when it is spoken, caught in the ambiguity of an actualization, in contradistinction to the place, it has thus none of the univocity or stability of a "proper"" (de Certeau 1984, p.117). The shared qualities of narrative and space enables the argument that narrative structures are sites of conflict. The possibility that any pretence of a singular truth or account can be abolished as having a status of spatial syntax renders narrative structures unstable.

We can view the actions of the Situationists as influencing de Certeau's thinking. The cut up maps of Paris, such as Guy Debord and Asger Jorn's *The Naked City* (1957), offer a reorganisation of Paris and its suburbs to contradict the cities actual geographical layout. The process of re-ordering the city, provides opportunity to experience and re-experience the city, they offer new sentences and itineraries. By reducing and re-ordering the city the Situationists invite citizens to generate information for themselves by maximizing their experience of a dense and fluctuant space-time.

If we consider de Certeau's space as being contested and unstable, as is narrative and stories, then histories, especially contextualised as posthumous constructions, fall within this political sphere of space and place. Events within time can be considered stable, but the arguments made of them through the writing of history makes them unstable. In time, accepted versions of events might and do manifest, so these written histories

become stable places in their own right, only to be destabilised through subsequent writings. The period of writing informs each rewrite, influenced by the knowledge or shifts in political perspectives of that time.

David Harvey (1990) asserts that political hegemony depends on the control of personal and social experiences. This concept enables us to understand the production of space and, importantly, how representations of place and space have a significant impact on identity and the behaviours they allow. Harvey argues that "some general conclusions can be ventured. Spatial and temporal practices are never neutral in social affairs. They always express some kind of class or other social content, and are more often than not the focus of intense social struggle" (Harvey 1990, p.239).

If spatial and temporal practices are engaged in intense social struggles, and we believe de Certeau's reading of narratives as correct, then practices which engage storytelling and image making, whether fictional, factual, poetic or historical, are inherently political. Here we find an overlap between documentary and postdocumentary cultures, both being temporal and spatial practices and thus both involved in the politics of place and space.

As the world speeds up and the time of instantaneousness draws close, Harvey and Paul Virilio proclaim that spatial boundaries are diminishing. For Harvey, this manifests in time-space compression; for Virilio its Dromology. Enabled through technological advancements, time-space compression is ultimately built from Marx's phrase "the annihilation of space by time" (Massey 1991, p.7). The effect of this advancement of speed according to Virilio is the loss of the traditional rhythms of life. He argues for the end geography through continual acceleration and speed, what he defines as a Grey Ecology (Virilio 2009). Grey Ecology, according to Virilio is created through the "pollution of distance, and the diminishing of life-size aspects of places and time measurements" (2009, p.32). In considering arguments for indexicality, and the material link between the object and the referent, the loss of material representation could be viewed as a factor in the evolution of a Grey Ecology. The digitisation of our world, and with it an increase of speed of distribution, sees the proliferation of media. For Virilio (2009), the time of instantaneous can be seen in the reception of news events at the same time, regardless of where in the world you are.

Doreen Massey is one theorist that offers a different perspective to Virilio. Massey sees time-space compression as an overtly Western concern, and one that is not all about doom. Rather than seeing the compression of time, or pollution of distance, as an end, she sees it as an opportunity to question the traditional descriptions of the local and the global. In her essay 'A Global Sense of Place' (1991) she asks the question, "can we find a global sense of the local, and a global sense of place?". For Massey, place is not about boundaries and a long 'internalised history'. Places are constructed from a "particular constellation of social relations" (Massey 1991, p.7); they are for meeting. The rich tapestries of cultures and people that make up a place show how a single place has a complexity of interactions, far broader than the nationalistic prejudice for single cultural identities. This echoes Kutlug Ataman's 40 monitor video work, *Küba* (2005) where residents of the shanty town neighborhood of *Küba* talk about their lives. *Küba* highlights an interrogation of a meta-subject through form and installation.

Documentary culture is a vehicle for disseminating these rich tapestries of place, as is post-documentary. Massey's assertions that place is constructed from a particular constellation of social relations shares a similarity with Benjamin's concepts of history being the outcome of connecting and reconnecting moments in time.

Conclusion

Both *The Flat Earth Society* and Hidden in the Shadow Lovers can be viewed as transitional works. Both were made with an assertion of being documentary or having documentary elements. Hidden in the Shadow Lovers brought into focus the thin line between fiction and non-fiction and the role of observation. It questions where we draw the line between a social actor and an actor.

The complexity of discerning between fiction and non-fiction is that, be it history, identity, or notions of place, they are all constructed. In his book *The Ticklish Subject? A critique of Zizek's Lacanian theory of subjectivity, with emphasis on an alternative*, R. C. Smith argues "the basic impetus of the Enlightenment is that nothing should escape its conceptual stranglehold over the phenomenal world – even if this exhausts all meaning from 'lived experience'" (2013, p.56). He continues by saying "enlightenment thought and, too, mythic thinking, can be seen to function similarly to the Lacanian notion of

the Real and the Symbolic: i.e., as a desire to completely account for the world – that is, to construct, in Lacanian terms, a Symbolic order" (Smith 2013, p.58). Each of the two works feature particular elements or styles applicable to documentary, including the use of traces and observational footage. And while neither of the two works fit neatly into established forms of documentary, the very idea of what constitutes documentary is an ongoing critical debate. My place within this debate is to mark the opportunity to consider post-documentary as a useful categorisation, alongside others such as expanded and experimental documentary. The difference and relevance for post-documentary is the semantic statement of reaction to as represented by the use of post.

Using post-structuralism as an example, Zizek highlights "post means things that went on in French theory after the American (or German) gaze perceived them, while 'structuralism' tout court designates French theory 'in itself', before it was noted by the foreign gaze" (2000, p.105). He elaborates this by saying an entity like 'post-structuralist deconstruction' comes into existence only for a gaze that is unaware of the details of the philosophical scene in France: this gaze brings together authors, such as Derrida, Deleuze, Foucault, and Lyotard, "who are simply not perceived as part of the same episteme in France, in the same way that the concept of film noir posits a unity which did not exist 'in itself'" (Zizek 2000, p.105). I propose my interest in post-documentary has been generated through an exterior gaze on documentary, which has surfaced through experiencing and practicing video art.

Expanded documentary is certainly a term that offers the potential for developing the realm of the documentary, including its forms and its functions. It indeed provides a linkage to performative works, and works that break the traditional space of single channel linear cvinema, fiction and non-fiction. However, I propose that expanded documentary maintains the lineage of forms and functions currently and traditionally associated with documentary. It doesn't present as an argument of reaction. I would argue in both documentary and post-documentary we can use tactics of expansion and performance.

Documentary, as a style of storytelling, is a style which cements an order of truth regarding the reality or realness of its subject. In doing so, documentary practice proclaims a sense of authenticity concerning its sources, interviews, found and archival footage, etc. and exposition of its subjects.

Both post-documentary and documentary respond to lived experience, however, we might argue that post-documentary doesn't require a sense of authenticity to consider and mediate upon the world as found existing. As post-documentary is a reaction to documentary, it is, arguable that one differencing factor between them are the forms and styles used to tell a story. We can argue that post-documentary opens itself up to performance, fictions and enactments more so than documentary, reducing the requirement of authenticity in post-documentaries mediations upon the world.

A

THE ACIDTROPHIC LAKE, 4 CHANNEL HD VIDEO, 2015

THE ACIDTROPHIC LAKE, 4 CHANNEL HD VIDEO, 2015

THE ACIDTROPHIC LAKE, 4 CHANNEL HD VIDEO, 2015

THE ACIDTROPHIC LAKE, SEVENTH GALLERY, 2015

3. Singing with the sirens

In this chapter I will consider possible forms and functions of post-documentary. These considerations have developed from John Corner's proposition of a need for post-documentary. Corner's proposition will be considered through examination of particular video artworks and key artists whose work extends or contrasts with given or established modes of documentary practice. I am considering Corner's proposition from the perspective of art, rather than traditional documentary practice and criticism.

Making and reflecting on the creation of *The Acidtrophic Lake*, a four channel video work made in 2015, has helped me develop another possible function of post-documentary. Considered alongside arguments that position documentary as a practice of history, *The Acidtrophic Lake* has prompted me to consider the potential for mythological structures to inform post-documentary forms or functions. In this light, metaphor and analogy, and the contestation of space and place are important considerations in determining post-documentary functions. Also of importance is Baudrillard's simulations theory with its recycling of signs and symbols. Throughout this chapter, I will consider post-documentary as an art practice. I will introduce what art might bring to, and how it might extend, documentary in the development of a post-documentary practice.

In 'Documentary in a Post-documentary Culture? A Note on Forms and their Functions' (1999), John Corner proposed a need to consider post-documentary as he argues that documentary is no longer a helpful category. Much of his attention and critique focuses on the development of Reality TV. With its principal focus on entertainment, Reality TV presents a complexity for documentary and its status within the discourses of sobriety. While it operates within the world, there is a contrived nature that borders on the structures of cinema. We can trace a historical relationship between Reality TV and art practices. In the 1970s, Ant Farm performed media stunts to promote a critique of mainstream media, most famously *Media Burn* (1975). In 1998, UK collective Blast Theory produced *Kidnap* where contestants paid ten pounds to enter a lottery to be kidnapped. The ten winners were put under constant surveillance, and from these ten people, two winners were selected and captured and held for 48 hours. Their captivity was broadcast live on the internet. This work and other live broadcasting projects, such as 'Jennicam' where a 19-year-old woman name Jennifer Ringley broadcast snapshots of her life ever 15 minutes, helped forge the path for programs such as *Big Brother*. In both reality TV and the works of artists such as Blast

Theory and Ant Farm there is a distinct blurring of what constitutes real and screen life. In the current period of reality television, events within them have become news worthy, albeit within the network that owns the show, an current example is Master Chef on Network Ten in Australia. Network Ten's history of making news out of reality television, reporting upon the fictions and events of reality television, started with the screening of Big Brother on Australian Television.

Jill Godmilow (1997) makes the point, "documentary film, in more obvious ways than does history, straddles the categories of fact and fiction, art and document, entertainment and knowledge". This statement aligns with Corner who challenges the term 'documentary', suggesting that it "is now an unhelpful category with which to assess current changes occurring in factual television, in particular in the context of 'popular knowledge and audio-visual experience'" (Corner 2000, p.28).

To claim a practice of post-documentary we need to ascertain what constitutes such a practice. What are the steps required to transgress from an established mode of practice? In this case, documentary. The process of transgression and the surfacing of interconnections between practices takes time. Shifts in practice often occur without a declaration of intent and differ depending upon the field of practice; their popularisation takes time.

Corner proposed another possible function of post-documentary, a post-documentary of extreme representation (Corner 1999). In art, post-documentary of extreme representation seems a highly plausible place to formulate what such a function might entail. If we consider works by artists such as Santiago Sierra, we see a practice that interrogates its subjects by taking it to, and beyond, its logical conclusion. Instead of being oppositional, it exposes the realities of the subject through extreme action and representation. For example, in Sierra's Workers in a Ships Hold (2001) North African migrant workers are crammed below decks in the hold of ship docks for three hours in stifling heat against the backdrop of demonstrations for changes in immigration laws. One might consider this practice as an extreme equivalent of the documentary trope of recreation. Christian Marclay's *Guitar Drag* (2000) can also be considered as an extreme representation through its reconstruction of the murder of James Byrd in Texas.

In The Flat Earth Society, the focus was on dystopian novels. Dystopian works, though fictional, use the hyperextension of realities to comment on particular socio-economic situations. Artists such as Santiago Sierra use the hyperextension of subject matter to expose the extent and cumulative trauma of a specific action, policy or ideology. Sierra's work clearly focuses on real-world events and situations as found existing. Although not strictly documentary, they could be seen as such.

It is the consideration of practices such as those of Santiago Sierra and Christian Marclay that have spiked my interest in Post-documentary. Marclay's *Guitar Drag* (2000) operates on many levels. First, and most obviously, the work explores new ways to produce sound. The action of dragging a guitar along the ground resonates with Marclay's other sonic enquiries, which have included playing records by imitating the actions of guitarists. In this context his work has a material focus; it doesn't activate the guitar as a sign or icon, though the guitar, by nature, is charged with metaphor and significations. The role of the guitar changes when we understand Marclay is also considering the violence of rock and its masculine history of destruction, as well as referencing Fluxus artist Nam June Paik and noisy rock art of the 1980s. At this point, the guitar and the actions of dragging it down a dirt road have become a metaphor, layered or encoded with numerous references. Whether these references are decipherable or not, seems unimportant. Finally, and this is not clear unless you know, the work also re-enacts James Byrd's brutal murder in Texas.

Marclay says that the conflict between these layers of signification is intentional:

> All these references are there, and I think it depends on the viewer's interest, knowledge, and state of mind. People will have different readings of this video, and I want all these to be legitimate. Ultimately, I made the video because of what happened to James Byrd, but all these other references allowed me to think of the guitar as this very anthropomorphic instrument that was already associated with violence, and with rebellion, and crazy youth. I believe that it's fine when people walk out of there disgusted. I think it's also fine when they walk out of there exhilarated. (Kase 2008, p.422).

It may be contestable, but I believe that a requirement of documentary films is to draw a conclusion. In doing so a documentary takes its audience on a journey through a particular subject matter in a clear and coherent manner. To this end, the majority of documentaries don't seek to hide their topics and points of reference. A documentary's claim of accuracy is focused on the quality and impartially of the evidence given, and the subsequent formation of a conclusion. *Making a Murderer* (Ricciardi and Demos 2015), which aired in 2015 on Netflix, follows the trials of Steven Avery and his nephew Brendan Dassey, accused of the murder of local women Teresa Halbach. The series is a good example of an audience questioning the bias of the filmmakers through the accuracy or selection of information used to tell its story. It is evident that the agenda and intentions of the filmmakers are clear, there is little doubt about the conclusion they expect the viewer to make.

Yael Bartana's trilogy, *And Europe will be Stunned* (2012), defies the category of documentary. The work calls for the return of Jews to Poland through a fictional movement, the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP). Claiming that she doesn't have answers, Bartana develops a work that conflates what is real and what is not. The main protagonist, Slawomir Sierakowski, plays himself, yet in a fictional role. In the second film, a new ghetto is built on the site of the Warsaw Ghetto. The view of people going about their everyday lives in the background places this action as an intervention. Finally, the scenes at Slawomir Sierakowski's funeral are filled with individuals who belong to JRMiP and who are keen to debate subjects at hand. As observed by Laura Cumming in her review, "Bartana's films swim between fact and fiction. They move seamlessly from one genre to another, from documentary to biopic to Riefenstahl" (Cumming 2012).

Galit Eilat, a writer, curator and research curator at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven, highlights how the work embraces the complications of politics; it doesn't shy from the horrors of political history. Instead, it asks us to reconsider them. In doing so, it holds particular tensions such as hope and despair, while challenging our perspectives on such topics as immigration, racism and the plight of the Jewish people. It questions the loss to culture when a particular group of individuals are removed or leave a country such as seen in the historical situation of Poland (Eilat quoted in Meanwell 2013).

Through these works, we can outline possibilities and opportunities for post-documentary and extreme representation. Works can layer reference

and meaning, they can extend the plausible outcomes of a particular action or policy, and they can engage with duration which defies the limits of traditional documentary. Kutlug Ataman's *Küba* (2005) is one such example where the length of the work exceeds standard cinema and documentary convention. Utilising over 40 televisions sets to present interviews with residents from *Küba*, a shanty town on the outskirts of Istanbul which does not officially exist, it is an intervention if you like by the residents in Turkey. The total duration of the work exceeds 28 hours. In *Küba*, Ataman is examining the complexities of understanding place, and the realisation that place is known, in urban centres at least, through a smattering of people and conversations.

The rules and restrictions of art, and the anticipation of art's aware audience, comes into consideration when contemplating documentary within a video art practice. Of significance is the spatial and temporal nature of the art gallery, and the mobilisation of the visitor. As a double-edge sword, these attributes are at once problematic and exciting. The gallery introduces new opportunities for spatial and temporal relationships to develop between the work and the audience. Importantly, it introduces the ability to expand the view of the image beyond the single frame and total duration of the cinema. The strict temporal structure of the cinema can be freed and reformed. Elizabeth Cowie suggests that in the gallery, "both the space and the time of spectatorship of time-based works are transformed" (Cowie 2009, p.125).

But what does this transformed time-space of spectatorship mean in regards to the nature of documentary? Does the art gallery provide a launch pad to move from documentary to post-documentary? If so, what does this mean? Where is the collision between the nature of art and the nature of documentary? Cowie argues that documentary as installation in the gallery disturbs the categories of both 'art' and 'documentary'.

For Cowie, an artwork that engages documentary, with documentary being an indexical signifier, disturbs the 'artness' of the work, while documentary as simply referential, as information and as record, is problematised. This disturbance that Cowie identifies rests at the position of understanding the nature of realities and the constructed nature of what she calls our audiovisual discourse of knowledge. For Linda Williams, "some form of truth is the always receding goal of documentary film" (Williams 1993, p.20). A documentary's truth is constructed with careful consideration throughout

the filmmaking process. For Williams, the documentary is "an intervention in the politics and the semiotics of representation" (Williams 1993, p.20), something documentary shares with art. The receding goal of art is the intervention and disruption of truths, morals and guiding values of the sober disciplines of political and religious institutions. In this light, art and documentary are working from a common place, but from opposite perspectives.

Structures of myth, metaphor and allegory

Through reflection on works, and in particular through making *The Acidtrophic Lake*, I would like to propose another possible function of post-documentary, which is post-documentary of mythical structure. This proposition has developed as a reaction to documentary being a discipline of history. The question is, what do mythical structures enable that are not enabled within documentary style?

I acknowledge that mythology is in many regards concerned with histories. However, there are many significant differences that we can draw upon, in particular, the impossibility to refute, through evidence-based empirical systems, the historical events which underwrite a myth. Percy Cohen in his paper 'Theories of Mythology' highlights that myths "are really not errors they are certainly not like the errors in which science abounds: for they always contain reference to some objects and events which could not possibly exist and occur" (Cohen 1969, p.387). In these terms, Bartana's work *And Europe Will Be Stunned*, appears to behave in a modern mythical fashion. Doug Atiken's work *Erasure* (1998) has also been considered a nature doco-myth by art critic Jerry Saltz (Saltz, 1998).

Critical analysis of mythical structures is complex, with various schools of thought claiming particular elements as key. My interest in mythologies is not their relationship to ritual and spiritualism but defined by the structuralist theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss and the post-modern writings of Derrida, in particular his considerations on metaphor. Craig Chalquist, in his short essay on myth, highlights that for Derrida "myth has no ultimate source; it remains shadowy and virtual, ephemeral and elusive, like a cloud of texts referring only to each other". With mythology closely linked to metaphor, Derrida writing on metaphor in White Mythology, highlights the illusiveness of metaphor and thus myth by saying: "Metaphor is the moment of possible sense as a possibility of non-truth. It is the moment of detour in which truth can still be lost. It surely belongs to mimesis that redoubling in physis, that point at which nature, veiled by her own act, has not yet recovered her proper nakedness, the very act of her proper self." (Derrida 1974)

Derrida concludes that metaphor is "classified by philosophy as provisional loss of meaning, a form of economy that does no irreparable damage to what is proper, an inevitable detour, no doubt, but the account is in view, and within the horizon of a circular reappropriation of the proper sense" (Derrida 1974), and which he says:

> From this point, the whole teleology of sense, which constructs the philosophical concept of metaphor, directs it to the manifestation of truth as an unveiled presence, to the regaining of language in its fullness without syntax, to a pure calling by name: there would be no syntactic differentiation, or at least no properly unnamable articulation which could not be reduced to semantic "sublation" or dialectical interiorization. (Derrida 1974)

For Lévi-Strauss, "Myth is unsuccessful in, giving man more material power over the environment. However, it gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe, is, of course, only an illusion" (Lévi-Strauss 1979, p.17). When Lévi-Strauss is asked, "'does myth explain the events of the natural and social world?' His answer is 'No'" (Cohen 1969, p.346). Instead, he builds an argument that "the main function of myth, the main cause promoting its existence as a mode of thought is, that it is as device for 'mediating contradictions' or 'oppositions' as experienced by people'" (Cohen 1969, p.346).

Myths when considered akin to day dreams, they use the symbols of dreams to "express unconscious wishes and conflicts" (Cohen 1969, p.341). Myths differ from dreams. In day dreams "the conscious element is strong, making it more readily communicable than its counterpart" (Cohen 1969, p.341). Cohen argues:

> the main reason for this is that the unconscious fantasies and mechanisms are checked only when consciousness itself introduces the feedback of external reality; and in a day-dream this check is partly absent, so that some reality is processed into the world of fantasy, and the picture of the world is partly a controlled projection of the unconscious (Cohen 1969, p.341).

I am not making the case for myth as being grander or better than something else. I am not proposing to pit mythology against documentary. My proposal is that myth enables the use of metaphor and allegorical relationships, the manipulation of signs to tell stories that appear to go beyond fiction. It also embraces subconscious thought that is directed by consciousness. It brings together the realms of human cognition, the conscious and the unconscious.

'In White Mythology', Derrida writes, "I have at last made you realize one thing, Aristos, that any expression of an abstract idea can only be an analogy". Derrida, writing on metaphor and analogy — "Analogy is metaphor par excellence" according to Derrida —   highlights that from metaphor "we can best get hold of something fresh", and that a good "metaphor, for Aristotle, has the virtues of putting something before our eyes". This virtue of putting something before our eyes is done so through the use of non-truth. In that metaphors use resemblance, according to Aristotle, to highlight something new, he says "metaphor (metaphora) consists in giving (epiphora) the thing a name (onomatos) that belongs to something else" (Derrida 1974).

Dreams have long held significant guiding roles in societies, yet, with the need to remove science from mysticism, they lost their standing in Western cultures. Post-documentary as myth does not have to do away with documentary elements. Instead, I am interested in the potential of conjoining them in the same manner that Lévi-Strauss observes science's re-engagement with qualitative modes of examination. He says for:

"Bacon, Descartes, Newton, and the others, it was necessary for science to build itself up against the old generations of mythical and mystical thought, and it was thought that science could only exist by turning its back upon the world of the senses, the world we see, smell, taste, and perceive; the sensory was a delusive world, whereas the real world was a world of mathe- matical properties which could only be grasped by the intellect and which was entirely at odds with the false testimony of the senses" (Lévi-Strauss 1979, p.6).

However, he sees science "which had a purely quantitative outlook in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries" (Lévi-Strauss 1979, p.24), now "is beginning to integrate the qualitative aspects of reality as well" (Lévi-Strauss 1979, p.24).

Lévi-Strauss observes that "mythology is static, he says, we find the same mythical elements combined over and over again, but they are in a closed system, let us say, in contradistinction with history, which is, of course, an open system" (Lévi-Strauss 1979, p.40). We can attribute this closed system to the fictional and metaphorical nature of the stories being told. Through these unobtainable fictions, the use of metaphor and allegory, myths meanings are, however, open to interpretation. The questionable nature of documentary, its openness, we can argue, is produced when questioning its authenticity.

A key objective I had when making *The Acidtrophic Lake* was to move on from a number of formal styles that I had previously been adopted, in particular, the use of found footage and single screen composition. Conceptually, *The Acidtrophic Lake* had been on my mind for some time. At the onset I was interested in examining or 'mediating' on the complicated relationship between the natural world and human/built world. A metaphorical device I was keen to use was acid and its ability to erode. On reflection, this reference was influenced by my upbringing in the UK, hence the title, *The Acidtrophic Lake*. During the 1980s acid rain and its environmental effects seemed to be a continuous and highly debated subject. Regardless, the gesture I was interested in working with was the erosion of particular signs and symbols of Western male dominated worlds.

Lévi-Strauss places the abstract mode of thought as the primary importance in mythology, whereas Cohen sees narrative as having a primary importance as "a narrative is an ordering of specific events" (Cohen 1969, p.349). In Cohen's views on myth, placingthe present in the past is important. He explains:

This is done by establishing a dramatically significant series of events: and the drama is conveyed by the style, which may well consist of using oppositions and their resolution; and it is also conveyed by dredging deep into unconscious symbolism, so that the message communicated by the myth does have an impact at a number of levels (Cohen 1969, p.350).

The Acidtrophic Lake places the present within a sequence of apparently unrelated past events. These events all point to particular situations of female repression, or where women have risen against their oppression in protest or resistance. This common thread and line of research created

connections, a simple tapestry, which reads in some sense like an abbreviated history.

The intention with the historical references to Neptune Equester, Penthesileia, and IX.IV.MCMXV was the establishment of a universal time, or, of all time. The first scene is titled Ou-Topos, which is Greek for 'no place', and the word that founded Sir Thomas More's coining of the term 'Utopia'. The title Ou-Tops was a proposition that now is never, or maybe, always.

According to Lévi-Strauss, myths are the precursor to science, not science of the concrete (as called by Lévi-Strauss) but science of abstract relations. The importance of myth to post-documentary as a vehicle used for in this project, in particular *The Acidtrophic Lake*, is myth's alignment to history through the referencing of events, with the possibility to reject or resist the need for scientific or rational validation of the events or their linkages, thus keeping myth and metaphor's ephemeral and illusive nature alive. We could argue that in *The Acidtrophic Lake*, the date that marks Clara Immerwhr's suicide, potentially validates the mythical statues of Penthasillia. The rhetoric that surrounds Clara Immerwhar's death, and the possibility that her suicide note was destroyed, highlights the biases, and thus possible non-truths inherent in histories, and other forms of rational exposition. This critiqueue on rational exposition is the fundemental, or meta narrative of *The Acidtrophic Lake*.

Myths are thus open to interpretation through the examination of poetic and symbolic relationships. Myth offers post-documentary a diversion from documentary and science concrete, both of which more often play to the testing and evaluation of empirical evidence. R. C. Smith argues that "while the Enlightenment tried to overcome or supersede the mythic world and humanity's precarious dependence on nature (existentially), the enlightenment became a sort of excrescence of myth. The Enlightenment, we could say, emerged in history as almost the extreme opposite of Myth" (Smith 2013, p.56). This provides an interesting proposition for myth as a potential influence on post-documentary. Especially when we consider Smith's reading of Ardono, that 'the 'rational' drive toward superseding myth is organised according to a certain analytical and explanatory schema which, in turn, fosters a reductionistic approach to the phenomenological world of experience. Everything gets reduced to the status of mere 'object' which can therefore be manipulated and controlled. Thus, the Enlightenment confuses "the animate with the inanimate, just as myth compounds the inanimate with the animate"' (Smith 2013, p.56). Post-documentary isn't the

formulation of empirical debate and evidence-based conclusions. However, like myth, post-documentary can be considered "as a device for 'mediating contradictions' or 'oppositions' as experienced by people" (Cohen 1969, p.346).

Metaphor and allegory enable the concurrent telling and painting of local and global stories, arguments and portraits. The man in *The Acidtrophic Lake* is an allegorical figure; he holds within him a hidden identity. His position in society and history is ambiguous. His clothes and the very nature of him being a man prescribe a particularly elevated position. The business suit he wears has a certain status and implies a particular trade, one that we can attribute to Western Culture.

Likewise, with Bartana's *And Europe will be Stunned* (2012), the people play themselves. In the case of *The Acidtrophic Lake*, the man has a dual identity or purpose, he is both a metaphor and a real person, Nathan. When we view the man as Nathan, the work becomes a portrait of him. This portrait was created through the placement of Nathan within a context that speaks of his internal struggles and trajectories. The formal intention of the work echoes Marclay's sentiments regarding the layers of reference in *Guitar Drag* (2000).

Through knowledge of Nathan's indigenous heritage, either through close friendship, or through recognition of particular physical features, the metaphor becomes ambiguous and open to more than one interpretation. It enables a global consideration of people whose culture has, by various means, been subsumed into other cultures, and in effect who have been made to live within a set of constraints unfamiliar or outside of their traditional belief systems. It considers the transference of dress as a significant act in colonisation.

The titles of the other two chapters which adorn the woman's dress offer a historicity, while the performative actions that dominate the work create an unobtainable fictional world. This world invites mediation on the oppression of women and indigenous people by patriarchal Western societies. The possible complication or contradiction of this statement is that the unobtainable fictional world comments on what would be determined in the documentary as the real world as found or existing.

The woman in *The Acidtrophic Lake* is also an allegorical figure who brings with her the tools to strike down the contracts of patriarchy. Her story is

played out through three scenes: a journey, a meeting with the man, and the burying of his clothes. I was determined to reference and appropriate Homer's *Odysseus* (Homer 1992). In *The Acidtrophic Lake*, the gender of Odysseus is reversed; the vignette of the female figure traversing the landscape becomes a metaphor for the struggle of women. Through the inversion of Homer's journey, the woman is empowered to free herself from the constraints of man. In her meeting with the man, the man submits to her while she frees him of the symbols of Western society: the all-encompassing business suit with all its social hierarchies and denouncements of individuals and alternative identities.
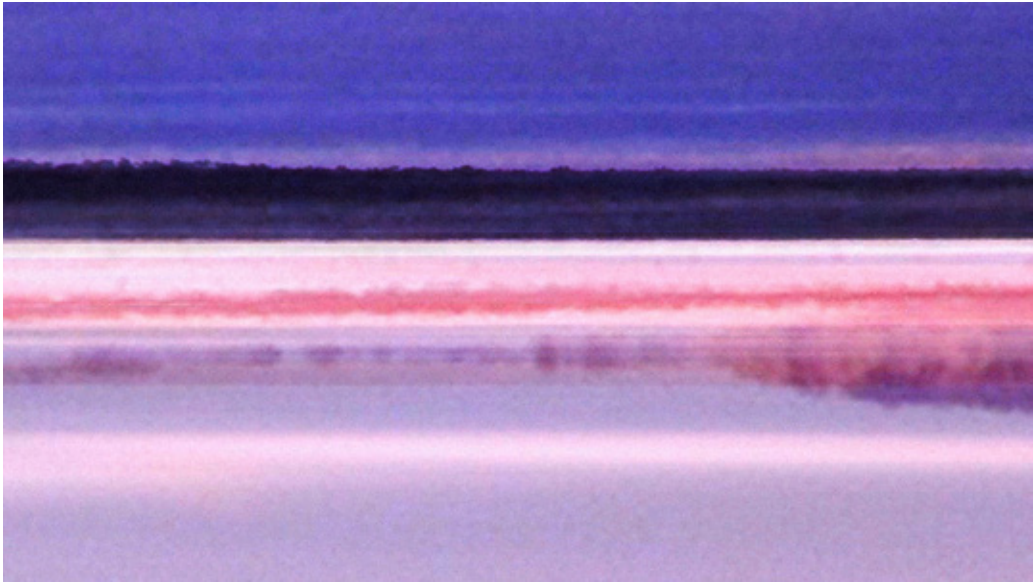
Conclusion

I see post-documentary as a mode of storytelling which responds to "the world as found and existing" (Nichols 2001, p.89), but which does not adhere to documentary's soberness and its stylistic rules, as varied as they can be. We can consider post-documentary works, especially within the context of video art, to be forms of oral story telling. This is developed when post-documentary practice engages with metaphor, allegory and myth, for example *The Acidtrophic Lake*. However, as an audio visual medium, the text does not all need to be written or spoken. Metaphor and narrative can be drawn through visual poetic gestures, the use of sound to influence our reading of images, and the expansion of the visual field through multiple screens and spatial installation. In this case, post-documentary practices become spatial as well temporal forms of storytelling.

The use of metaphor and allegory presents opportunities to engage with Correlationism by describing something with something else. Through metaphor and allegory post-documentary ruptures the repetition of symbolic truth. These ruptures present opportunities to contemplate new fields of perception. At this point post-documentary claims not truth but fallacy, when considering what might be real, or the truth. As demonstrated in Bartana's work, instead of shying away from fiction, the intentional intertwining of fictional narratives and non-fictional references enables a compelling place of comment and reflection upon the world we live, often, again paraphrasing Bartana, without answers.

AFTERLIFE LAKE, HD VIDEO, 2014

AFTERLIFE LAKE, HD VIDEO, 2014

AFTERLIFE SALT, HD VIDEO, 2014

AFTERLIFE SALT, HD VIDEO, 2014

SURFACE TENSION #1, DARK OCEAN, INSTITUTE OF MARINE AND ANTARTIC STUDIES, DARK MOFO

SURFACE TENSION #1, DARK OCEAN, INSTITUTE OF MARINE AND ANTARTIC STUDIES, DARK MOFO

SURFACE TENSION #1, DARK OCEAN, INSTITUTE OF MARINE AND ANTARTIC STUDIES, DARK MOFO

4. Shifting spatial and temporal registers

In this chapter I would like to turn the focus to formal considerations within my practice, in particular those related to time and space, such as slow-motion video, non-standard shutter speeds, spatial installation, duration and sound. Through these formal devices, and subsequent outcomes, I will consider opportunities for visceral forms of storytelling and the use of sensorial tactics. These formal considerations, actions and responses will be positioned alongside Bergson's concept of time and his switching of normal motor activities to develop alternate plains of perception.

The key works examined in this section are *The Afterlife* Series, *The Shrine of Triticum Durum*, *Perspectives* and The Acidtrophic Lake. I will also consider a new work produced as a work in progress for a future postdoctoral work, titled *Surface Tension #1*. *Surface Tension #1* extends material enquiries such as those found in *The Afterlife* Series by positioning them within a symbolic commentary on the biases in the writing of histories.

Evident in numerous video works, including mine and in others, is the use of temporal devices such as slow motion, macro videography, sound, and spatial configuration. These are all spatio-temporal devices which are used to create potential disturbances or ruptures in the repetitions and mirrors that veil our realities. In this sense, Hal Foster's observations of Warhol's *Death in America* (1962–1964) images align with Simon O'Sullivan's reading of Bergson's concepts of time, examined in his journal article, 'The aesthetics of affect, thinking art beyond representation' (2001). O'Sullivan suggests that "as beings in the world we are caught on a certain spatio-temporal register: we see only what we have already seen (we see only what we are interested in). At stake with art, then, might be an altering, a switching, of this register" (O'Sullivan 2001, p.124).

The concept of 'affect' and the possibilities for switching temporal registers will be considered alongside a long standing metaphor in my work, the horizon line. The horizon line has become an important theoretical device to consider potentials for destabilisation, or what Hito Steyler calls 'free fall' (Steyerl 2012).

Inversion and the horizon

The horizon line and its relation to the stars gives us a body and a sense of place. Seafarers used the horizon to calculate their position and to orientate

themselves within the world. Hito Steyerl argues that this sense of orientation enabled "colonialism and the spread of a capitalist global market" (Steyerl 2012, p.15). According to Steyerl, this "became an important tool for the construction of the optical paradigms that came to define modernity, the most important paradigm being that of so-called linear perspective" (Steyerl 2012, p.15).

It is argued that Western thought and mathematics has flattened the horizon line, in turn creating a stable and homogenous space. Steyerl sums this up by saying, "[Western Geometry] computes a mathematical, flattened, infinite, continuous, and homogenous space, and declares it to be reality" (Steyerl 2012, p.18). The effect of this stable horizon is the creation of a 'view onto a calculable future' (Steyerl 2012, p.18). In some sense the beauty of this calculable future is its unobtainable point of arrival. Our destination beyond the horizon has to leave the horizon for it to become a place of arrival. In this time of diminishing boundaries and collapsing of distance through speed, our physical and metaphysical destinations are more often known and projected before our departure. The techno-sphere has eradicated the horizon, replacing it with the security room of a panopticon. The illusion of stability has been cemented within our fibre-connected worlds. We see and hear everything at the same time from the point of transmission. All the traumas of life, the fears of economic collapse, the horrors of war, and the lies of politics have become our stable reality saturated with illusion and fear.

Advertising and its stable life is in essence a media horizon that propagates the stability of society. For instance, if you buy this product it will lead to this experience and this sense of life. Advertising attempts in most cases to present a world that is coherent and defined. People's roles are clear and their goals are outlined. Measures of success and failure are written in thirty-seconds or within a full-page spread. The horizon lines in advertisements are perfectly straight, not a cloud lingers in the sky; its perfect, life is good. The spectacle is in full force.

Afterlife Lake's destabilising factor develops through a continuous zooming into the horizon line, which in turn reveals the oscillations of heat, and the dance of digital compression. Through the duration of the work, new lands reveal themselves as they get further and closer to our outstretched hand. In *Afterlife Salt* we witness the forward and backward view of the horizon line, superimposed upon each other. Without a marker in the sky, and any

bends in the road, this duality of view intends to destabilise. This time of now, is, in this sense, an accelerated back and forth between the future and the past. As soon as we believe we are in the now, it is past and our trajectory moves to the next point on the horizon. Our past experiences in turn direct and contort our future path, discerning the potential returns of chance, stability and blindness. Merleau-Ponty's concepts of perception are this, a continuous evaluation of the events of now, with memories of the past, and projections of the future (Merleau-Ponty 1962).

Trude Iversen, writing about Inger Lise Hansen's 16mm films of inverted landscapes of faded industrial and commercial places, sees the horizon line as an "interesting place to consider how we see, represent and experience the world, or representations of it" (Iversen 2011).

Iversen continues to say:
> "The dissonance between knowledge and art can be traced back to Plato, who famously banished artists from his ideal republic, because he believed that science/philosophy are in themselves sufficient as means of discovering truth. For Plato, art has power but is untrue and corrupts. But one can invert this relationship and argue that it is rational science and philosophy that are corrupt. Therefore, what we need is a realm outside that of the sciences, one that allows us to consider possible truths freely" (Iversen 2011).

In *The Shrine of Triticum Durum*'s main video sequences sits a spinning 3D render of Earth, made from satellite images. In the video the globe is seen spinning in its opposite direction and rotating on its horizontal axis. This renders Earth moving in an upside motion. By switching the axis on which the globe rotates was intended to challenge the viewer to question how place is represented, and to acknowledge the politics of place and its representation. Such visual tactics sit outside of the realm of science. It is not a critique on science, rather, an opportunity to consider the incumbent, inscribed and embedded truths and realities that have been drawn over time, the North is top.

Perspectives is a dual channel video that acts as both a dérive through Melbourne, as well as an observational documentary on the hidden and found skate parks in urban infrastructures. In *Perspectives*, the world is problematised and fictionalised through the inversion of the image. The

inverted images of Melbourne, shot from underneath the skateboard are presented as a perpendicular view. The use of slow motion furthers the abstraction of time and space. From the slow-motion video and the cameras being positioned close to the ground, the illusion of time is distorted through parallax. Objects close to the lens seem fast, whilst in the distance things move slowly; there are moments when it seems we are moving in reverse. These formal aspects change the constant and fluid shots from being pans through a city to a distorted reality grounded by the shadow of the skater on the surface of the pavement.

At times in *Perspectives* the city of Melbourne and some of its architectural icons are viewable, particularly for its residents. These views highlight an architectural survey of the city. The movement of the skateboard, the moments where our orientation to the world is altered, twisted and spun, as well as the views of another skater charging through a car park, offer a commentary on skating. In terms of narrative, I was interested in exposing the rifts between skating as an expression of freedom, and the constraints of urbanism and the idealism of architecture. Skateboarding as an activity, and as a metaphor, has long enabled alternate expressions of movement and the use of public space. The expression and freedom of skateboarding has stood in opposition to given and established spatial practices as defined through urban development, architecture and the laws inscribed upon them. If urbanism is linear time and fixing of space, I propose that skateboarding offers the possibility of a multitude of time and the impermanence of space.

For Bergson, our concept of time is misunderstood. Bergson "distinguished between time as we actually experience it, lived time – which he called 'real duration' (durée réelle) – and the mechanistic time of science" (Phipps 2004). He attributes this to a misconception by placing spatial concepts onto time. This distorted version of time, according to Bergson, "is perceived via a succession of separate, discrete, spatial constructs – just like seeing a film" (Phipps 2004). The reality though, according to Bergson's theory of time, is that time is a continuous flow "with no clearly demarcated beginnings and ends" (Phipps 2004).

Spatial configuration and the expansion of video field

I would like to consider the use of installation, in particular, narrative opportunities developed through the use of multiple channels of video, and/

or potentially inaccessible or extreme durations. As previously discussed, Kutlug Ataman's *Küba* (2005) uses duration and the spatial configuration of screens to compartmentalise our ability to experience the township of *Küba*. Expressing a sincere examination of the town's people and their lives, he problematises the phenomena of experience of place as being built or governed from a few discrete meetings, points of view and conversations. These interactions develop our concept of place and the identities, behaviours and ideologies housed within specific places.

In her essay 'Is a Museum a Factory?' (2012) Hito Steyerl makes an interesting observation regarding cinema and the gallery. She observes that "multi-screen projections create a multifocal space" (Steyerl 2012b, p.67). Steyerl proposes that the multifocal space addresses "a multitude spread out in space, connected only by distraction, separation, and difference" (Steyerl 2012b, p.67). In contrast Steyerl makes the comment that traditional single-channel cinematic works focus the gaze and organise time, whereas "many of the newer works explode into space" (Steyerl 2012b, p.67). Cinema in Steyerl's opinion 'is a mass media'. She argues the difference between mass and multitude "arises on the line between confinement and dispersion, between homogeneity and multiplicity, between cinema space and museum installation space"(Steyerl 2012b, p.67).

The effect of cinema as a multifocal space is "the public operate under the condition of partial invisibility, incomplete access and fragmented realities" (Steyerl 2012b, p.72). Steyerl highlights this through her examination of Documenta 11 and the outcry concerning the combined duration of video being longer than the length of the event. Having a combined duration of video that extended beyond the time of the event made it implausible for a single person to see the whole of the exhibition, "rendering overview, review and survey impossible" (Steyerl 2012b, p.71). It is through activation and participation that Steyerl then coins the phrase 'post-representation' (Jordan and Steyerl n.d.). She bases post-representation on political cinema's move away from education which she says "was an instrumental effect at 'representation' in order to achieve its effects in 'reality'. Whereas today she claims "political cinema of today does not educate the crowd, it produces the crowd, through the articulation of the crowd in space and in time" (Steyerl, 2012b).

In our current world where consumption has usurped production, Baudrillard expanding upon Marx's concepts of consuption, that the underlying logic of capitalism is the accumulation of wealth through commodities, "analyzes the commodity from a more radical perspective, to consider it not merely as a material object but as a vehicle of communication, a Sign" (Mendoza 2010). Through this analysis of the commodity Baudrillard, "claims that politics in its traditional form is no longer viable; it is replaced by the practice of manipulation: of appearances, signs, and empty forms" (Boer 2005). Both Steyerl and Baudrillard highlight the changing political landscape of dis-information, or what is currently being termed post-truth.

For art historian Blake Stimson:
> film offers no greater vision as the organising of individual frames into sequences of moving images renders the detail of the individual frame subordinate to duration. Whereas, the photographic essay enables the detail of the single image to be read alongside alternate readings through an image's proximity, spatially and temporally, with other images. The flow of the eye and the decision of the reader, renders the final composition, which in turn is ephemeral as multiple renders are possible (Stimson 2006).

The proposition of ephemerality through spatial composition and the dividing of attention enables the peripheral to be considered in the formation of a narrative and its subsequent readings. I attribute the peripheral to what Stimson considers the interstices between multiple pictures. For Stimson, this sliver of space, utilised by the photographic essay, offers "the promise of another kind of truth, which unfolds, in the movement from one picture to the next" (Stimson 2006, p.96).

Stimson writes in a polemic that pits the photo-essay against film. He writes that the "photographic essay is thus a form that holds onto the opening up of time, which, draws its meaning from the back-and-forth interrelation of discrete images that is eliminated when those images are sutured together into film" (Stimson 2006, p.98). This suture of images into a linear time by montage and the damage Stimson claims it has upon possible meaning contrasts sharply with Steyerl's view. Steyerl sees the "montage as a perfect device for destabilizing the observer's perspective and breaking down linear time" (Steyerl 2012b, p.22). In many cases, we could argue the photo-essay holds elements of montage. This is especially true when a

montage is doubled, tripled, expanded beyond the single screen. Steyerl's destabilisation of linear time is furthered through the creation of a 'multifocal space' (Steyerl 2012b, p.67). This space mobilises the interstices that Stimson sees as important to the creation of a multiplicity of reading.

When activating a multifocal space through multiple channels of video, the process of editing and the organising of events opens opportunities for narrative structure unobtainable in single channel video. Mark Boulos's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* (2008) uses the spatial positioning of screens to present two spectrums of the world, linked but ultimately foreign. I will acknowledge that my experience of the work was at the Sydney Biennale, where the two screens were positioned facing one another. The positioning of the screens directed the audience to view the work from within this internal space. I have seen documentation of this work where this spatial configuration was not used. However, the spatial configuration greatly affected my experience and appreciation of the work.

Boulos's work is layered with various enquiries that focus on two different groups of people, his interest lies in the language of ritual and the fetishism of commodity. This subject was considered through the observation of two groups of people: workers at the Chicago Mutual Exchange, and a group of freedom fighters from the Niger delta. Oil is the glue that joins these two groups of people. The freedom fighters are fighting for land rights. Their lands have been subsumed by large oil companies who profit from the extraction and sale of oil from this resource-rich place. The Chicago Mutual Exchange is the global trading place of oil, and in the video we see the frenzy of the trading room, operating within the abstraction of global financial markets. The freedom fighters draw strength from their spirits and gods, which they claim protects them in their war against these global corporations. This global conflict is expressed through the two screens, one showing the fever of trading, the other showing the frenzy of traditional ritual and the taking up of arms. This narrative and view on a global issue of resource management, land rights and commodity, is grounded within the context of our (the audience's) lives by positioning us within and between this conflict. The beauty lies in the silent positioning of us within the conflict as the spatial configuration underwrites a trove of debate, consumption, policy, and resistance.

Materialism and affect

In Simon O'Sullivan's paper 'The aesthetics of affect, thinking art beyond representation' (2001), he argues that "art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world. Less involved in knowledge and more involved in experience, in pushing forward the boundaries of what can be experienced" (O'Sullivan 2001). In contrast, for Baudrillard and non-representational writers such as "Dewsbury et. al." (Smith 2005, p.9), "the world is a performative flow of appearances not indexed to the truth, that it is not the meaning, but the performativity of representations that we need to take seriously" (Smith 2005, p.9).

What does performativity of representations entail, especially for recorded mediums such as sound and video? Where is the audience situated in this performance of representation? Are they active or passive? Does the audience even exist? One way to answer this is to view audiences as active, as another text, another performance as valid and active as the artwork. As demonstrated with Boulus's work, audiences can be mobilised and hence become performative. We can also ask ourselves what is the difference between experiencing the brutality of James Byrd's murder through the extreme action of a guitar being dragged behind a ute, to experiences whereby we are told of it through a textual factual account, or even the factual re-enactment found in crime shows?

Experiences are central to how we understand ourselves and the world. In the end, everything we do is an experience, from the mundane to the ecstatic. The power of art is to create new experiences that show us new potentials, through which we garner knowledge. O'Sullivan brings to light that art can't necessarily get away from representation, "after all, art objects, like everything else, can be read" (O'Sullivan 2001, p.128). In the end, all art is engaged in discourse, codes and traditions. There is no autonomous art. According to O'Sullivan, art is a block of affects which cannot be read they can only be experienced. The relationship between affects and experience can be understood or summarised as moments of intensity" (O'Sullivan 2001, p.126). This intensity creates physical reactions in or on the body. Deleuze and Guattari see affects as being a block of 'sensations' (O'Sullivan 2001). This place of experience manifests as a place that can't be read or recorded. It is through these moments of intensity that art opens us up to

the non-human universe. Art then acts as a fissure in representation. In How to Think Sound in Itself? Towards a Materialist Dialectic of Sound, Luc Döbereiner states that if "we understand the real as the 'impossible' of a situation, an artistic intervention – the creation of a new possibility or an achievement of the impossible – is a moving of the real" (Döbereiner 2014, p.5).

In producing *Afterlife Salt*, I was interested in exploring the experience of being out in the desert. While making the work I did not ask, how do we recreate the experience of the desert as an actual representation? If I had, the soundtrack would have been field recordings taken on location. The final colour grade would have mimicked as closely as possible the desaturated light caused by the intensity of the sun. Instead, I asked myself, what are the experiences evoked when standing alone on the salt flats of Lake Eyre? And, how can they be explored through an art practice engaged with the sensorial? How do we experience the sound of silence that manifests so intensely? O'Sullivan claims art is a "portal, an access point, to another world (our world experienced differently), a world of impermanence and interpenetration, a molecular world of becoming" (O'Sullivan 2001, p.128).

This brings us back to considerations of realism and materialism, and in degrees the visceral. It would be unfair to say that documentary cannot and does not operate on a visceral level. The proclamation of Susan Sontag (cited in Stallbrass, 2013, p.16)—"let the atrocious images haunt us"—underlines how the visceral is important to storytelling. Of course, affect can materialise in many ways—beauty, isolation, empathy, shock, fear, and horror, to name a few. In considering possible functions of post-documentary, affect is one such formal consideration as an outcome for a post-documentary work. It would rally against exposition, leaving a sensorial outcome. Though again, documentary can and does have an effect. In that case do we need to consider style and form as the differing operatives between a documentary of affect, and a post-documentary of affect? Could it be that documentary uses moments of affect to underline its argument, and post-documentary uses affect to propose or enable a position of mediation? In this sense, can we consider that the primacy of image and sound in post-documentary is important, as is spatiality. In contrast, documentary more often places linguistic exposition as its primary device in the establishment of argument.

Rather than just enabling a situation where we let shocking images shock us, what are the considerations or opportunities for an arts practice to engage with materialism? Materialism being about looking beyond the cognitive subject to the world before or outside of humanity. In the dawn of the anthropocene, a new epoch where humanity is the dominant influence on climate and the environment, it's understandable that there is a growing interest in materialism, and the impermanence of experience. We can also propose that a move towards materialism is a reaction to the dominance of post-modernism, "which finds its prolongation both in contemporary 'theory' and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum" (Jameson 1984, p.58). There is a need and a desire to seek experiences outside of the linguistic and symbolic—for instance James Turrell's investigations into light, space and perception.

Levi-Strauss sees the development of text as the moment where humanity stopped being primitive, or in his words, "'primitive' - let's describe them rather as 'without writing,' because I think this is really the discriminatory factor between them and us (Levi-Strauss 1995, p.15). Not that primitive people had less intelligence, but time has changed people's needs. As our needs have changed, so have our senses and the way we use our brains. He says that people "who are without writing have a fantastically precise knowledge of their environment and all their resources" (Levi-Strauss 1995, p.19). He continues to say that even though we lost this capacity, we did not lose them for nothing; we are now able to drive an automobile without being crushed at each moment, for example, or in the evening to turn on our television or radio. This implies a training of mental capacities which 'primitive' peoples don't have because they don't need them. I feel that, with the potential they have, they could have changed the quality of their mind, but it would not be needed for the kind of life and relationship to nature that they have (Levi-Strauss 1995, p.19).

Can we consider the current interest in materiality, in the reverberations of our world, as a turn against writing? A desire to move on from symbolism and return to our senses? To find meaning from lived experience? I believe we can. In criticism of symbology, R. C. Smith, who elaborates on Adorno's concepts that "'myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology", states the basic impetus of the Enlightenment, and hence myth, is that nothing should escape its conceptual stranglehold over the phenomenal world—even if this exhausts all meaning from 'lived experience' (Smith 2013).

One process in making *Surface Tension #1* has been to investigate the sound of the human body. I have been working with a Lecturer in Neural Science at the University of Tasmania exploring the reactions the body has to different situations. These have resulted in some basic recordings of moisture, muscle tension, pulse, and breath. Sound, image, touch, and taste are our connection to the material world, the world beyond the discursive field and cognitive subject. When viewing the image of the lion's teeth ripping apart the thigh of a person, our guttural reaction does not originate from our linguistic brain. The biological response is pre-linguistic—fight or flight—the realities of survival that lie beyond the mechanisms of cinema and text.

The sound recordings we have been investigating through performative manipulations of the body, muscle tension, moisture (response to stress), pulse, breath, etc., are taken from the point of actual neural response. They live in the material world; they expose bodily reactions to external and internal events, and how the different systems in the body relate to the other. The different audio recordings highlight the durations and immediacies of different response mechanisms. Regardless of whether this is immediately knowable by an audience or not, the process of recording these responses, I believe, imbues the work with some form of authenticity and knowledge.

The visual component of *Surface Tension #1* is made up of slow motion sequences of water. The video sequences of water are intended to function as a metaphorical device as well as a materialist observation. As observations, they propose a view unto a world far out in the ocean, a world where the external forces of nature govern. We can see the movements of water, and the effect of wind. The metaphor stems from the concept of external forces, and applies it to the effect they have on other matter. In the case of oceans, the effect of wind in contorting the surface of water. The metaphor is expanded to consider skin and the effects of oppression felt through the ages by women within patriarchal societies. By flipping the image on its vertical axis the water becomes abstracted. In doing so the image alludes to the surface of skin and the contortions that affect surfaces by external forces. When inverted the image no longer reads as water, it's abstracted, yet it appears to contain qualities of skin. In its extended reading, the proposition of this metaphor was a critique of histories. In particular, the construction of gender and racial identities, and the effect of inscriptions of identities upon people.

The possibility to decode this metaphor is enabled through the formal installation of the work. In the third component of *Surface Tension #1* engraved pressed concrete sheets are used as two discrete projection surfaces. As the work plays, the image of the water moves form one 'screen' to the other. When the image of water is present on one screen, the other screen is illuminated through the projection of white light. Engraved on one of the sheets of concrete is a list of dates. Within these dates is a waveform that shows the sound of muscles engaged in physical action. The second sheet is blank, except for the singular waveform of a relaxed muscle. The proposition of bias is offered by way of excluding explanation of the dates and what they represent.

Surface Tension #1 shares formal commonalities with *The Afterlife* works. All three works oscillate between material and symbolic worlds. In response to materialism's critique of symbolic projection, and correlationism's claim that nothing exists outside of text (Cox et al. 2015), I am interested in the possibilities of engaging both sides of this theoretical coin. What I am trying to say is that my practice has an interest in materiality and metaphors, without consigning the material object to pure metaphor. This is something I have struggled with for a long time. If all we do is film things and have no desire of representation, what are we left with? And, on the flip side, if everything is symbolic, are we are able to experience the lived world of senses? If we take the critical realist position, the material and symbolic are indivisible. The struggle that emanates in my mind regarding materialism, especially when considering sound recording, film and video, is that recording is technologically mediated, the directness is a translation. Once again we come back to Kahana and his insights that documentary is a transitional medium. Recordings inherently abstract the time, space, object, material, or sound that lies at their source. Artists working in representation can't help but to make abstract their subject.

The polemic in *Afterlife Lake* takes into consideration the impact borders and boundaries have on people and places. The intention of the angular attacks of the delayed guitar in the opening of the video is to shape the relationship between the viewer and the subject. The sound proclaims something, an emotion. In the same way that spatial orientation can position us, sound and colour has the potential to create feeling, through which we consider the experience within a particular emotion. This emotion affects or helps shape any potential reading and/or experience. If we feel an emotion

towards something that is bodily with an intense swelling within us, and this occurs in relation to an environment, scene or object, do we then need narration to explain how we should decode this relationship between object and emotion? The hole left when linguistics is absent, presents in my mind opportunity for consideration and mediation. It is up to me, in my moment of experience, and periods of reflection, to consider what the emotional response is, why, and whether I believe it or not.
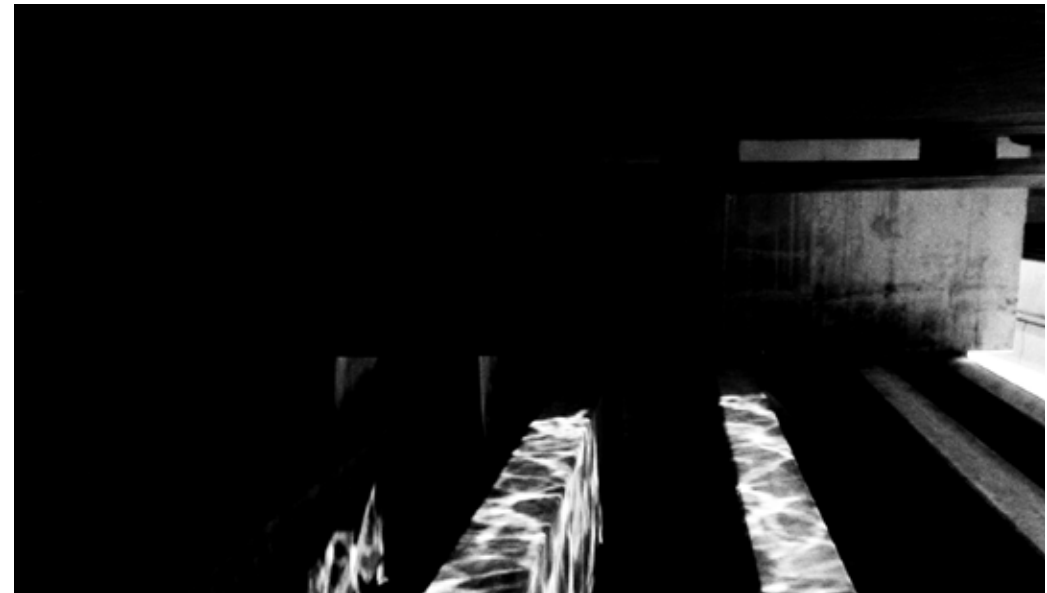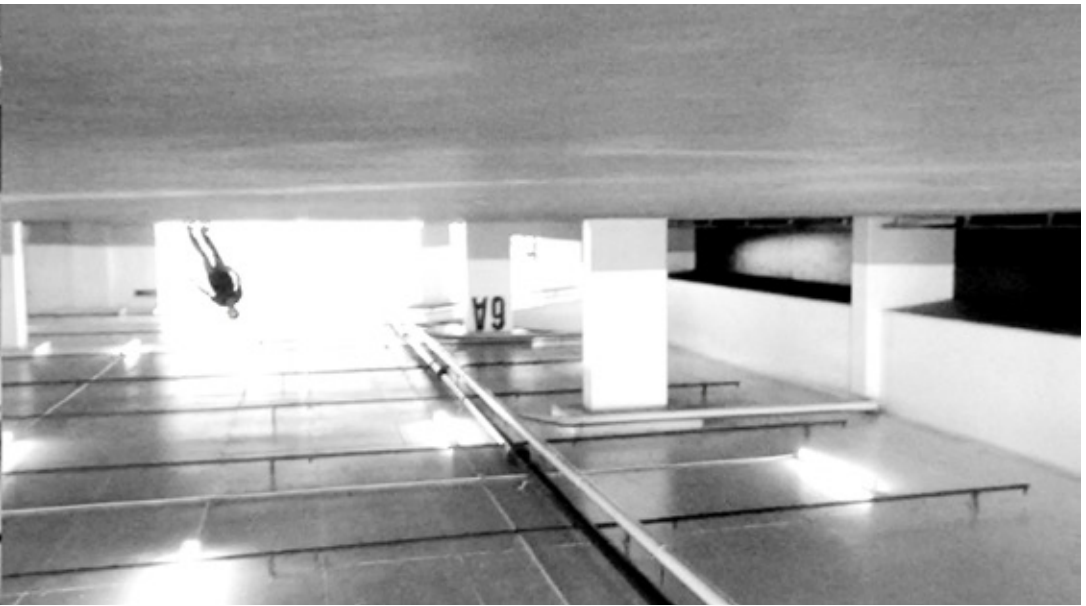
Conclusion

In-depth critical discussion can render the complexities and desires of the work as solid, tangible explanations that people can discuss. Whilst this process can offer a window into the thinking behind the work, it potentially disrupts the possibility of experiencing the work from a sensorial perspective. Through making and discussing the work with collaborators, the collaborators and I gain another level or field of perception and knowledge of a work.
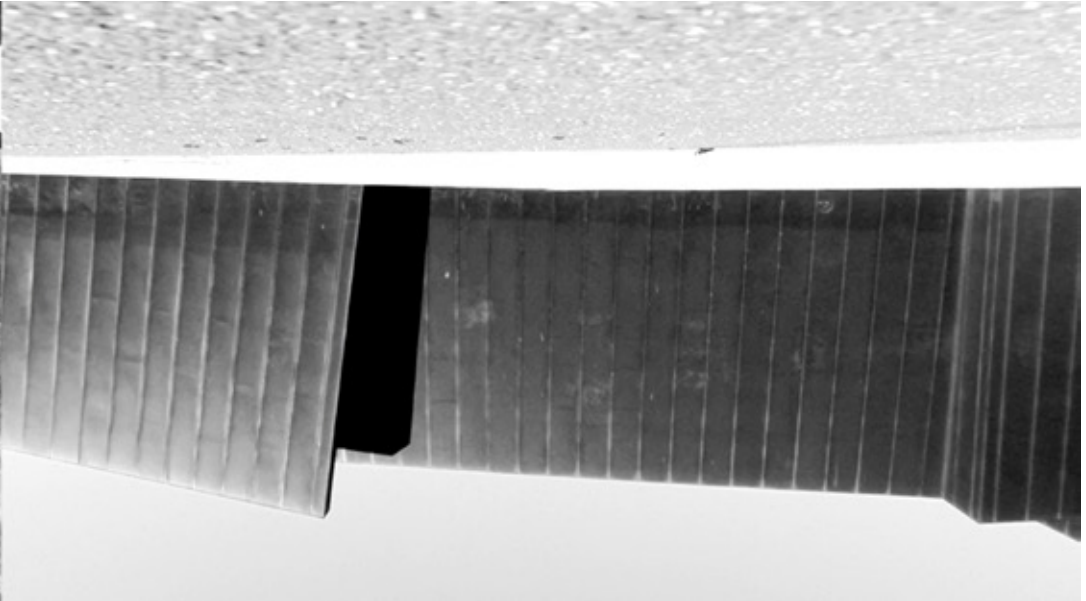
I consider that form and content are intertwined. We can't have one without the other. The process of making may be led by form or content. The content may, or does, influence the decisions I make when considering what and where I will film. Form will influence how I engage with the content. In the case of *Afterlife Lake*, a formal process of looking in my rear view mirror whilst driving through New South Wales, made me consider possible subject matter. It wasn't until I found myself on the back road to Mungo National Park that the subject emerged, a subject developed through the happenstance of crossing from one person's land to another. In *Surface Tension #1* my desires to film oceans, to explore emotions such as isolation and fear drove me to find a way of filming water to appear as though it was shot in the dark depths of the Southern Ocean. The subject directed the form, and the form, then, through the inversion of the image, furthered the metaphorical consideration of exterior forces, as the inverted image took on the appearance of skin.
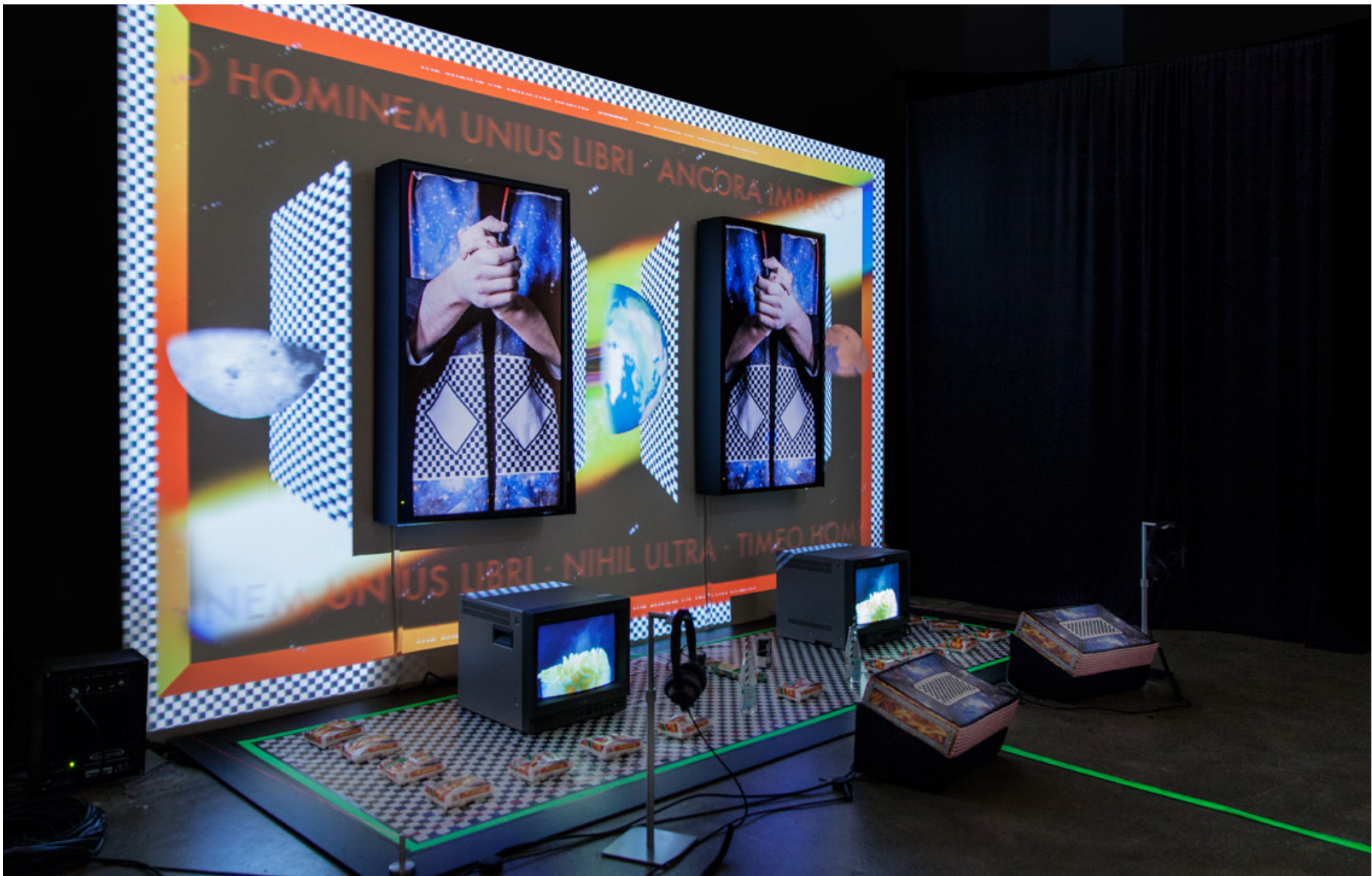
Throughout this chapter there are a number of considerations of the theoretical considerations of materialism and correlationism. When considering the potentials for post-documentary, and because I have proposed a post-documentary of mythical structure, see chapter three, I also need to consider post-documentary as affect. In proposing these two functions, I am not looking at binaries where one is adopted or not. In fact,

my proposal is to resist the binaries of the theoretical arguments for and against materialism and correlationism. Instead, my interest lies in how they might interweave and inform each other. In proposing post-documentary as affect, we can consider how we might switch or enable, through temporal and spatial practices, planes of perception.

PERSPECTIVES, 2 CHANNEL HD VIDEO, 2013

PERSPECTIVES, 2 CHANNEL HD VIDEO, 2013

PERSPECTIVES, 2 CHANNEL HD VIDEO, 2013

THE SHRINE OF TRITICUM DURUM, 5 CHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION, 2015

THE SHRINE OF TRITICUM DURUM, 5 CHANNEL VIDEO INSTALLATION, 2015

Conclusion

When we prefix post- to something, we are signifying that we are moving beyond a particular genre, or conceptual framework. Regarding post-documentary, the dispersion of documentary practice across a broader range of audio-visual culture, of which video art is a significant player, provides the foundation to affix post- to documentary. In doing so, we are building upon its foundational forms and functions, and considering them within new arenas of audio visual storytelling. As documentary practice continues to engage in new audio visual platforms, activities, and technologies, the way we tell stories evolves. This evolution of storytelling is evident on both sides of the fiction/non-fiction debate. The works made during this research have sought to explore the complexities that lie between art and documentary. *The Flat Earth Society* was made to challenge assumptions of documentary form, through engaging with established documentary conventions, most notably found and archival footage. Through this work I was able to consider possible stylistic boundaries that might exist between documentary and post-documentary.

I would argue that post-documentary engages with what we might term the real world, and in this sense it doesn't differ from documentary. However, this engagement also acknowledges the problems of claiming things as being real and being the truth. The problematic of documentaries claim of being real, truthful, rational and public, is eloquently considered by Kahanna when he argues that documentary is an inherently abstract and transitional medium. In practices of recording and editing, abstraction of the real is unavoidable, making claims of realism and materialism complex. If we consider transition as being similar to translation, in the case of documentary, we are translating the events of scene from that scene, interpreting that scene and then presenting it to another public, we can consider the complexities of translation and its inherent problems. F. C. T. Moore makes this note as the translator in the English version of Derrida's *White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, Moore writes:

> Note from the translator: "Here is a parody of the translator," writes M. Derrida. It is a truism that translation is impossible, or at least a treachery. Indeed, it is the piety of the translator to say so. (Derrida 1974)

A significant shift in post-documentary is not having to make claims of authenticity and rationality. In doing so, a post-documentary practice

considers how we might represent the real beyond the scope of documentary, and without documentaries claim of sobriety. One such potential is to move representation from signs and signifiers to affects and experiences. In doing so post-documentary expands beyond the scope of the single screen and becomes a mode of story telling that is both spatial and temporal. For example *the Shrine of Triticum Durum* used installation and multichannel sound and video to mediate upon the problematics of religion, belief, spirituality, and the cultism of food, it did so by appropriating elements of shrines and alters and inviting the audience to kneel as though in a place of worship.

More importantly, and this goes back to mediation over persuasion, post-documentary, in my view, doesn't concern itself with just wanting to form an argument that uses as its foundation rational and objective claims. Instead, I would argue, a possible strength of post-documentary practice is its ability or freeness to engage with storytelling methods which Nichols may claim uses make-believe characters and imaginary worlds. Both *The Acidtrophic Lake*, and *The Shrine of Triticum Durum* make use of fictional, performative worlds to comment on significant aspects of our post-colonial world. In *The Acidtrophic Lake* the performative actions, such as cutting the suit from mans body, highlight the possibility for metaphor and performance to consider complex problems, such as the inscription of western culture upon indigenous people, and the ongoing and historic effects of patriarchy upon women. Inscriptions which have had significant impacts on the identities of people and places.

A difference between post-documentary and documentary, highlighted by *The Acidtrophic Lake* and *The Flat Earth Society*, is they do not require a definitive conclusion. In documentary film making there is often a need for the filmmakers, in their pursuit of an argument, to form a conclusive conclusion. I have sought to explore the possibilities of ambiguous and layered metaphoric narratives. The use of metaphor, allegory and mythological narratives enables the mediating of contradictions as experienced by people. By engaging with principles of metaphor, poetics, and allegory we can argue that post-documentary has the potential to operate as an oral story telling medium. However, I would argue, that as oral texts, post-documentary works, do not require written or spoken words to engage with orality. For example, the use of repetition in *Afterlife Lake* presents a poetic examination of place and its demarkation through borders, physical and ideological. Concurrently, the angular soundtrack adds intonation and emotion to the video loop, that expands and influences how we might read or feel about the scene we are watching.

In this post-truth world of Trump and Bretix, where the closing down of language and the simplification of political knowledge is leading the world down a dystopian path where '"the viewer can no longer "recognize" the link between the simulated performance and the "original" performance"' (Dunham 2015). A world where "all subject matter is presented as entertaining" (cited in Dunham 2015). In this world we need to ask to what extent is documentary relevant, a world where rational, scientific evidence is questioned, and rejected by ideological rhetoric. The problem with documentary is its claims of truth and sobriety. Post-documentary can offer radical interrogations and alternative perspectives without the need to form opinion and abject answers, it can claim to work from a place of myth and affect, with a goal of mediation rather than exposition.

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kd@keithdeverell.net