

## Becoming video: indeterminacy, intimacy, image

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# **Becoming Video: Indeterminacy, Intimacy, Image**

**Emily O'Connor**

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## Abstract (max 350 words):

The aim of this paper is to accompany and extend the body of work I have made during my Master of Fine Arts. My approach in making these works has been to position modes of neo-documentary as potentially transgressive in relation to (bio)political and social systems.

In 1958 Japanese filmmaker Toshio Matsumoto defined neo-documentary as a mode of cinema which uses both documentary and avant-garde methods. I extend the term to include documentary-art hybrid styles which have emerged with the invention of handycams, cable television, public access channels and the internet, as well as other affordable technologies in the post-net age (especially those which highlight and champion amateurism).

This paper examines neo-documentary practices that perform a way of seeing and being which bastardise heteronormative narratives by disorienting the idea and image of the body and its social reality. In order to discuss neo-documentary forms and their capacity for disorientation and transformation, I consider work by Matsumoto (JA), Sione Monu (NZ), Nelson Sullivan (USA), Zackary Drucker (USA) and Boudry/Lorenz (DE) alongside scholars who identify types of spatial and corporeal disorientation as queer and transgressive.

The two works that comprise the practice component of this research are *Physical* and *19.12.15* – the latter made in collaboration with collective Hissy Fit (EO Gill, Jade Muratore, Nat Randall). *Physical* is a non-linear narrative video work that documents the everyday lives of its protagonists Catmeat, Candy, The Satellite Boys and Rubbermaid (played by myself and my friends). The characters are camp and perverse, incongruous with the Australian suburbia they attempt to inhabit. *19.12.15* is an abstract road-trip film, which documents the banal conversations between a group of queer friends as they drive aimlessly through the suburbs of Sydney for six hours. Both videos work to corrupt dominant ways of seeing through performative modes of disorientation.

This paper inhabits a mode of writing which draws from autotheory (a style that Maggie Nelson, after Paul B Preciado, has recently elucidated) and creative non-fiction. It does not perform the function of an explanatory caption to my body of works; rather, it operates in the same way as my body of work: as a network of definitions which are not inherently stable or objective, but instead variably produced and experienced.

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# Introduction

*Drag is embodied speculative fiction, clubs are queer heterotopias, pornography is pedagogy, and queer collectivity is a means of survival. – Auto Italia South East*

I am EO Gill and I am an artist based in Sydney, Australia. I make non-linear narrative videos, moving-graphic text works as well as video and live performance with collective Hissy Fit (EO Gill, Jade Muratore, Nat Randall) of which I am a core and founding member. My practice is an ongoing project that considers the body as a social, physical and narrative site where (bio)political and social structures manifest and are transformed. I use performers with no acting training and often cast myself as the protagonist. My videos are underscored by a preoccupation with figures moving through a variety of natural and domestic locations, a distortion of time and space continuity, destabilised/ fragmented subjects, mobile and ambiguous sources of agency and desire, stylised physical characterisation and dream-like narratives.

My practice sits within a lineage of filmmakers

and video artists interested in a form of cinema that emerges at the point of collision between documentary and avant-garde practices. I am influenced by the European art cinema associated with filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard, Michelangelo Antonioni and Chantal Akerman. I am also influenced by American underground cinema and the works of Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith and Andy Warhol as well as (perhaps most significantly) new-realist Japanese filmmaker Toshio Matsumoto and his narrative feature *Bara no Soretsu/ Funeral Parade of Roses* (1969), set in the underground queer counterculture of 1960s Tokyo. Matsumoto called his type of cinema 'neo-documentary'. Mika Ko describes 'neo-documentary' as devised "not only to achieve the 'new realism' created by dialectic confrontation between documentary and avant-garde conventions but also to explore its methodological potential for interrogating the political tensions of the period in a way that does justice to both visible and invisible social realities and avoids subordinating film's own independent reality to political imperatives." (2011: 380)

My research highlights performative modes

of spatial, temporal and corporeal disorientation as potentially radical and transgressive components of 'neo-documentary' alongside other documentary-art hybrid modes which have bubbled to the surface with the invention of handycams, cable television, public access channels and the internet, as well as other affordable technologies in the post-net age.

When I use the term 'neo-documentary' I also mean to highlight the function of the form's performative gesture as imparting a sensual relationship to the works' subject matter. The term post-documentary is also useful here, and has been defined by John Corner in part to describe the performative and self-conscious nature of reality TV, a mode that Corner argues has documentary origins (2002). In *Reality Television, Affect and Intimacy: Reality Matters* Misha Kavka proposes the ways in which reality television can highlight the performative nature of everyday life. She writes "the emotional excess and intimacy of reality television produces 'a reconfiguration of public/private spaces that is hardly heteronormative even if its representational content often is'" (2008: 139). Kavka goes on to note,

This reconfiguration is most keenly felt in those moments when the banal and formulaic nature of reality television breaks open to expose subjects caught between their private selves and a performance of social identity. These examples of 'too much' emotion and intimacy unravel not only the performance onscreen but the fiction that everyday life is natural rather than performative (2008: 139)

My video practice achieves a similar level of intimacy by harnessing the performative qualities within the everyday using reality tv and documentary

forms. These performative gestures challenge attempts to codify the material within neat linear narratives.

In Chapter One of this paper I will perform a close reading of Matsumoto's *Funeral Parade of Roses* in order to give ground and context to the term 'neo-documentary'. I will read *Funeral Parade of Roses* alongside the work of emerging Tongan artist Sione Monu whose short video works are made with a smartphone and exhibited on Instagram as well as in gallery spaces. As I will show, Monu's practice is exemplary of neo-documentarism in a contemporary context.

To assist me in examining and expanding neo-documentarism and to understand its potential for transformation I will engage with scholars Sara Ahmed, Jose Esteban Muñoz and Hito Steyerl whose theories of queer performativity have helped me to interrogate how identities are produced through social, pharmacological and technological conventions that coerce bodies to become recognisable as a particular gender. These theories propose that space is also constituted through actions. Thus, everyday space is not gender-neutral, but determined by the repetition of heterosexual practices which render themselves invisible or normal. Sydney based academic and artist Sumugan Sivanesan observes: "This is not dissimilar to what critical race theorists describe as the establishment of whiteness as the norm in Western cosmopolitan societies, its invisibility and also its hyper-visibility" (Sivanesan: 2017). As such, one can analyse the interplay of gender, race and class in constituting space and how in turn these spaces shape bodies and sexualities.

In Chapter Two I will focus on the work of US video artist Nelson Sullivan, who is known for his boundless documentation of the 1980s New York club kid scene. The performative and disorienting nature of



Sullivan's camera-operating style further speaks to the aforementioned scholars, who look specifically at the performative and productive qualities of disorientation and getting lost. Muñoz's work on 'getting lost' has had a structuring influence on this project – in *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), Muñoz writes about states of being lost as political, creative and queer. He writes: "We can understand queerness itself as being filled with the intention to be lost. Queerness is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds' mapping of space" (2009: 72).

Muñoz's understanding of queerness is in accordance with his mentor and peer, queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Sedgwick writes that "queer" can refer to "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (1993: 8). The queer self is the self in rehearsal, always in a state of becoming, "emerging in difference", propelled into a site of disorientation and deviance (2009: 112). As well as agreeing with Sedgwick's definition, I think of queerness in relation to my own sexual orientation and community, who are oriented towards each other through deviance, that is, predominantly non-straight and nonnormative sexualities. My own queer lived-experience as a non-binary person is a deviant, disorienting and ambiguous one. Muñoz's definition of queer modes of seeing and being (like getting lost) resonate for me on a personal level as being connected to an understanding of the social body in-flux. Muñoz's understanding of 'getting lost' and more broadly, his theories of queer performativity have also been fundamental in my reading of neo-documentary practices like Sullivan's which have the ability to expose the performative and fictional (though

nonetheless entirely 'real') aspects of everyday life. In Chapter Two I will also draw on a video work by my collective Hissy Fit titled *19.12.15*. The work was shot over a six-hour journey in a van (travelling aimlessly through various suburbs in Sydney) using 3 mini-DV camcorders which were passed around and operated by the vehicle's eight inhabitants. *19.12.15* works to resist conclusive interpretation by the viewer through the use of roaming, lo-fi cameras and a van always in motion, intentionally disorienting and therefore expanding a sense of reality. Like Sullivan's videos, the work is in part indebted to its participants – all of whom are well-known members of the Sydney Queer community. All the participants bring their own unique story to the work, born from immigrant, adopted or foster families; working class, middle class or upwardly-mobile families; broken, absent or strict families. They work as artists, club-performers, cleaners, social-workers, bartenders and sexworkers. All queer-identified, the participants also find family with one another. The work was commissioned by Campbelltown Art Centre (2015) and presented again at SUCCESS Gallery, Perth (2016) and ACCA, Melbourne (2017). *19.12.15* has been installed in a number of ways, perhaps most successfully across three CRT televisions on TV trolleys which could be wheeled around the gallery space into different configurations. This installation further disorients the idea of singular narrative, pushing the viewer to become an active player in assembling information.

Artist and theorist Hito Steyerl defines disorientation as partly due "to the loss of a stable horizon" or "groundlessness" which, according to her, is thought by many contemporary philosophers to be a condition of the present moment (2011: 14). In Chapter Three I will be drawing on Steyerl's definition of the 'free-fall', along with Sara Ahmed's extensive

writing on the association between disorientation and queerness in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). I will focus on Ahmed's definition of 'self-shattering':

What is shattered so often is scattered, strewn all over the place.

A history that is down, heavy, is also messy, strewn.

The fragments: an assembly. In pieces. Becoming army. (2017: 186)

I will be reading these key theorists alongside my video work *Physical* presented at Alaska Projects, Sydney in April 2018. *Physical* a non-didactic piece of queer-core. It is shot with my friends on iPhones and amateur range camcorders and given narrative form during the edit. Through these modes of amateurism, the work focuses on failed performances of gender and includes personal accounts of growing up queer in middle-class Australian suburbia. The work is character driven, cutting between a series of portrait-style vignettes of characters Catmeat, Candy, Rubbermaid and The Satellite Boys. Presented at Alaska Projects (a gallery space on the second floor of an underground car park) the work evokes a heightened awareness of the invisible systems at play in/as heteronormative culture. I transpose these social systems into the work which feels at home alongside exposed sewer pipes and an oil-stained concrete floor.

In looking to theories of disorientation in relation to moving image practice I have found it important to glean an understanding of intimacy, that is, how we are oriented toward and away from one another, not just physically, but also across time. In Chapter Four I will focus on artist Jesse Darling's keynote speech at the Goldsmiths University Conference 'Intimacies: art and the techno-social reconfiguring of the personal sphere.' In this keynote,

the artist asks, "how can we talk about intimacy without talking about proximity?" In understanding that there are intimacies at play which aren't necessarily physical, Darling uses the term 'ghostmodern intimacies' to describe "the connections between bodies dispersed across time" (Darling: 2015). Darling's ideas have been integral in establishing intimacy as an important and necessary component of neo-documentary practice. In this chapter I will read artist Zackary Drucker's video work *You will never be a woman [...]* (a collaboration with Drucker, Van Barnes, Mariah Garnett and A.L. Steiner) as a contemporary ghostmodern text. I will also look at video forms outside of the arts, namely Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response videos (or ASMR) and amateur pornography. I look to these examples to articulate the ways certain modes of amateur performance and everyday video making practices which occur in 'real-time' might be connected to neo-documentary and to broader understandings of the ways in which we manifest social realities in everyday contexts.

In Chapter Five I look to forms of drag and gender performance which accentuate ambiguity. I will be drawing on the theory and practice of art collective Boudry/Lorenz (Pauline Boudry, Renate Lorenz) who coined the term 'Transtemporal Drag' in order to talk about performances of gender which aren't inherently fixed, but instead are slippery and difficult to define. I will reintroduce my video work *Physical*, this time focusing on its awkward, campy characters (played by myself and my friends) whose badly painted faces accentuate a kind of melancholic hope for the possibilities of bodies. The characters are in excess of a biopolitical system that cannot hold them.

Paul B. Preciado uses the term 'biopolitics' with reference to the politics and control of the production of life. Specifically, Preciado understands

the pornography and pharmaceutical industries as exemplary modes producing and governing subjectivity. He defines the alliance of these industries as the 'pharmacopornographic regime' (2013: 45). In his book *Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era*, Preciado writes "gender [...] is reproduced and reinforced socially by its transformation into entertainment, moving images, digital data, pharmacological molecules, cybercodes. Pharmacopornographic female or male gender exists before a public audience" (2008: 118). Biopolitics refers to modes of becoming, of process, of a body in pieces, a body as assemblage. Like Preciado, this thesis uses biopolitics and theories of 'becoming' in the Guattarian sense, that is, relating to a "molecular revolution" (2008: 137). Becoming is a performative and agential kind of 'doing' or 'acting' – a continuous reassembling or reforming related to the politicised body. As Preciado notes, the Guattarian becoming is "attentive to structural modifications such as the consumption of drugs, changes in perception, in sexual conduct, in the invention of new languages [...] pointing to a kind of political homeopathy of gender" (2008: 137). These terms are useful in deciphering the transgressive qualities of spatial and corporeal disorientation in relation to video-making practices.

This thesis aims to create a network of definitions using autobiographical modes where fragments of text are remediated from my everyday life onto the page. My style of writing combines modes of storytelling and personal narrative alongside theory and criticism – a style often referred to as 'fictocriticism'. For Anna Gibbs, fictocritical modes such as this are necessarily performative, "focusing as much on the saying as the said, on how things are said and what kind of difference that in turn makes to 'things'" (Gibbs: 2005). My video practice takes a

similarly fictocritical mode, splicing together found and collected text to form loose narratives which allow me to harness multiple voices at once. The project, in both writing and practice, comprises "a fragile archive, a body assembled from shattering" (2017: 17).

It is the discomfort of reorienting the body in opposition with heteronormative space that allows a subject to come up with new ideas and new ways of seeing and being in the world. Neo-documentary practices expose the quotidian as performative and malleable – together, we can take it apart and reassemble it in new and diverse ways.

# Chapter 1

## On Neo-Documentary

In 1958, Toshio Matsumoto published 'On the Method of Avant-Garde Documentary' in the journal *Documentary Film* (Kiroku eiga), founded by a study group of experimental documentarists of which Matsumoto was a part. In this essay Matsumoto defines a new kind of documentary mode, divergent from social realism and from John Grierson's understanding of film documentary in which "consciousness reigns supreme" (quoted in Gee, 2014: 58). The mode, which Matsumoto defines as 'neo-documentary' brings together "Surrealist-inspired avant-garde filmmaking and documentary film style" (2014: 58). Neo-documentary practice was informed by the understanding that filmmaking could expand, even shatter, our understanding of quotidian reality. As Felicity Gee notes in her essay 'The *angura* diva: Toshio Matsumoto's dialectics of perception. Photodynamism and affect in *Funeral Parade of Roses*' "Matsumoto places emphasis on the relationship between inner thought (emotion, memory, imagination, irrationality, the unconscious) and exterior objective reality (material traces, events, social phenomena, consciousness), seeking to explore "A new synthesis of multi-layered human experience"

(Gee is quoting Matsumoto himself here) (2014: 58). Matsumoto is careful to stress that this is not a reiteration of earlier avant-garde practice but a new dialectical mode of filmmaking: "I do not mean the so-called documentaries or so-called avant-garde of the past, I am talking about a realm with higher potential in which each genre negates itself in opposition to the other" (quoted in Gee, 2014, 58).

Matsumoto's narrative feature *Funeral Parade of Roses*, set in the queer district of Tokyo, undermines any semblance to a single film genre. In his essay 'Tokyo 1969: Revolutionary Image Thieves in a Disintegrating City', Stephen Barber notes the Shinjuku district in which *Funeral Parade of Roses* was principally shot was intimately associated with experimental arts and gay culture in the 1960s and had a heavy police presence. This meant Matsumoto was unable to obtain official permission to film there. "As a result," Barber notes, "the exterior sequences of the film were done covertly, usually in one take, before the police arrived to break up the filmmaking process" (Barber: 2013). The urgency and spontaneity produced in this environment in part determines the stylistic form of *Funeral Parade of Roses*, infusing the

work with a sense of immediacy and intimacy. The footage was shot on handheld cameras in single takes and focuses primarily on the faces and bodies of the characters, contributing to an affect of proximity and sensuality. The film's interior scenes are shot in small rooms, which Barber notes are "often crowded with figures dancing or engaging in sexual acts, so that the camera has to manoeuvre and negotiate its way through space, with a perpetual sense of mobility" (Barber: 2013). A constant negotiation between space, bodies and the movement of the camera is another defining feature of the film. This negotiation can often be uncomfortable, signalling the creative ways in which non-heteronormative, non-white bodies drive their own desire through and against the heteronormative mainstream.

*Funeral Parade of Roses* is formed from a collage of fragmented parts – TV commercials, interviews with the actors, popular culture references, political happenings, drag performance, Greek tragedy and Kabuki Theatre. Matsumoto states: "my creative intent was to disturb the perceptual schema of a dualistic world dividing fact from fiction, men from women, objective from subjective, mental from physical, candidness from masquerade, and tragedy from comedy [...] I dismantled the sequential, chronological narrative structure and arranged past and present, reality and fantasy on temporal axes" (Gerow: 1996). The advantage for artists and filmmakers working with neo-documentary mode is that they operate from a position of infiltration – working within quotidian reality in order to expose reality itself as a performative fiction. Theatrical artifice and modes of amateur performance are characterising features of *Funeral Parade of Roses*, perhaps in part due to the rise of the "happening" performance groups and of the *angura* (underground) theatre



Sione Monu (image from Instagram account: @sione93), 2017

movement in Japan at this time as well as "an urgent need to theorize newer media such as television, video and the computer" (2014: 51). In the film, we see the fictional narrative juxtaposed against street interviews with passers by and interviews with actors. We see the leading actor, Peter, who performs the role of a gender-queer drag queen named Eddy, wandering through the streets of Shinjuku only to be filmed as one of the onlookers who watches an actual street performance of a funeral staged by the members of the avant-garde performance group Zero Dimension (Zero Jigen). As Yuriko Furuhashi notes: "The distinction between fiction and non-fiction quickly dissolves as the camera doubly documents the actual event of Zero Dimension's street performance and Eddy's reaction as its spectator, incorporating both into the fictional diegetic space" (2014: 81–82). The scripted and unscripted performances are constantly folded into each other in this manner, giving rise to our

awareness of the inseparability of artifice and actuality, fiction and nonfiction.

• • •

It is nighttime in a suburban backyard. Tongan artist Sione Monu has the camera. They are recording a few friends from collective Fafswag as they casually vogue on the lawn, carefully avoiding the bent Hills Hoist. The performances are relaxed, even nonchalant, and the picture quality is grainy. The whole scene seems amateur at first – then the camera cuts to another angle and another, with cinematic grace and calculatedness. I stumble upon this video on Monu's Instagram account (@sione93) amidst dozens of other videos and self portraits by the artist. I click on another video. In this one, Monu works alone. They set up their smartphone camera, hit record, then enter the frame. It is pleasurable to imagine Monu's process of curating each shot before they enter it. Monu's videos are cinematic in that the artist carefully crafts each shot with the final edit clearly in mind. The works are highly domestic, usually shot in or around the artist's family home.

Monu is an emerging artist who practices photography, drawing, painting and moving image. They are part of art collective Fafswag and sub collective WitchBitch, a group of Queer Pacific Islander identity-focused artists who have re-established queer balls and voguing culture in Auckland, New Zealand. Contemporary identity artists like Ryan Trecartin, Babymorocco (Clayton Pettet) and Petra Cortright generate intimacy through their signature digital-slacker, low-fi aesthetics, using cheap video effects apps and software like Photobooth to craft their video works and self-portraits. Monu's video practice is similar to the works of artists like Trecartin in that it speaks through a lived queer

subjectivity and utilises low-fi, everyday technologies and amateur performative modes. Where Trecartin and Babymorocco use this formula to accentuate a kind of grotesque brat-mania related to identity-building and post-internet culture, Monu uses similar “flakey aesthetics” (@sione\_93, handle tag) in a way not dissimilar to earlier punk-identity artists like Miranda July and Sadie Benning, whose exploratory, hopeful approaches, highlight the potential for intimacy in neo-documentary forms. Modes like this, in which everyday realness meets refined theatricality generate intimacy in their exposure of process.

Like my own practice, Monu's process involves coordinating and directing video works that combine a cast of figures (the artist's friends and family) captured in everyday environments but who slip between acting/performative modes and ‘real’/documentary modes. In Monu's work, as in mine, we see the self under analysis. We see conflict between beauty, desire and a cynical feeling about contemporary queer ideals and class systems. Monu's work harnesses authenticity through documentary modes while allowing space for the viewers' ability to play, fantasise and assemble. Antke Engel notes that “an active audience uses images as entry points for connecting to its own personal archive” (e-flux journal, October 2011). The outcome allows for conceptions of the future which are not just metallic and virtual but also caring and sensual.

I read Monu's video practice in terms of a kind of contemporary neo-documentary style in that it occupies reality modes and subverts them in order to fabricate an expanded version of reality. This form is particularly relevant for people of colour and queer subcultures which are used to creating their own histories and identities through performance – I'm thinking here of voguing culture and queer balls which

became a popular form of subversive expression in New York through the 1980s. As mentioned, Monu's collective's 'Fafswag' and 'WitchBitch' have re-established queer balls and voguing culture in Auckland, New Zealand. In 2018 Fafswag created an interactive online documentary which takes the viewer into this queer vogue dance scene. The work achieves a sense of immediacy and intimacy through its use of documentary mode, revealing the personal lives of its five performers, whilst also expanding a sense of reality through its virtuosic and interactive interface. In the following chapters I will draw from further examples of neo-documentarism which, like Monu's practice, highlight its performative and queer potential.

# Chapter 2

## Getting Lost

*"[...] I am, I am still seeking, I am, it's coming to me, it's coming to me, what I'm doing..."* – Nelson Sullivan

In 2007 I had just moved from Canberra to Sydney and I was working at a mainstream television station, scheduling commercial breaks. My job was to make sure the KFC ads didn't run in the same ad-break as the Red Rooster ads. I bought a bike with my first paycheck. The following day I took it out for a ride and as I was crossing at the corner of Elizabeth and Wellington I got hit by an airport shuttle bus. Funny to feel the weight of something that big on top of you. Like a child's thumb pressing down on an ant. Funny where the mind takes you in moments of discombobulation. The psyche says to the body "everything is going to be OK" and then distracts it with something, a memory, maybe. My distraction was fried-chicken commercials. I busily scheduled them and filed them away in my subconscious, while the paramedics scooped me off the road and hurried me into the back of an ambulance.

• • •

To explore disorientation through film and video is to insist on the liveness of film – the performative capacity that can conjure disappearance while pointing to future potentials. In a video titled *Going to see Christina (who is in a good mood)* (April, 1989) hosted on YouTube channel 5 Ninth Avenue Project American video artist Nelson Sullivan visits his friend Christina (played by Marilyn Manson in the 2003 film *Party Monster*) in her apartment at the Chelsea Hotel. Arm extended, with his VHS fisheye lens camera pointed inward, capturing his face and surrounds in a slightly tubular view, Sullivan enters the Chelsea Hotel Lobby and calls Christina from the lobby phone. "Christina, I'm down in the lobby. I'm just going to take the stairs." He hangs up and begins making his way up the hotel stairs. "I'm lost in the Chelsea [...] gosh, I forgot how high the Chelsea Hotel is, how far it is to Christina's room, through this cavernous hotel." Sullivan swings the camera around over the stair-rail to reveal the levels of the staircase, creating a visual wormhole that evokes a sense of time travel. "Oh god, this is the wrong alcove." (Sullivan's videos are filled with moments like these; moments of searching or aimless meandering).



Finally, Sullivan knocks on Christina's door. Inside the apartment, Christina's friend Lynne takes the camera from Sullivan (a rare moment) and begins interviewing him about reality and video. Sullivan describes the way the wide-angle lens distorts reality, inviting viewers to engage in their own process of recovery. "The fisheye lens [...] is so distorted that it is obviously not reality but it is something from which you can reconstruct reality. You realise you are looking at pure information and not the real thing." Lynne says, "You seem in a sense that you are still seeking, you're still seeking exactly what you want to do." "Yeah I am" Sullivan responds. "I am still seeking, I am, it's coming to me, it's coming to me, what I'm doing..." Sullivan's video resonates with the fourth chapter of Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia*, 'Gesture, Ephemera and Queer Feeling', in which Muñoz writes about the potentially transgressive qualities of getting or feeling lost. "To accept loss", he writes, "is to accept the way in which one's queerness will always render one lost to a world of heterosexual imperatives, codes and laws" (73: 2009). For Muñoz, getting lost is a performative gesture which violently extends the body into an always-emergent future. All at once we extend toward future possibilities and register the past insofar as it is conditioned by memory, history, and the social forces that regulate bodies. Scholar Jordy Rosenberg describes being lost (whether geographically and physically lost, or lost in research) as "related to having – or developing – a political life: to the extension of ourselves into the world and to the forming and care for the collectivities that we will need to survive this world" (Rosenberg: 2014).

Sullivan's video works produce an understanding of getting lost – in particular because of the constant and disorienting flow of his camera-operating style. Like many artists in the early 1980s,

Sullivan recognised an unlimited potential in the new inexpensive handheld video cameras then coming on the market. Using first a VHS camera and later upgrading to an 8mm camera, he shot well over 1000 hours of tape over his career, capturing himself and his friends in Manhattan's queer downtown scene. He taped experimental and amateur performances in bars and clubs, house parties, trips to Lenox Square Mall with RuPaul, and prosaic sunset walks with his dog Midnight on the then-still-existing west side piers. Sullivan turned the camera in on himself and used his reflection in the fisheye lens to frame his shot. "A film crew can't do what I do. They are not flexible enough" (*Going to see Christina (who is in a good mood)*: 1989). Never allowing the camera to rest on a particular subject too long, Sullivan's ritual of traversing the queer geography of downtown New York highlights the performative measures necessary for a culture to redefine itself.



Nelson Sullivan, *5 Ninth Avenue Project*, video still, 1989

Sullivan's films do not record a way of living as much as manifest it. His practice literalises Muñoz's articulation of queerness as a utopian formation, fabricating a "desire [that] is always directed at the thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (2009: 19). Discussing the aesthetics of his video project, Sullivan insists that the fisheye lens coupled with the portability of his camera allows for what might be a

new orientation to life. Scholar Ricardo Montez (whose research on Sullivan's video archive has been of huge significance to this chapter) notes Sullivan appreciated the lens's ability to capture more information and offer a wider field of vision in cramped spaces such as tiny apartments, taxicabs and dressing rooms. He acknowledges that the lens offers a distorted vision of reality while also recognising that this very distortion is imperative to his practice (Montez: 257).

Sullivan believes that his viewers understand how to orient themselves to this particular experience of reality. According to Montez, Sullivan's videos enact "a handheld choreography of spectatorship and intimacy, performing himself within these worlds that are themselves productions of self-fashioning. [...] the footage he left behind enacts a philosophically compelling mode of documentation that Sullivan describes as 'active-passive' observation, a way of utilizing handheld video technology to perform and inscribe his bodily presence on tape" (2017: 397-398). This active-passive mode points to a performative and deeply embodied relationship between the artist and the camera. The gesture of the camera is in conversation with the content of the image – at times they support and carry each other, at other times they appear in violent conflict. Importantly though, the gesture of the camera constantly reminds its viewer that the image before them is constructed. The gesture of the form itself is therefore an integral component of neo-documentary practice, reminding us that in some hands a camera can preserve an alternative history.

Similarly, the performance video work *19.12.15* by Hissy Fit attempts to understand forms of disorientation in relation to video and performance making practices. Together with five friends from the Sydney queer community, Hissy Fit hired a van and for

six hours embarked on a utopian vacation to nowhere. Neither the journey's end-point nor the endpoint of the work itself were predetermined – instead we took interest in the movement between places, a movement particular to queer identities. In the video, locations are occasionally pointed out or referenced – not as a way to anchor the participants but as a way of disorienting place and memory in order to build dreamscapes (spaces of potentiality, desire, deviance). This strategy alludes to an active-passive documentary style, highlighting sites and their anthropological value and cultural specificity while simultaneously subverting the style with a self-aware performance of the form. Mini DV and hand-held recording devices were used as a method to not only document but also distort, incorporating amateur filmmaking techniques with a focus on detail and the materiality of the equipment.

Unlike Sullivan's works, in which he is positioned almost exclusively as camera operator and narrator, *19.12.15* uses three mini-DV camcorders which are passed around between participants in order to disrupt an understanding of camera-operator as anchor point. This footage was then edited down into a one-hour film. The effect of this technique created a spatial and non-linear platform in which multiple visual narratives could unfold side by side. In one scene, a banal conversation unfolds about the movie *ET*. The participants converse excitedly, speaking over the top of one another:

"Do you know what ET's profession is?"

"You mean the alien ET?"

"Some kind of Communications person?"

"Like Marketing Communications?"

"I thought he was a baby and his family left him." "

No, he's not a baby. He's a botanist."



19.12.15, Hissy Fit, video still, 2015

19.12.15, Hissy Fit, *Unfinished Business*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2018, installation image by Andrew Curtis

Simultaneously, the van cruises through the Sydney suburb of Redfern. For a split-second we see the Block out the window, Redfern's most iconic landmark, marked by a large Aboriginal Flag painted on the side of a building. The camera cuts to images of traffic, and then a POV shot of one participant (Spence Messih) feeding another participant (Jackson Stacy) a Caramello Koala. "Oh, he's a botanist!" "I knew it!" [...] "What's a botanist?" Through the use of spatial, temporal and narrative disorientation 19.12.15 occupies this dual-space of the archive and a future becoming. In this work we were engaging with the banal performance of documentary form not only as a tool for remembering the past but for constructing futures. The participants recall memories, while also physically moving forward without direction. The camera rolls continuously, documenting every moment, creating a sense of urgency and immediacy as the participants surge into the unknown, taking the viewer with them. The relentlessness of the documenting mode speaks to reality TV, embracing, even championing banality, promising the viewer unparalleled access to the intimacy of the everyday. The constant shifts in perspective as the camera's are passed between participants mean the viewer must attempt to orient themselves by engaging with the particular camera-operating styles of each individual further developing a feeling of intimacy between participant and viewer. Modes of disorientation in moving-image practice thus require the viewer to play an active role - extending into the work in order to establish new senses of connection.

# Chapter 3

## Going to Pieces

*“Something is broken. It is in pieces. A body can be broken. If we keep coming up against walls, it feels like we can shatter into a million pieces. Tiny little pieces.” –Sara Ahmed*

*“all through my labor, I could not shit at all, as it was keenly clear to me that letting go of the shit would mean the total disintegration of my perineum, anus and vagina all at once [...] letting go would mean falling forever, going to pieces” –Maggie Nelson*

Last month, my friend and I saw a plastic surgeon who specialises in top-surgery for trans patients. My friend is undergoing top surgery and asked me to come along to the consultation appointment with them. It is our five year anniversary as friends this month and as I see them sit on the bench, with the surgeon outlining their nipples and the “fattiest” bits of their chest, I feel such a deep love for them I am propelled to sit behind them with my legs on either side, like we are at a birthing class. The scene teaches me something about intimacy, touch and care which is very particular to the violent malleability of the body. Of your body. I look at you and I think you are very brave. We have met the reality of our bodies

being continually renegotiated, as flesh is infected by circulating imagery, and selves are extended out through an erotics of prosthetics.

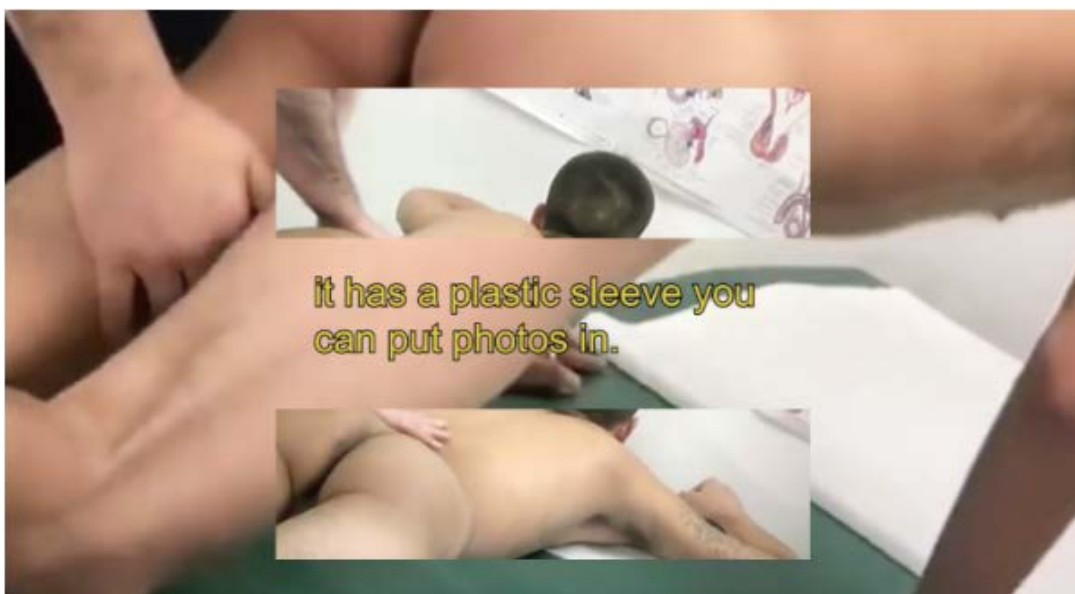
• • •

A face appears on screen. Painted in grey and chroma-key green, it expresses camp excess and coy reservation all at once. The character is called Candy. Although we can only see Candy's face, their head bobs in a way that suggests a rubbing or tugging motion. Occasionally an arm or limb comes into frame. It becomes clear that Candy is rubbing baby oil into the skin of another. Bellini's 'Norma – Casta Diva' swells in the background, its emotion and grace oddly juxtaposed against the grainy banality of the scene. As the scene continues, parts of the image begin to slide away in blocks, revealing text underneath. Other blocks slip out of frame to reveal slices of homo-pornographic videos in which a doctor gives an erotic examination to his patient. More text is revealed bit by bit as the blocks fall out of frame:

*We bought a wallet off the telly last night.*

*You know how you can buy things off the tv?*

*They have those ads, you know, where they sell*



*Physical* by EO Gill, video stills, 2018

*all kinds of things.*

*Anyway, we bought a wallet and when you buy one you get another one free so we have two wallets coming in the mail.*

*They should arrive any day. I don't often buy things off the tv but this wallet is a really good one you know it has a plastic sleeve you can put photos in.*

My video work *Physical* is made up of a series of vignettes which have been shuffled and chopped up in the editing process in order to avoid conclusive narrative meaning. The scene described above uses banal text which has been lifted from personal memory

and given the pace and consideration of poetic verse in the editing process. I use editing techniques in the same vein as Matsumoto, particularly his short video work *Relation* (1982) in which he introduces “blocks” of an image of crashing waves. Each block slides into frame in pieces. In *Physical* I use this technique to give weight to an erotic charge located in the banality of the everyday, allowing the homoerotic undertones of the imagery to blossom and wilt. Like Matsumoto, I also use collage in my practice as one way to reference the fragmentary nature of archives, with particular reference to bodies. I have spent time in a number of archives, (film archives, insect collections

and Australian wildlife archives) in order to understand the representation of bodies through history (both human and non-human) only to emerge with further queries about the damaging and unavoidable omitting in archival processes. Living bodies trouble categories they are assigned, always seeming in excess of them. My work attempts to address this issue by intentionally 'shattering' the image in an act of hopeful defiance.

For Muñoz, the horizon is the point which propels us forward as desiring, hopeful and failing entities. In her text In 'Free Fall: A Thought Experiment in Vertical Perspective', Hito Steyerl gives an account of the horizon as historically constructed as a means for humankind to orient itself. She uses "free-fall" to describe a recent move away from linear perspective. The "Free-fall" is associated with our current climate in which image-value is "defined not by resolution and content, but by velocity, intensity and speed" (Steyerl: 5). For Steyerl the free-fall is a kind of "horizon shatter" (a shatter of linear perspective) in relation to the falling or spatially disoriented subject (2013: 14). Steyerl writes:

"A fall toward objects without reservation, embracing a world of forces and matter, which lacks any original stability and sparks the sudden shock of the open: a freedom that is terrifying, utterly deterritorializing, and always already unknown[...] But falling does not only mean falling apart, it can also mean a new certainty falling into place. Grappling with crumbling futures that propel us backward onto an agonizing present, we may realize that the place we are falling toward is no longer grounded, nor is it stable. It promises no community, but a shifting formation" (2013: 28).

As with Steyerl, Ahmed relates theories of self-

shattering to non-linear motion. In particular she sees self-shattering occur in the moment in which the subject fails to orient themselves in line with pre-existing social or political narratives. According to Ahmed:

Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground [...] Such a feeling of shattering, or of being shattered, might persist and become a crisis. Or the feeling itself might pass as the ground returns or as we return to the ground. The body might be reoriented if the hand that reaches out finds something to steady an action. Or the hand might reach out and find nothing, and might grasp instead the indeterminacy of air. The body in losing its support might then be lost, undone, thrown (2006: 157)

As with Steyerl, Ahmed also understands self-shattering as a kind of becoming: "[Self-shattering] need not be understood only as the loss of the integrity of something, but as the acquisition of something else, whatever that else might be." (2017: 180) The potential for neo-documentarism to further expose such a "molecular revolution" is clear; Its expression of a kind of banal reality connects the viewer to the image. When the image is deliberately shattered as in the aforementioned description of *Physical*, so too does the viewer shatter. In pieces, their body falls, picking up pixels and particles as it rushes through the air. The molecular bases of the body becomes contaminated, exposing itself as a socially-produced fiction.



# Chapter 4

## Ghostmodern Intimacies

*"Intimacy without proximity is immediacy; intimacy is erotic, contingent, a transgression of protocol. Intimacy has a tendency to go beyond the body, eros meets thanatos in the will to cross over, to meet the other, to become part of something or someone else"*  
—Jesse Darling

I needed to piss badly. I looked down to find I had had a urinary catheter implanted during surgery. The catheter tube, filled with piss, ran down the edge of the hospital bed, connected to a bag, half-filled with piss at the end of the bed. I squirmed with discomfort. My friend was sitting beside me. I'd only met them a week prior but they were there anyway. They saw my discomfort and took the catheter tube in their hand, working it with their fingers until all the piss had made its way into the bag. I let out a groan of relief. I felt, most acutely, a sense of connection with my friend in this moment. Somehow, as they massaged the tube, they also massaged me, and I them, into a different form.

• • •

"You will never be a woman. You must live the rest of your days entirely as a man and you will only

grow more masculine with every passing year. There is no way out," Zackary Drucker states in her video work of the same name (a collaboration between Drucker, Van Barnes, Mariah Garnett and A.L. Steiner). Drucker is performing opposite trans-identified actress Van Barnes. Her tone is ambivalent and monotonous. The women hold each other in various poses, delivering utterances to one another of love, insult and masochism. A.L. Steiner writes: "The two characters prepare each other for a larger, more dangerous culture of intolerance and violence, occupying multiple roles and preparing on all fronts as they appropriate and enact the fetishistic language of sex ads, assault the spectator and antagonise each other, ultimately regaining their agency." (Steiner: 2008). The performance styles of both Drucker and Barnes are characterised by boredom and indifference despite the violent charge of the utterances themselves.

Somehow the hints of mocking irony do not negate a genuine message. The tone reminds me of Sullivan's sarcastic southern drawl, which Montez describes as a "wry affective performance of attention [that] often invests people and places with an interest that is driven by an indeterminable judgement" (2017: 420).



As for Sullivan, Drucker's performance style generates a virtual intimacy between the viewer and performer.

Intimacy is in motion – intimacy is the movement toward and away from, the way we orient ourselves in relation to others. Intimacy isn't always about closeness, togetherness or unity – it is about moving and being moved simultaneously. It is experiencing and affecting the movement and orientation of others as you too are affected. Intimacy is not sameness, it is not one thing, it is many. Here I ask, what if we could understand 'intimacy' as dissolving the idea of the whole? What about the idea of intimacy as going to pieces?

In their Keynote Speech for the Goldsmiths University conference *Intimacies: art and the techno-social reconfiguring of the personal sphere* London-based artist Jesse Darling gives a reading of intimacy in virtuality, an intimacy that is not anchored to physical proximity. Physical intimacy, Darling notes, is related to violence: "if one of you in the back row would shoot a gun in this direction you'd have a chance of putting a bullet through my physical body" (Darling: 2015). Darling goes on to ask, "can we feel this same connotation of sex and violence [...] in our daily lives online?" (Darling: 2015). Darling plays a YouTube video of an interview with Jacques Derrida in which he defines cinema as "the art of ghosts." They then move on to describe non-proximate intimacies that spark between "bodies dispersed across time" as *ghostmodernity*. "If you don't have proximity," Darling notes, "what you have instead is the space made by longing, which is quite literally a space of projection, the parallax view" (Darling: 2015).

• • •

I am lying on a bed with the fan rotating above me. It is 37 degrees here, how hot is it where you

are? I slide my shirt up, slide my hand up underneath it. My stomach is clammy, my hand sticks to it. I feel hot. I feel a prickle on my skin. Is it the heat making my junk tingle or the memory of lust somehow linked to the click click of the fan or the deafening swell of the cicadas singing outside my window. I grab my laptop who is sleeping beside me, (the green light on its left side flares with each breath), and pull it up onto my lap. A Google search takes me to a low-res video clip titled 'Dude Gets Erect During Physical'. A twink sits on a doctor's bench. He is asked by a voice behind the camera (the doctor) to remove his shirt. The twink obliges. The doctor moves into frame and proceeds with a number of tactile examinations including listening to the twink's heartbeat through a stethoscope, pressing on his abdomen to test for "any pain or discomfort" and tweaking his nipples to test sensitivity. The final act by the doctor is to collect an "ejaculate sample" which he does by giving the twink a handjob. As the doctor moves his hand the twink's cock becomes a smudge of lagging pink pixels. The twink comes into a petri dish and the clip ends. Let's go back to the beginning – the clip begins. A twink sits on a doctor's bench. What I should have mentioned earlier is that he actually sits on the bench for a long time before anything else happens. Someone has decided the waiting is part of it. The twink seems to be



POV Video still from YouTube account 'Tony Bomboni ASMR'



I/D Video still from YouTube account 'Tony Bomboni ASMR'

actually waiting (rather than pretend-waiting). I watch as his mind wanders. This permitted act of voyeurism feels exclusive, thrillingly intimate: “something bodies in proximity take for granted, and even tire of” (Darling: 2015).

Autonomous Sensory Meridian Response (or ASMR) videos produce feelings of proximity in a similar way. ASMR videos surged on platforms like YouTube in the early 2000s. Wikipedia defines ASMR as the following:

Autonomous sensory meridian response (ASMR) is a term used for an experience characterised by a static-like or tingling sensation on the skin that typically begins on the scalp and moves down the back of the neck and upper spine. ASMR signifies the subjective experience of “low-grade euphoria” characterised by “a combination of positive feelings and a distinct static-like tingling sensation on the skin”. It is most commonly triggered by specific acoustic or visual stimuli, and less commonly by intentional attention control (2017).

In the ASMR community, the sensation of watching ASMR videos is sometimes referred to as a “brain massage”, “head tingle”, “brain tingle”, “spine tingle” and “brain orgasm”. Its connotation with sexual arousal has been disputed by many in the community (possibly

in part because the videos are used as parental aids in attention-focusing for children) though others have embraced it, creating a sub-genre called ASMRotica which is designed specifically for sexual arousal.

ASMR videos, like amateur pornography, generate ghostmodern intimacy through their very particular performative formulas, which contain “a certain eros” as Darling suggests:

*[...] an aspect of the life drive, a will to permeate, to propagate to connect, to tessellate, to reach beyond yourself into the whatever of another (Darling: 2015).*

In ASMR videos there are two popular and distinct modes which I will name ‘Instructional/ Demonstrational (I/D)’ and ‘Point of View (POV)’. In I/D ASMR videos we are greeted by our ASMR host, who speaks softly, intimately to camera, demonstrating a particular task. The task itself is always a tactile one and can range from how to give the best head massage to how to fold towels. The second category, ‘POV’, is restricted to role-play in which the viewer is incorporated. Most commonly, POV ASMR videos place the viewer in the position of the camera and the ASMR host in the position of caretaker, playing a doctor, nurse, hairdresser, masseuse or make-up artist. These videos often use binaural microphones to heighten a sensation of intimacy for the viewer. The ASMR host reaches out towards the viewer, literally performing virtual-touching. Intimacy is further-generated in ASMR videos through the slippages in the virtual fantasy being displayed. In an I/D ASMR video on YouTube titled Binaural / 3D Full Head, Neck, & Back Massage (ASMR), ASMR

host Tony Bomboni (a camp teenager in a tracksuit) performs an instructional massage, demonstrating on his friend who he introduces as Briana. Bomboni's performative tone is professional and didactic, though his professionalism is undermined when it becomes clear Bomboni doesn't know a lot about massage technique. He performs the massage in what appears to be a bedroom in a suburban house. In frame is a white dresser, its drawers half open with clothes hanging out of them. The camera is sloppily set-up, creating an awkward framing in which Bomboni has to maneuver his body to avoid stepping into frame in a way that would obstruct the demonstration. These slippages allow the viewer access into the real life of Bomboni furthering feelings of proximity in a way that feels completely accidental and therefore thrilling.

As Muñoz articulates, "Performances that display their "means" are, like punk, a modality of performance that is aesthetically and politically linked to populism and amateurism [and that interrupts] aesthetics and politics that aspire toward totality" (2009: 100). In other words performances of amateurism signal a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming. I have chosen to work with non-performers in my works 19.12.15 and Physical not only to display the means of the work, as Muñoz suggests, but because, in doing so, I increase a sense of the work as vulnerable and therefore open to intimacy and connection. This approach also gravitates toward deliberate weakness, manifest damage, and evocations of mutual support. It partakes in a long history of queers constructing their own families – be they composed of peers or mentors or lovers or ex-lovers.

# Chapter 5

## Transtemporal Drag

*“the most interesting thing about drag is not that it repeats norms or repeats them wrongly, but that it introduces a distance to norms and processes of subjection” –Antke Engel*

The term ‘transtemporal drag’ was suggested by Renate Lorenz, one half of art collective Boudry/Lorenz (Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz), in a catalogue of the same name published in 2011 which introduced a number of their works. Lorenz writes that when drag is at its most radical “it is about a copresence that does not produce any transition from one state to another (from femininity to masculinity), but a third thing – a collective body that remains in movement and that shies away from any conclusive appropriation, any understanding or access” (2012: 67). Although the term “drag” has often been used as a designation for “drag-queen”, “drag-king” or “monster-drag” club performances within queer subcultures, there are surprisingly few queer-theoretical reflections available on the term. Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* (1990) introduced drag as an exemplary figure of the political. As Lorenz explains, Butler understands drag as “imitating gender identity [thus] it implicitly exposes the imitation structure

of gender identity as such” (2012: 60). Lorenz continues: “Drag can denaturalise not only the two-gender system and heteronormativity but also, if we understand gender and sexuality as a structuring force for a wide variety of social institutions, this practice can intervene in the various areas of the social – in hierarchies and exclusionary practices (2012: 60). In this early work, Butler also calls such performances “gender parody”, while emphasising that it is not gender itself that is parodied, but the notion of the original (1990: 175-176). Fundamentally, it is the function of drag to make it visible that all practices of subjectification are “drag.”

In her text *Queer Temporalities and the Chronopolitics of Transtemporal Drag*, Antke Engel gives a definition of the transtemporal drag performances of art collective Boudry/Lorenz. The drag in Boudry/Lorenz performance and video practice is characterised by a kind of ambiguity in which a performer might wear facial hair and an 18th Century gown for example. The performances themselves are characterised by “boredom, indifference and simultaneous submission to and rejection of “the law”” (2011). This mode of performance, which echoes



that of Drucker in their video work *You will never be a woman [...]*, conjures a kind of gestural and tonal indeterminacy. Engel continues:

[Boudry/Lorenz] create a network of cross-references that undermines linear time and generates an interplay of heterogeneous historical, social, cultural, and geopolitical sites, realized in biographical references that celebrate

the singularity of individual lives that have been denied recognition, or have even experienced abjection (Engel: 2011).

In order to further explain and expand upon Lorenz and Engel's definition of Transtemporal Drag I would like to draw on Susan Sontag's definition of 'camp' as well as Ahmed's definition of 'perversion'. These terms help better define the ways transtemporal drag can be used as a device to expose the mutable nature of gendered bodies. A defining characteristic of Transtemporal Drag is its 'camp' quality. Though camp is driven by aesthetic excess and is both over the top and entirely earnest, for Sontag, the signature feature of camp is its expression of a "seriousness that fails" (1961: 283). She writes that not all seriousness that fails can be redeemed as camp, "only that which has the proper mixture of the exaggerated, the fantastic, the passionate, and the naïve" (1961: 283). Though the outlandish qualities of camp might incorrectly associate it with gender parody or irony, the seriousness of its ambition reveals something else entirely - as Lorenz notes "a third thing" related to the quality of the ambition itself, not only the style of the work (2012: 67). Another important aspect of transtemporal drag its affiliation with 'perversion'. Perversion is defined on dictionary.com as "that which distorts or corrupts the original course, meaning, or state of something". Ahmed adds, "Perversion is also a spatial term, which can refer to the willful determination to counter or go against orthodoxy, but also to what is wayward and thus "turned away

*Physical* characters 'Catmeat' and 'Candy, image by Zoe Wong 2017

*Andy Warhol, Self Portrait in Drag, in collaboration with Christopher Makos, 1981*

from what is right, good, and proper.” For some queer theorists, this is what makes “the perverse” a useful starting point for thinking about the “disorientations” of queer, and how it can contest not only heteronormative assumptions, but also social conventions and orthodoxies in general” (Ahmed: 78).

Alongside my video work *Physical* I have created two photographic portraits of the transtemporal characters from my work – Catmeat and Candy (photographed by Zoe Wong). Catmeat has a pink face with grey lips. Their long brown hair is slicked back behind their ears. They wear a child’s pink t-shirt which reads “I eat glitter for breakfast” paired with army pants and Ugg boots. Candy has a grey face with chroma-key green lips. They wear a blue tracksuit and a white cap with the word “gutters” on it. Both characters hold themselves in postures which simultaneously perform and undermine any conclusive understanding of their gender or class. The photographs are in a way, self-portraits that negotiate my politics, fears, questions, and possibilities without binding me to a body, a biology or to practices that can be directly considered or understood as my own. The characters in *Physical* are relational beings. They do not fit easily into cohesive, normative, regulated subject moulds. The characters also do not reject a normative subject mould, rather, they are unaware that their attempts at achieving such cohesion have failed. Their inability for self-reflection and self-realisation allude to Sontag’s definition of camp and to tragi-comics and sissy caricatures of the 1920s-30s Hollywood era, characters who, due to Hays Code regulations, were ambiguous illusionists bubbling with subtext. The ways in which queers and other minority groups use code to persevere through repression remains important to me in the development of my characters. I use code in my

work through the development of intimate subtexts between my characters, queer vernacular and by directly referencing readably queer characters from mainstream cinema and TV. Importantly, the characters do not embody these personas so much as imitate them unsuccessfully.

In Andy Warhol’s photographic drag portraiture series from 1981 (photographed by Christopher Makos with Warhol as subject), Warhol performs a kind of transtemporal drag, dressed in stone-wash jeans, a white shirt and a crosshatch tie, feminising makeup and a variety of feminine wigs. As with the works of photographic portrait artist Cindy Sherman, Warhol’s ‘transtemporal drag’ portraits reference a whole range of critical drag aesthetics in which the aim is not to become either woman or man, but something else entirely. Warhol’s gestures are intentional in their soft theatricality, creating a double-reading of homosexual masculinity and the feminine. Warhol’s challenge to both bourgeois and working-class masculinity and its stylistic closeness to feminine or homosexual self-presentational modes threatened the bases of interpretation built into modernist art history and criticism.

Warhol’s portraits are resonant with my own. Through these images the genre of self-portraiture becomes newly invented as something that does not so much demand a view inward as it privileges the view to assemblages, to contact with others, to an association with others and to a comparison with other biographies and other courses of action.

# Conclusion

A surgeon in a white lab coat entered the white hospital room where I lay in bed. As he entered he blended into the white walls. His head floated towards me. In his hand, held upright, was a green marker. He popped the lid and began drawing on my skin, circling areas of my body. He reminded me for a moment of my baby cousin who would stick crayons in my ears and call it medicine. He circled a stomach muscle on my lower right side and told me: “this muscle will be extracted and implanted down there.” He gestured to my mangled leg with the marker. The lines he drew were lines of care, tactile and hopeful, and yet drawn with a cool focus, almost violent. Soon, this man would cut me open and reach his hand inside my abdomen. The literal re-assembling of my body has meant becoming more conscious of my body in or as a different way, particularly in relation to other bodies and other kinds of touch.

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In this thesis I have set out to understand the transgressive potential of various types of disorientation related to neo-documentary practice. Using theories put forward by scholars of Queer Geography (Munoz, Ahmed, Steyerl) I have defined spatial, psychological, temporal and corporeal disorientations in relation to neo-documentary modes. Muñoz’s theory of getting lost and Ahmed’s understanding of self-shattering have been of particular influence to this thesis in understanding the

ways in which feelings of disorientation encourage the subject to extend themselves, allowing for new modes and ways of connection as you “reach beyond yourself, into the whatever of another” (Darling: 2015). I have also used scholars of queer performance (Lorenz, Engel, Sontag) to describe transtemporal drag as a kind of progressive disorientation of mainstream gender ideals. I have used theories of intimacy related to image-making practices (Kavka, Darling) to describe the ways in which neo-documentary draws from televisual modes to express everyday ‘realities’ as the grounds for an experience of immediacy or non-proximate (ghostmodern) intimacy. My video work *Physical*, along with Hissy Fit’s video work 19.12.15 have formed the practical component of this research project. Both works experiment with reality TV and documentary modes to produce interventions into normalities and offer alternatives to social power relations. Working collaboratively with my queer friends and peers has allowed my voice to have presence within my work without the voice being singular or conclusive. The artist’s voice, in this case, is a shy and perverse one, which swivels and side-steps, duplicates and distracts. This research in both practice and theory therefore demonstrates a privileging of assemblages and process over polished or unified formations. All of the methods presented in this thesis form a sensual and intimate mode of image-making which punctures (bio)political and social structures.





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