

Record work - Accounts of writing, reading, moving and speaking performance's documentary history

Giles Bailey

Since 2008 I have been producing texts to be presented as performances that extrude content from historical and archival source material. Developing a relationship to the history of the discipline in which I found myself working I have made efforts to devise new projects that responded to documents recording work by other practitioners that I admired, felt affinity with or was simply curious and uncertain about.

Though these performances occasionally include writing appropriated, quoted or collaged from the documents with which I had become preoccupied their scripts are equally textual responses to time or image based material. They are attempts to productively and creatively conflate the act of writing *through* or *across* this material with the act of writing *about* it.

In each case a script was developed that I would perform, composed by writing, speaking and rehearsing the text for the specific context of a live encounter with an audience. My intention was to articulate a subjective relationship to these histories and precedents via a writing practice constituted as much by the mechanics and effects of my voice, body and manipulation of the situations of reception as the literary composition of words on a page.

The documents with which I worked – images, fragments of video, written accounts, interviews and criticism depicting or concerning performance works by others – were all striking in their incapacity to clearly communicate what exactly transpired in a particular

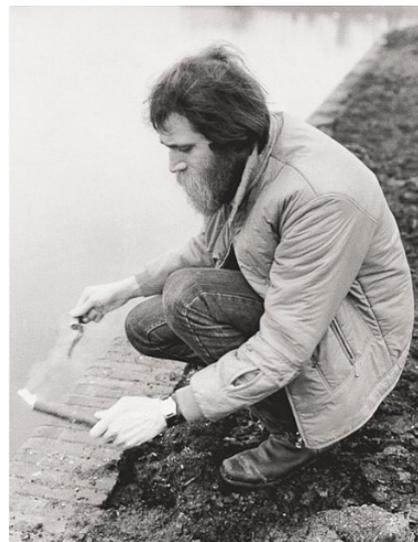
time or place prompting me to imaginatively construct the missing content. The potential for this speculative missing content, comprised of moving, speaking, active bodies became the material for a series of performances collected under a project titled *Talker Catalogue*. These performances aimed to articulate the character and operation of a subjective mental space and posed questions concerning the responsibility of historiography to 'truth' and the value of internal imaginative processes prompted by the documentary matter of performance's history. What follows is an elaboration of how this working methodology came about with appended performance transcripts and accompanying commentary that aim to contextualise and expand these ideas.

Some time ago, while conducting research in anticipation of developing a new performance work, I was prompted to go back to certain formative encounters with historical precedents. I looked back at examples of performances collected in books cataloging the trajectory of this field of the visual arts. Beginning at a point in the mid sixties where a discernible movement began to take shape, bolstered by the broadening acceptance of conceptual art, I came to familiar examples of work by Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Marina Abramović and Carolee Schneeman all of whom are considered significant figures in the canon of performance-makers. Largely the manner in which such work is historicised and compiled is via single or small series of black and white photographs judged to document a representative singular instant conveying the essential character of works that took place at a certain moment and for a certain period of time.

These were images that I recalled from early days of studenthood and are thought of as emblematic or general signifiers of what is now considered to be performance art. They are the pieces that are turned to in order to construct stereotypes and it is from these images that many of the defining tropes of the discipline are drawn. Though much of this

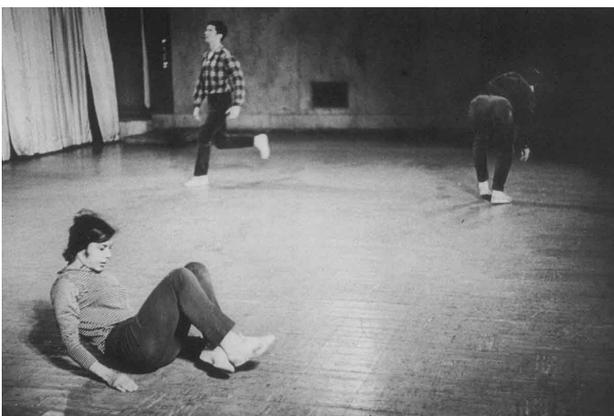
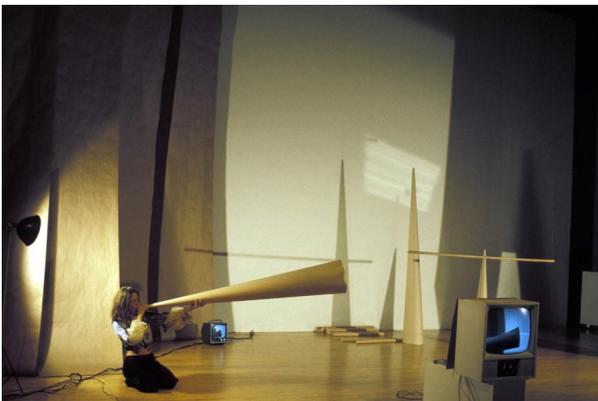
work was then and, on the whole, still remains marginal in the general scheme of the visual arts it has become very much incorporated into the histories of modern and contemporary creative practice. The precedent set by the examples I mention and the conventions of print and academia are such that this tendency for a single image to stand in for a durational work persists in journalistic, critical and historical projects.

In the case of a great deal of the performance work associated with conceptual art its objective seems to be to illustrate or demonstrate an idea via an action and as such the single image often serves the work quite effectively. To pick two iconic examples we can look at Chris Burden's work from 1973 *747*, in which he purportedly fired several shots with a revolver at a Boeing 747 in flight, where the image that represents this work appears to show him doing exactly that. Similarly documentation of Lawrence Weiner's *Residue of a Flare Ignited Upon a Boundary* (1969) shows the artist crouched lighting said flare which, accompanied by the work's title, leaves very little to the imagination regarding physically what took place.



However, looking at cases of other performance work which reaches beyond the demonstrative to explore more layered, manifold or narrative live scenarios it is clear that

the singular image is less efficient. Such work asked much more of its audience in terms of deciphering the content and developing imaginative interpretation. In the cases of works by Joan Jonas, Richard Foreman, Yvonne Rainer or Guy de Cointet for example the depiction of what has taken place before the audience remains extremely enigmatic. Bodies are positioned articulating dynamic tensions between each other, gestural configurations suggest the tone of dialogue or areas of significance on the stage, props remain charged and abstract. Suddenly as a reader of such images there is a great deal to do in terms of locating and organising meaning based upon the information provided.



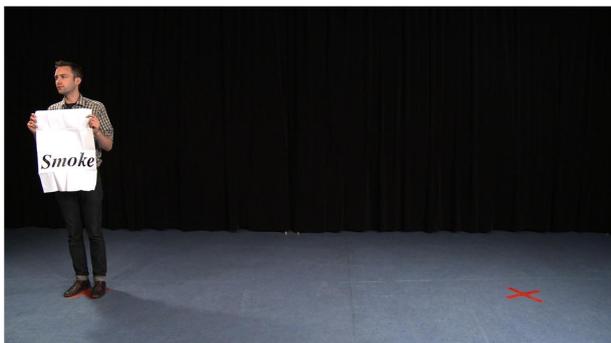
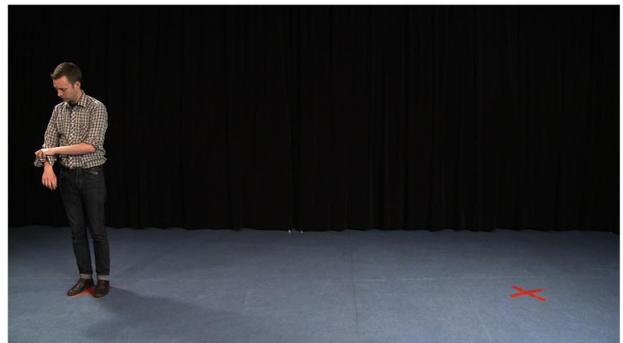
Though the images tend to resonate most strongly performance works are also occasionally documented by written accounts or snippets of video and sound but of course

these too are very inefficient mediations of the live event by virtue of their fragmentary character. You get nothing more than a gist. But really what more could you expect? How would it be possible and what would it mean to reanimate the very particular character of these instants in the past that took place in very particular contexts? Thinking this through is another reminder of how mediation and translation affect and modify the subject they attempt to transmit. Also perhaps it is a prompt to respond creatively to that fact. That the reader or critic's subjective interpretation of a text is an operation independent and uncontrolled by the work of the writer is a notion well established in literary theory and as such the text can be thought of as something to act upon or participate with. With this in mind and the activity of the imagination privileged I was eager to explore the creative possibilities for reading and interpreting these incomplete representations and inefficient documents of bodies doing things.

So, occupying some mid-territory between historian-researcher and artist-researcher I was prompted to investigate this place I found myself and figure out where to move on in terms of producing work of my own. Convention would dictate that the role of the historian would be to map a causal network of developments based upon evidence and sources with a responsibility to precision, verifiability and cogency but, conscious of the plural nature of the material with which I was concerned, experimenting with this relationship seemed filled with potential.

Absolved of a responsibility to the orderly conventions of historiography the inefficiency of these images, documents and fragments did not seem to be necessarily unsatisfactory. I was struck that this inefficiency provided a space and with this absent section of the work came a gap that I was invited to fill. It did not seem to be unreasonable to indulge the more immediate impulsive and associative responses I had to these records given they carried

with them potential for further activity. Thinking in terms of a roll of celluloid that captures the motion of a subject these pictures could be considered as single, excised frames. All that was necessary was to construct the rest of the film. And this could be done however I saw fit. In each case there is some immediate physical logic as in how a raised arm might fall or the apparent momentum of a body would cause it to progress through space but more imaginative activity is required to conceive of how props are activated or other characters are introduced, even how time and space could be wildly and recklessly contorted to reflect mental processes more accurately. Each document prompted its own subjective kinaesthetic response extending out in either direction along a temporal continuum, upon which the photograph or snippet of media marked a single point,



occupied by bodies moving, speaking and responding to their environments. The physical component of the empathetic activities in my imagination that were responses to these documents were also subject to the vagaries of my subjectivity and I would allow these elements to entangle. As a result content from a whole broad body of research, not exclusively addressing performance's history, was inevitably coexisting and subject to my mental ordering process. The resulting odd collisions and unorthodox collaging from

disparate yet related material became content for the performances and proposed new terms to think through the way the substance and sources of history are organised and made meaningful.

In each of the works that made up the *Talker Catalogue* project accounts, demonstrations or abstract enactments of corporal motor activity are set against or operate alongside sections of spoken narrative delivered as a monologue. By studying the documents from which I was working the verbal capacities of the bodies depicted struck me as just as prominent in my responses as those which were choreographic or gestural.

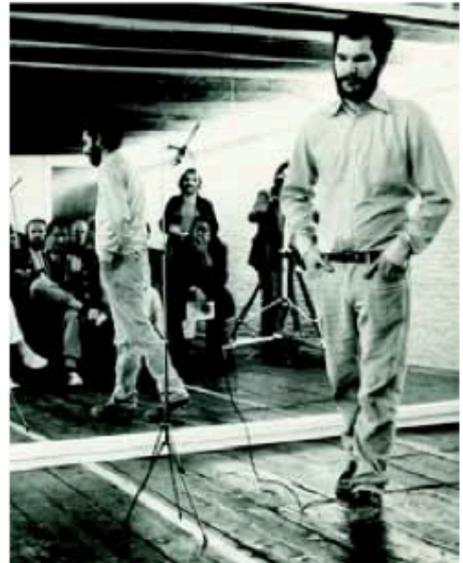
In the project *Exit THE AZTEC* (2009) I developed a performance comprised of a monologue and series of gestures elaborated from a footnote to the screenplay of François Truffaut's 1962 film *Jules et Jim*. A minor character who appears on screen for less than minute is mysteriously dubbed THE AZTEC by the writer/director. The enigmatic charge of this particular naming and uncertain identity singled him out as a subject onto which a series of figures could be projected. In particular some parallel research into the American experimental theatre company the Wooster Group drew my attention to the figure of Ron Vawter, a member of the group from the mid 70s until his death in 1994. My coextensive interest in these two figures brought them together as a composite individual of which I was also one key part. In the performance their identities were presented as simultaneous and entangled composed of fragments of quotation alongside explanatory sections and interspersed with an abstract syntax of hand movements. My own identity as a performer was protean and inflected by those of the subjects I was responding to with the intention of synthesising my research processes and actualising the mental, speculative and subjective participation with the documents from which content was drawn.

The two works that follow *Exit THE AZTEC*, *Tom/Lutz: Two Scenes in 1983* (2009) and *The Nineteen Sixties* (2010), have a more concrete link to dance and choreography and will be addressed in more detail below.

It is important to acknowledge that there are a number of precedents of artists working in this way with relation to the enigmatic potential of documentary records and historical miscellanies. A notable example would be Mike Kelley's *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction #1 (A Domestic Scene)* (2000) which is one component of a proposed and incomplete series of 365 loosely autobiographical works derived from photographs documenting what the artist refers to as "folk performances". In the case of ...*(A Domestic Scene)* an image of a drama production found in a high school year book is fleshed out into a Beckett-like, absurd and chilling one-act TV play. Presented on a monitor installed amidst a reconstruction of the set depicted in the photograph the two male performers of the year book become unbalanced, embittered lovers bickering in a grim, tatty apartment whose oven is haunted by a spectral Sylvia Plath.



Keren Cytter
Performer/Audience/Mirror (2009)



Dan Graham
Performer/Audience/Mirror (1975)

In another case the Wooster Group, with their National Endowments for the Arts funding cut in the wake of the fallout from their controversial work *Route 1&9* (1981), produced *Hula* (1981), a dance performance that interprets and re-imagines Ray Whitfield and the Johnsons' LP *The Waikiki Hula Boys*. Three performers from the company, naked but for garlands of flowers and grass skirts with the genitals of the male performers painted green, dance the entirety of the record indulging the peculiarities of polynesian stereotypes and Western exoticism. The artefact of the LP, both materially and sonically, became material that articulated the performers' responses to their encounter with this very culturally-specific document from 1954 negotiated from their particular context as theatre makers in New York City in the early 1980s.



A third and more contemporary example would be Keren Cytter's *Performer/Audience/Mirror* (2009), a reinterpretation of Dan Graham's 1975 performance of the same name presented as a companion piece to her work *The Death of John Webber* (2009) that imagines a revolutionary scenario where men and women mysteriously change gender. In the Dan Graham piece, a performance documented on video, the artist stands before a seated audience with his back facing a mirror. While pacing to and fro he carries out a procedure of alternately objectively describing himself and the audience first observing them first hand and then via the mirror. Introducing a dramatic narrative the Israeli artist

employed one actor to reenact the Graham work while another interjects, speaking a monologue written by Cytter from within the audience. Occasionally the second actor, a woman, plays music on a portable CD player and illuminates the male actor in Dan Graham's role with a lamp. Perhaps this work more than any seems to allow an ambivalent relationship to art history play out and allow for new imaginative possibilities. Cytter's experience of the Graham performance in its mediated and historically specific form invites her to introduce a disruptive element subjectively conceived but very much a physical articulation of her encounter.

In the examples of my work that follow and those of other artists' projects that I describe the body can be seen as providing the empathetic tool of interpretation. In its highly specific and highly subjective condition as a yardstick allowing the actions of others to become intelligible the body, like voice and text, acts in the space left by the document. It is the absent, uncommunicated, unknowable facets and character of an event that is speculatively constructed by the body in the imagination before it is actualised in the work of art. In particular the works by Mike Kelly and Keren Cytter illustrate a treatment of documentary material that yields text which creatively elaborates what it is and what it could mean. It is a similar expanded notion of writing that negotiates the subjective physical, verbal or academic responses to the matter of history in the performances that constitute my *Talker Catalogue* project. Included here it is my hope that they demonstrate an intermeshing of text at different registers, inflected and opened up by the specific materiality of the voice, body and language.

The Performances.

TOM/LUTZ: TWO SCENES IN 1983.



Transcript:

A performer stands before the audience. Behind him is a screen onto which a video or presentation could be projected.

So, I've prepared an action to introduce this performance and, perhaps a little later, we'll try it with some music.

From his pocket he takes a small, white plastic bottle.

These are just ordinary eyedrops and what I do is simply remove the cap and place it in my mouth, tilt my head back and tug the flesh above my cheekbone to expose the eyeball and ease the application of the liquid. The head is tilted forward again, the eyes blink to displace any excess, I remove the cap from my mouth, replace it on the bottle and screw it tightly. I'm aware it might seem a little strange at first but my hope is that through repetition it will become normalised and habitual.

A pause.

So perhaps the best thing to do is just demonstrate that for you now.

As described, very slowly and deliberately, he enacts the application of the eye drops. This is repeated four times in total silence.

Ok so as you have probably grown familiar with that, I will continue. These are two scenes in 1983.

He makes a small, rapid gesture tapping the fingers of his right hand on his chest, brushing them across his chin then curling them into a fist with the thumb extended so that it points to his right.

A young dancer travels from America to begin working on a new directed ensemble piece in Germany.

He makes the same small, rapid gesture, this time with his left hand pointing to his left.

Imagine if you will a room in the *Elysee* hotel on Manhattan – I suspect not many of you will have stayed there, I certainly haven't – but it is occupied by a writer in his seventies, once boyish and handsome now somewhat portly and seedy. He mutters to himself, recalling:

His father taunts him as a sissy and calls him “Miss Nancy.” His older sister, an imaginative muse to him, tragically retreats into schizophrenia until a prefrontal lobotomy in 1937 left her immured in a perpetual mental twilight. He reflects on characters for which he has been responsible and their journeys over a landscape that pulses with the strife-torn dualities of human nature.

He draws the great curtains, sits on the bed, stands and opens them again. Struggling with the handle of the balcony door he is finally able to turn it and step out into the night air.

His secretary sleeps in the adjoining room for whom, when he reflects upon him and the tasks and activities they have planned for the coming days, he feels intermittent pangs of lust. However his main preoccupation is his health, which is bad. And though it is bad he is convinced that it is much worse and maintains a good relationship with an unscrupulous doctor who keeps him in regular supply with pills that sedate and activate him as his whim dictates in reckless disregard of his formal diagnosis of heart disease. In fact, as is routine, only a quarter of an hour earlier he took barbiturates and is feeling the first hints of synthesized well-being twinkling in his body. He wobbles a little as he inhales the night air and steadies himself on the railing as gentle little waves of contentment ripple across him. Returning to his room and closing the door he pours himself a large whiskey and...

He pauses momentarily, his brow furrowed in doubt.

well, let's say there's a record player in his room. I appreciate that this is unlikely given he is in a hotel room but, for the sake of what we're attempting here, let's say

he has a record player. Sipping his drink he flicks through the small selection of LPs he asked his secretary to bring, selects one and, with the precision of his coordination lessening with the drink and pharmaceuticals, fumbles at the paper sleeve.

He think of his home in Key West where he spends much of the rest of the year and the rest of his collection is kept.

He performs the small gesture indicating the space to his right.

Let's say that now the dancer is aboard an aeroplane. It lands, they rehearse. His dressing room is waiting. Well, technically it is not his dressing room as he shares it with the rest of the company but it is waiting. It is very improvised, built from cheap, unpainted timber but, in accordance with the archetypes with which we're all familiar, the mirror is ringed with light bulbs burning brightly. The filmmaker is readying her camera and he stands before it. She checks and tests the tape recorder. A man and a woman perform a choreographed tussle in the preceding scene against which he is to be edited, though of course both she and he have no knowledge of that in this moment.

The gesture again to the left.

The record plays and in his swimming imagination he sees a strange image of himself in the future.

He queues a video that plays on the screen behind him. It is a very low quality, digitally compressed extract from Chantal Akerman's Un jour Pina à demandé (1983). Dancers from the Tanztheater Wuppertal stand together performing a solemn, stylized action of alternately wiping away imagined tears and clapping their hands together. This is accompanied by a version of the English folk song Froggy Went a'Courting sung in a falsetto. While this plays the performer repeats the eyedrop-applying action with which he opened the performance. This continues until the song finishes and the image of the dancers cuts to one of a man and woman embracing. The video image disappears altogether.

Though this image is familiar it distresses him a great deal and abruptly he lifts the needle from the record and, with his thumbs on the black, roughly removes the disk and replaces it with another. He takes long sip from his glass and lowers the stylus on the record. In his intoxication his attention is atomised. His eyes ache and he rubs them not noticing the the needle jumps impotently and fractionally to and fro in the dusty outer rings of the LP with the song never starting.

Gesture to the right.

In the dressing room he explains how, during the rehearsals, he was asked by the director to show her something he was proud of. He learned the party piece while in the United States and when he showed her it became a dance and she incorporated it in the work. The filmmaker cues the music out of shot and he demonstrates for the camera.

Gesture to the left.

He takes the bottle of eye drops from the writing desk and begins a ritual he enacts twice daily. As he stands staring up at the ceiling he is conscious that he sways and the barbiturates have made him warm and slow and happy. Then, just at the moment that he would tilt his head forward, remove the cap from his mouth his jaw momentarily and involuntarily slackens and the cap falls backwards across his lethargic tongue clogging the entrance to his trachea. He gags, grabs his throat and wheels desperately about the room to the soundtrack of the crackling stylus until he is no longer joined to the living.

Gesture to the right.

He stands in a field of carnations as part of the performance proper. His black suit is barely visible, indistinguishable from the backcloth, leaving his face and hands and collar and cuffs suddenly very visible, and he performs the dance again. I will show you this now and then I'll go and sit down and the performance will be over...

Gesture to the left.

...but first the writer's body falls, now comprehensively asphyxiated and there is a loud thump as a chair topples with him. This sound heard by his secretary though only investigated, too late, the following day when the corpse is discovered. But the impact of the writer's body and the chair on the carpeted floor, I need hardly add, is just enough to jerk the needle of the record player and so that it in the first groove of the first song on the LP.

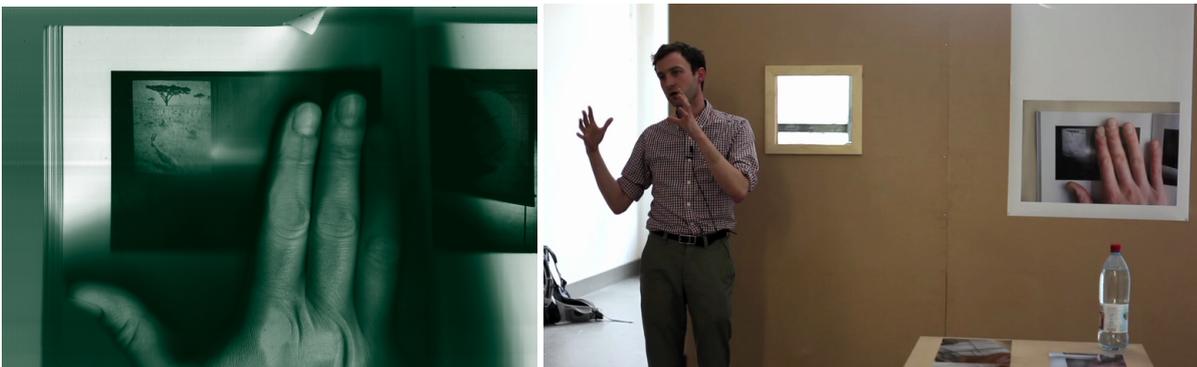
The screen behind him is filled with blue light as he queues more music. This time the song is 'The Man I Love' by George Gershwin performed by Sophie Tucker. As the singing begins the he accompanies the voice performing the lyrics to the song in American sign language. A male voice can be heard on the recording quietly singing along. The song finishes and the performer is left head bowed, arms crossed over his chest. The song begins again, this time an audience can be heard on the recording laughing and applauding. The performer steps into the beam of blue light from the projector and repeats his sign language accompaniment. The song ends, the recorded audience applaud and he goes and sits down. The performance is over.

Though not explicitly cited during the performance the work makes use of some particular references as source material from which much of the content is drawn. The writer's death is a largely accurate account of the death of American playwright Tennessee Williams though much of the detail is imagined. The story of the dancer is based upon two scenes from Chantal Akerman's film *Un jour Pina à demandé* (1983). This film is a portrait of German choreographer Pina Bausch and her company Tanztheater Wuppertal. In the fragments with which I am concerned German dancer Lutz Förster performs *The Man I love* as described above in extracts from Bausch's work *Nelken* (1982). The video that plays during the performance is another moment excised from the Akerman film that was uploaded by a user to Youtube.

In this work Tennessee Williams becomes emblematic of the 20th century dramatic establishment. He is set as a counterpoint to Pina Bausch, an equally definitive fragment from postmodern performance practice which is mediated through the experimental

cinema of Chantal Akerman. In this layered form the work speaks about an epoch while constructing a narrative that leaves the relationship between the two male protagonists ambiguous but entangled. The actions that provide parentheses for the performances are extrapolated from the material and given an equivalence that is informed by the practice of the second subject (Lutz Förster dancing Pina Bausch). The narrative takes its queue for emotional tone, specific description from Tennessee Williams. The performance's delivery is also designed to problematise the register at which the document is received. As story, lecture, demonstration or dance the content shifts its character as each mode of observation changes. Finally re-staging of content from one scenario/paradigm within the other makes the threshold between the two equivalent sources porous and they are changed, reevaluated and played with simply by being placed alongside each other

THE NINETEEN SIXTIES: STORIES WITH ELEMENTS



The performer stands, illuminated by a projected image. This image depicts the photographed page of a book. The black square of an illustration is partially obscured by a hand, but a smaller rectangle within the black one, in its top left corner, depicts an African landscape and a heard of Thompson Gazelle running away from the camera in the direction of the horizon. The performer stands so that

the area of the image occupied by fingers plays across the upper portion of his body.

This is a performance about the nineteen sixties and it's called "The Nineteen Sixties: Stories with Elements".

It begins: He has stayed up working late, distracted by the computer. Not drinking.

When he wakes he is startled by how alert he feels – no foggy head. There is daylight falling through the windows above him on to the bed, his body and duvet.

He thinks of how the birds would now be audible outside – in the park, the garden, the streets around the houses.

He rises and stretches. Seated on the wide, flat expanse of the wooden floor he grips one foot then the other, arcs his spine rolls his neck and thinks:

Antimony, arsenic, aluminium, selenium,
hydrogen, oxygen, nitrogen, rhenium,
nickel, neodymium, neptunium, germanium,
iron, americium, ruthenium, uranium,

Then there's breakfast which he drinks and eats. He pauses, reflecting. Insecurity rises within him and he pushes it down like a rubber ball beneath the surface of a pond. He knows an antidote to this would be more stretching. He can prepare for this

evening – he likes the protocol and he knows it. He can do a half rehearsal, reiterating patterns and listen to the radio at the same time.

He thinks that she says “no” to everything and

bend knees, head to the left, Swingball™ arms, turn and walk and outstretch arms and fingertip circles. Back, crossing legs walk, turning right, leg comes round, hunch shoulders and down, chest out. Leg out behind, back of hand to forehead, point down and forehead to ground. Up and prayer hands, right knee up, down, horizon hands. Back of hand to lower back, elbow up reach round and touch.

europium, zirconium, lutetium, vanadium,

lanthanum, osmium, astatine, radium,

gold, protactinium, indium, gallium,

iodine, thorium, thulium, thallium,

Hand on elbow and do all the bit with the hand on the elbow. Hand on elbow hand on elbow. “S” ankle wiggle, toe twist, tip toes, ballet arms, ankles together, facing the back. Arms up together, down together, lean left. Arms out, aeroplane, zombie, pulsing left. Crouching, pulsing, standing, right leg and grip shin.

He was always impressed by her and particularly when she instructed him to do this - this action in particular. It is more taxing to execute than it might appear. Palm applies pressure to trouser leg and beneath trouser leg, beneath palm there is a scar that is the product of horseplay.

On the island in the Summer. This was momentary respite from the busy, foreign city he was visiting, the festival there, all the art and the high anxiety interactions with people who don't speak his language. They had crept beyond the bounds of the park which they had paid to enter, scrambled down to the water, made a careful balanced circumnavigation of railings set in concrete with the late afternoon sun on the sea and the few distant bathers visible on the expensive resort beach on the other side of the little bay. They swam, lolled on rocks, felt exhilaration.

When they are dried and dressed he's full of beans. The sun has begun its descent.

Back in the park, for a wager, from a friend, he jumps from standing onto a picnic table. Though his toes make their mark the soles of his pumps slide (perhaps they're wet on the underside) and he crashes down with his shins against the wooden edge. It's a shock and he feels pain but mainly he smarts from the wound to his pride (He always liked the parts in her work where the action is as if she holds a limb like its wounded – Hand on elbow) and doesn't look down. His friends gather to check on him, concerned, and he laughs and says he's alright. But one friend looks down, points her finger and says "oh my god!"

There is a perfect rectangle of white shin bone exposed – four centimetres by one point five – with an angry scarlet edge, just a little window into his leg. No blood. It really stops him in his tracks thinking that for the first time he has seen part of his inside that should manifestly not be on the outside. If he imagines touching it, placing his finger on the bone, it his brain begins to retreat from the world and shut it down so he concludes that it's probably not a good idea to think about that anymore. He also remembers that sometimes when a machine breaks down it exposes its mechanics.

yttrium, ytterbium, actinium, rubidium,

boron, gadolinium, niobium, iridium,

strontium, silicon, silver, samarium,

bismuth, bromine, lithium, beryllium, barium,

They ride down in a horse and cart like Mennonites in pious silent shock to the little island hospital. Here he is stitched up and it takes ten minutes. The zealous doctor back home takes the stitches out too soon and his leg scars.

During the show that night (the whole piece lasts for an hour and a quarter this part, where the focus is truly his, is just ten minutes or less) – crouching, pulsing, standing, raise right leg and grip shin.

She is smart. He thinks “I like these moments where I’m made to think about and find meaning in something totally unfamiliar very much. All the organising principles that I had been unconsciously subscribing to are thrown into question”

Such as earlier when above the dancers this image (*he indicates the upper left portion of the image on the page of the scanned book on the wall behind him*) was projected.

holmium, helium, hafnium, erbium,

phosphorus, francium, fluorine, terbium,

manganese, mercury, molybdenum, magnesium,

dysprosium, scandium, cerium, cesium,

Africa. The photographer had tumbled from the jeep just to see. It's all grass, not sand like you'd expect, and the gazelle are just distant forms thundering toward the horizon. But the photographs have been taken and are later developed.

The photographs are great. One in particular. A great expanse of land with three trees in dark silhouette that look like umbrellas blown inside out. One Thompson gazelle at the bottom of the frame, its body arched, the others fleeing. It seems like there are two options in terms of how to read this image – either the photographer is among them, charging at the flanks of the beasts and one of the herd or equally, or in fact more probably, he is hunting them, in pursuit. The camera snaps at their heels. He is living vicariously through the eyes of a lion. With every electrical impulse of instinct the gazelle turned their backs and flee. He captures them. Reality does not explain itself.

This turning away causes a memory to take shape from the radio that morning during the stretching. A voice explaining:

“I was watching all the people running around and, you know, people would do things and she would pat them on the back and everybody's eyes were aglow and they were all trying together to make art and being very turned on by that which of course is classically the definition of this collaborative effort that is making theatre or making film. And I realised, sitting there in the grass watching them work, oh my god I turn totally

against this. What popped into my head was, and I spoke to them about this, you know we've all seen cartoons where the little cartoon character is singing and dancing and he's so happy and all the little houses on the street develop smiling faces and sort of turn and look down at him and dance along with him and I thought, you know, when I've learned things, when I've been opened to the truth it seems to me: imagine that cartoon and here I am and all of a sudden all the houses on the street and the trees, instead of turning and smiling to me, they turn away from me and they bend away from me and somehow that is the personification of the kind of inside experience that I have found most valuable in my life."

lead, praseodymium, platinum, plutonium,

palladium, promethium, potassium, polonium,

tantalum, technetium, titanium, tellurium,

cadmium, calcium, chromium, curium,

During the show that night – crouching, pulsing, standing, right leg up and grip shin –

He is illuminated for an instant by the flash of a camera.

And at the end,

sulphur, californium, fermium, berkelium,

mendelevium, einsteinium, nobelium,

argon, krypton, neon, radon, xenon, zinc, rhodium,

chlorine, carbon, cobalt, copper, tungsten, tin, sodium.

Lie flat, sweep arm round head. Knees up, work round, onto feet, ballet arms round, point toe, walk looking down, sweep arms overhead, round to hip. Stop. Right foot back onto the ball. Hold. The end.

The projected image behind the performer changes as he steps out of the beam of light. The words "The Nineteen Sixties", appears and the music of the Beach Boys fills the room. It plays out.

This work is a response to a number of specific references but the most salient of which is documentation of Yvonne Rainer's *The Mind is a Muscle*, an evening length work performed at the Judson Dance Theatre, New York in 1968. This performance was a composite piece structured around Rainer's defining solo choreography *Trio A*, a dance that aimed to emphasise the task-like character of movement, stripping away tropes and stylistic conventions of modern dance. Along side choreographed movement *The Mind is a Muscle* also introduced film, slide and text elements with a stark, utilitarian set that had certain formal parallels with the contemporary minimalist sculpture of artists such as her peer Robert Morris. The image projected behind the performer is taken from Catherine Wood's book from 2007 addressing *The Mind is a Muscle* in Afterall's 'One Work' series. The image has been rephotographed so that my hand conceals the performers present in the instant depicted. The list of chemical elements that reoccurs in the monologue is taken from the song *The Elements* (1959) by American satirist Tom Lehrer in which the names of

all the then-known elements on the periodic table are sung to the tune of The Major General's song from Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *The Pirates of Penzance*.

Wood's book is filled with curious, charged images which, though compelling, only offer the slightest indication of what took place over the course of the work's performance. The glimpses one gains are of tableaux and configurations of subjects and objects all filled with the potential to move and reconfigure themselves. One image in particular provided the starting point for this work and proposed terms to advance the dynamic relationship to documentation that was initiated in *Tom/Lutz...* This was a depiction of Bill Davis performing *Trio A*. The dancer appears to stand alone, leg raised, his hand apparently gripping the shin. This image was among many that depicted arresting and often bewildering gestures and actions that appeared, as the performance intended, to defy narrative and carry many potential readings, but yet was strangely exceptional. My response was oddly and profoundly empathetic because of the particular character of the stance assumed by the dancer. This is simply because if I were to adopt the same position myself my palm would exactly cover a scar that I happen to have on my leg. I saw myself and couldn't help but attach a personal experience to the stylised snapshot single moment within an elaborate choreography. From this very subjective reading and the abrupt moment of recognition in the empathetic encounter with the picture and its subject a narrative presented itself and began to unfold. It describes, in the third person, the experience of a male performer over the course of one day: waking, breakfasting, rehearsing, reflecting, recalling and eventually taking the stage. I imagined the *The Elements* broadcast on the radio mentioned in the text and in its list form proposed parallels to the mnemonic, rhythmic listing of actions from the dance rehearsed in the protagonist's apartment. The text also features quotations from an interview with the theatre-maker Richard Foreman and allusions to Rainer's 'No Manifesto' from 1965.

The effect of the literary character of much of the narrative within *Tom/Lutz* was that of identification and it was with this that the audience was led through the two accounts of the experiences of the male protagonists. So with such a direct and subjective connection made between the image documenting *The Mind is a Muscle* and my own experience and body it invited the unorthodox historiographic process of recounting autobiography as a means of negotiating a defining moment in the history of performance art.