

Performing Documents

Panel 5 (Saturday 13th April 2013)

Pursuing Pursuit (I am bound to follow): Steven Paige's remaking of elements of a personal archive.

Dr Mark Leahy

[title slide]

**Pursuing Pursuit (I am bound to follow):
remaking elements of a personal archive**

Dr Mark Leahy

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For this presentation I will discuss the project 'The ties that bind ...' by Steven Paige, which was developed and performed at Exeter Phoenix in January 2012. Drawing on ideas of 'return', of the 'cinephiliac anecdote', and of the personal archive, my paper will consider the recomposition of material coded with pastness and the loved moment. Displacement in remaking of the (mis)remembered, the partly remembered, the re-remembered will be discussed through textual display and replay. The presentation will include excerpts from a fake or facsimile film script written in response to the project.

[slide 2]

“The ties that bind me to my brothers are not wrapped around my wrists, but rather are fastened to my heart”

(Performance, video & installation, Phoenix Gallery, Exeter, January 2012)

Artist: Steven Paige

Assisted by: Ryan Curtis

Curator: Matt Burrows for Exeter Phoenix

Performers: Jonny Rowden & Simon Bradshaw

Filmmaker: Benjamin Borley

Sound Recordist: Harrison Wilmot

Sound Designer: Neil Rose

Respondent: Mark Leahy

Publication: Library of Independent Exchange

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The project involved a number of participants contributors and collaborators, and the outcomes included a gallery installation, a video, a live performance (daily at 4.00 pm), and a publication.

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through quoting the author becomes viewer

The burgeoning of the copy not only facilitated the quotation of the original but splintered the supposed unity of the original "itself" into nothing but a series of

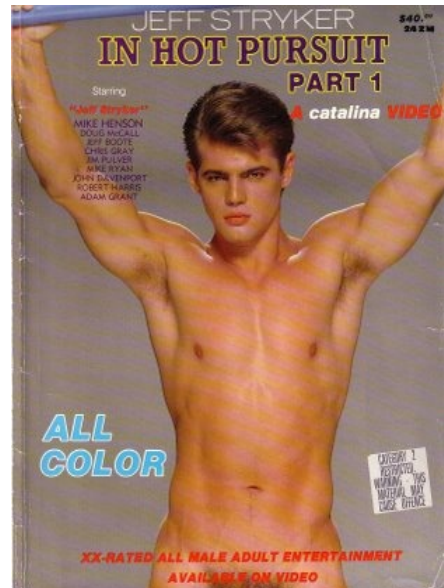
quotations. And, in the place of what was formerly an author, the operator of these quotes, in being redefined as pasticheur, was repositioned to the other side of the copybook to join, schizophrenically, the mass of its readers. (Krauss, 290)

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The project engaged in an act of remaking, of quotation, of reperforming. The artist, Paige, occupied various roles or positions within this complex as keeper of the memories, as viewer of the 'original', as author of the 'copy'. 'The ties that bind ...' engaged with cinematic questions of the remake and the version, and with live art questions of liveness, re-performance and recollection.

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The cover of the 'original' (1987) publication of the video on which the 'The ties that bind ...' project was based.



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Taking a fragment of existing moving image material (part of the opening sequence of 'In Hot

Pursuit' a 1987 'adult' video starring Jeff Stryker), the project restaged and reperformed this document in a number of ways. The filmed action was dismantled into constituent elements which were remade and recombined using different tools, different contexts, different understandings. Arising from Paige's recollection of seeing the 1987 VHS, and addressing the experience of watching films at home or outside, in company or alone, the project opened out the re-presentation of this through quotation, retelling, anecdote, and memory restaging.

[slide 5]

Steven Paige, *Cubby-Hole* (2011)

Wood, magazines, books,
paper ephemera, penknife,
action figures,
yo-yo. 37 x 30 x 57cm



[photo: Steven Paige]

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'The ties that bind ...' is in some ways an extension of 'Cubby Hole', the personal archive installation by Paige, which was part of the Fireplace Gallery series in Plymouth in 2011. In that case a replica or version of Paige's teenage hoard or secret stash was reassembled in the confined space of a closed off bedroom fireplace; to activate or perform the work, visitors had to kneel or crouch (one at a time) in the fireplace and peer into the partly boarded up space; depending on their age, or their background they might recognise some of the items

and could imagine their significance; no inventory or catalogue was available, and no description was given of the 'meaning' or sources of the material;

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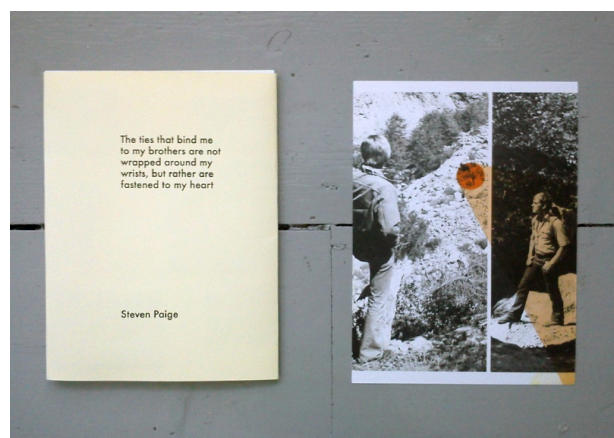
Steven Paige, *“The ties that bind me to my brothers are not wrapped around my wrists, but rather are fastened to my heart”* (2012)

<http://vimeo.com/42166497>



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Scene 1. INT. A cabin in the woods.

JOHN: ding dong

JACK: No need for preliminaries of name or stuff

The point of entry. JACK is 'at home', relaxed, and moves the action across the space.

JOHN: So where now does the question of faithfulness reside ... in the move between source and target ...

JACK: And the labour of translation is rewarded, fitting with high value of self-making, ...

JOHN's grateful.

JOHN: In particular ... this also allows for bonding via a shared (male) knowledge ... shared recognition

JACK: So, what does it mean to do a version, to do a remake? another retake?

JACK can make this additional generous offer; he is 'at home' and he is in his underwear, it is his property; a property of being at home.

[slide 8]

reuse and remaking

Gus van Sant's *Psycho 98* ... , is very much what Leitch calls an homage, the primary purpose of which, he says, is “to pay tribute to an earlier film rather than usurp its place of honor” (47-50). Leitch argues that “a faithful homage would be a contradiction in terms (the most faithful homage would be a re-release)” (47). But Van Sant deliberately engages in this ‘contradiction in terms,’ precisely at a time when re-release has become a largely unremarked commonplace. (Leitch, 2002)

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Through reuse this material from an archive of personal associations, of individual recall, becomes public as an art work, as performance. The work starts from being at home, at home with the domestic, in the domestic scene of watching, the domestic site of interaction, of intercourse. This was what VHS offered, sold via mail order, for private consumption. Via a project or process of translation, of shifting existing material from its historical source, to its performance target, from its source in a particular lived life to a target in the live, this scene of consumption is opened out, is replayed, is rewound and made available for close attention.

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Scene 2. INT. The ideal(ised) bachelor pad.

ROCK: Is this one of my parts, a fragment?

ROCK has been walking to wherever he was headed.

HARD: When you're ready ...

Concerned for the wet figure ... ROCK welcomes HARD in, draws him into the warmth of his den.

ROCK: What is going on here? is it an homage?

HARD: " ... stryker never turned me on. ... he was a bore, ... "

ROCK: So reiterating the comparative template.

HARD: They're substitutable and interchangeable, and operate by number, weight, switching slots and prongs and reassembling the elements in various combinations ...

Setting up comparison as repetition, the viewer's goal, and the aspirant spectacle.

There is an element of play.

ROCK: Challenge up! there's work needed, more than blue-collar nine-to-five this needs a seven-day-a-week commitment.

Clone zone. ROCK shifts it to a safe area off.

[slide 10]

disassemble and review

As the pensive spectator manipulates the temporality of a film, s/he not only transforms her/his relationship with that film, but also transforms the film itself. When a scene is “halted and extracted from the wider flow of narrative development,” when it is “broken down into shots and selected frames and further subjected to delay, to repetition and return,” Mulvey argues that, “hitherto unexpected meanings can be found hidden in the sequence”. (Mulvey, 2006, 8, 144)

□

The project reverses or complicates the position of the 'pauser', the viewer who can slow down, stop, repeat, rewind, skip details, passages and moments of the moving image. By remaking the moment as a live performance the 'overattention' of the 'possessive spectator' as Laura Mulvey, describes him or her, is displaced or replaced; the 'pensive' viewer is shifted out of his or her pensive position into a new relation to the visual material; the live event ~~re~~performs the fragment, and remains a fragment. It ~~re~~stages the remembered moment and expands to become whole.

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Scene 3. INT. An apartment.

JOHN: knock knock

JACK: pretty pretty

JOHN: The master document / the master tape.

JACK takes the compliment, the appreciation ... and the camera's looking.

JACK: It seems oddly banal, but perhaps there is an awareness of the codes operating here ...

ROCK: As something copied, as learned from models and templates.

HARD: Which we may adopt, occupy, enter, ... and may adapt, colonise, take over ... ; skins
or costumes to play within, that offer us lines to speak, or actions to carry out;

Again JACK makes a generous gesture.

ROCK: Or one of those beautifully choreographed impeccably lip-synched drag
performances that you just happen on in a beer-sticky, smoke-edged pub function

room, with tinsel streamer curtains a glitter ball and a revolving colour disco light, where a man gets up on the tiny stage and does a fantastic Shirley or Judy or Barbara and his dress isn't right and the make-up's a little cakey but it still makes you cry ... something about the almost matching, true-false, real-fake, displacement is affective ...

JACK: He doesn't need wrapping up ... he doesn't undress to show off .

HARD: You can watch this footage in several ways at once, and other viewers will watch differently at different moments ...

ROCK: Not with an intention to give a definitive 'reading' or 'playing' of the 'text', but perhaps to open it up to multiple, various ...

HARD: A permitted male looking that is allowed or even encouraged, a comparison and appreciation of physical development ...

Reintroducing proximity; JACK makes a positive reverse, shifts up a level.

END.

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cinophilia and return

cinophilia, a "desire for cinema" is manifest as, in Mary Ann Doane's words, "a love that is attached to the detail, the moment, the trace, the gesture within."

(Doane, 2002, 226-227)

The cinephiliac anecdote, ... seeks to illuminate the ways in which movies displace themselves out of their original contexts and step into our lives.

(Keathley, 2006, 152)

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From a personal archive of cinephiliac moments – significant for personal or particular associative reasons – one has been selected for return. Through a desire for cinema that is attached to the moment, a fragment has been extracted and revisited. The live event enacts the cinephiliac anecdote, that moment when some recollected detail of a movie steps into our lives, into a space of bodies and of voices, the place of exchange and of traces.

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pastness and image

Vera Dika describes new interpretations produced by return. [by] ... the “image . . . seen as ‘returned’ from the past” and “frequently composed of material referencing old movies.” Dika observes that “the image returns not as representational of the natural real, but as simulacral, as a copy of copies whose original has been lost. A play of references is thus engendered, one now highly coded with pastness.” (Dika, 2003, 3)

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This copy, in the gallery, live or on a screen, returns a moment from the cultural past, the past of pre-internet pornography, and the past of the artist; the presentation retells his cinephiliac anecdote, and does these while recognising the nature of copy, copies without origin, as that

cinephiliac moment, stored in the personal archive returns to an image that already returned to prior images, prior moments of generic play; and in foregrounding its pastness the re-performed moment tells a tale that gestures to nostalgia.

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cinophilia and introspection

Keathley distinguishes “film moments” from “cinephiliac moments,” with the former being “visually striking and narratively important,” while the impact of the latter is highly subjective. (Keathley, 2006, 33)

Fowler discusses a shift from memorable to remembered moments and films. Gallery films can extract fragments from cinema’s past, yet a cinephiliac mode of looking back rejects retrospection: “it moves away from the image track of cinema’s past to instead reconnect with memories of film viewing, thereby embracing introspection.” (Fowler, 2012, 45)

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In its ordinariness, its banality, the selected fragment does not position itself in relation to great cinematic moments, or moments of significance in visual or plot terms; its ordinariness is part of its appeal in cinephiliac terms; those moments chosen for archiving for personal, subjective, associative reasons; to return to such moments is to touch on one's own past, at the moment of storing them (rather than the past or history of cinema); but it is also to bring them into the present, into a present of recollection, of introspective review;

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conclusion:

'The ties that bind ...' takes a fragment from the personal archive, a cinephiliac anecdote, and reactivates this in a public context via translation to a new medium and a shifted context.

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The project took a fragment, a fragment of a whole film; a film which was already made of fragments (of scenes and set pieces) and it staged it across different media and in a new form. The selected moment, selected from the personal archive of remembered moments, in the ~~re~~telling as a cinephiliac anecdote, becomes framed as a ~~new~~ whole; this new whole operates between pastness and the present, between memory and introspection. It shifts the private moment of first viewing and of subjective attachment into a public context of future shared anecdotes, of multiple ~~re~~tellings. It performs the archival as both / and past / present over and ongoing.

[END]

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Biography:

MARK LEAHY, writer, artist, and teacher, operates among textual practices and live art. Recent performance work includes ‘muster page habit’ (Bristol and Plymouth, May 2013), ‘Voice Recognition’ (Liverpool, Oct 2011); and a reading at POLYply15: Colour (London, Jan 2012). He has written texts to accompany work by artists, including LOW PROFILE, Teresa Grimaldi, Katy Connor. Recent essays appeared in *Open Letter, Performance Research Journal* and *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*. ‘Swatches’ was published by Acts of Language (Dec 2009), and curated projects include ‘Public Pages’ (Plymouth, 2007). He is a Visiting Lecturer at Falmouth University.