

## **Living Archives**

### **The Assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan by the Outlaws Wilson and Evans**

#### **(Re-enactment and Autopsy: Patagonia)**

Nine people costumed in 19<sup>th</sup> Century fancy dress, with far from ‘state-of-the-art’ technology in hand. Some stand at microphones imitating the howling wind, while a man kneels on the floor painting a backdrop of a beach landscape. On the television monitors in the room, a picture fades in through the blackness. “This is the only known photograph of Llwyd ap Iwan”, less digitally airbrushed, high definition replica; more crude photocopy mounted onto black card. But the match is exact. From storyboard to stage and finally to its intended on-screen destination, re-enactment from the archive has realised the first two frames of Clifford McLucas’ *‘Patagonia: Enactment + Autopsy’*. But how much of the archive would we restore?

*‘The Assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan by the Outlaws Wilson and Evans’* was an attempt by the 2011 Practicing Theatre and Performance MA group at Aberystwyth University, under the direction of Mike Pearson and Mike Brooks to re-create an unrealised film from its storyboard document – live. The storyboard, created by McLucas in 1993, only ever existed as a written pitch for a film, inspired by Brith Gof’s 1992 performance, *‘Patagonia’*. No film version existed.

*‘Patagonia: Enactment + Autopsy’* tells the true story of the assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan by the two men who would later become Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. McLucas’ storyboard was dependant on archival research, incorporating evidence such as letters, manuals and newspaper articles into the film script, and photographs from the time of settlement in Patagonia, and Brith Gof’s research visits in 1992. The 2011 live film project

not only performed this archival material but used copies of the photographs within its creation, and represented both a performance archive and an historical one, exploiting the syncopation between past time, present time, performance time and recorded time within a performance re-enactment.

Re-enactment is a slippery term, as Rebecca Schneider explains in 'Performing Remains'. The Oxford English Dictionary defines the verb "re-enact" as: to "reproduce, recreate or perform again." (Schneider 2011: 29) The 2011 event is cautiously described as performance re-enactment, for the method of staging the film was completely unique, unimagined by its creator. However, the story concerns a murder that was real, that took place in a recent past only 104 years ago, and was re-enacted for a live audience and for film from the documentation that remained.

This paper is a personal perspective into the relationship between the porous term re-enactment and the various approaches to archiving that were revealed during the performance process. *'The Assassination of Lllwyd ap Iwan by the Outlaws Wilson and Evans'* is a work inspired by research into the story of Patagonia, both place and performance legacy. 'Living history' defines those working museums such as Blists Hill Victorian Town in Ironbridge, which perform history for a visiting public. Through the research project, a 'living archive' emerged, live and mediated performance that recollected itself through time, though never exactly "in time" (Schneider 2001) or 'in place', performing those voices that have left us, both Welsh emigrants and fellow artists. But as performers, how do we uphold the ethics of archiving and genuine authenticity when creating complete re-enactments?

Our fascination with the preservation of documentation has shifted us further from the views of practitioners and academics of performance art in the 1960's and 70's, where the conditions for performance's existence were fundamentally tethered to its act of dying. The

often quoted *'Unmarked'* by Peggy Phelan persistently argues that documentation has no potential to preserve the ephemera of performance. Helen Iball acknowledges this argument, stating that “the curational responsibility towards preservation, conservation and restoration belies the myth of the stability of the artefact. Nowhere is this more the case than in performance studies, which grapples to find appropriate styles in which to catalogue and shelve its ghosts.” (Iball 2002: 59) But as we assert the value of documentation as a means for restoring work, the photographic or textual archive increasingly, and ironically, serves as evidence of performances disappearance, a testimony of the existence of an event. Rebecca Schneider’s ‘hyperactive ghost’ of performance, which never really put death on its to-do list (2011: 26), lives in a determined cycle of re-realisation with every photocopy and quote.

The ‘hyperactive ghost’ of *'Patagonia: Enactment + Autopsy'* also refused to remain on its shelf. Informed by the history of Patagonia, both location and performance, the storyboard represented a series of tragic ends. Yet Iball discovers promise in the documents and records of past events; “Archiving is about beginning at the end. And making that end continue in some way”. (Iball 2002: 59) As a company we met with a relic highlighting a distinct absence from Brith Gof’s archive, and set out to re-enact *'Patagonia: Enactment + Autopsy'* as fully as possible, restoring the film relic amongst the history of Brith Gof and the legacy of Patagonia.

*'The Assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan'* functioned as a mechanism, with a working group of performers taking multiple roles as cameramen, actors, sound technicians and vision mixers. These performers worked in one studio location around the audience who were free to move about the room, creating the film in one continuous shot, in sequential order. Every image was dictated by the storyboard, created frame by frame. But while the document gave us the directions we required, many stumbling blocks also lay hidden within it.

While the project established a method for performance to exist beyond its written documentation, we had to be able to reproduce that documentation as entirely as possible. As artists we were challenged by the inadequacies of our chosen mechanic, unable to recreate certain frames and sequences due to formatting problems between moments of scrolling text and camera zooms, the mixing board effects available being not quite accurate, or simply not having enough hands. Our efforts to re-enact *'Patagonia: Enactment + Autopsy'* forced us into a negotiation between the archival document and the constraints of the kit and individuals; the available mechanics hindering our attempt to create a full realisation and experience of the document.

Our negotiations highlighted the ethical responsibility that archivists have within both traditional and performance practice. For on analysis of the storyboard, we discovered that it was riddled with gaps. While archivists must take curatorial responsibility and indicate where evidence should be present, but is lost or unavailable, McLucas' document referred to texts that were still to be written, parts assigned but never played, references to historical documents that we had no access too. As Mathew Reason claims: "At the same time as it is possible to point to the sheer wealth and bulk of material in any archive, it is also necessary to acknowledge the even larger body of material not present" (Reason 2006: 32). We had to make a decision; restore the document and create those missing texts and passages, or make an incomplete re-enactment, performing only what was present. We chose to be as faithful to the document as possible, and re-enact the work as received, and there are instances in the performance where the phrase "Text still to be written" is spoken and scrolled across the image as directed by the stage directions, where McLucas indicated unfinished text.

But while the decision was made final, stage directions describing the composition of frames that contained both text and image raised questions concerning authenticity within the archive, especially when creating an accurate re-enactment of an incomplete document. The

screenplay often directed layers of scrolling text across the image in three translations – Welsh, English and Spanish. While finding a Welsh expert was easy enough, creating a Spanish translation relied on a google translate programme when no Spanish speaker could be found. The screenplay also contained many spelling and grammatical errors, and while we had previously decided to re-enact the document as we received it, it seemed strange not to correct those mistakes. The initial decision to re-enact this fragmented screenplay exactly appeared counter-productive, as living museums and civil war re-enactments aim to restore history for new audiences as accurately as possible. To negotiate between authentic archive and complete performance we required a degree of restoration, but it was a restoration that was far from accurate, and that acknowledged the holes within re-enacted performance. This complex term, referring to an event out of sync and out of location, seemed to perfectly describe the performance research project, as “*The Assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan*” was not a performance inspired by a previous performance, nor would it ever be only the completion of the documented screenplay. It was a unique approach towards an archived idea, that tried to re-enact that remain in the present. Our decisions highlight the responsibility to the realisation of written documents, but also the responsibility to new performance methodologies. A fresh negotiation emerged between the past and the future, to the document that had been and the live film that was yet to become.

The performance mechanic that addressed the issues of re-enactment within the work also forced enquiry into the true location of the performance archive throughout the research project, asserting that the fluctuating performance sites within the room established the ‘living archive’. As the documented images were pursued with the technology, a more in-room performance began to develop, beyond simply acting for the cameras. The images escaped from their final screen locations into the studio, in fragmented echoes, as individual cameras fed each part of the image to a mixing board which combined them back to the

monitors. The precise location of the archive became difficult to pinpoint, unable to be restricted to either document, live performance or film. Jane Blocker explains that “We need a history that does not save in any sense of the word; we need a history that performs.” (Quoted in Schneider 2001: 100) The performance archive then should not be a location for the rescue of relics, but a continuously evolving place of enquiry, where beginnings and endings can be collected, researched and begun again in a search for original approaches that preserve our former works. As Schneider’s civil war and living history re-enactors keep the past alive, they engage fresh witnesses to the event; audiences that share the experience of the past, now. Her ‘In-time’ connection through body-to-body re-engagement allows performance to re-situate history. As *‘The Assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan’* traversed various performance mediums in situ, each perception of the ‘event’ is different for every audience member.

But within this performance archive, traditional paper trails and material documentation are still created and preserved through the performance process. As methods were devised to integrate printed text onto moving images, new written documents were created. Words were printed onto acetate sheets which were then positioned across the camera lens during filming, achieving the scrolling text affect in the screenplay without cuts, and developing a convention in the performance mechanic that allowed us a continuous shot. These written props became material relics of the on-going history of the work, ready to be stored within their own archive at the end of the process. This cycle of historical evidence, from document to prop to relic allow the voices from the archive the room to speak. They speak of the Welsh immigrants, of the artists who collected the stories and framed them in performances and screenplays. They speak of those originally cast to play the roles and they speak of those students who eventually did.

Paul Clarke discusses the relics of performance when reflecting on Kira O'Reilly's '*Unknowing*' (2000), a performance that leaves a "graphic index on [a] tablecloth, caused by direct contact with the event; blood is directly printed onto it by the performers body, which was there." (Clarke 2009: 57) The relics created by the direct contact between performer and performance are often a secondary effect of the live performance. In the case of '*The Assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan*', the relics are primary rather than secondary, both integral to the success of the film and the sole intention. For the performance aims to create a relic, making it appear from beyond the archival grave. The 'living archive' alters the focus beyond what is live and what is left, concentrating its efforts on a continuing history weaving throughout 'events' both before, during and after a singular live performance.

Yet our intention was to make the film as ephemeral as the performance itself, existing only within the moment of projection, with no permanent remain. Phillip Auslander explains that "mediation is thus embedded with the im-mediate; the relation of mediation and the immediate is one of mutual dependence, not precession". (1999: 53) Our 'living archive', like Auslander's im-mediate also exists in a relationship mutually dependant on 'live' and 'recorded', neither live or 'documented' evidence preceding or following the other, and both elements equally 'lost'. Jacques Attali acknowledges the irony that "people originally intended to use the record to preserve the performance, and today the performance is only successful as a simulacrum of the record." (Quoted in Auslander 1999: 85) What is ironic in this case is that as we realised the record it would disintegrate around us.

The fatal flaw in human beings is that memory isn't enough. As the performance and film image dissolved from the performance studio, so the event in time would disappear from memory. The nostalgia for our past works, and the desperation to hold on to this time, to make it last, forced us to create a recording of the film only, and to have a final recorded relic in place within the traditional archive. So we attempted to record the film. During the first

performance the recording failed 11 minutes in. The second time we made a complete recording. For the first time ever, a mediatized version of 'Patagonia: Enactment + Autopsy' exists, the secondary recorded output of *'The Assassination of Llywd ap Iwan'*.

Performance archiving is a vicious circle, a complex cycle of collection, analysis, restoration, undoing and cataloguing again, in a bid to house our hyper-active remains. It is a process that questions the very authority of itself, asking not only of the legitimacy of that which is within it, but for methods of preserving those remains through more performance; live events and re-enactments that explore both performances longevity and the history surrounding it. Ok, so the film quality is amateur; the restrictions of an analogue rather than digital technology glaringly obvious to the viewer. But in 6 weeks a group of beginners picked up a set of kit they had barely set eyes on before and devotedly re-enacted this document. Our 'living archive' isn't only informed by a written idea of what might have been. This fluctuating storehouse, that both records the events that inspired it and that provides the relic to follow it, also continuously recalls the evolution of one idea by Brith Gof, based on an event in a store in Patagonia, where Llwyd ap Iwan was murdered by the men who would later become Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid. "As true a story as it is surreal" (McLucas 1993).

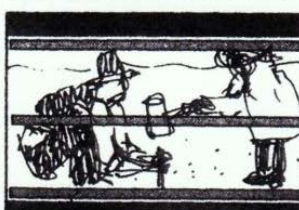
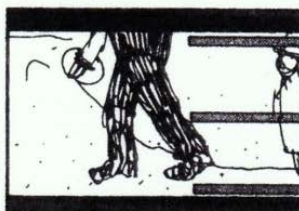
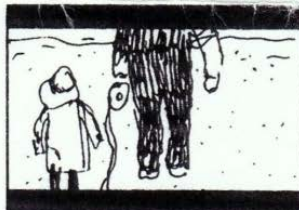
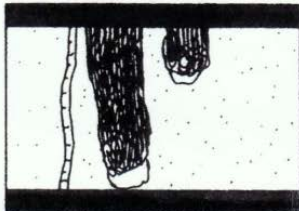
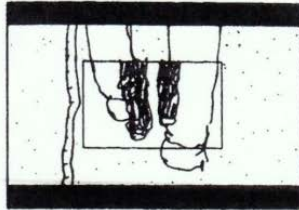
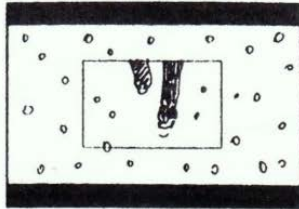


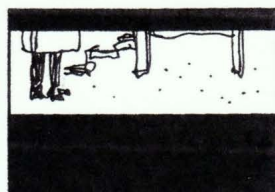
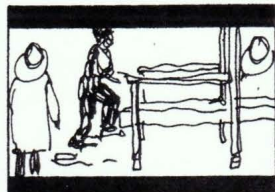
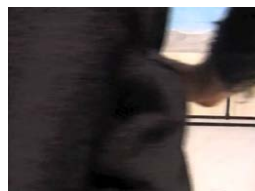
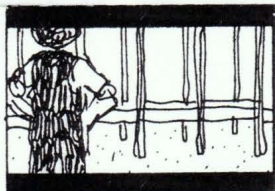
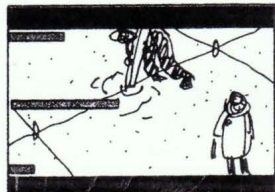
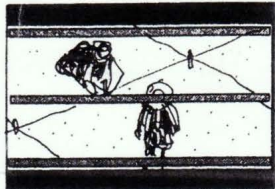
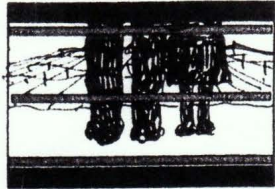
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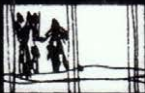
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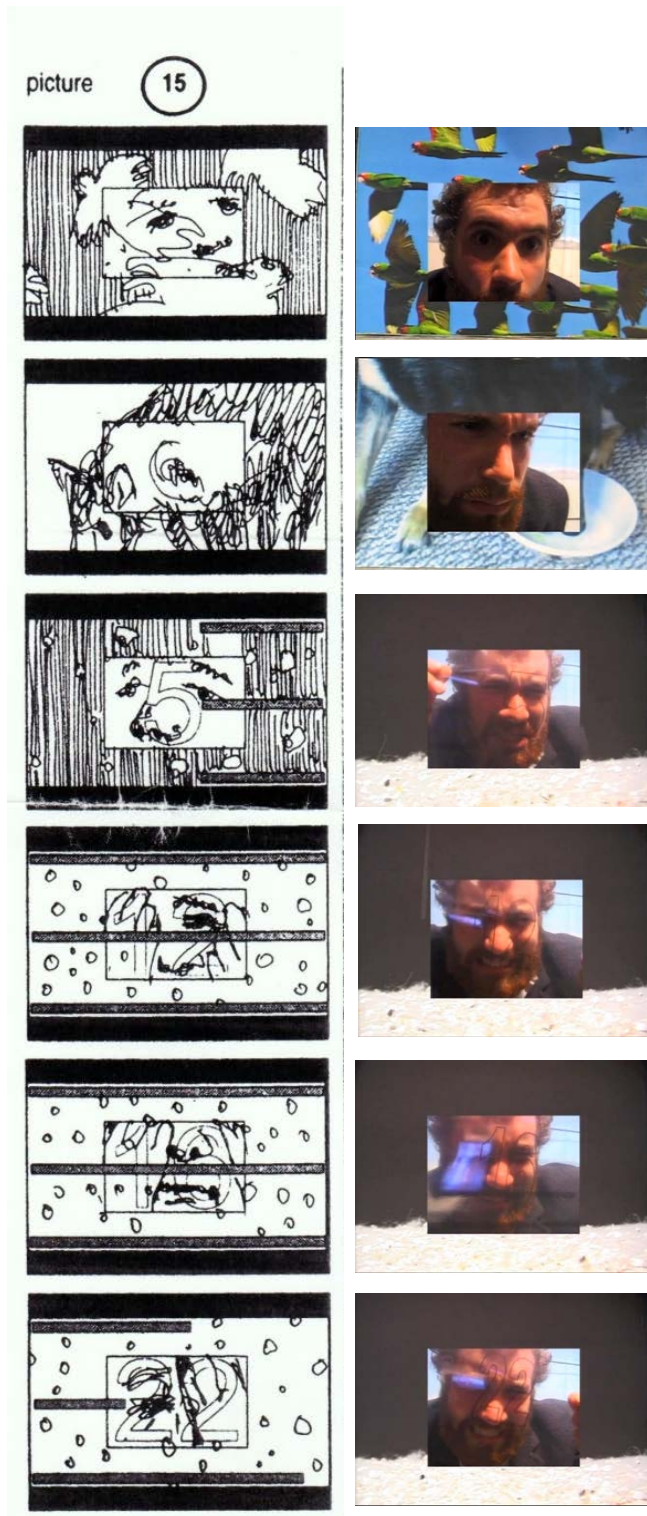


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Pearson and Mike Brooks and the Practicing Theatre and Performance MA group 2011, *'The Assassination of Llwyd ap Iwan by the Outlaws Wilson and Evans, (Re-enactment + Autopsy: Patagonia)'*, Aberystwyth University, 2011.