

Liar Lies: Contemporary Performance for the Camera

April 24, 25 and 26

Curated by Chi Jang Yin
DePaul Art Museum

"Contemporary performance art ranges from highly personal concerns to broad social and political issues, from the spontaneous to rigorously scripted and choreographed pieces. A series of video and film performances by artists in the United States, Finland, Germany, and the United Kingdom will be followed by informal discussion. Curated by Chi-Jang Yin of the Art and Art History Department, Spring Quarter."—DePaul Art Museum

Introduction –

Early performance videos, such as Annabelle Moore's *Serpentine Dance* (1895), tended to use the camera in a documentary mode, while later 20th-century artists such as Nam June Paik and Vito Acconci explored the medium of video and its potentials for art practice. Throughout this series of screenings, contemporary practices will be examined that rest upon the combined histories of performance and video art, yet place their own emphasis on employing video as a performative medium. These videos are presented collectively so that we might question what comprises a performance made specifically for the camera, especially as compared to live performances. For example, what is gained and lost when a performance is given for a live audience versus for the camera? When a performance is abstracted and quantified in recordable media, how does it affect the creative process and its reception? How does one draw the line between acting and non-acting, affectation and earnestness for the camera?

In keeping with the theme of deception, the screenings are divided between film and video that employ *mise-en-scène* in a theatrical setting and those that do not. An exploration of the complexities of performance for the camera can begin here with the setting and the acting, and the choice of the artist to create a believable reality around the performance or to place their own performativity above the attraction of *mise-en-scène*.

Night one –

Tonight's films and videos employ a theatrical *mise-en-scène* in order to create believable illusionism for the viewer. Therefore, the performances take place within artificial or actual correct settings, lending a theatrical element to performances for the camera and highlighting a quality of the medium that connotes illusion over reality. For example, *The Invalids* has a setting that mimics early-20th century Freudian theory/practice in order to engage the audience and ask questions of this milieu. How does theatrical *mise-en-scène* give an unspoken subtext to these works, perhaps dividing performance for the camera from performance for a live audience? How do we draw the line between performance for the camera, acting in film or onstage and live performance art?

Daynightly they re-school you The Bears-Polka (2005), Lucy Baldwyn and Goat Island, film transferred to video, 9:30 x 2, UK/Chicago

Ellis Island (1982), Meredith Monk, film, 28:00, New York (Video Data Bank)
Meredith Monk has been performing, composing and choreographing since the mid-1960s, a pioneer in the slim genre of dance/video. *Ellis Island* blends documentary, experimental, fiction and dance modes in what Monk describes as "a mosaic of sounds and images woven together into formal musical design." Tableaux vivants and a photo-documentary stillness collapse the passing of time in haunting scenes of immigrants and their families moving through the clinics, classrooms and waiting rooms that make up this landscape of memory, pain and hope.

A Heretic's Primer on Love and Exertion: 29 incidents of dual consequence (2007), Danièle Wilmoth, video, 24:00, Chicago
Performers Trevor Martin & Kym Olsen slip from monologue to dance, trousers to dresses, female to male, in 29 related incidents. *A Heretic's Primer on Love & Exertion* questions gender, power, love – and the collapse of meaning against a backdrop of social dysfunction.

The Invalids (2003), Mary Billyou, 16mm film, 9:15, Chicago
Inspired by the found materials of contemporary society, Mary Billyou's experimental film and video work creates worlds where large social/cultural structures are revealed in minutiae. This piece reviews the history of the psychoanalysis of women during the early 20th century in Europe and North America. It employs a contemporary female perspective to critique the potentially manipulative results of the male psychiatric community and medical system.

It's Aching Like Birds (2001), Lucy Baldwyn and Goat Island, film transferred to video, 10:00, UK/Chicago
Lucy Baldwyn is a London-based freelance filmmaker and video artist; Goat Island is a Chicago-based collaborative performance group founded in 1987. This film was developed alongside Goat Island's performance *It's an Earthquake in My Heart*. It incorporates elements of the live production that were re-staged and crafted for the camera.

Michoacan: La Muerta (2006), S.Gruffat and Ben Russell, HD, color, 8:00, Chicago/New York
"Shot in the Mexican State of Michoacan and constructed using the same techniques employed in the Surrealist parlor game of the Exquisite Corpse, this video holds a mirror up to the unseen, hallucinates and reflects it back into the everyday forever and ever and ever. To be screened in the same program as Michoacan: El Traidor."—Ben Russell

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Night two –

Tonight videos are screened that “reject” mise-en-scène as a function to create a theatrical setting in order to emphasize a narrative component or the immediacy of the performance. These works can be characterized as acts of self-observation, following from the rise of identity-based art practices in the 1970s and 80s. However, this mode of self-observation does not only expound autobiographical content, but also builds upon our theme of illusionism by promoting fiction over fact without relying upon the mediation of a theatrical mise-en-scène. Furthermore, then, how does the apparent illusionism of fictional narrative and constructed performance compare to that of theatrical performances? How does each mode stretch performative video toward different boundaries?

***Chests* (2004), Dolores Wilber**, video, 1:02, Chicago

In her artistic practice, Dolores Wilber begins with the ties that bind us together, our physical bodies and psychological and social violence. Her *Chests* examines a registry of the masculine. Through close-ups of two male torsos pushing against each other, her work connotes a sense of playful aggression with undertones of sexual tension.

***Daume* (2000), Ben Russell**, 16mm, B/W color, 7:00, Chicago/New York

“Culled from four rolls of Super-8 film shot while the maker was a development worker in a small South American village, *Daume* is at its center a film about ritual, power, and play. *Daume* is both ethnography and critique; it is an interrogation into how to represent a place that can't be represented.”—Ben Russell

***Don't Break the Oath* (2005), Josh Mannis**, video, 6:00, Chicago

“*Don't Break the Oath* represents for me an early stab at articulating what seemed at the time to be a kind of social contract between artist and viewer. While a viewer is encouraged to maintain a critical distance from the video's obviously homemade and jacked up material quality, the earnest urgency of the rave/dance motif is hopefully a sympathetic counterpoint. These two very different positions are held in oscillating tension by the oppressive force of the piece's strenuously optical and rhythmic aspect.”—Josh Mannis

***Le lit des amants [The Lovers' Bed]* (2004), Elina Saloranta**, video, 18:35, Finland

Elina Saloranta is a visual artist interested in words. In this work, she adopts the text of Marguerite Duras' novel *The North China Lover* to create a collage of words. Through a reading event, she asks: “What happened to the text as I read it? How did someone else's story become my story?”

***Les mots oubliés [Words Left Behind]* (2005), Elina Saloranta**, video, 9:20, Finland

Elina Saloranta is a visual artist interested in words. In this work, she transcribes her lover's criticisms of her video *Le lit des amants*, related to Marguerite Duras' writing.

***L'hotel des vies reproductibles* (2000), Pierre-Yves Cruaud**, video, 3:10, France

The repetition of movement in a small hotel room composes imaginative scenarios.

***Palindrome* (2001), Rebecca Reynolds**, video, 11:00, Maryland

Palindrome uses a split screen to explore desire and the desire to become formless – to be invisible.

(space) (2003), Susan Giles, video, 00:23, Chicago

Susan Giles' video work arises from her desire to understand what occurs at the root of common linguistic and tourist encounters and examines the shaping of self and others abroad and at home. In *(space)*, Giles captures the in-betweens of speech comprised of pauses, breaths and grimaces that are then combined to explore the connection of that which happens outside language.

***Songs and No Reason to be Still* (2004), Jenny Walters**, video, 18:00, Chicago

"My most recent work explores specifically both physical and experiential aging, as I've witnessed through my family and myself. I discovered that vulnerability as revealed by a parent to his/her child becomes a complicated point of power exchange and role reversal. Child becomes caregiver and simultaneously loses her caregiver in the process. In this sacrifice, the mythology of one's parents (and one's belief in it) crumbles and a deeper intimacy occurs in its failure. In our failures we begin to see each other and ourselves and draw closer together. This point of power exchange, in all its manifestations is what I am most interested in."—Jenny Walters

***Untitled Affair* (2003), Chi Jang Yin**, video, 7:00, Chicago/China

Chi-Jang Yin is a Chinese-born media artist who specializes in combining the forms of photography, texts, video and performance. *Untitled Affair* addresses the conflict of spectatorship – a dialectical relationship among memory, interpretation and reality. A scenario is presented in which the details of an affair raise questions concerning reality through an experiment in narrative, performance and video.

Night three –

Amie Siegel's *Empathy* encapsulates questions of fact/fiction and acting/non-acting that were broached in the previous screenings. While retaining a filmic quality, the work undermines a traditional documentary genre in order to expose multiple varieties of performance for the camera including scripted, improvisational, and those captured without the performer's knowledge. *Empathy* promotes these forms of performativity through the voyeur's lens, while constantly recalling an awareness of the performer's own representation.

***Empathy* (2003), Amie Siegel**, 16mm & dvcam to 35mm, 92:00, Chicago/Germany

*The films/videos will not necessarily be screened in this order. They have been listed alphabetically.