

## ARTICLES

### Reaching Through to the Object: Reenacting Malcolm Le Grice's *Horror Film 1*

Lucas Ihlein and Louise Curham

In June 2014 Teaching and Learning Cinema, an Australian artist group coordinated by Louise Curham and Lucas Ihlein, presented a reenactment of Malcolm Le Grice's *Horror Film 1* (1971) at Canberra Contemporary Art Space. A key work of Expanded Cinema, *Horror Film 1* involves a live performer playing with shadows, interacting with the overlapping beams of three 16 mm film projectors. Our reenactment was the first time in the work's forty-year lifespan that it had been performed by anyone other than Le Grice himself. In this paper, we offer some reflections on the process of making our reenactment, which we regard as ontologically double: simultaneously "the original object" and an entirely new entity. We discuss our methodology of *tending the archive*—an activist strategy operating at the borders of archival and artistic practice. And we suggest that reenactment, as a creative practice, can be a way of "reaching through to the object" which sheds new light on the artwork and its cultural-technological context.

#### Expanded Cinema and Malcolm Le Grice

Expanded Cinema—a hybrid form of live art combining elements of performance art and experimental film—emerged in the mid-1960s among avant-garde artist groups in Europe, North America, and Japan. Its hallmark was the "expansion" beyond the physical limitations of the film projection, deploying (for example) multiple simultaneous projections, live performances, and spatial interventions within the cinema or gallery. The history of Expanded Cinema is perplexingly diverse. As A.L. Rees writes, "at full stretch, it embraces the most contradictory dimensions of film and video art, from the vividly spectacular to the starkly materialist" (Rees 2011, 12). As way of sketching out the scope of the field, here we very briefly describe a few key Expanded Cinema works:

1. American techno-utopianist Stan Vanderbeek is best known for his *Movie Drome* (1963–66), a geodesic dome structure whose interior housed multiple simultaneous 16 mm film and slide projections, to be viewed by an audience lying flat on the floor. Vanderbeek had no desire to offer a coherent cinematic experience, but rather hoped that the abundance of images presented in chance juxtaposition might inculcate a new kind of visual media literacy. As he wrote, "each member of the audience will build his own references and realizations from the image-flow" (Vanderbeek 1966, 16). Vanderbeek planned to create a "culture-intercom"—a kind of embodied proto-Internet system facilitated by a network of communicating *Movie Dromes* distributed across the globe, but his dream never materialized (unless we consider the Internet to be its ultimate realization).

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2. Austrian artist VALIE EXPORT's *Tapp und Tast-Kino* (1968) was a miniature cinema consisting of a cardboard box strapped to the artist's bare torso. The box had an open front, across which were draped small curtains. Working in collaboration with Peter Weibel, the performance of *Tapp und Tast-Kino* took place in the street, where audience members were invited by Weibel, spruiking with a loud-hailer, to "visit" the cinema one at a time, by reaching through the curtains to touch EXPORT's breasts. The work is often described as a critique of the fundamentally voyeuristic conditions of cinematic viewing (Mueller 1994, 15).

3. Japanese filmmaker Takehisa Kosugi created *Film & Film#4* in 1965. Cinema theorist Jonathan Walley describes the work thus: "a performer . . . makes rectangular cuts of increasing size from a paper screen lit by a film-less projector. The performer gradually works his way out from a small cut in the centre of the screen, eventually cutting away the entire sheet of paper, leaving an empty frame through which the projector's light passes on its way to the rear wall of the performance space" (Walley 2013, 216). *Film & Film#4* is typical of a range of Expanded Cinema pieces by different artists from the period that cut, penetrate, or otherwise violate the screen surface (Renan 1967, 247).

Many other works could be chosen to represent the field of Expanded Cinema; however, these three pieces do embody some fairly common tropes: a critique of the audience's allegedly passive consumption of mainstream cinematic culture; an interventionist approach designed to defamiliarize the "normal" viewing conditions of the moving image; and a somewhat paradoxical iconoclasm in which the "destruction of the image" is performatively demonstrated for our viewing pleasure. The Expanded Cinema works that emerged from the London Film-Makers' Co-op (LFMC), where Le Grice was a central figure from the late 1960s, tended toward reflexivity, drawing attention to the social, architectural, and ideological context for cinema itself. Aspects of the cinematic experience in "real-time" (to use Le Grice's term)—including the projection apparatus, cinema seating, the interior space, and the audience itself, which are usually mentally bracketed out when watching films—were consciously reframed (Le Grice 1972). As an extension of the structural-materialist films characteristic of much early LFMC production, in British Expanded Cinema "the projectors or monitors, the process and material, were primary signifiers in their own right, as well as channels for images" (Rees 2011, 14). With its triple 16 mm colour loop film projections and live performance, Le Grice's *Horror Film 1* (1971) is well known among this body of work. In his review of a presentation by Malcolm Le Grice at the 2013 Performa Festival in New York, Noam Ellcott describes the piece:

Part shadow play, part abstract color film . . . Le Grice slowly makes his way from the screen to the projectors, all the while casting multiplied, peripatetic shadows that assert not only the here-and-now of the performer and the projection event, but also the simple and sublime wonder that undergirds all cinematic experience. (Ellcott 2014, 23)

## Reenactment and Teaching and Learning Cinema

Reenacting works of Expanded Cinema like *Horror Film 1* requires a combination of approaches including the gathering of oral histories, research within formal archives, and physical

experimentation. Our own creative practices place us in an interesting position in relation to the work of reenactment: Lucas is an artist working primarily with social relations as the medium of his work and Louise is an experimental film-maker and a trained archivist employed by the National Archives in Canberra. Our approach to reenacting Expanded Cinema events, which we will discuss throughout this paper, thus draws on the disciplines of socially engaged art making and moving image archiving—resulting in what we believe is a generative contribution to both fields.

Performance reenactment (or “re-performance”) has emerged since the turn of the century as an arena of practice and scholarship, a means of “doing” historical research as well as a way of critically reflecting on ephemeral artworks from the past. One of the best known interventions to date is undoubtedly Marina Abramović’s *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005), in which she reenacted iconic works from the 1960s and 1970s by Bruce Nauman, VALIE EXPORT, Vito Acconci, Gina Pane, Joseph Beuys and herself at the Guggenheim Museum in New York. Recent texts have begun to unpick the multiple layers of mediation that produce, and emerge from, reenactment practices (Jones and Heathfield 2012; Santone 2008). Reenactment inevitably raises questions about authenticity and the primacy of “unmediated” experience versus the role of documentation (Walley 2013). Teaching and Learning Cinema’s contribution to this field is fairly modest. Since 2003, we have been very slowly piecing together reenactments of particular works of Expanded Cinema—usually from the 1970s, usually from LFMC—sharing with an open-source ethos our difficulties and discoveries. To date, our major reenactment experiments include Guy Sherwin’s *Man with Mirror* (1976), Anthony McCall’s *Long Film for Ambient Light* (1975), and William Raban’s *2’45”* (1972) (Teaching and Learning Cinema 2009; Ihlein 2012; Curham and Ihlein 2009). As Jonathan Walley writes, the motivation for carrying out a reenactment may begin with a desire to access an “authentic” experience of a past work of ephemeral art, but the physical-material practice of actually executing a reenactment can prove unpredictably generative of insights that go far beyond the historical (Walley 2013).

## Experiencing Ephemeral Events from the Past

We begin with a nod to Peggy Phelan’s seminal text on the ephemeral condition of performance. It is, Phelan says, the defining feature of performance to exist only in the present. Its ontology is characterized precisely by its own disappearance. It cannot be documented; or if it is, such mediation transforms it into *something other than performance* (Phelan 1993, 146). Phelan’s impulse—to consider performance as occurring only in the unmediated present (i.e., *you had to be there*)—has wielded a seductive power over discourse in this field, although she is not without her critics. Amelia Jones, one of the foremost theorists of performance of our generation, has argued forcefully that an encounter with documentation *can* offer a performance experience in its own right (Jones 1997). Since 1993, when Phelan’s book was published, massive changes in global communications technologies have fundamentally altered what we understand performance might be, and how, socially, it can manifest itself. Clearly, the phenomenon of bodies interacting with one another within the same physical space can no longer sustain exclusive naming rights to the notion of “performance.” And yet, this does not prevent denizens of the hypermediated 2000s from reaching back to the past—in our case, to the very decade in which we were born—in search of an experience of *that* time, and of *that* techno-cultural context.

How might we achieve an experience of ephemeral events from the past? In the following sections, we explore this question using the reenactment of Le Grice’s *Horror Film 1* as our case study. It is

our contention that archives are one of three major sites of research necessary for the practical problem of reenactment—the others being primary research through oral history interviews and the task of physically “trying it out” for ourselves. As creative researchers, we vibrate between these three major research sites, each of which generates possibilities that allow us to deepen our understanding of the work: technically, conceptually, and contextually. Ultimately, we argue, we are *tending the archive*—not just extracting what we need from it, but using it to produce new material, which feeds back into the archive, to enrich its content and open it up to further, hitherto unknowable, applications.

## Intergenerational Transmission

Our project began in 2010, when Malcolm Le Grice toured Australia and New Zealand to present a series of film and video screenings.<sup>1</sup> Le Grice had heard about TLC’s previous reenactment projects, in particular Guy Sherwin’s *Man with Mirror* (1976–), and suggested that we take on *Horror Film 1*. The piece is well known among the networks of avant-garde film enthusiasts around the world, and Le Grice is called upon to perform it regularly. However, now aged in his mid-seventies, he told us that his body was tiring and that he would be interested in “passing on” the work.

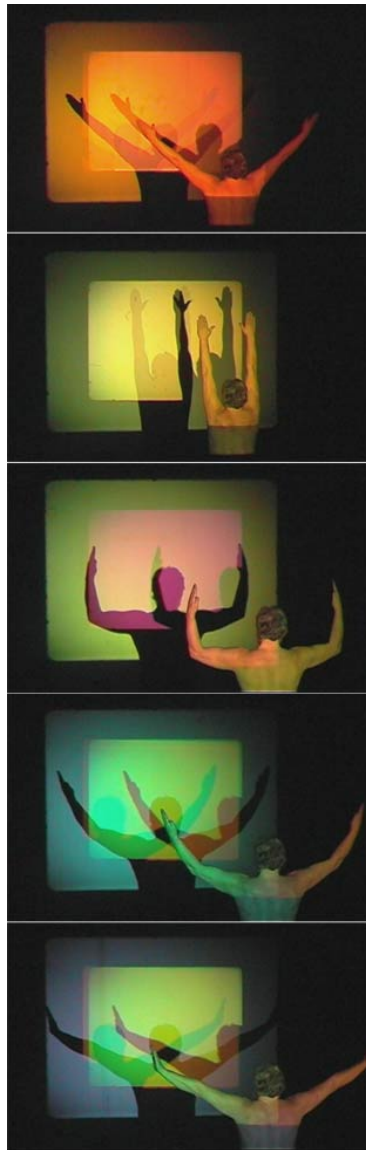
This notion of intergenerational transmission, with Le Grice “passing on” the work and TLC “taking it on,” is not new to us. Since we began developing our reenactment methodology, we have often described our process in terms of custodianship, implying the taking of responsibility for something inherited. In part, this began from an anxiety: the sense that without our intervention, ephemeral performance works like *Horror Film 1* could go to the grave with their originators, and thus be unavailable for the first-hand experience of future generations.<sup>2</sup>

Such anxiety perhaps aligns our attitude towards ephemeral artworks with Phelan’s notion that unless experienced directly, performance disappears. And yet, despite our desire for direct access, we also hold the view that the experience of the work is multiple and distributed.<sup>3</sup> There are many ways of accessing *Horror Film 1*, and following the argument made by Amelia Jones, participating in a live performance situation should not necessarily be privileged over “the specificity of knowledges that develop in relation to the documentary traces of such an event” (Jones 1997, 12). In many cases, such documentary traces have already infiltrated our experience of the work before we come to it in physical co-presence. Furthermore, the awareness that documentation (photography, video, narrative) of an event *is being generated* will inevitably mediate our live experience of it.<sup>4</sup> If, as Jones argues, the nature of body-based performance is to “play within the arena of the symbolic,” an arena inherently codified within the domain of representation, then it is a “modernist dream” to cling to the desire for an unmediated event (Jones 1997, 13, 17).

## Experiencing *Horror Film 1* through Documentation

In the case of *Horror Film 1*, our primary access to documentation was via videos posted on YouTube and Vimeo: some by Le Grice himself, and others by audience members in attendance at various Expanded Cinema events.<sup>5</sup> The duration of *Horror Film 1* is “officially” fourteen minutes, but this varies (depending largely on the size of the room). Documentation videos show a shirtless man, standing with his back to us, stretching his arms slowly up, and then out. The three 16 mm film projections used for *Horror Film 1* are trained on the same area of the screen, frame within frame, rather than sitting side by side. Blocks of solid light—red, blue, green—flash and flicker

across the man's body. Primary colours from these film-strips "mix" in real-time on the screen, producing multiple permutations of cyan, magenta, yellow, and white, with the shadow of the man's body generating even more complex colour variations. His hands attempt to find and hold for a moment the boundaries of the projected rectangles of light. Shadows flickering, oscillating left and right, growing ever larger, the man slowly steps backward towards the 16 mm film projectors. He is accompanied by the constant, loudly amplified sound of heavy breathing, the breath's physical wind crackling and interfering with a microphone. Toward the end, his hands are very close to the film projectors: blurry hand-shadows fill the entire projection surface, finally enveloping the screen . . . "crushing it" . . . at which point the film projectors are switched off, the room reverts to darkness, and the breathing soundtrack gives way to the audience's applause. All of this is the work's "content," easily accessible via online documentation.



Malcolm Le Grice, *Horror Film 1*, 1971–, documentation video stills (LUX 2014).

What fascinated us about this video documentation of *Horror Film 1* was the powerfully affective combination of sound and image, created with such simple means. The work's "narrative" is hardly

complex: it involves the linear transition of the performer from far to near, resulting in the corresponding transformation of his shadows from small to large. It could even be argued that the piece is “predictable”: it follows a procedural logic determined in advance by a tacit performance instruction or score: “walk slowly from screen to projector, moving your hands to allow your shadows to touch and hold the frames of projected light” (thus reflexively drawing the audience’s focus to the generally taken-for-granted rectangular film format). And yet, like some other seminal works of procedural, concept-based art, the process and its results are surprisingly mesmerizing.<sup>6</sup> The ability of *Horror Film 1* to hold our attention, even when filtered through the distracting medium of a low-resolution online video platform like YouTube, is what made us curious to discover its seemingly simple means of production—and to (re)produce the work for ourselves.

### **Transmissibility: *Horror Film 1* in the Archive**

This curiosity is what propelled us to the archive—specifically, the extensive holdings of the British Artists Film and Video Study Collection (BAFVSC) at Central St Martins College in London.<sup>7</sup> The collection holds the world’s most comprehensive set of archival documents on the London Film Makers’ Co-operative (LFMC), of which Le Grice was an active member in the 1960s and 1970s. There is a modest amount of material about *Horror Film 1*, mixed in with documents about Le Grice’s wider body of work: newspaper reviews, interview transcripts, publicity materials, film event program sheets, and artist statements. The reviews and program sheets give some idea of the context within which the piece was presented: usually as part of film screenings in London and other European cities, attended by small groups of underground film enthusiasts. Its most iconic appearance was part of a touring Expanded Cinema program called *FILMAKTION* (1972) at the Walker Art Centre in Liverpool, UK, organized by Le Grice in collaboration with Gill Eatherley, William Raban, and Annabel Nicholson (Reynolds 2005).

For the purposes of our intended reenactment, the most enlightening documents in the BAFVSC archive contain statements articulating Le Grice’s own thoughts on the “transmissibility” of *Horror Film 1*: its in-built potential to be “passed on” to other performing bodies. In an interview transcript from 2003, he asserts that the live audience should be able to clearly perceive the “ingredients” of the film—three overlapping film loops, sound, and the performer’s body—which, when combined, add up to more than the sum of their parts: “the audience in a way can see everything [it’s] made from, it’s a bit like [a] recipe: . . . six oranges, a slug of brandy and . . . what comes out of it isn’t the same as what went into it: that kind of magic that happens when the thing is transformed” (Wyver 2003). For Le Grice, it is this legibility of the performance’s components which might empower audience members to try it out for themselves: “They can see that magic happening . . . but also . . . they can look and see how this is done and they can say to themselves: I can do that, you know. There is nothing I couldn’t do if I wanted to do it” (Wyver 2003).

In another item from the archive, Le Grice reflects on performing *Horror Film 1* in 2000 at London’s Whitechapel Gallery. He writes: “Thirty years ago I normally did this naked, but now only venture to remove my shirt—when I did it at the Whitechapel show I decided I should soon need to train a stand in” (Le Grice 2001). We will come back to the question of nakedness in *Horror Film 1*. For now, the point of interest is Le Grice’s articulation (possibly as part of a self-deprecating joke) of the need for a “stand in.” In theatre, the stand-in replaces the lead actor in case of illness. For Le Grice to regard himself as *Horror Film 1*’s lead actor implies that the work might not be bound inextricably to his own corporeal presence. Following this line of thinking, if we consider *Horror Film 1* as a work

of experimental theatre, then Le Grice would be repositioned as its “author” and *initial* lead actor, opening it up to other performance personnel and a lifespan beyond Le Grice’s own.<sup>8</sup> Although we were already aware, from our personal discussions with him, that Le Grice was keen for the work to be “passed on,” the discovery of this item in the BAFVSC archive confirmed that the problem of the work’s “mortality” was something that had been on his mind for some time. Since at least 2001, Le Grice had been entertaining the idea that detaching himself physically from *Horror Film 1* was one way of ensuring that the work would continue to be available for future audiences.<sup>9</sup>

What we did *not* find in the BAFVSC archive were any immediately useful instructions about how to perform *Horror Film 1*. There were several hand-typed notes intended for potential screening venues, indicating basic technical requirements—three projectors, a room of a certain size, and so on—but since Le Grice himself was always present, hitherto there had been no pressing need to codify its enactment to enable *somebody else* to carry it out. However, in the BAFVSC archives, we found evidence of Le Grice’s desire for such a codified set of instructions. In an interview with Mike Sperlinger in 2005, Le Grice states:

I could certainly give a script, an approximate script like a notation, for someone else to do the performance. I’d be extremely happy if someone else performed *Horror Film*, I wouldn’t have any problem at all, and again there could be a set of instructions and I could say as part of the instructions, “Take a look at this documentation.” I’d rather someone did that than relied just on the documentation. (Sperlinger 2005)

For this reason, we visited Le Grice at his home in Devon, UK, over four days in June 2013. Our intention was to piece together a working “recipe” for *Horror Film 1*, together with a sense of its original context, including his intentions and the work’s meaning within the time and place of its conception.<sup>10</sup>

## Spending Time with the Author

The goals for our visit to Le Grice in Devon were threefold. First, we wanted to receive a tutorial from Le Grice about the *technical set up* and performance of the work. In this way, we would be in a position to try out the piece for ourselves. Second, we hoped to get a sense of the *original context* for the performance of the work. In our experience from previous reenactment projects, making changes is an inevitable part of the process—and deciding which changes are possible within the work’s fundamental structure depends on a deeper understanding of how it operated within its original cultural context, and subsequently over time. Third, beyond the pragmatics of our immediate reenactment project, we wanted to collect *any other information* from Le Grice that might be useful in the future—to ourselves or other researchers. To this end, we created audio recordings of our often free-ranging conversations, which we are now in the process of transcribing.

In Devon, we spent much time with Le Grice going through the technics of performing *Horror Film 1* (splicing film loops, projector operation, using zoom lenses, choreography, etc.). However, we don’t want to focus on those matters here—our provisional “user’s manual” is posted on the TLC website, and will continue to be updated as we refine our own staging of the piece. Rather, we want to touch on the major issue that arose when we were preparing our initial performance of the work in Canberra in 2013: the corporeal presentation of the performer. This factor, we believe, is at the

heart of the work's meaning and affective impact within the live performance event. It required us to flip back and forth between our own practical attempt to present the work, the archival documents from the BAFVSC, and the interview transcripts generated in Devon the previous year.

### **Aging and Gender: *Horror Film 1*'s Emergent Themes**

Up until our reenactment, *Horror Film 1* had always been enacted by a single performer: a man. But there are *two* of us in TLC—a man and a woman. This raised a key question: which of us should perform the piece?<sup>11</sup> How might we go about making this decision? The following three points roughly approximate our thinking process in mid-2013 as we developed our initial reenactment of *Horror Film 1*:

1. When he first performed *Horror Film 1*, Le Grice was in his early thirties. He used his own body in the work because it was the most readily available (not because he intended to make a work explicitly reflecting on issues of gender or masculinity). He has continued to present the piece using his own body, which in the ensuing years has inevitably aged. Despite this, “the work” he performs is still *Horror Film 1*. Thus, it is inherently variable: able to accommodate different bodies and yet be the same piece of Expanded Cinema. In fact, the work's meaning over time continually evolves: now layered on top of its shadow play is a poignant reflection on the aging process.<sup>12</sup>
2. Le Grice has mentioned that the presence of the male body reaching his arms up and out in *Horror Film 1* has been “read” (by audiences, and himself) as an echo of Leonardo's well-known drawing *Vitruvian Man* (ca. 1490). This drawing, sometimes also called *The Proportions of Man*, codified the male bodily form as a system of universal measurement: an architectonic analogue for the linguistic use of the term “man” to signify humanity in general. Is this male=universal construct (even if not intended by Le Grice) an essential part of the work?
3. What meaning could be generated in our reenactment by the continuation of the use of the male body? Would this reinforce the notion of male=universal, even if that were not our intention?

Following this thought process, we decided to conduct our first reenactment of *Horror Film 1* with Louise as the performer. It is worth stating that this was not a definitive move on our part. We may change our minds later; we may decide to have two different versions of the work, one male, one female, or to develop another version with simultaneous performers from each gender. For reenactment to operate as a form of creative research, the key is to start *somewhere*. We present the work in progress and involve our audience in the process of appraising its affective impact and possible meanings. These new discoveries are then fed back into the archive—via our website, and into the more formal archives at the BAFVSC.

Having nominated Louise to perform the piece, we turned to the question of clothing/nakedness. As noted earlier, in early presentations of *Horror Film 1*, Le Grice performed completely unclothed. Later, he would wear trousers but no shirt. What was the reason for this switch? When did it happen? And should we adhere to Le Grice's earlier or later iteration when making our reenactment?



In our Devon interviews, Le Grice explains that after carrying out the early performances, he realized that it wasn't necessary to take all his clothes off for the performance:

*TLC:* Do you remember what made you switch from performing it without clothes on to performing it just without a shirt, but with the pants on?

*Malcolm Le Grice:* I fairly quickly came to the conclusion that there wasn't any particularly good reason to do it with no clothes on. That wasn't what it was about. It was really important that the torso was there because that's what's illuminated, but the backside, not terribly important because it hardly appears in the movie [laughs] and it appears less and less as the movie goes on. I never minded doing it with no clothes on, it never bothered me. Certainly in the 60s and early 70s people couldn't wait to get their clothes off. (Teaching and Learning Cinema 2013)

Le Grice's mention of "the movie" here refers to the overlapping rectangles of coloured light on the projection screen. Only his torso, from the waist up, is illuminated by the projection and is thus "in the movie"—and this is borne out in the video documentation on YouTube. His final remark—that people "couldn't wait to get their clothes off" in the 60s and 70s presumably refers to the proliferation of naked body art performances from the period. Certainly Le Grice was aware of this context for his work. In the interview, he mentions VALIE EXPORT and Carolee Schneeman—both key practitioners crossing over between experimental cinema and performance/body art—but he prefers to situate *Horror Film 1* within the context of *film*:

*Malcolm Le Grice:* I know [*Horror Film 1*] is performance art . . . but I wasn't thinking of it in that context, I was thinking of it much more in the context of film, [the] cinematic. And about shadows. Not so much about the performance itself. . . . I never thought about that very much when I first started doing it. I certainly didn't "perform" in inverted commas.

*TLC:* No, it's more of a procedural activity or something like that.

*Malcolm Le Grice:* That's right. (Teaching and Learning Cinema 2013)

To argue that the function of the performer's body in *Horror Film 1* is largely "procedural" is to place that body among the set of functional components that make up the cinematic apparatus: the projectors, screen, seating, audio speakers, and the architectural space of the cinema itself. It is not "expressive" in its own right. It does not signify in its own right. The performer's body need only intercept the flickering projected light, creating shadows on the screen beyond. In this way, it doesn't matter whether the performer is male or female, clothed or naked. Except, of course, *it does*. Le Grice's jokey statement about needing to train a stand-in demonstrates that the work is signifying on multiple levels all the time.

In live performance, an array of conscious and semi-conscious thoughts is triggered: Le Grice's body as it is right now; our culturally-specific attitudes towards the male, aging body; the performer's own perception of how others might perceive his body; even his "everyday" trousers and belt, selected from the range of available high street fashion of the day. All these things shimmer back and forth in

the work's signification, in the minds of audience and performer, even as we are absorbed in the "procedure" of the slowly moving arms, the inevitable transition from far to near.

While the performance of age and gender have become visible themes in our experience of *Horror Film 1* in 2014, they do not appear to have been particular concerns for Le Grice in the early 1970s. His own published writing at the time of *Horror Film 1*'s first presentation tends to emphasize *formal* experimentation as a political agenda in its own right. In "Real Time/Space," Le Grice explains the importance of intervening in the projection event as a way of drawing the audience's attention to the present moment (Le Grice 1972). Events that raise awareness of the *here and now*, he argues, offer a means to rupture the audience's passivity. This passivity is engendered by standard narrative cinema, whose ideological function relies on presenting a fictional representation of a *different* time and space from the audience's own.

A historical framing of avant-garde cinema along the lines of Le Grice's account in "Real Time/Space" has become fairly standard, but it is not the only way of considering the activities of the 1970s. For example, in her essay "Whose History?" LFMC artist Lis Rhodes makes a strong critique of this historical model (Rhodes 1979). In 1979, Rhodes and several other artists withdrew in protest from the Hayward Gallery exhibition *Film as Film: Formal Experiment in Film 1910–1975*. They argued that the emphasis on formal innovation in the exhibition marginalized experimental cinema's overt engagement with identity politics, particularly gender. As Rhodes points out in her essay, the few women who were included in the exhibition were framed in terms of the dominant formalist story—and for the purposes of telling that story, these artists' gender was subsumed. "History," she writes, "is presumed to be male unless otherwise defined" (Rhodes 1979, 120).<sup>13</sup> If the passing of time has allowed *age* (now visibly performed by Le Grice himself) to become a central theme in *Horror Film 1*, the "passing on" of the work to TLC has also forced *gender* to the surface as a theme. Le Grice's own interest in this aspect of the work is perhaps less important than the fact that the concrete process of reenactment has made it undeniably visible.

A future project of TLC is to investigate in greater depth these emergent themes of aging, gender and the "performing-body versus apparatus-body" in Expanded Cinema reenactment, as they seem to arise repeatedly in our work. However, back in June 2014, while preparing our first reenactment of *Horror Film 1*, our concerns were rather more pragmatic. Working on a hunch, we had to jump in and see what might happen. In a blog entry we wrote while developing our reenactment, one of the factors we thought deeply about (but which was not raised by Le Grice himself) was the idea of enabling the performer to enter into the work's mood—or as we wrote, its "spell":

The feeling we're getting as we muck around with the loops in the gallery here in Canberra is that the piece needs to cross a threshold from the everyday to the special. Well, *all* cinema does this: the lights go out, a hush goes across the cinema space, people turn off their phones and stop muttering, and the spell begins.

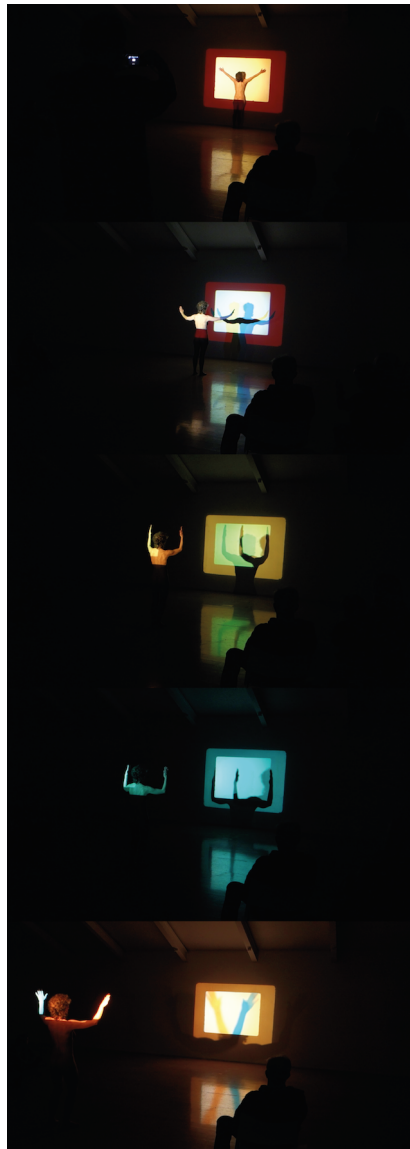
Anyway, our thought is . . . we need to create the conditions for this spell-state, to have ourselves cross a threshold into something ceremonial and ritualistic. This is not just to generate something special for the audience, but also *for ourselves*.

. . . one of the big things to consider is how the performer can get into that state. It's a sort of mindfulness so that a charged atmosphere is generated, so that the

performer is tuned into his/her body and its relationship to the projectors, the screen, the room, the amplified breathing, the audience.

Our feeling is that one factor that could contribute strongly to the transition from the casual everyday, to the generation of this mindful state, is the shedding of the trappings of the everyday—in other words, *nudging up*. (Teaching and Learning Cinema 2014b)

This was the hunch we worked with. Our main concern was that Louise, if performing semi-clothed, might feel awkward, self-conscious, “stagey”—in short, that she would not successfully pass the threshold into “something ceremonial and ritualistic,” and that she would be stranded on the border between the everyday and the ceremonial. Only moments before the performance, we had been greeting and chatting with audience members as they arrived. Now, here she was, *performing*, in quite a different mental space altogether.



Teaching and Learning Cinema, *Horror Film I Re-enactment*, 2014, documentation video stills.

We are still debating whether our hunch was right. Is this absorptive atmosphere—the “spell”—the correct way of interpreting Le Grice’s work? Perhaps the jarring effect of a semi-clad performer, boundary-riding between the everyday and the ceremonial, drawing attention to the event’s inherent awkwardness, is precisely the point of *Horror Film 1*? As we wrote in our blog:

In some ways, to claim that a piece by Malcolm Le Grice also subscribes to this transition into spell-state is odd. He’s the great debunker of Hollywood spectacle, the iconoclast—he wants us to uncomfortably shift ourselves out of our seduction by the spectacle. But . . . but . . . his works *do* have a visual pleasure and a social specialness, and that’s one of the things that makes them endure. (Teaching and Learning Cinema 2014b)

We don’t know the answers to these questions. But, in TLC’s reenactments, getting it right might not matter as much as having a go in public, seeing what happens, reflecting on the results, and carrying on, all the while recycling the provisional results back into the archive.

### Reaching Through to The Object

At various points in the above description of TLC’s provisional methodology, we’ve used the phrase “the work” in inverted commas. It’s a problematic construct, and previously we’ve found solace in pragmatist philosopher John Dewey’s redefinition of the *work* of art from a noun to a verb (Ihlein 2012, 334). Dewey’s notion, that the work of art is the *work that art does* in shaping our experience, helps empower the reenactor as a mediator of cultural encounters rather than a crafter of objects (Dewey 2005 [1934]). Despite this, the idea of the work as a nameable entity, a thing in itself, an object that endures across time and space, is very difficult to dislodge. In the public discussions following our performances, we have often employed the metaphor of genetic structure—the idea of a fundamental DNA code—to ask what changes might be possible while still retaining the work’s “essence” or identity. In this sense, while arguing for a multi-sited work, we are still, as we oscillate between archive and action, “reaching through to the object”—reinforcing the notion of the object-nature of the ephemeral artwork, even as we problematize it. In this final section, we dwell briefly on a formative idea from archival practice that may help shed light on the problem of what it is to propose an inherently variable work of art.

In his essay “What is Past is Prologue: A History of Archival Ideas Since 1898, and the Future Paradigm Shift,” archivist Terry Cook describes a fundamental principle of modern archiving practice: maintaining original context (Cook 1997). This principle, developed initially by the Dutch Association of Archivists in 1898, asserts the importance of retaining not just the objects (or “records”) in an archive, but also, as much as possible, *the manner in which those records came to be archived in the first place*. Cook is concerned mainly with the creation and management of official archives—the paperwork generated by government departments, for example—rather than those related to the historical fate of experimental artworks like *Horror Film 1*. However, the same principles apply, namely that the layers of metadata swirling around an archival record are potentially just as useful as the record itself. Or to put it another way: destroying layers of metadata by, for instance, “tidying up” the seemingly disorganized filing system of an administrative body is tantamount to degrading the archival record itself.

This notion of an archival record as a composite of a physical object and its set of relational connections (how it came to be deposited in the archive, the logic of its categorization, how it links to neighbouring documents, and so on) resonates with TLC's approach to Expanded Cinema reenactment. Reenactment, we argue, creates the conditions for a live experience, which opens up a multiplicity within the archival record. Our experience in the present moment is clearly not "of the original," but it nevertheless "reaches through to the original." Live performance brings to conscious awareness the mediating presence of the reenactment as both an archival intervention *and* a creative work in its own right. This foregrounding of the multiple layers of mediation aligns our approach with the archival principle of "maintaining original context." In our case, this manifests in the provision of multiple pathways reaching through to the original, while simultaneously acknowledging how difficult it might be for audiences in Canberra in 2014 to experience the work in the same way as audiences in London in 1971.

### Archives and "Flesh-Memory"

To return to where we began this discussion, it is clear that the definition of *performance as disappearance* is troubled by the practices of reenactment. In his essay "The Performativity of Performance Documentation," Phillip Auslander suggests that the term "revival" (borrowed from the theatre) could be useful, implying as it does the continuation of a performative tradition. Revival, he writes, suggests "the reawakening of an organic entity rather than the rebuilding of a lost object" (Auslander 2012, 58). By passing on non-exclusive custodianship of *Horror Film 1*, Malcolm Le Grice transforms his own artwork into a small cultural tradition, acknowledging that keeping it alive depends not only on conventional archival deposits (papers, diagrams, artist statements, video documents) but also on a regularly repeated *ritual* of live performance. In his 2005 interview with Mike Sperlinger, Le Grice borrows from jazz the notion of musical improvisation to consider how *Horror Film 1* could be part of an evolving tradition:

I think it might be smart to have a set of instructions, with the right spirit so there's an improvisational element there too—if someone has a good idea while they're doing it, it belongs to them. It's like in the tradition of jazz, you take a piece of music and if there's something that you want to do with it, at the point when you perform it, it belongs to you. (Sperlinger 2005)

Similarly, reenactment theorist Rebecca Schneider argues that live performance can operate as an evolving archival practice in its own right. Like Le Grice, Schneider places value on the necessary *alterations* that occur in the process of repetition and transmission across generations. In *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Re-enactment*, she writes: "Paradoxically, perhaps, it is the errors, the cracks in the effort, the almost but not quite, that gives us some access to sincerity, to fidelity, to a kind of touch across time David Román has termed 'archival drag'" (Schneider 2011, 112). These transmission errors, through which artists and audiences become conscious of the *inherently double* nature of their experience (bodily present in real-time, as well as time-travelling to a prior event) are perhaps one of the keys that enable us as reenactors to "reach through to the object." In such moments, to quote Schneider again, "we feel a leak of affective engagement between the then and the now that brings time travel, as it were, into the fold of experience: shimmering on an edge, caught between the possible and the impossible, touching the interval itself" (Schneider 2011, 112).

In this sense we could argue, alongside Auslander, that the nature of performance is not disappearance, but *revival*: the ongoing, repetitive practice of keeping something alive, visible, in cultural currency, and therefore by definition, *always changing*. As Schneider asserts, many forms of culture rely on oral transmission as their primary method of archiving. Live performance might not leave behind a documentary artifact, but instead operates as the very site of memory-residue itself: “In such practices . . . performance does remain, does leave ‘residue.’ Indeed the place of residue is arguably *flesh* in a network of body-to-body transmission of affect and enactment—evidence, across generations, of impact” (Schneider 2011, 100).

### **Conclusion: Tending the Archive**

The expanded cinema reenactments of TLC identify with Schneider’s assertion that along with traditional documents, history can be embedded and passed on via “flesh memory” (Schneider 2011, 104). Such ideas mount a challenge to conventional notions of the archive. As an artist/archivist collaboration, we might characterize our approach to thinking through and with archives as threefold. First, it is pragmatic and opportunistic. We use archives as a means to an end: the production of a new work of performance. Second, it is generous and interventionist. We reorder and augment the existing archival material through blog entries and public discussion, and by making new archival deposits. To borrow a concept from digital culture, this might be characterized as a “read/write” approach, where we grant ourselves permission to both access archival records and make changes to them.<sup>14</sup> And third, our approach is ongoing and ritualistic. Our process doesn’t stop once we have pieced together a functioning reenactment. We need to *keep practising* the performance, and this means that “the work” (in its now expanded definition) will continually evolve over time—as will its associated archival entities.

The sum of these activities is an archival *tending*: treating this space of interaction as a sort of garden, involving planting, feeding, mulching, and harvesting, in an ongoing, cyclic process. The idea of tending to a work of performance frames it as a rich network of archival records connected to a wider cultural ecosystem. Reenactment helps us in our attempt to understand the work’s original techno-cultural context, even as it vibrates with our own mediated experience in present time and space.

### **Notes**

1. Le Grice’s antipodean tour was co-presented by OtherFilm and IMA, Brisbane; the New Zealand Film Archive; Govett Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth; and Performance Space, Sydney.
2. For more on this anxiety of disappearance, see Ihlein 2013; and Ihlein 2005.
3. This notion of a distributed and variable work of art is more thoroughly elucidated in Umberto Eco’s *The Open Work* (Eco 1989).
4. This problematic is further explored in Santone 2008.
5. Video documentation of *Horror Film 1* can be viewed at the following URLs (accessed January 4, 2015): <http://vimeo.com/28460177>; and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6bRddEfxCok>.
6. Here we are thinking about procedural works by minimal and conceptual artists such as Sol Le Witt. In 1967, Le Witt wrote: “When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art” (Le Witt 1967, 80). Le Witt’s wall drawings, which are generated via a rather dry set of textual

instructions (a “machine”), nevertheless often produce rich visual results. Notable for our own inquiry is the fact that Le Witt’s drawings continue to be executed following his instructions even after his death in 2007.

7. From the BAFVSC website: “The BAFVSC was founded in 2000 by David Curtis and Malcolm Le Grice, its currently associated researchers are Research Fellows Steven Ball and Duncan White with David Curtis as advisor” (<http://www.studycollection.org.uk/about>). Another major resource in London is LUX, an organization that evolved from the ashes of the London Filmmakers’ Co-Operative (LFMC). In 2009, New Zealand curator Mark Williams visited LUX to conduct extensive research into the archival records pertaining to Malcolm Le Grice. His working notes are posted online (Williams 2009). Williams’ research trip resulted in Le Grice’s 2010 screening tour of Australia and New Zealand.

8. To be clear, we are not actually suggesting a reframing of *Horror Film 1* as a work of experimental theatre. Le Grice himself clearly situates the work within the tradition of cinema. However, for argument’s sake we are borrowing an idea from a neighbouring discipline: the standard theatrical practice of a work’s transmissibility to diverse performance personnel.

9. Le Grice’s desire to ensure the immortality of *Horror Film 1* also complicated our reenactment project. Whereas up until now our reenactments had been driven solely by *our own curiosity* (and in this sense were “self-commissioned” and responsible only to ourselves), layered on top of our *Horror Film 1* research was a deeper sense of responsibility towards its “commissioner.”

10. We are conscious of the valuable work of the Variable Media Network and Forging the Future in their development of the *Variable Media Questionnaire*—a tool for creating archival deposits to ensure the survival of artworks whose media (software and hardware) are in flux. However, we have not yet directly used their tool in our own reenactment projects (Forging the Future 2014).

11. TLC’s reenactment of Guy Sherwin’s *Man with Mirror* (1976–) resolved this problem by creating a new version of the work performed simultaneously by both Lucas and Louise, standing opposite one another, each effectively “mirroring” the other. This new work is called *(Wo)man with Mirror* (Teaching and Learning Cinema 2009.)

12. The aging body also emerges as an “unexpected theme” in Guy Sherwin’s *Man with Mirror* (1976–), in which the artist (now in his mid-sixties) performs live with a super 8 film of himself in 1976 (then aged twenty-eight). As Sherwin notes, the original impulse for *Man with Mirror* was an experiment in combining a live performer and his own image, using a visually complex interplay of projector, screen, and mirror. Performing it now, nearly forty years later, it is both the same work and something completely different. Sherwin concedes: “It’s to do with ageing. I know it is. It’s become something different from when I first made it. . . . At that time it was nothing to do with my getting older of course, because I would have been almost the same age when I first performed it in 1976” (Sherwin, Loo, and White 2011, 253). Commenting on this development, Noam Ellcott wryly describes Sherwin’s visage in *Man with Mirror* as “the very face of Father Time” (Ellcott 2014, 24).

13. See also Gaal-Holmes (2015), who makes a strong case for a more diverse history of experimental cinema in the UK that goes beyond the dominant formalist narrative.

14. In his influential book *Remix*, media theorist Lawrence Lessig borrows the analogy of *RW* (*read/write*) versus *RO* (*read only*) from the everyday practices of saving, loading and archiving of computer files. He writes, “If the user has ‘RW’ permissions, then he is allowed to both read the file and make changes to it. If he has ‘Read/Only’ permissions, he is allowed only to read the file” (Lessig 2008, 28).

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