

i-SCREENS:
SCREEN PERFORMANCE AND SCREEN PRESENCE
AS THE CURRENCY OF CONTEMPORARY SUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract

This essay explores the pervasive influence of screen-based performances in the context of a world that envelops us with its mediations. The essay argues, firstly, that we have become so attuned to these external, image-based performances that we tend to conflate them with our own interior sense of self, and secondly, that as we become increasingly wedded to screen media — not just as consumers but also as “DIY” producer-performers — the phenomenon of having a screen/media presence for our own self-performances is becoming a significant means by which we authenticate ourselves as subjects. The essay proposes that our growing intimacy with cameras and screens, combined with an apparently intensifying imperative to perform ourselves to real or imagined audiences via various screen-based channels of mediation, could be said to be transforming us into postmodern “performing subjects”.

Keywords: cyberspace, DIY culture, participatory media, performative documentary, reality television, screen performance, self-reflexivity, social media, vlogging, web 2.0, YouTube.

Introduction

In this essay I explore several significant manifestations as to how screen performances have intruded into our consciousness and experience of the world, in ways that affect our self-perceptions and social behaviours. I propose that we have become so attuned to the ubiquity of the screen performances that surround us that we tend to conflate our own identities with these external images and performances, to the extent that we begin to feel as if we too are performers. Indeed, this is literally becoming the case for many of us. As we become increasingly wedded to screen media — not just as consumers in an emerging culture of participatory media- but also as producers and performers — the creation of a screen-based media presence for our own performances of identity seems to be becoming a form of currency via which we validate ourselves as subjects of the contemporary, media-saturated world.

According to the parameters of mainstream film and television drama production, there are distinct and unbreachable divisions between producers/performers/productions on the one side, and audiences (or “consumers”) on the other. In this model, the audience member is essentially a passive recipient, even

if she or he actively engages psychologically at the level of fantasy, identification, etc. Generally speaking, this has been the situation for the greater part of cinema and television history. However, it is evident that a very different picture is emerging in the contemporary media landscape. In addition to the continued existence of mainstream feature films and television programs which maintain the divisions referred to above, we can also see a plethora of other forms becoming prominent. The increasing availability of sophisticated, low-cost digital video equipment has dispersed the base of screen productions. Increasingly, films are being made on miniscule budgets by a diverse range of filmmakers and in a variety of digital formats. An ever-mutating array of actuality-based programming has become a mainstay of both free-to-air and subscription television. There is a tendency in these “media actualities” to turn “ordinary people” — i.e. the erstwhile TV consumers — into TV performers, and/or to conflate the private and the public by following the daily lives of celebrities. Media is transforming in ways that enable the screen productions and media performances of “amateurs” to be seen by (or at least be accessible to) vast numbers of people. This is especially true of the internet and the trend towards greater interactivity and increasing amounts of “user-generated content”.¹

As a culture, we have lived alongside our screen media for over a century. The presence of media is increasingly pervasive and influential in our lives. Consequently, we all carry thousands of fragments of media images, sounds and performances around in our minds, and it can be argued that we often reproduce aspects of these performance-based mediations when we perform our social roles in the world. Screen-based performance is becoming increasingly central to understanding what it means to be a social subject in today’s world as we are witnessing a complex intertwining of media performances and our own self-images and self-understandings. We seem to increasingly act as if we might be caught on camera at any moment. In this sense, we are always “on”. This is not an entirely new phenomenon. Indeed, it seems likely that we have developed a fascination with screen-based performances over years of exposure to audio-visual mediation. Some decades ago, the incisive cultural commentator, Christopher Lasch, made the following observation:

We live in swirl of images and echoes that arrest experience
and play it back in slow motion. Cameras and recording
machines not only transcribe experience but alter its quality,

giving to much of modern life the character of an enormous echo chamber, a hall of mirrors. Life presents itself as a succession of images or electronic signals, of impressions recorded and reproduced by means of photography, motion pictures, television, and sophisticated recording devices. Modern life is so thoroughly mediated by electronic images that we cannot help responding to others as if their actions – and our own – were being recorded and simultaneously transmitted to an unseen audience or stored for close scrutiny at some later time. “Smile, you’re on candid camera!” The intrusion into everyday life of this all-seeing eye no longer takes us by surprise or catches us with our defenses down. We need no reminder to smile. A smile is permanently graven on our features, and we already know from which of several angles it photographs to best advantage.ⁱⁱ

We have acclimated ourselves to a performance-based world of mediations over three or four generations (even more if we consider this process to have begun with the invention of photography). As we are changing, so too is our media. We act *as if* our behaviour ‘were being recorded and simultaneously transmitted’, as Lasch described on the eve of the 1980s. This is literally occurring as younger generations of media users record nearly all of their behaviour — or at least “samples” of it — onto digital camera devices before uploading the material onto various social networking sites in order to create an (online) identity. In this way, cameras and screens increasingly become the medium not only through which we see and experience the world around us, but also the medium via which many (especially young) people express their identities and relate to other people. It seems that we no longer only see media images and performers as aspirational role models, but instead we begin to equate and conflate ourselves with those images and performers. Furthermore, a significant part of this process of turning ourselves into “performing subjects” has been the increasingly intimate terms upon which we embrace the technologies of mediation — utilizing cameras and screens, and performing for them — as a natural part of everyday experience.

Traditionally media focused on providing us with distant and inaccessible images of desire that we passively and longingly gazed at, there is now an emphasis on encouraging us to construct and display our own visibility to the world via screen-based performances. We seem increasingly impelled towards the notion that we now have the opportunity to be validated by turning ourselves into media

identities/performers who can be seen and acknowledged by others. Clearly, the popularity of internet sites such as Facebook, MySpace, YouTube, and Justin.tv are indicative of this trend, as is the apparent desire of so many people to perform in all manner of reality shows, game shows, and the like, along with the more general willingness of many people to allow the intrusive presence of TV cameras into their lives. There are a number of inferences that we could make regarding the reasons behind these emerging trends.

On one level, it seems reasonable to say that we are simply witnessing a relatively new version of the market capitalization of our psychic needs — in this case, the need to be acknowledged by our own visibility. It should be reiterated at this point that we are not describing a development that has suddenly emerged from a vacuum; but, rather, one that results from the convergence of a number of factors which have been evolving for some time. These factors include: a growing familiarity with the codes of screen performance and imagery as our relationship to media becomes such an intimate part of our everyday experience; an apparently inexorable conflation of the public and private spheres; the (r)evolution of media production and distribution technology into increasingly accessible and interactive forms, and an apparently ever-increasing fascination with all forms of visibility. In this context, it could be suggested that our obsessive relation with otherness at the level of image and performance may be thought of as a manifestation of a belief that, ultimately, our visibility is the only meaningful way we can verify our own existence — the only means by which we can be fundamentally authenticated by (and for) the other.

From a Lacanian perspective, the subject's gaze at the other, always implies reciprocity. Beginning with the infant's earliest ocular experiences (for example when, as an infant, our looking towards our mother is validated by an approving look back), the exchange of looks has great power. As the subject becomes entrenched within the order of language, society, and authority, the position from which the Symbolic Other regards the subject via a returning gaze becomes a fundamental aspect of what Lacan referred to as the paranoid nature of human knowledge and experience. That is to say, while the feeling that an object of our gaze is looking back at us can be an uncanny and unsettling one, it is also, according to Lacan, fundamental to how we are constituted by our relation to alterity.ⁱⁱⁱ It is in this respect

that we might well unconsciously believe that we exist only *if* we are looked at by the other. In the context of an exploration of screen-based performances of the self, we could speculatively reformulate this concept to suggest that, as subjects of a media-saturated world in which we are increasingly encouraged to perform ourselves as user-generated content, we may start to feel that we only exist if we are gazed upon by an audience of some sort.

Our engagements with screen images and performances are no longer restricted to our visits to the cinema, or even to our passive consumption of television. Screen images and performances are now present everywhere in our environment (on a scale ranging from the miniature to the gigantic), and our fascination with them seems to be steadily intensifying. However, this contemporary fascination with media-generated performances of the other can no longer be thought of as simply analogous to that of the (Lacanian) immobile, observing infant as suggested by so-called “apparatus theories” and other related forms of 1970s screen theory.^{iv} We are now increasingly liable to interact with these media images and performances in an actively self-reflexive and dynamic manner. We no longer merely gaze at them in an enthralled and quasi dream-like state: we now copy them, paste them, manipulate them, re-work them, download them and upload them. It is clearly apparent that today’s acutely media-savvy (and media-reliant?) individuals form intensely intimate relationships with their “media instruments”.^v In some respects, we could say that the logical extension of this intimacy is the current tendency for media audiences and media producer/performers to converge into a conflated entity.

The idea that contemporary subjects increasingly commingle their own sense of identity with media images and screen performances resonates with much postmodern/posthumanist theorizing about subjectivity. In broad terms, such theorizing rejects the humanist assumption of the individual’s authentic, coherent and singular interiority in favour of the idea of a subject constituted by multiplicity, contingency and ephemerality.^{vi} While theories of postmodern subjectivity and contemporary media/technoculture can sometimes seem extreme and/or abstruse, there are many respects in which the behaviour and attitudes of contemporary individuals puts such theorizing into practice on a daily basis. In our contemporary world of media-aware and media-generating subjects, media performance takes on

new meanings and new directions. One way we can think of this is in terms of a trajectory away from the humanist/realist conception that we exist purely as authentic individuals centred within our own interiorities, and towards the idea that our sense of self is created and continually adjusted by reference to external sources. Screen-based media, along with the performances that are their primary content, are amongst the most influential and pervasive of these external sources, and much of our thought and behaviour is now complexly imbricated with them.

The Performing Filmmaker-Subject

There are numerous manifestations where performances of identity have become enveloped within screen-based media. Less immediately apparent than current (online) examples, a particular strand of avant-garde cinema/screen practice can be seen as a significant precursor to this widespread phenomenon. This strand involves bringing together the screen practitioner and her or his screen practice into an intimate and subjective conjunction of “first person” filmmaking. Such experimental filmmaking practice extends back to the work of Maya Deren whose experimental films — especially *Meshes of the Afternoon* — functioned, amongst other things, as a self-reflexive vehicle for her to perform her own subjectivity.^{vii} In a similar vein to the so-called “trance films” of Deren, Kenneth Anger also performed as the protagonist in an apparent journey through his own unconscious in the film *Fireworks*^{viii}, while the later “diary films” of Jonas Mekas (e.g. *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*)^{ix} also strongly foregrounded the presence of the filmmaker. Meanwhile, Stan Brakhage, another pioneer of the American avant-garde, explored his formalist concerns with the materiality of the film medium through the filter of his own perceptual subjectivity.^x

In various ways, such films questioned the nature and structure of the medium of cinema by interposing the filmmaker-as-subject with the camera/screen/image. Eventually, this tendency coalesced with a trend towards the autobiographical/performative/self-reflexive in documentary and “video diary” forms during the 1990s and beyond, in ways that rendered the camera almost as an extension of the self of the filmmaker. We could say that these avant-garde instances, in which the filmmaker enters into an intimate relationship with the mediating apparatus of

camera and screen, are manifestations of the emergence of what has become an ever-intensifying tendency towards a merging between the “other” of screen-based media and the “self” of the subject into a kind of amalgamated entity.

The early screen works of video artist/filmmaker Sadie Benning in the 1990s, and Jonathan Caouette’s 2003 documentary, *Tarnation*,^{xi} are good examples of this tendency; and in certain respects they can be seen as forerunners to the embrace of screen-based performances of the self that are now proliferating in the rhizomatic universe of cyberspace. In the works of these two screen practitioners, the mediated performance of self, (or, in fact, a multiplicity of selves), along with the appropriation of the materials of popular culture, become the principal instruments of self-definition and self-expression. Both Benning and Caouette are screen practitioners who are exemplary of a postmodern performing sensibility insofar as they demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of popular screen culture, combined with an ability to utilize the camera, the materials of popular culture, and their own performance skills, in order to fashion new identities in a playful and creative manner.

Sadie Benning is a highly regarded American video artist/filmmaker.^{xii} Her early work consists of a series of short productions, all of which were shot on a low resolution Pixelvision “toy” video camera.^{xiii} Her productions centre on images of herself (which includes not only a range of differing “versions of herself”, but also other clearly fictive characters that she portrays), inter-cut with the iconography of popular culture, and occasionally over-laid with text-based graphics in the form of crudely handwritten or paper “cut-out” titles. These visual elements are accompanied by a combination of monologues and voice-over narrations that, once again, represent a number of fictive characters and/or facets of Benning’s identity. The soundtracks of her productions also contain a rich variety of popular cultural sources in the form of music tracks and soundtracks from cinema and television. In a number of respects, Benning’s videos exemplify the kind of experimentation and identity play that is at the performative heart of postmodern subjectivity in terms of the notion of an identity that is continually explored, experimented with, modified, and developed. There appears to be such a strongly symbiotic relationship between Benning’s on-screen portrayals and the creative construction of her own identity that it is tempting to conjecture that the image-identities she invents for the camera/screen function as

prototypes for her own life. It seems as if Benning attempts to discover a way to be in the world through the characters that she constructs and performs in front of the camera.

In *It Wasn't Love*, for example, Benning uses performance to subvert normalizing and essentializing notions of gender identity by assuming a number of personae and giving a range of performances throughout the film. At times, the characters she portrays are clearly gendered, while at other times their gender seems more ambiguous. The film also traverses, and ironically deconstructs, a range of cinematic *genres*: in particular, the road movie, and the young-love/outlaws-on-the-run films. As we follow a somewhat convoluted and ambiguous narrative, we encounter a multiplicity of characters that Benning performs. Benning's work in the 1990s anticipates aspects of the pervasive phenomenon of webcamming and video blogging that is now one of the most significant features of cyberspace in its emphasis on a kind of camera-based autobiographical/diaristic exploration of identity.



Figure 1: *It Wasn't Love* - A multiplicity of characters and performances.

While bearing certain similarities to the work of Benning, Jonathan Caouette's *Tarnation* is a more "extroverted" work in which the filmmaker-performer interacts with other members of his family while at the same time exploring his own subjectivity. Like Benning, Caouette freely utilizes the audio-visual materials of popular culture to form one layer of this multi-faceted, kaleidoscopic collage of images and sounds. The other audio-visual layers of *Tarnation* are primarily made possible by virtue of Caouette's predisposition towards documenting himself and his family via the media of photographs, super 8 film, video images, and audio tape recordings.

It is clear that Caouette uses the camera as a way of exploring the self, although to put it in this way inadequately expresses the fullest sense of Caouette's relationship to his camera, to images in general, and to images and performances of himself in particular. He seems compelled — almost as a matter of psychic survival — to make his camera, and his performances in front of that camera, an integral part of his life. We are told in *Tarnation* that Caouette's life was interwoven with tragedy, trauma, and abuse from an early age. As if instinctively, it seems that Caouette understood the need to find a way through his painful life by means of an interplay of image-creation and self-performance — an interplay which ultimately constituted the foundation of his filmmaking. A belief such as this, however, can only arise in the context of a particular sensibility that perceives an intimate correlation between "real life" and the "mediated real" — a sensibility that could be thought of as one of the defining aspects of contemporary/postmodern experience. It is in this sense that the reality of Caouette's existence can be thought of as doubled: simultaneously lived experience *and* dramatic/screen content.

Tarnation resists easy and conventional generic classification. It has clear affinities with experimental/avant-garde/underground traditions, it incorporates the stylistics and aesthetics of the music video form, and it contains aspects of, and allusions to, narrative cinema. For all this, though, it is reasonable to say that the primary form of the film is that of documentary — especially given the plasticity that has increasingly characterized the documentary form in recent decades. *Tarnation* documents Caouette's own life and family history in a manner that is partly self-reflexive autobiography and partly "domestic ethnography".^{xiv} However, an understanding of

Tarnation's place within the tradition of documentary can perhaps best be explored through notions of the “performative” mode theorized (in different ways) by Bill Nichols and Stella Bruzzi, as well as by means of the trend towards “new subjectivities” in documentary-making identified by Michael Renov.^{xv}

These (closely related) notions of subjectivity and performance within documentary practice are significant manifestations of an increasing trend towards exploring, defining, and asserting one's identity through camera-based performances. Increasingly, it seems that these mediated performances not only become self-referential in the Baudrillardian sense of taking on their own order of (hyper)reality, but also, as Nichols suggests, tend to prioritize ‘the experiential quality of an individual's relations to signs’ over any external (“real world”) referents.^{xvi} The performative documentary could be said to demonstrate – both theoretically and as an almost palpable manifestation of such theory – that the self is constructed through its performances. And the increasing incidence of this performative mode of “self-documentation” — especially via the utilization of now readily accessible video and image-capture technology — demonstrates that notions of the constructedness of identity may be finding increasing acceptance, not only in the relatively arcane universe of academic discourse, but also in popular consciousness.

Stella Bruzzi's take on the performative documentary calls upon the notion of performativity proposed by the linguist J.L. Austin, and subsequently employed by Judith Butler in her gender/performativity theorization.^{xvii} Just as Austin proposed that some linguistic utterances could be defined as performative, as opposed to being merely descriptive (or “constative”), in that they simultaneously describe *and* perform an action, Bruzzi suggests that:

... the performative documentary which – whether built around the intrusive presence of the filmmaker or self-conscious performances by its subjects – is the enactment of the notion that a documentary only comes into being as it is performed, that although its factual basis (or document) can pre-date any recording or representation of it, the film itself is necessarily performative because it is given meaning by the interaction between performance and reality.^{xviii}

The notion that subjects — the filmmaker and/or other individuals — can be thought of as ‘acting out a documentary’^{xix} seems to be a particularly useful approach in the context of an increasingly indistinct separation between “real life” and its performed simulations. There is certainly a significant degree to which *Tarnation* is imbued with a spirit of performance. Caouette, himself, is an actor and his urge to perform is evident throughout the film. From an almost unimaginably early age, Caouette uses performance as a kind of self-therapy: a combination of acting out and acting through his fears, anxieties, and hurts. In one of the most compelling scenes in *Tarnation*, we see Caouette as an 11-year-old — in the early days of his camera use — giving a sustained monologue performance of a southern American woman who has been abused by her husband and who is now giving a court testimony after having murdered him. Clearly, the young Caouette’s performed persona has been derived from a complex mixture of popular culture media performances, his mother’s life and personality, and his own fears and anxieties. The filmed performance constitutes an early indication of Caouette’s lengthy journey of finding himself/constructing a self through his experiments with performance and image. Also significant — and particularly striking in the youthful drag performance referred to above — is the ease with which Caouette performs before the camera. While Caouette is clearly a very capable actor, he can also be seen as a typical example of a generation to whom performing for the camera, and basing one’s performances on the materials of media culture, seems to be an effortless, unproblematic, and “natural” process.



Figure 2: *Tarnation*: Performing for the camera from a young age – performance as self-therapy.

Home Movies in the Postmodern Age

In a number of respects, *Tarnation* could be described as a home movie for the twenty-first century. However, Caouette is certainly not alone in his use of the camera

for purposes that simulate (and subvert) the home movie's urge to document familial images and performances. Patricia Zimmerman identifies a trend — beginning in the 1980s when video cameras and recorders started to become more readily available — of 'college-level film students' and other young practitioners appropriating the home-video camera and turning it towards (and, in some senses, *against*) their parents and conventional representations of the family.^{xx} Zimmerman also argues that in productions such as these — which, like Caouette's, are characteristically intercut with inter-titles, images from the mass media, and other types of found footage — 'the home-video footage sheds its naturalistic aura and its masquerade of unmediated humanity'.^{xxi} In this context it would seem that films such as *Tarnation* — and, for that matter, the films of Sadie Benning — are examples of hybrid and multi-layered texts that can rightly be thought of as postmodern in the way they combine a diverse range of elements, from Hollywood genre film to conventional documentary, experimental art film and underground schlock, to home movie and intimate video diary.

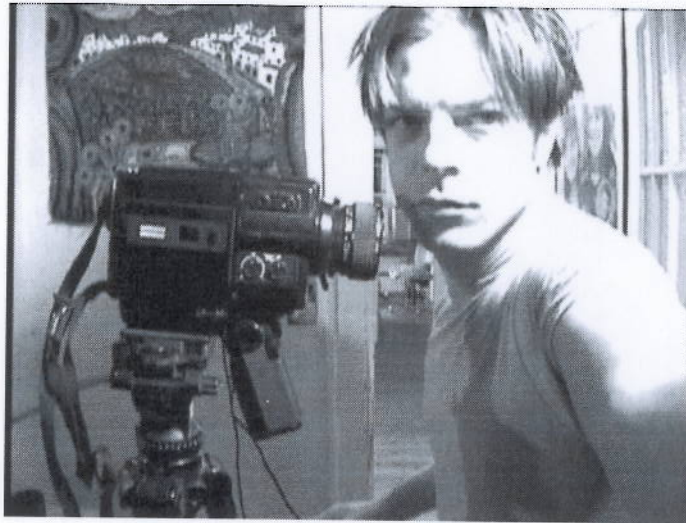


Figure 3: *Tarnation* - home movie for the twenty-first century.

Caouette and Benning are just two examples of what seems to be an increasing incidence of screen practitioners who share a finely-honed awareness of the role of performance in the determination of (self-)identity, along with an acutely subjective

and self-expressive approach to filmmaking. In accord with Nichols' identification of a more emphatic degree of subjectivity within the performative mode of documentary representation, Renov notes the appearance of this highly subjective approach in a growing body of work during the 1980s and 1990s by individuals from a diversity of cultural backgrounds, 'in which the representation of the historical world is inextricably bound up with self-inscription'.^{xxii} And in this context it seems significant that Benning and Caouette are, respectively, lesbian and gay screen-image practitioners. Indeed, Renov observes that — in what he identifies as the “post-*verite*” period since 1970 — ‘documentary explorations of gay and lesbian identities have exhibited a particular dynamism and vitality’.^{xxiii} Certainly, the playful blurring of identities and genders is an important aspect of the work of Benning, Caouette, and a number of other gay and lesbian filmmakers, as well as being a central preoccupation of queer theory and gender studies.^{xxiv}

Although Judith Butler unequivocally distinguishes between performativity and “theatrical” notions of performance, there do seem to be distinct resonances between her conception of gender identity, whereby the gendered body is conceived of as having ‘no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality’, and the manifestly self-reflexive and intentional uses to which performances are put in the creation and negotiation of identity by filmmakers such as Caouette and Benning.^{xxv} In the screen productions of both Benning and Caouette we find a complex and intriguing interplay between the representation of a series of clearly fictive performances, the presentation of the “real” selves of the practitioners (which, of course, could also be thought of as socially constructed *personae*), and the performance of identities that smudge sharply delineated lines between the real and the fictive. One could say that their work is indicative of a convergence between theorizing the postmodern on the one hand, and the existential pragmatics of living in the postmodern world on the other. Renov certainly seems to be of the view that the self-inscription inherent in such works functions to enact ‘fluid, multiple, even contradictory’ identities.^{xxvi} He writes:

If indeed we now live in an age of intensified and shifting psychosocial identities, it should surprise no one that the documentation of this cultural scene should be deeply suffused with the performance of subjectivities.^{xxvii}

These tendencies are not, however, limited to the world of avant-garde screen practice. We can also see them manifested in more mainstream and/or accessible media realms. First, the mediated performance of subjectivities is being brought into the mainstream through an increasing emphasis on various types of media “actualities”, such as documentary, docu-soap, and reality TV. Second, it is also evident that the proliferating world of cyberspace-based screen performances offers, at least potentially, near-universal access to audiences for “DIY” screen performances of identity. In the remainder of this essay, I will briefly explore how each of these phenomena increasingly intertwine with the contemporary subject’s apparently intimate and symbiotic relationship to screen-based technologies of mediation, and to the performance of self through such technologies.

Media Actualities

The performances that exist in the various forms of “media actuality” which currently constitute a highly prevalent aspect of screen content are vividly revealing of what appears to be a growing interdependence between media performance and social identity. These mediated performances exist in a range of forms and styles, including documentaries, “docu-soaps”, news and current affairs programs, chat shows, video diary-style programs and competition-based reality TV. On the one hand, we could say that the performative aspects of these media actualities conflate the quotidian and the dramaturgical whereby, again in a Baudrillardian sense, performances in the media become a replacement for experiences in the real world. On the other hand, though, it might equally be the case that what seems to be a growing interest in media actualities over explicitly fictional representations reflects a hunger for some sense of authenticity in a world of simulation.

Instances of “news-breaking” events covered by screen media in which information and entertainment, news and narrative, seem to fold into each other in ways that capture our collective imaginations are too numerous to catalogue.^{xxviii} In all such cases, however, comments along the lines that “real events” were like “watching a movie” have become very familiar. Clearly, there is a sense manifested in such statements that, due to the ubiquitous presence of cameras and screens in our lives, and the fact that actual experience seems increasingly to be replaced with mediated

experience, everything we now see seems to evoke the sense of “watching a movie” (or, for that matter, “being in a movie”), whether it has emanated from a screen or not. According to some, for example, it is this confusion of reality with mediated experience that has led particularly disturbed individuals to perform acts of extreme violence in ways that replicate episodes of screen mayhem.^{xxix} The connections and confusions between image and reality, self and other, that camera technologies seem to evoke is clearly an important issue in the context of how we invest ourselves in images of the “performing other”, as well, increasingly, how we validate ourselves through our own performances in front of cameras.

As referred to briefly in relation to the film, *Tarnation*, a number of documentaries in recent years have taken a highly self-reflexive turn whereby performance becomes acutely foregrounded. In these cases, the “star performances” of the filmmakers themselves become a key element.^{xxx} In one variant of this type of performative documentary, the relationship between the filmmaker and the camera becomes a crucial factor. In films such as this, the main theme is often the documentation of the filmmaker-subject’s life and/or the reinvention of his/her identity. Ross McElwee’s 1986 film, *Sherman’s March*, is a seminal work in these terms.^{xxxi} Even more pertinent to an age where the “video handycam” is more-or-less omnipresent is Robert Gibson’s 1996 documentary, *Video Fool for Love*, in which Gibson literally turns his life into a soap opera as he uses a pre-digital camcorder to document his life experiences, including a series of failed relationships, over a ten year period.^{xxxii} Another, somewhat different, example of a film that relies on the apparent compulsion felt by some to use a camera to document all that is around them, is Andrew Jarecki’s *Capturing the Friedmans*.^{xxxiii} The film could not have existed in its final form, and would certainly lack its undeniable narrative drive and fascination, without David Friedman’s apparently obsessive determination to document on video the breakdown of the family unit under the pressure of accusations and subsequent arrest of his father and brother on charges of paedophilia. In some ways, the use of domestic footage in films like *Capturing the Friedmans* takes us back to the earliest impulses of photography in terms of the urge to preserve a record of family and everyday life. In the case of David Friedman, however, one senses the existence of a more contemporary tendency in operation – an urge to render one’s life into media content.

A documentary that vividly encapsulates the belief that the camera can be used not only to validate oneself but, in effect, also to re-invent oneself via one's performances in front of the lens is Werner Herzog's *Grizzly Man*.^{xxxiv} Herzog's film tells the story of how an aspiring actor, Timothy Treadwell, reinvented himself as a quasi Steve Irwin-style protector of wildlife. Treadwell's self-imposed "mission" was to save a population of grizzly bears (even though these particular bears were actually protected within a national park on the Alaskan peninsula). As it turned out, Treadwell and his companion at the time were eventually killed by the bears, and *Grizzly Man* was constructed by Herzog from over a hundred hours of Treadwell's own video footage that he shot in an attempt to create a television series based on his exploits.^{xxxv} What emerges from the film is the story of a person who seems to believe it is possible to re-fashion himself principally by means of the screen performances he records on his camera. And what we largely see in the film is a sadly ironic commentary on a character who yearned for a substantive and meaningful identity, but who became caught up in a network of invented identities cobbled together from the superficial stereotypes of popular culture. In Treadwell's case, the importance that is placed upon the media, fame, recognition, and the validation that comes from being able to achieve an audience for one's reinvention of self is acutely evident.

In the current media landscape of television broadcasting, the dominant type of media actuality is generically labeled "reality TV", although this tends to be something of a catch-all category covering a variety of forms and styles. Some versions of reality TV share affinities with the observational documentary, along with its televisual sibling, the "docu-soap",^{xxxvi} and are based on capturing the performances of "real people" in "real situations". However, another strand of reality programming, places "real people" in contrived or simulated environments (for example, castaway on an island, in charge of a restaurant, thrust into a different historical era, or housed with a group of strangers).^{xxxvii} In these latter instances, there is little prospect that the participants will ever forget that they are performing in front of a camera.^{xxxviii} Indeed, the process of auditioning to be cast in a reality TV show is now treated in a similar fashion to auditioning for any other acting part. Some "audition manuals" for actors now include advice about auditioning for reality TV,^{xxxix} while other books have been specifically written to advise aspiring reality TV contestants how to maximize their chances of

securing a part.^{xi} It seems evident that reality TV participants remain acutely aware of producers' (implicit or explicit) requirement for them to maintain interesting and dramatic performances and characterizations in front of the camera. At the same time, it is also apparent that participants are equally concerned with the consequences of their portrayals in terms of public opinion and popularity (particularly in those programs which are interactive to the degree that viewers vote to decide whether a participant will remain in the show).

In this context, such reality TV shows shift from being, in any sense, a reflection of reality, to becoming a self-referential exploration of performance. Annette Hill has noted how the performances of reality show contestants rapidly became highly self-reflexive:

The problem is that contestants in reality gameshows learn how to behave from previous series, and there can be an element of parody to their performances. Thus, in *Big Brother 3/4* in the UK, contestants talked endlessly about how they would be perceived by the public and the media, knowing that once out of the house they would be media stars, even if only for a day. Indeed some contestants have already appeared on other reality TV shows, and there is a danger of repeat performers flooding auditions for reality gameshows.^{xli}

Clearly, reality programming offers viewers the promise of seeing how “ordinary” people *perform* themselves to others (or, in the case of “celeb-reality” TV, how public figures perform in private). While sociologists and others over a number of decades have observed the fact that our assessments of our own attractiveness and self-worth are predicated to a large degree on how credibly we perform ourselves to others,^{xlii} it seems that the added dimension of having some kind of “media presence” and some kind of “media audience” is now becoming a significant criteria for how some of us measure our success as social subjects.

Cyberspace as “Centre Stage” for the Postmodern Performing Subject

There are some respects in which the hypothesized dissolution of the singular, phenomenological subject, and its replacement with a “subject-in-process” characterized by multiplicity, fragmentation and becoming (as espoused by a number

of poststructuralist/postmodernist theorists) seems practicable and realizable as a result of the possibilities offered in cyberspace. To some degree at least, cyberspace allows us to construct simulated identities and mutable lives in ways that would be unimaginable without such media technology. The internet is a screen-based medium that throws up a myriad of new possibilities in terms of how we might relate to media performances (including our own performances), just as it continues to make us question past presumptions about identity and selfhood. It is apparent that the processes by which we have become intimately connected to the technologies of screen mediation are becoming dramatically intensified in the world of online experiences. In this context, it is evident that cyberspace brings even more acute resonances to the notion that identity is something we can construct and thereby perform to the world.

The underlying implications of what clearly seems to be a growing trend towards performing oneself online are manifested in a number of different ways, ranging from “mainstream” social networking and file-sharing sites to the prolific universe of internet erotica and pornography. In all such cases, we can see a strong trend towards a culture of “DIY” participatory media production, and a privileging of the “amateur”, underscoring the notion that the contemporary individual can increasingly be considered to be a “performing subject”.

In just over a decade – approximately from the mid-to-late 1990s to the end of the first decade of the new century – there has been a proliferation in the use of audio-visual streaming (both of live webcam and pre-recorded material) that could be said to have created a new virtual universe of self-performances. Unsurprisingly, the mainstream media has continually focussed on the more extreme, lurid, and disturbing aspects of such online activities.^{xliii} Perhaps more significantly, however, is the rapidity and ease with which contemporary subjects have incorporated and normalized the new online capabilities of cyberspace into their lives. For example, while the first instances of self-surveillance via live video streaming from webcams in the middle of the 1990s was seen, variously, as scandalous or revolutionary, it has now become a widespread practice which — for its practitioners at least — is merely considered to be a part of everyday life. The fact that the history of transmitting and/or uploading video images into cyberspace spans less than two decades only adds

to the sense that the nature of cyber-performance is changing before our eyes. The performance of one's identity via web cameras, video blogging, digital photo galleries, and "face books" has become a commonplace, and it is evident that the incorporation of the technologies of mediation and mediated imagery into the presentation/creation of contemporary identity has indeed entered a new (hyper-intensified) phase.

Much of what we see in the arena of "vlogging" and "lifecasting" can be described as an *autobiographical performance* of self. One significant issue in the context of thinking of online camera-based practices as "autobiographical performances" pertains to the question of authenticity. Unlike situations such as online gaming, in which identity-as-pure-invention is not only considered acceptable, but is almost requisite,^{xliv} the autobiographical context in which practitioners such as webcammers and vlogger/diarists operate seems to implicitly mandate a core of honest self-representation. Beneath even the most playful and imaginative practices in which life and art, reality and fantasy, coalesce on webcamming and vlogging sites, there appears to be a minimum requirement for the "real self" of the person to reveal itself as an underlying presence.^{xlv}

The question of authenticity/inauthenticity received widespread publicity due to the LonelyGirl15 controversy. In 2006, Bree, or LonelyGirl15 as she called herself on her YouTube vlogs, started to gain a large following for her apparently sincere and emotional postings. However, it was eventually revealed that Bree was in fact an actor, Jessica Rose, and that her posts were a form of marketing for a planned online TV series. While there was considerable anger expressed by many YouTube users who felt they had been duped by LonelyGirl15, her vlogs continued to attract numerous viewers after the hoax was revealed. As Burgess and Green note, while LonelyGirl15 'violated the ideology of authenticity associated with DIY culture', it is an example of how 'the possibilities of inauthentic authenticity are now part of the cultural repertoire of YouTube'.^{xlvi} In this sense, the notion of authenticity becomes ambiguous, providing yet another facet of the playfully performative nature of postmodern identity that seems to so often find expression in cyberspace. And as for any performance, it seems incontestable that for the cyber-performer the idea of audience is crucial. Indeed, it would seem that having an actual audience —

evidenced by the recording of website “hits”, video responses, text comments, chat room discussions and, quite commonly, credit card payments — is *the* validating component of the phenomenon. In this sense, we are once again confronted with the notion that identity seems increasingly viewed as valid only to the extent that it is *performed* to an audience.

There can be little doubt that there is often a voyeuristic and erotically charged dimension to many online performances. This element, of course, finds its fullest expression in the universe of cyberporn. The cyberporn industry has for some years utilized the webcam and the digital “handycam” as its fundamental technological instruments, and has appropriated the notion of the “ordinary person” performing themselves as a sexualized commodity — the-amateur-as-porn-star — in a manner that reflects the influential effects of the contemporary subject’s increasingly intimate relations with cameras, screens, and audiences. Very many of the so-called “amateur” porn sites in fact engage in financial transactions and consequently the terms “amateur” or “professional” are not entirely meaningful.^{xlvi} Nevertheless, there is a clear trend towards a kind of DIY aesthetic and/or practice inherent in much of the porn that now proliferates on the internet – a trend that is further accentuated by the recent enhancements of Web 2.0 capability. Over recent years, porn sites such as *X-Tube* (and a variety of other similar sites) have utilized elements of Web 2.0 interactivity by providing free viewing, uploading and file-sharing facilities. Largely as a result of these recent developments — termed “Porn 2.0” by some — there is now a very real sense in which the once-hyped but mostly mythical idea of the amateur porn performer is now increasingly becoming an actual phenomenon.^{xlvi}

All such phenomena — from the anonymous creation of chat room characters and avatars to a constantly visible exhibition of one’s private life — are simulations in which identities are fluidly constructed and presented in a kind of performance praxis. As such, it could be argued that these practices exemplify a particular way of understanding identity that is not only in keeping with poststructuralist/postmodernist conceptions of the subject, but which is also indicative of a subjectivity principally characterized by an intimate relationship to media-saturated exteriority, and by a drive

to perform versions of the self to real or imagined audiences. It is in this context, then, that we may well feel it is justified to think of the contemporary subject as a highly self-reflexive *performing subject*.

In concluding this essay, I would like to refer to two brief examples of how some emerging screen practitioners are embracing new digital and online possibilities while, at the same time, exploring their own status as performing subjects.

Natalie Tran — “Australia’s Queen of YouTube”

Natalie Tran is a media production student at an Australian university.^{xlix} In one newspaper article, she was referred to as “Australia’s Queen of YouTube” on the basis that she is the most subscribed YouTube contributor in Australia, and amongst the top 40 most subscribed internationally.^l Tran has been regularly posting videos since 2006, and her videos often receive more than one million views.^{li} Her video posts consist of wryly comic observations about her own experiences and about contemporary culture more generally. The videos all begin with Tran directly addressing the camera, but then often segue into short comedy sketches in which she utilizes her comic performance skills, usually performing multiple characters. Her sketches are tightly edited, and via keying/compositing techniques, she creates multiple images of herself performing different characters in the one shot. While Tran seems destined at some stage to utilize her performance and production skills in the more “conventional” arenas of cinema or television, there are certain elements of her YouTube work that specifically fit within the notion of “cyber-celebrity” and the paradigm of “Web 2.0” creativity and participatory culture.^{lii} In Tran’s case, all of her productions take the form of vlogs, or diaries, which are anchored by the performance of her own identity.

The image is a screenshot of a YouTube channel page for 'communitychannel...'. At the top, the YouTube logo is visible on the left, and navigation links for 'Videos', 'Channels', and 'Community' are on the right. The channel name 'communitychannel...' is prominently displayed, with the tagline 'where bandwidth commits suicide and cool comes to die' underneath. Below this, there is a video player showing a woman with long dark hair smiling. To the left of the video player is a channel profile box with a small profile picture, the channel name, and statistics: 'Joined: September 22, 2006', 'Last Sign in: 43 hours ago', 'Videos Uploaded: 2,459', 'Subscribers: 155,662', and 'Channel Views: 6,832,886'. Below the video player, there is a section titled 'Videos (134)' with a search bar and a 'Subscribe to communitychannel's videos' button. Three video thumbnails are shown with their titles and view counts: 'sliding escapes and POWERboards' (85,711 views), 'Winking' (325,434 views), and 'stop doing that thing with your ...' (732,982 views).

Figure 4: Natalie Tran - "Australia's Queen of YouTube".

Although Tran rarely delves very deeply into the details of her private life, her productions give the impression of being grounded in her “real self”; that of a down-to-earth university student who still lives at home with her parents and who has an unpretentious and self-deprecating sense of humour. Even though her sketches explore a range of different characters/types in various fictional situations, there is always the sense that we are being shown all of this by (and through the eyes of) the “real Natalie”. Also characteristic of the mode of “DIY creativity” exemplified by online performances such as Tran’s, is the interactive nature of the relationship between performer and audience. A performer-producer such as Tran clearly maintains her status as a highly popular “cyber-celebrity” due to her incisive wit and performance ability. However, an important dimension of Tran’s continued popularity within the context of the YouTube “vlogosphere” is the way that her audience feels included in the process. Each of her video postings receive numerous text comments as well as a number of video responses (including parodies of her productions), and she also shows and discusses selected viewer comments at the end of each of her

videos, thus encouraging an even greater degree of interactivity. In this respect, Tran's screen work is not only based on the performance of her own identity, but is also constructed as a form of dialogue with her audience.

Four Eyed Monsters — A Moebius Strip of Reality and Screen Performance

The film *Four Eyed Monsters*^{liii} is much closer to the conventional paradigm of narrative filmmaking than are Natalie Tran's videos. However, the film's storyline, its stylistics, and the manner in which it was produced and distributed, resonate strongly with the contemporary zeitgeist in terms of how two young filmmakers (Susan Buice and Arin Crumley) engage with digital media, cyberspace, screen imagery, and screen performance as an integral part of their experience of being in the world.

Buice and Crumley co-direct and co-star in this highly self-reflexive (digital) film, which makes much of its autobiographical status. The film's storyline can be summarized as follows: Susan is a painter who is working in a café, and Arin is a video producer aspiring to create artistic work but reduced to making wedding videos and other corporate dross. They meet via an internet dating service. However, Arin is too shy to approach Susan in a "normal" manner for a face-to-face meeting, so he stalks her for a time, recording her movements with his ever-present video camera. He sends her an edited version of the video. Susan is flattered and/or turned on by the surveillance and is consequently persuaded to enter into a relationship with Arin. Due to his past experience of quickly aborted relationships, however, Arin insists that their relationship remains virtual rather than corporeal for some time: For the first four months of the relationship, their only contact is by an exchange of emails, notes, pictures and videocassettes. (According to their own publicity, this series of events is more or less autobiographically accurate.)^{liv} Eventually, Arin and Susan decide to make a film together, which is, of course, the film presently under discussion.



Figure 5: *Four Eyed Monsters* - Susan Buice and Arin Crumley

The storyline, then, is primarily about how (these two) young people's lives are influenced by screen mediation and screen performances in nearly every imaginable way. In the filmmaking practice of Buice and Crumley, we are once again confronted with a moebius-like relationship between the subject's experience of being in the world and the operations of media. Their relationship is based upon their work as screen image producers and performers, and, at the same time, their creative work is based upon their (heavily mediated) interpersonal relationship. In fact, we are presented with the idea that these two aspects of their lives are almost inseparable. It would seem, from the way they represent themselves in the film and elsewhere, that Buice and Crumley conceive of their lives as thoroughly conditioned and controlled by mediation and mediated self-representation.

Additionally, the filmmakers' approach to the film's distribution and exhibition also demonstrates new ways in which media-savvy young filmmakers are finding online media solutions to the problem of transforming themselves from consumers to producers of, and performers in, media. Despite the film's success at the Slamdance Film Festival, Buice and Crumley were not able to secure a distributor. Their solution was to build a following through their own website and podcasts of their film, along with an agreement with YouTube to show their entire film for a limited period of time in order to create publicity and build a market for the film. Their website/podcasts contained a number of short "episodes" which documented aspects of what we might term Buice's and Crumley's ongoing real life/soap opera/filmmaking adventure, including an ongoing account of the aftermath of the film in terms of the effect it was having on their relationship.^{iv}

What we can see in these two brief case-studies are vivid examples of how many contemporary individuals are intimately connected to screen media, and how it seems almost natural and necessary to them to express identity as media performance. As we have previously seen in a number of other instances discussed in this essay, the lives of these contemporary subjects — Tran, Buice and Crumley — are thoroughly enmeshed within the virtuality of image, performance, and (now increasingly) online media.

I began this essay by suggesting that after more than a century of exposure to the cinema, and to the various screen media that have subsequently evolved and which now form such a ubiquitous part of all of our lives, we unavoidably carry a multiplicity of screen images, grabs of dialogue, bits of narrative, and fragments of performance inside our heads. Now, a vast databank of performances and other audio-visual based material proliferates in an unstoppably “viral” form in cyberspace, and, perhaps most particularly, by way of the highly influential phenomenon of YouTube. While it remains to be seen whether, as some claim, the DIY culture that online sites such as YouTube exemplify will truly lead to a more engaged form of participatory citizenship, there can be no doubt that it already results in a vast number of individuals entering into a performative dialogue with other “cyber-performers”, and with an ever-expanding virtual universe of mediated images, sounds, and performances. The idea that screen-based media performances are becoming central to social experience appears to be increasingly borne out by the way that digital/online video capability is being embraced in such a performance-based manner. It now seems as though our world is almost literally becoming “one big media performance”.

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Notes

ⁱ For a useful interrogation of some of the key assumptions of, and ambiguities surrounding, the idea of “user generated content”, see José van Dijck, “Users like you? Theorizing Agency in user-generated content”, in *Media Culture Society*, 31: 41 (2009), located at <http://mcs.sagepub.com> (accessed January 17 2009).

ⁱⁱ Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, 1979; reprint, New York and London: W.W. Norton, 1991, p. 47.

ⁱⁱⁱ The power that we invest in the notion of being seen is summed up in Lacan’s well-known sentence, “I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides.” Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. Alan Sheridan, 1977; reprint, London: Penguin, 1994, p.72. This is crucial in considering how the logic of the Lacanian Imaginary can be considered to be a logic of performance — not only in terms of how and why we are attracted to performers and performances, but also in terms of how we self-reflexively imagine ourselves as performers who are always on show, always in view. Of course, countless pages have been written in explanation and commentary concerning Lacan’s notions of the gaze, the return of the gaze, and the paranoid nature of human knowledge in relation to the constitution of the human subject. For Lacan’s own explication of his theory of the mirror stage, see Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience”, in *Ecrits: A Selection*, Trans. Bruce Fink, USA: W.W. Norton & Co, 2002, pp. 3-9. And for his discussion of the “the eye and the gaze”, see Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts*, especially pp. 72-119.

^{iv} Chief amongst these were the apparatus theories of Jean-Louis Baudry and Christian Metz which conceptualized the spectator (in an analogy with the pre-linguistic infant) as a passive subject who is without agency but who is duped into believing himself or herself to be an omnipotent voyeur by misrecognizing images (and/or image systems) for the self. See: Jean-Louis Baudry, “Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus,” trans. Alan Williams, in *Film Quarterly*, 28, no. 2 (Winter 1974-75), pp. 39-47; and Christian Metz, “The Imaginary Signifier”, in *Screen* 16, no.2 (Summer, 1975), pp. 14-76.

^v Although he was writing in an era before the internet, let alone “Web 2.0” interactivity, participatory media, etc., Marshall McLuhan’s notion of media as our “sensory extensions” still has considerable resonance. See Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964.

^{vi} Again, much has been written on this topic and it seems unnecessary to review theories of postmodern subjectivity in detail in this essay. For one useful discussion of the postmodern subject within the broader context of subjectivity, see Nick Mansfield, *Subjectivity: Theories of the Self from Freud to Haraway*, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2000, pp. 162-173.

^{vii} Maya Deren and Alexander Hammid, directors, *Meshes of the Afternoon*, 1943.

^{viii} Kenneth Anger, director, *Fireworks*, 1947.

^{ix} Jonas Mekas, director, *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania*, 1972.

^x For example: Stan Brakhage, director, *Anticipation of the Night*, 1958; *Window, Water, Baby, Moving*, 1959; and *Thigh, Line, Lyre, Triangular*, 1961.

^{xi} Jonathan Caouette, director, *Tarnation*, 2003.

^{xii} Benning’s video work has been exhibited internationally, including at the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, Centre Georges Pompidou, the Tate Modern and the 1993 Venice Biennale. A more extensive “resume” can be located at <http://www.bard.edu/mfa/faculty/faculty.php?id=2420> (accessed 22 July, 2009).

^{xiii} These “early” films, all directed by Benning, include: *A New Year*, 1989; *Living Inside*, 1989; *Me and Rubyfruit*, 1990; *Jollies*, 1990; *If Every Girl Had a Diary*, 1990; *A Place Called Lovely*, 1991; *It Wasn’t Love*, 1992; and *Girl Power*, 1992. Her other productions include: *German Song*, 1995; *The Judy Spots*, 1995; *Flat is Beautiful*, 1998; and *Aerobicide – Julie Ruin*, 1998.

^{xiv} See Michael Renov, “Domestic Ethnography and the Construction of the “Other” Self”, in *Collecting Visible Evidence*, eds. Jane Gaines and Michael Renov, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 140-55.

^{xv} See: Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, pp. 92-106; Stella Bruzzi, *New Documentary: A Critical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, pp. 153-80; and Michael Renov, “New Subjectivities: Documentary and Self-Representation in the Post-Verite Age”, in *Feminism and Documentary*, eds. Diane Waldman and Janet Walker, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, pp. 84-94.

^{xvi} Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries*, p.99.

^{xvii} For a useful and brief summary of how Butler utilizes the concept of performativity and how it relates to Austin's original notion, see Sara Salih's introduction to an excerpt from Butler's *Gender Trouble*. Sarah Salih, ed., *The Judith Butler Reader*, Malden, Mass: Blackwell, 2004, pp. 90-94.

^{xviii} Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 154.

^{xix} Bruzzi, *New Documentary*, p. 155. Bruzzi writes: '.... what a filmmaker such as Nick Broomfield is doing when he appears on camera is acting out a documentary'.

^{xx} Patricia Zimmerman, *Reel Families: A Social History of Amateur Film*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995, p. 153.

^{xxi} Zimmerman, *Reel Families*, p. 153.

^{xxii} Michael Renov, "New Subjectivities", p. 88.

^{xxiii} Renov, "New Subjectivities", p. 92.

^{xxiv} In this context Renov includes works from the Sankofa Film and Video Collective, Marlon Riggs, Sadie Benning, Gurinda Chada, Su Friedrich, Jan Oxenberg, Sabdi Dubowski and Deborah Hoffman. Renov, "New Subjectivities", pp. 92-93.

^{xxv} Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, New York: Routledge, 1999, (originally published 1990), p. 173. For a useful discussion of the distinction that Butler makes between performativity and performance, see Elin Diamond, "Re: Blau, Butler, Beckett and the Politics of Seeming", in *The Drama Review*, 44, No. 4 (Winter 2000), 31-43, pp. 31-3. Diamond observes that, for Butler, an act of performance suggests a degree of "humanist subject intentionality" that undermines her conception of performativity as a reiteration of norms and regulatory schemas rather than being any singular act. Nevertheless, Diamond argues that the resignifying potential of a concept such as (e.g. gender) performativity requires the embodiment of a performance for it to be put into meaningful practice.

^{xxvi} Renov, "New Subjectivities", p. 91.

^{xxvii} Renov, "New Subjectivities", p. 90.

^{xxviii} Some of the most well known examples over recent decades would include: the arrest and trials of O.J. Simpson; the videotaped evidence, court trials and subsequent riots related to the beating of Rodney King; the saga of Michael Jackson's life and death; the terrorist attack on New York's World Trade Centre, and the televised invasions of Kuwait, Afghanistan and Iraq. In an Australian context, the arrest and trial in Bali of the Australian tourist Schapelle Corby provided a lengthy "real life melodrama" for the Australian viewing public, courtesy of the television networks. A combination of Corby's photogenic appearance and apparent naiveté provided some of the key ingredients for an orgy of sensationalized media coverage.

^{xxix} The debate about the effects of screen violence has been ongoing for many decades and has focused much of its attention on the effects on children. For an overview of theories of the effects of media violence, see W. James Potter, *On Media Violence* (California: Sage Publications, 1999). For one example of a book which chronicles many instances of how so-called "copycat violence" mimics screen violence, see Loren Coleman, *The Copycat Effect: How the Media and Popular Culture Trigger the Mayhem in Tomorrow's Headlines*, New York: Paraview, 2004.

^{xxx} The films of Michael Moore and Nick Broomfield are celebrated examples of this tendency, while other documentaries in this performative category such as *The Yes Men*, Morgan Spurlock's *Super Size Me*, and (to the extent that we may label them documentaries) Sacha Baron Cohen's feature films tip the scale even further towards the performance of the filmmaker(s) as the main focal point of the film.

^{xxxi} Ross McElwee, director, *Sherman's March: A Mediation to the Possibility of Romantic Love in the South During an Era of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation*, 1986.

^{xxxii} Robert Gibson, director, *Video Fool for Love*, 1996. Like *Sherman's March*, the narrative of *Video Fool for Love* centres around the filmmaker's "love quest".

For a useful discussion of *Video Fool for Love* (along with other autobiographical documentaries including *Sherman's March*), see Keith Beattie, *Documentary Screens: Nonfiction Film and Television*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 105-124. Beattie rightly contextualizes these films by placing them alongside "video diary" based television shows that became popular in the 1990s and which have influenced the "confessional/diaristic" components of much current reality television. In this context, he cites BBC series such as *Video Diaries* (1990), and *Teenage Diaries* (1992), along with the Australian series, *First Person* (1996).

^{xxxiii} Jarecki, Andrew, director, *Capturing the Friedmans*, 2003.

^{xxxiv} Werner Herzog, director, *Grizzly Man*, 2005.

^{xxxv} In addition to Treadwell's footage, the film is also comprised of interviews conducted by Herzog.

^{xxxvi} This form of reality TV can be traced back to the seminal 1973 series, *An American Family*, which Jean Baudrillard memorably described as providing the perfect moebius-strip model of mediated simulacra: the 'dissolution of TV in life [and the] dissolution of life in TV'. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, p. 30. Contemporary versions of such "docu-soap", however, have tended to replace the domestic situation with the workplace. This "sub-strand" of the docu-soap began with *Cops* before proliferating into numerous variants such as *Airport*, *Driving School*, and *Miami Ink*.

^{xxxvii} This last scenario was first used in the MTV series *The Real World* which, like Australia's *Sylvania Waters*, commenced in 1992 and which, in turn, spawned a number of imitations such as *The Living Soap*, 1993 and *Flatmates*, 1999.

^{xxxviii} It is evident that documentary as a mode of exploration, interrogation, argumentation, etc., is largely being overtaken by the imperative to entertain mass audiences in the form of "Reality TV", "infotainment", etc. Examples of this trend include *The Human Race*, 1997, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, 2004, *Outback House*, 2005, and *The Farmer Wants a Wife*, 2008. For an interesting insight into this development from the perspective of a politically and socially engaged Australian documentary maker, see Paul Roberts, "Rooting for Goliath: Implications of Corporatism for Would- Be Independent Australian Filmmakers", in *Interactive Media: E-Journal of the National Academy of Screen and Sound*, ISSN 1833-0533, Issue No. 2 (2006).

http://www.mcc.murdoch.edu.au/nass/nass_previous_issue_no2.htm accessed 8 February, 2010.

^{xxxix} For example, see Marnie Hill, *The Actors' Handbook: A Guide to the Australian Entertainment Industry*, Carlton, Victoria: Artists Technologies, 2007, p. 173.

^{xl} For example, see: John Saade and Joe Borgenicht, *The Reality TV Handbook: An Insider's Guide - How to Ace a Casting Interview, Form an Alliance, Swallow a Live Bug, and Capitalize on your 15 Minutes of Fame*, Philadelphia: Quirk Books, 2004; and Jack Benza, *So, You Wannabe on Reality TV*, New York: Allworth, 2005.

^{xli} Annette Hill, *Reality TV: Audiences and Popular Factual Television*, USA and Canada: Routledge, 2005, p. 38.

^{xlii} Most notably, see Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, New York: Doubleday, 1959.

^{xliii} There are numerous examples that could be cited in this context. Instances of (mostly young, mostly male) people filming themselves committing crimes (and then uploading that vision to sites such as YouTube) are regularly reported in the media, as are instances of camera/internet-based "cyber-bullying". For one discussion of so-called "media panics" about cyber-technology, participatory culture and, more specifically, YouTube, see Jean Burgess and Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture*, Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity, 2009, pp. 17-21.

^{xliv} For Sherry Turkle, it is precisely the anonymity of certain online practices which allows for playful – and relatively consequence-free experimentation with identity. See Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995.

^{xlv} For an interesting discussion of this issue, see Andreas Kitzmann, "That Different Place: Documenting the Self within Online Environments", in *Biography* 26.1 (2003):pp. 58-9.

^{xlvi} Burgess and Green, *YouTube*, p. 29.

^{xlvii} Mark Andrejevic's notes, for example, that the focus on the porn amateur has become so intense that it has created the phenomenon of "shamateurs" – professionals who pretend to be amateurs. Mark Andrejevic, *Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched*, Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, p. 59. Andrejevic refers the reader to the following newspaper article: Nick Galvin, "The Porn Star Next Door," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 January, 2003, p. 27.

^{xlviii} As the name "X-Tube" suggests, sites such as these are modelled as the porn equivalent of YouTube, highlighting the degree to which the trend towards "user generated content" is proliferating. Other sites which play on the name of *YouTube* include *YouPorn* and *PornoTube*, while other similar sites include *PornCor*, *YouPornGay*, and *WatchMe*. For a detailed discussion of the phenomenon of amateur online porn, see Katrien Jacobs, *Netporn: DIY Web Culture and Sexual Politics* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), pp. 45-80.

^{xlix} At the time of writing, Tran was studying digital media production at the University of New South Wales.

ⁱ Asher Moses, "How Natalie Became Australia's Queen of YouTube", *The Sydney Morning Herald*, February 4, 2009, located online at <http://www.smh.com.au>, accessed 11 September, 2009.

ⁱⁱ Tran had 778,618 subscribers and her combined video blogs had attracted over 37 million views at the time of writing. Tran goes by the name of "communitychannel" on YouTube, and can be found at <http://www.youtube.com/user/communitychannel>

^{lii} As Graeme Turner notes, the defining features of online “DIY celebrities” are that ‘they generate their own content and they design their own performances of themselves’, Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, London: Sage, 2004, p. 65.

^{liii} Susan Buice and Arin Crumley, directors, *Four Eyed Monsters*, 2005.

^{liv} From background information provided at <http://foureyedmonsters.com> (accessed 18 October, 2007).

^{lv} See <http://foureyedmonsters.com>