

## University of Technology, Sydney (UTS)

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### **Dead but still/moving—the slide show and documentary, a space between photography and cinema**

#### Abstract:

From magic lantern shows to *PowerPoint* presentations, the slide show has cast a long shadow on documentary film. In the 1880s the New York Police reporter, Jacob Riis, barnstormed America with magic lantern images of urban poverty, hoping to rouse sympathies and eventual relief for the city's underclass. In mid 2006, *An Inconvenient Truth*, a documentary woven around Al Gore's slide show *PowerPoint* presentation, screened to audiences around the world. This article examines links between the slide show *and* documentary. It argues that this connection is illuminating in thinking about the relationship between stillness, movement, cinema and photography. It also argues that a characteristic of 'slide show documentaries' is their preoccupation with time, memory, mortality and death.

#### Biographical note:

Andrew Taylor is a Senior Lecturer in Media Arts at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) and prior to this worked as an animation director, documentary filmmaker and cinematographer. Taylor wrote and directed *Kabbarli* (2002), a feature length dramatised documentary on the life of Daisy Bates. He has recently completed *Siberia* (2009), a documentary memoir based on photos he took in Russia in the early 1990s, and is currently working on a series of film-photo-essays, *Love, Death & Photography*.

#### Keywords:

Slide show – Documentary – Cinema – Photography – Time – Memory – Death

This article is about films that occupy a space between photography and cinema. I am referring to work that sits between still images (photography) and moving pictures (cinema); sometimes discussed under the descriptor ‘still/moving’<sup>1</sup>. Chris Marker’s dystopian science fiction film, *La Jetée* (France, 1962), made almost entirely from re-filmed still photographs, is arguably the best known example of a film that fits this category and about which much has been written.<sup>2</sup> My concern is somewhat different. I focus on the slide show *and* documentary. I argue that examining the intersection between the slide show and documentary is insightful in thinking about the relationship between stillness, movement, cinema and photography. I also argue that a characteristic of ‘slide show documentaries’ is their preoccupation with time, memory, mortality and death.

### **The slide show of old is dead**

In 2004 the last of the Kodak slide carousels rolled off the production line and last year Kodak stopped manufacturing *Kodachrome*, the ‘classic’ slide-film emulsion it had developed seventy years earlier. The click-chuh-clunk sound of slide carousels and rich saturated colours of *Kodachrome* were both deeply associated with slide shows. The end of their manufacture effectively marked the death of the photo-chemical slide show as a popular medium.

The slide show of old may have been put to rest but digital slide shows are cropping up everywhere: eBay, *flickr*, real estate portals, *PowerPoint* presentations... Adding to this list there’s been a recent spate of large-scale public projections; artists reworking found collections of 35mm slides; and several publicly performed slide show performance monologues.



Public projection on St Mary’s Cathedral (Photo: Natalie Hayter, 2010)



Three images from *Slide Show Land Dorothy* (Elvis Richardson, 2006), part of an installation made from slides Richardson sourced from eBay, from the deceased estate of Dorothy E. Elsberry (top left). (Photos: Dorothy E. Elsberry, 1952-1976)



Paul Dwyer performing slideshow performance monologue, *Bougainville Photoplay Project*. (Photos: Katrina Bridgeford, 2009)

### Slide show documentaries

In recent years there have also been several successful 'slide show documentaries'. Jonathan Couette's *Tarnation* (USA, 2003), mixed slide show, family snaps and home-movie. In 2004 Agnes Varda released *Cinevardaphoto* (France, 2004), a compilation of three of her earlier film-photo-essays. And Guy Madden's, *My*

*Winnipeg* (Canada, 2008), combined idiosyncratic travelogue with live narration in a manner reminiscent of a slide show.

Some other recent documentaries directly reference their connection with the old 35mm carousel slide show. *Eddie and Thea: a very long engagement* (USA, 2009) is structured around a slide show, and the *very* longterm relationship of two New York women, Eddie and Thea. The film, *Sadness* (Australia, 1999) is another example. It is based on William Yang's photographs and his slide show performance monologue of the same title.<sup>3</sup>

At the other end of the spectrum from these 'retro' slide show documentaries are online slide shows, like those residing on *Media Storm* (found at <http://www.mediastorm.com/pub/projects.html>). These 'films' blur the traditional distinction between the slide show, photo-journalism and documentary. I'll return to a discussion of several of the works mentioned above but first I'd like to briefly discuss my personal connection with the form.

In mid-2009, I completed *Siberia* (Australia, 2009), a film memoir that could also be thought of as a 'slide show documentary'. *Siberia* resembles a slide show in several ways: the images are composed primarily from scanned 35mm transparencies (slides); it relies heavily on off-screen narration (singular, male); and it is based on images taken on a journey to an exotic location (echoing a mainstay of the subject matter of the popular 'lounge-room slide show'). If this film is not a sibling of the slide show, it is certainly a close cousin.

The story is woven around some fragments of 16mm film footage and approximately three hundred still images. To give some sense of the 'world of the film', here are six of the images, each one scanned from an original 35mm slide:



*Por River, Siberia* (Photo: Andrew Taylor, 1992)



Red baby in town, *Siberia* (Photo: Andrew Taylor, 1992)



Adi repairing reindeer harness, *Siberia* (Photo: Andrew Taylor, 1992)



Nenet men pose before hunting trip (Photo: Andrew Taylor, 1992)



Iger and film crew at work. Image from *Siberia* (Photo: Andrew Taylor, 1992)



Iger, match and gas flare. Image from *Siberia* (Photo: Andrew Taylor, 1992)

After finishing *Siberia*, I made a list of ‘slide show films’, or films that I had made using sequences of stills and I was astounded. I had made 10 films, like *Siberia*, that were made almost entirely from stills, or that featured lengthy sequences of stills. I had no idea this was such a recurring feature of my work.

But as I started to research and think about this in more depth, I found that the slide show and my filmmaking was not just some aberrant isolated practice. It also spoke to a tradition of documentary that stretched back to the nineteenth century.

From magic lantern shows to *PowerPoint* presentations, the slide show has cast a long shadow on documentary film. In the 1880s the New York Police reporter, Jacob Riis, barnstormed America with magic lantern images of urban poverty, hoping to rouse sympathies and eventual relief for the city’s underclass. In mid 2006, *An Inconvenient Truth*, a documentary woven around Al Gore’s slide show *PowerPoint* presentation, screened to audiences around the world.

### Why am I so attracted to this form?

This device... isn't a spaceship, it's a time machine. It goes backwards, forwards. It takes us to a place where we ache to go again. It's not called the Wheel. It's called the Carousel. It lets us travel the way a child travels. Around and around and back home again, to a place where we know we are loved. (Don Draper, from the TV series *Mad Men* (USA 2007), pitching for a new Kodak account, while showing slides of his young family).<sup>4</sup>

My family was a 'slide family'. They didn't keep shoe boxes full of snaps, or make photo albums, or shoot home movies. They 'did' slides. Family photos were kept in metal slide tray containers and yellow-lidded plastic boxes, high in a cupboard, near the front door of the family home. Being a 'slide family' suggests we were also a 'slide show family'. This tallies with my perception of my family but most of the family slides were taken before I was born and now, as I am knocking on the door of fifty, when I try to recall actual slide shows, only a few come to mind.

I remember my parents holding a party in a disused milking shed at a small place called Woodstock, about 30 miles north of Melbourne. I was about ten. It was the early seventies, and there were kegs of beer, kaftans and loads of people. Somewhere in the middle of this swirl a screen was rigged—I think it was a sheet—and my father put on a slide show.

I also remember my father giving repeated versions of a slide show based on a trekking holiday that my father, sister and I took together in Nepal in the late seventies. After my father returned home from Nepal, I continued to travel for a few months in India and South East Asia, as part of a 'gap year' between school and university. When I came home, I also put on a slide show of my own of the Nepal / India trip and have continued to do so at various stages of my adult life.

On my fortieth birthday my mother and sister flew from Melbourne to Sydney and gave me the family slide collection (mostly *Kodachrome* slides from the fifties and early sixties). Perhaps, for the rest of the family, it was case of clearing out junk no one else wanted, but for me it was like being given the family jewels. I studied Cinematography at film school<sup>5</sup> and had an interest in popular photography and archival images so it made sense to pass the collection on to me. Physically, I became the care-taker of the family collection—looking after about 1500 slides and a Kodak carousel 35mm slide projector. Symbolically, it felt like I was being given an important role in maintaining family history and memory.

Following a well-worn path, I also had a party for my fortieth. At the time, I lived in a block of flats in Bondi<sup>6</sup>. The flats had a sizeable back yard for that part of the world and as it was a typically hot and humid February night, we held the party outdoors. We drank vodka and lime-based cocktails in the garden under a canopy of two huge crepe myrtles, bursting with pink blossom. I put together a carousel of slides and towards the end of the night projected them on a sheet rigged deep in the dark lush recesses of the back-yard.



Kodachrome slides from Taylor family collection 1952-1964 (Photos: John and Gilly Taylor)

The ‘coloured’ language used in the above paragraphs and the associative linking of the different stories highlights how much these family photographs are interconnected with memory and remembering. The language used also reminds us that our memories have something in common with the language of dreams and the unconscious (‘projected...deep in the dark lush recesses of the back-yard’). Annette Kuhn’s influential book of essays, *Family secrets: acts of memory and imagination* (2002), reminds us that a family photograph is different from a memory—photos and memories are not the same thing—but the two often overlap and feed into each other<sup>7</sup>.

Arguably then, part of my attraction and fascination with the slide show is about a desire to explore a connection between photographs and memory. But this is only a partial answer to the question of why I have been so interested or attracted to the form. There is more to this.

### ‘Cheap films’ and ‘In-between-ness’

In 2005, Darsie Alexander curated a show for the Baltimore Museum of Art, featuring artists who had worked with slides, as part of the performance and installation art movements that blossomed in the ‘70s. Alexander discusses the use of slide shows by artists in her introductory essay in *Slide Show* (Alexander, 2005: xxi), a beautifully illustrated and designed book that was released in conjunction with the exhibition.

Nan Goldin was one of the artists represented in the Baltimore exhibition and is featured in Alexander’s book. Goldin’s photographs of the New York demi-monde are probably the best-known work surviving from this time<sup>8</sup>. These images were reworked into a slide show performance piece that became a cult hit, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency*.





Images from Nan Goldin's, *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (Photos: Nan Goldin, c.1979-85)

*The Ballad* ... was shown in bars and clubs on the lower East side in the early 'eighties and was screened with a sound track that included Kurt Weill, Velvet Underground, and Petula Clark. The work began as individual photographic portraits taken using slide film but as a slide show performance its mode of exhibition, with its highly scored soundtrack and evolving narrative structure pushed it towards the realm of cinema. According to Alexander, one of the artists from this era used to say that slides were 'a cheap way to make films' (Alexander: xxi). The relative lack of expense of reworking slides and stills has certainly been a factor for me but there is more to it than budget (or lack thereof).

I have worked as a photographer and a filmmaker, cinematographer and director and somewhere in between. This 'in-between-ness' partly explains my very un-brilliant freelance career but I think there is something else in this 'in-between-ness' that pertains to slide shows. The next section of the paper explores this idea.

### **Dead but still/moving**

My title 'Dead but still/moving' can be read three ways. It refers to the slide show

being a dead form but there still being life in it (as suggested by the examples above). It also refers to an obvious point of difference between photography and cinema – one being still pictures and the other moving. And finally, it refers to a continuum between photography and cinema. If we think of cinema as a series of projected still images – as in, a second of moving image is typically 24 or 25 projections of still images – then still and moving image photography form two ends of a spectrum and the slide show (and magic lantern presentations) occupy a space somewhere in between.



Still from *Siberia* (Photo, Andrew Taylor, 1992)

### **Death 24x a Second**

In *Death 24x a Second* (Mulvey, 2006), Laura Mulvey investigates time, stillness, movement and death in their cinematic incarnations. A central idea running through Mulvey's book is an examination of a fundamental illusion of cinema—twenty-four still frames per second of screen time creates the illusion of motion.

Reflecting on Vertov's, *The Man with a Movie Camera*, Mulvey discusses a sequence where the movement of a galloping horse is frozen into a still frame of a horse and is then reanimated ... "In stillness they (the horse frames) represent photography but in movement they represent cinema". (Mulvey: 13-17)

This technical observation is nothing new but Mulvey marries this observation with an exploration of ideas of the psychological uncanny (Mulvey: 37-44)<sup>9</sup> and an association of photography with death. According to Mulvey:

The answer to Godard's question in *Le Petit Soldat* (1960) – 'What is cinema? ... truth 24 x per second' should also be 'death 24 x per second'. The photograph's freezing of reality—truth in Godard's definition—marks a transition from the animate to the inanimate, from life to death (Mulvey:14-16).

As smart and seductive as this sounds, in order to agree with Mulvey's arguments we need to accept the link between still photography and death. To assist us here, Mulvey

looks at writing on photography by Andre Bazin and Roland Barthes.

### **Embalming time**

Bazin argues the process of embalming time, stopping the flow of time is perfectly realised by photography. “Death is but the victory of time. To preserve the bodily appearance artificially is to snatch it away from the flow of time, to stow it neatly away, so to speak, in the hold of life” (Bazin, quoted in Mulvey: 57).



Andre Bazin, 1918-1958 (Photographer unknown)

### **The death mask as an index**

In Barthes’ *Camera Lucida*, the presence of death in the photograph is a constant recurring theme. ‘All those young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents in the capture of death’ (Barthes : 92).

Barthes continues with this theme following in the wake of Bazin’s ‘embalming’, ‘preserving’ and ‘mummification’ analogies: ‘For death must be somewhere in society; if it is no longer (or less intensely) in religion it must be elsewhere; perhaps in this image which produces death while trying to preserve life’ (Barthes: 59).



Roland Barthes, 1915-1980 (Photographer unknown)

## Memento mori

In *On Photography*, Susan Sontag rolls these ideas of Bazin and Barthes together in the oft-quoted passage:

All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt. (Sontag: 15)



Susan Sontag, 1933- 2004 (Photo: Jill Krementz)

## Death everywhere

After reading Mulvey et al., I started to see manifestations of stillness and motion, life and death everywhere. Especially death. I started to see every film made as a film about death. Populist thrillers or more extreme blockbuster action films with huge body counts could be read as veiled meditations, explorations of death. Many photographs and still life paintings, appeared to me as meditations on life and death. And if they weren't about death, then every other work I saw seemed to be about time, memory, mortality. Here we are back at death again. Not quite. Death is final; mortality is a contemplation of that finality.



*untitled* (Photo: David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson, ca. 1845)



*Paris communards* ( Photo: André Adolphe Eugène Disdéri, 1871)



*Body of Joe Byrne, member of Kelly Gang* (Photo: JW Lindt, 1880)



*Car Accident Route 66* (Photo: Robert Frank, 1955)



Untitled (Photo: Carl Mydans, 1963)



Vanitas still life ( Painting: Aelbert Jansz, ca.1645)

### ***The Cold Winter of 1926 and a case of the ‘new car phenomena’***

Maybe it was a case of the ‘new car phenomena’. After all, ‘life’, ‘death’, ‘time’, ‘memory’, ‘mortality’ are major themes in works of art. They are not exactly new either. But I was taken by Mulvey’s arguments and her work has resonated with me. I’ve noticed that one of the characteristics of ‘slide show films’ and still/moving sequences is how often they are used in film to reflect on life and death; time and memory. The frozen horse sequence from Guy Madden’s *My Winnipeg* plays like a visual thesis on themes in Mulvey’s book: the animate / inanimate; motion / stasis; life / death... Madden’s sequence depicts race-horses fleeing a fire at a racetrack in Winnipeg. In the frenzy of their flight they dive into a nearby river only to be trapped by some compacting frozen ice. Archival footage shows the horses’ faces and necks poking out of the frozen river, twisted and distorted in anguished death mask poses, that remain frozen in ice and snow throughout the following winter. Madden’s wry commentary chimes in to describe the frozen horse heads as being, ‘like eleven knights on a vast white chessboard’.<sup>10</sup>

Is the above *My Winnipeg* example a case of generalising from the particular? Perhaps, but interestingly this film and others mentioned earlier—*Edie and Thea: a very long engagement*, *Sadness*, *Tarnation*, *An Inconvenient Truth*—are all in part

meditations on ‘time-memory-mortality’ or are concerned with ‘life-death’ themes. In light of this idea these works are discussed below.

### ***Eddie and Thea : a very long engagement***

*Eddie and Thea: a very long engagement* opens on two silhouetted figures (Eddie and Thea) looking at slide images of their younger selves projected on a kitchen cupboard. The style is loose, casual, at home – the camera wobbles and re-frames. The crack and handles of the cupboard are easily visible. Eddie and Thea respond to the images with gasps of recognition, wise-cracks and narrational asides.



Eddie projected on kitchen cupboard. Still from *Eddie and Thea: a very long engagement* (Photo: Susan Muska & Greta Olafsdóttir, 2009)

The women in the projected images are attractive and thirty-something. Young. The women commenting on the images are eighty-something. No longer young. The film is a story of a long-term relationship, an extraordinary love affair, and New York/Lesbian social history. The opening juxtaposition between the young and old Eddie and Thea also establishes it as some form of meditation on youth, age and mortality. This is reinforced by continued cross-cutting throughout the film between images of Eddie and Thea as young women and images of them now. Their respective life stories are told in parallel to the story of them travelling to Canada to be legally married, having already been in a relationship for fifty years. As the story unfolds, Thea becomes increasingly frail. She dies before the film is released and her passing is acknowledged in a full frame ‘text card’ before closing credits roll. So, on one hand, the film is a celebration of the two women’s lives together but it is also a documentation of the end and death of this life together.

### ***Sadness***

The film version of *Sadness* interweaves two strands. One, is a slightly folksy recreation of a journey to north Queensland where Yang explores his Chinese-Australian heritage. The other is a series of reflections based on Yang’s friends—mostly Gay men from Sydney—who Yang photographed while a social photographer in the late ’70s and ’80s and then later when many were dying from HIV-related illnesses.

The film opens on images of 35mm slides being shuffled around a light box. Yang narrates off-screen: 'All my work begins with photographs'. We then see images suggesting Yang's Chinese - Australian heritage and several images of young men and parties from the late '80s. Yang continues his narration: 'When I re-read my diaries from the early 90s, I saw that I'd been to more wakes than parties...'

Slides are placed in a carousel and a close-up of Yang's hand is shown pressing the slide remote-control, advancing the carousel to the next frame, and the film to the next sequence. A haunting Chinese flute underscores Yang's narration, and sets the tone for the film's ensuing meditation on sadness, death and dying.



William Yang projects a slide of his friend Allan, whose story forms part of William's monologue performance, *Sadness* (Photograph: Anne Zahalka, 1996)

### ***The Marlboro Marine***



Marine Lance Corporal James Blake aka '*The Marlboro Marine*' (Photo: Luis Sinco / LA Times, 2004)

It's an insane connection that you make with that person... to see somebody in your sights, and to pull that trigger...it's almost like you are there with them, seeing their life flash before your eyes (James Blake, quoted in *The Marlboro Marine* )



*The Marlboro Marine* (USA, 2007) resides on the site Media Storm and is based on a series of photographs by *LA Times* photojournalist, Luis Sinco, narrated off-screen by returned Iraqi veteran, James Blake. Sinco's photograph of Marine Lance Corporal James Blake (above) became an iconic image in America after the siege of Fallujah in 2004. Sinco's film opens showing partially animated stills of US soldiers in a conflict zone in Iraq but the body of the film is a series of photos of Blake back in Kentucky trying to readjust to live as a civilian. The ex-marine suffers from depression and post-traumatic shock syndrome, his marriage unravels, and his life falls apart. He contemplates and plans his suicide but eventually drives across the country to seek professional help.

The tone and imagery of *The Marlboro Marine* comes from a very different place to *Sadness* and *Edie & Thea*. It doesn't fit the 'time-memory-mortality' paradigm as neatly as these films do but its concern with life during and after war, including reflections on killing another and contemplation of suicide, place it within the 'life-death' themes characteristic of still/moving films.

### **The rise of personal and biographical documentaries**

The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses. (Walter Benjamin, in *Illuminations*, Arendt (ed.) 1968: 221)

Can the preoccupations of still/moving films be accounted for by the rise of personal and biographical documentaries? The films discussed above are all narratives and are either told directly in the first person or have a distinctly personal or biographical focus. Since the late 1970s, we have seen a burgeoning of first person, family and biographical documentaries. Many of these works explore unconscious themes that one that one may uncover in therapy – eg. the dominance of a father figure, influences of violence or drugs and alcohol, or feelings of otherness. These films tend to draw more heavily than others on stills, slides and home-movies. In her book *Family Frames* (1997), Marianne Hirsch, suggests that in their examination of the family and the past these films have a tendency to examine the still image in more depth and detail, and images are held on screen longer. Hirsch argues that these films are more likely to reveal psychological matters. They combine Benjamin's 'optical unconscious' with a psychological investigation into the (filmmaker's) unconscious (Hirsch: 12).

This final point combining Benjamin and Hirsch does not negate Mulvey's arguments but it does provide another explanation for the prevalence of 'time-memory-death' themes in so many recent documentaries, especially the ones I have discussed that I began calling 'slide show documentaries'.

### ***An Inconvenient Truth* as a meditation on 'time-memory-mortality'?**

Surely, it is a big stretch to suggest that *An Inconvenient Truth* is a meditation on 'time-memory-mortality'. Clearly, the film is concerned with the issue of global warming but re-watching the film, it is surprising how much it is *also* concerned with

time and memory. For example, the shots where cross-sections of icebergs are revealed to indicate their age, like rings of trees in an old growth forest, are also depictions of time (and an environmental memory). Similarly, the film's shots of glaciers, giant icebergs and snowy peaks of Kilimanjaro, before and after recent warming, are also images concerned with changes *over time*. And the film's many wide-screen graphs, showing rising levels of carbon and temperatures are also literally, depictions of rising carbon levels *over time*.

In considering the work as a still/moving film, it is also interesting to note how stasis and movement is used in transitional moments. There are many scenes where Gore has discussed something dire about global warming and we see him looking down pensively or off to the distance. For a few beats the viewer might think it is a freeze frame – he is alive but it is as if he is contemplating death - and then he blinks or moves his head slightly. The image cuts to Gore animated and alive again. He is back in the lecture theatre continuing his message of imminent danger (and need for action).

In order to break down the 'coldness' of the filmed lecture format, the film includes sequences where we get to know something more about Al Gore, the person. Significant episodes from his life were re-created as memories. In these sequences movement was slowed down considerably or stilled altogether. For example there's a sequence of black and white stills showing Al Gore and his six-year old son in hospital after his son nearly died from a car accident. The pace of the cutting slows down and there is very little camera movement on the stills. The pictures barely move. Neither do the shots of the Harvard lecture theatre, that are used to evoke memories of the place where Gore first became interested in the issues of the film (and where he probably saw educational slide shows a bit like the one he gives in the movie). Images recreating memories of Gore's childhood back on the family farm down South are filmed with a warm home movie-like patina. They are moving pictures not stills but the camera speed, rhythm and overall visual style are all slowed down considerably.

### **Photography is mute...cinema is deaf...**

So, returning to my fascination with the slide show and the still/moving, moving/still form, perhaps, unconsciously I've been trying to say something about these big imponderable themes: life and death, time and memory... For me it is as if photography alone is too silent to speak. It is mute. And cinema is usually so busy moving that it is unable to stop and hear—it is deaf or suffers from partial deafness. Whereas 'still/moving films' are in-between—they can 'speak' more than still images do standing alone, but they allow more space than their 'pure' moving image relatives.

Mulvey expresses this idea more poetically than I am able to and also gives a further clue for the prevalence of 'time - memory - death' themes in still/moving films:

Unlike the photograph, a movie watched in the correct conditions (in the dark, twenty-four frames per second) tends to be elusive. Like running water, fire or the movement of trees in the wind, this elusiveness has been intrinsic to the cinema's fascination and its

beauty. The insubstantial and irretrievable passing of the celluloid film image is in direct contrast to the way that the photograph's stillness allows *time for the presence of time* (my italics) to emerge within the image (Mulvey: 66)

### **The curious creature that baffled the world**

As much as I'd like to end with Mulvey's rich and evocative quote there is a niggling query and doubt with my characterisation of still/moving form that I'd like to discuss. Do still/moving films suffer from being in between two forms? Do they neither have the satisfaction of still photography, where the viewer is allowed to determine the length of their view and time of contemplation, nor the immersive pleasure of cinema (moving pictures). Are they a case of 'neither fish nor fowl'?

In concluding (and in defence of some slide show and still/moving work), I'd like to explore a non-pejorative connotation of the phrase 'neither fish nor fowl'. My example is from the world of natural history. In an article "*The taxonomy of Platypus: the curious creature that baffled the world*" Moyal (2002) writes:

From the moment the first preserved specimen of a platypus reached England in 1799 it was a wonder. Was this a colonial hoax? A creature with webbed feet and the bill of a duck attached to the body of a quadruped? Astonished naturalists pondered an animal that confounded all their views of taxonomic classification.

Moyal goes on to discuss the profound influence of the platypus in science and evolutionary thought, including its influence in Darwin formulating his theories of evolution. And more recently:

Researchers discovered that the platypus has an 'electric' beak, a dense set of nerve endings across the shield on its bill that enables it to find its food. ... From this striking evidence researchers concluded that the platypus left the mainstream and evolved a completely new and distinct sensory system that differed from any other animal. (Moyal:10-11)

At best, I have a hunch there is something special about the unorthodox hybridity of still/moving works. They are like the platypus—a form that defies the usual categories—fragile but well adapted to its environment, thought-provoking, enigmatic, elusive, and revealing of other ways of understanding the world.

In my mind, works as disparate as *Sadness*, *Tarnation*, *An Inconvenient Truth*, *My Winnipeg*, and even *Siberia* are all 'platypus films'. They all share an interest in exploring some other way of showing and telling about the world. At worst, they are all strange and unusual, and at best they are also different and memorable. If nothing else, it is not so bad being a curious creature that baffles the world.<sup>11</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For excellent introduction and series of ‘Still/moving’ essays see Beckman, Karen and Ma, Jean (eds), 2008 *Still moving: between cinema and photography* Durham: Duke University Press

<sup>2</sup> I am unaware of any dedicated discussion of the form in popular culture studies or social and photographic histories. For a discussion of the slide show in installation and performance art see Alexander, Darsie *Slide Show*, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Since 1989, William Yang has performed ten slideshow performance monologues on numerous Australian and International stages. These include *Sadness* (1992), *Friends of Dorothy* (1999), *Shadows* (2002) and *My Generation* (2010). For more information see: <http://www.williamyang.com/main.html> .

<sup>4</sup> In 2007, a fictional depiction of the origins of the Carousel name appeared in cable network TV series *Mad Men*, in an episode entitled “The Wheel”.

<sup>5</sup> I studied at the Australian Film, TV and Radio School (AFTRS) between 1990 and 1994.

<sup>6</sup> A well-known Sydney beachside suburb and tourist destination, near central Sydney.

<sup>7</sup> Kuhn’s ideas about the overlap and difference between memory and photography are discussed in the introduction to her book and developed in most of the essays in the collection. See, for example; Chapter 2: ‘*She’ll Always Be Your Little Girl*’, 11-24, and especially 13-14.

<sup>8</sup> Other well known figures discussed in Alexander’s book (*Slide show*, 2005) include Lucy Lippard and Jack Smith, a New York based filmmaker and slide show performance artist well-known amongst the avant-garde in Manhattan in the 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>9</sup> Mulvey discusses differences in interpretation between Freud’s and Jentsch’s use of the word ‘uncanny’. For Jentsch, ‘the uncanny’ had a connotation to do with a sense of the familiar yet strange – *déjà vu* is one example, Madame Tassuad’s wax works are another. Freud associated it more with our fears of the dead return to haunt the living. In Mulvey’s subsequent use of the term she makes a composite of these two interpretations.

<sup>10</sup> See *My Winnipeg* scene (‘The Cold of Winter 1926’), at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AjnpTg85wqY>

<sup>11</sup> Earlier shorter versions of this paper were given at the *2010 Australian Screen Production Education & Research Association (ASPERA) Conference*, University of Sydney (UTS), July 2010, and *Visible Evidence XVII*, International Documentary Studies Conference, Bogazici University, Istanbul, August 2010. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the conference organisers, especially Gillian Leahy from UTS and Alisa Lebow and Can Camden from *Visible Evidence XVII*.

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