

Alice Maude-Roxby & Dinu Li

Title: *The Performance Document: Assimilations of Gesture and Genre*

Abstract: Artist or activist actions and performances often take place just once and are intended to be experienced live. These actions are recorded and disseminated through photography and video taken from a range of perspectives; from paid up and pre-briefed 'professional' photographers or videographers through to spontaneously taken images by audience members or passers-by. Inevitably 'documentation' is never neutral and these records are infused with the stylistic intervention and conventions of the photographer in question.

Within our conversation we locate the performance document as the site of a potential two-way assimilation of gesture and stylistic attributes of diverse photographic conventions. In our co-writing we track parallel analyses of photographs taken by commercial photographer Françoise Masson of the 1970s actions of artist Gina Pane and the utilisation of photographs within the contemporary lens-based practice of Dinu Li, in which gesture and conventions are assimilated and move fluidly backwards and forwards between political propaganda, film, documentary and domestic photography.

Bios:

Alice Maude-Roxby: is Fine Art Programme Leader at Middlesex University. Her forthcoming book, *Censored Realities*, is co-authored with Stefanie Seibold, and published by Camera Austria in 2018 and their co-curated exhibition *Resist: be modern again*, takes place at John Hansard Gallery in 2019.

Dinu Li: is a practising artist and Senior Lecturer of Photography at Falmouth University. His new project *Nation Family*, part of a trilogy of video works, will premiere at Danielle Arnaud Gallery in the summer of 2018.

Alice Maude-Roxby: *Between 1997 and 2007 I was particularly engaged in research of performance photography. My interest stemmed out of a studio based fine art practice and through a parallel experience of being asked to photograph live works for friends. A lot of my work within this area involved tracking down and interviewing photographers who had documented 'seminal' performances, speaking with the artists pictured and questioning the correlation between their lived experience, the photographic representation and the ways in which these images had been disseminated and received within art historical discourses. I was viewing performance photographs in 'archives' that reflected the varying values put on*

the work and ranging from boxes pulled out of attics through to those seen in museum archives or within safes viewed in bank vaults. Key publications and exhibitions I was involved in during this time included writing for Art, Lies and Videotape: exposing performance (curated by Adrian George for Tate Liverpool, 2003), On Record: advertising, architecture and the actions of Gina Pane (Artwords Press, 2004 and through the exhibition Relations at Galerie Kamm, Berlin, 2005) and Live Art on Camera (John Hansard Gallery 2007 and SPACE, London, 2008).

I first became really interested by performance photography specifically through looking at the images of Gina Pane's actions. Gina Pane (born in Biarritz, lived 1939-1990) made a series of highly charged actions generally known for putting her body at risk, within complex and poetic scenarios situated within domestic spaces, apartments, galleries and public locations throughout the decade of 1970s. Through this series of actions, each performed just once and usually with an audience present, Pane explored socially and politically engaged subjects using a wide range of gestures from standing high up and unsupported on the window ledge of the third floor of a tenement building, through to the insertion of cuts into her skin in order to trigger a response in the viewer that was received at a number of levels from the visceral through to the cerebral. There was often an underlying poetic narrative to the pieces and a sensibility to the physicality of the objects made, for example a pair of cymbals clashed together made no sound as constructed from cardboard and cotton wool, yet produced a response in the viewer alerting them to their own lack of sensation.

These complex actions by Gina Pane were tightly orchestrated and variously incorporated within the action: sound, light, moving image, activation of still photographs and objects which were used as props, and mechanisms through which the audience could see themselves present and within the work, such as video recordings being simultaneously broadcast. The actions were documented live and through a series of very controlled and pre-considered images, generally produced as colour photographic prints, that were subsequently placed together by Pane into composites or grids of images that she named 'Constats' or proof. Pane spoke of the audience being only able to 'see' the work in full following the action via her compilations of these photographs. My analysis of these photographs began as a physical process through setting up in my studio the same

viewpoint or composition using objects, lights and a mannequin. I was intrigued to explore the implication of a 'commercial' photographic language having been applied to such radical work, and I was accessing an insight into this through the particularities of how the work had been photographed. In parallel I was carrying out art historical research and struck by how aspects relating to the physical recording of the works seemed missing within the discourses of the time. It struck me that the lighting used for Pane's work must have been photographic and that the physical manifestation of photographing the work with the photographer moving her tungsten lights between the audience and artist must have implicated on the viewing experience. Since the audience would be present and the photographs of Pane were at times taken in close up, the photographer would have been very much part of what was seen or witnessed by the audience, and at times she would have physically blocked their view.

*In 2002 I tracked down and spoke with the photographer Françoise Masson who had been Pane's sole photographer throughout the 1970s. We met in Paris and later within her home in Burgundy where the documentation from her work relating to Pane could be seen in between boxes of her commercial photography. We recorded an interview in which we viewed and discussed Masson's photographs of Pane and walked through locations near Masson's house where Pane had re-staged earlier undocumented works in order to produce photographic documentation. In particular, we spoke about the ways in which the different photographic conventions of the time, both in commercial photography and in art, were mutually influential- one thing sparking another. This meant we were speaking about the work in terms of cameras, lighting kit and film as much as in terms of the gestures and intentions of the work. In Masson's case on a day to day level the commercial work provided an income, whilst her collaboration with Pane opened her eyes to radical art practices of the time and engaged her as a participant in the production of work that was politically and socially charged. In subsequent exhibitions and talks I contextualised Masson's photographs of Pane in relation to her commercial work before curating the more expansive exhibition *Live Art on Camera* as a way of presenting a diverse range of performance photographs within the context of each of the corresponding live art photographers' day job and archive. The purpose of this work was to 'bring into frame' the presence and engagement of the photographer and to look at how performance is inevitably received through the*

interpretation of the photographer, through a layer of stylistic intervention brought about by the particularities of the photographer in question.

In the decade since I curated the exhibition Live Art on Camera for John Hansard Gallery a considerable amount of writing, publishing and curation has taken place in which performance photography has been rigorously analysed, reconsidered and represented, in particular re-enactment has allowed for some of these pieces to be reviewed within a contemporary context. In parallel I can see that my initial interest in performance photography was motivated by wanting to show what had been 'cut out' of the frame- to identify reasons for this exclusion having occurred and progressively this has moved towards an interest to expose the ways in which certain female collaborative practices have been erased or written out of art history. In looking back at the work I did on Pane I see that I remain totally intrigued by the ways in which the gestures or conventions of one type of image or representation are usurped or underlying in another. I'm interested in this aspect of mediatization much more than with a motivation to see live work at source. In Pane's case the visual language of commercial photography has been usurped through Masson into Pane's oeuvre. A photograph taken by Masson of a jewellery model may indicate an usurpation of gesture from other contexts much as her photographs of Pane utilise a vocabulary associated with commercial photograph. The other images from Masson's archive that remain heightened for me are the preparatory 'light tests', the framing for example of Pane's arm before the cut, these images expose the levels of planning and control. Lastly the images which Pane used within her actions as props- for example an image of Masson's grandmother appears in Pane's 1973 Transfert pull one out of the action and into the parallel lived experiences of the artist and photographer.

Whilst present at a Tate Britain symposium, a presentation and critical analysis of contemporary still and moving image works by artist Dinu Li prompted me to re-think my motivations for researching performance photography. The direct connection that I could see between Li's ongoing utilisation of photographs and video within his practice and my earlier research is that Li brings attention to underlying stylistic interventions inherent in the images he explores and the contexts inherent span from documentary photography to political propaganda through to the domestic family photograph.

Dinu Li originally trained as a commercial photographer, working as an assistant, before taking on his own commissions for graphic designers and advertising agencies. A residency on the Isle of Skye in 2001 precipitated his starting to work as an artist. His early works were attempts to trace the passage of time through making comparison of photographic portraits of people with family snapshots of the same individual taken several years earlier. Li subsequently made a memory project with his own mother, in which they attempted to remind each other of her life stories, as they journeyed from Northern England to rural China, exacting as much as possible, the very site of a mother's embedded memories. From 2007, Li's work became more geographically focused on and specific to China, in which he explores the nuances and manifestations that defines a cultural identity. Li has consistently been interested in vernacular forms of photography, family albums, and an assortment of archives, often used as source material to launch into investigative studies. Over the past decade he has developed several projects, including a trilogy of video works, employing a range of strategies including the performative, animation and a problematising of the photograph as document.

Dinu Li's talk was the impetus for us to subsequently speak about the varied ways in which very different types of photographic image both trigger and become integral elements within his practice. Within his talk he introduced the participatory photographic project We Write Our Own History (2017), in response to the events of the 2014 Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. As a comparative study, Li presented a series of street photographs taken either by official photojournalists or by citizens themselves, showing the revolution as it unfolded. Li then followed up with a screening of a videoed performance work, Crescendo, which he made in 2010. Again, Li shifted back and forth in time by comparing the gestures of his group of activists against 1950's to 1970's archive images of trained actors at the pivotal moment of a screen revolution. Li also showed a more recent 2016 image of a lawyer outside a court in China.

Very different sources or types of video footage or photographic documentation, activate and become embedded elements within Li's works sparking connections to be made across genres rather than purely using film and photography as a means for recording his own live

works. Spanning the genres of news reportage through to film stills and domestic images, the photographic still sparks new works for Li. Inherent gestures or body language from one context will surface and become represented within a new work, exposing systems via which images are both 'read' visually and assimilated through a visceral or physical embodiment, whilst at the same time drawing attention to how the conventions of one photographic 'genre' spills into another. Whilst the photographs Françoise Masson took of Gina Pane in 1970s belong to an entirely different time, place and context parallels exist between the ways in which these images assimilate underlying and apparently conflicting commercial photographic conventions and the ways in which Dinu Li's practice reveals similarly encoded and disparate conventions characteristic of genres that apparently should not be brought together such as news reportage, the family album, staged photographs and film stills.

Alice Maude-Roxby:

In your talk you included videos, photographs and performance documentation, some of the works shown having been made in collaboration with activists. This seemed to me a very specific selection of works chosen out of wider oeuvre which is your practice. One came away with a heightened awareness of areas of overlap between diverse photographic genres which apparently shouldn't go together, for example the relationship of contemporary news footage to performance documentation. Can you tell me about your motivations for bringing these particular works together?

Dinu Li:

I selected images from several projects including archival stills from 1950s-1970s Chinese propaganda cinema, photographic documentation of rehearsals and performances that I had staged, along with images from recent history such as those of the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong. What I wanted to do, was explore the connections within these images between on the one hand lived experiences taken under the scrutiny of

being photographed, and on the other hand the gestures of actors performing either on stage or to a cinema audience.

My conference paper stemmed from an interest in presenting a discourse around the wide spread use of photography as a result of mobile phone technology, along with the proliferation of self-representation through social media and the notion of citizen journalism. In particular, I wanted to disseminate the idea of being self-conscious or self-aware, the idea of performing in front of the camera, and the ubiquitousness of the selfie as a form of expression and representation.

We all know the infamous image of 'tank man', taken during the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing during the summer of 1989. There is a sense of heroism in the way 'tank man' stood in defiance, placing himself as a human barrier against a column of army tanks. I compared this photograph with images of young people taken in Hong Kong in 2014 during several months of civil disobedience. I found images of people taking 'selfies' at the precise moment that they were being beaten or arrested by the police. This discourse allows for consideration of whether the gestures and mannerisms of 'tank man' and the youth of Hong Kong had been heightened either by the knowledge that one is being photographed or when one is making a self-portrait, even when under extremely intense circumstances.

AMR:

In your presentation, I was struck by the way in which these different types of photographs- from film stills to photographic documentation of political contexts through to vernacular imagery from your own family archive- influence the starting

points of your work and are also act as prompts for direction of participants, becoming integral elements inherent within the development of your work. Can you tell me about this side-how found footage or photography sparks or act as impetus for new works?

DL:

I was born in 1965, just before China's decade long Cultural Revolution started. The chaos brought on by the revolution reverberated over the border into Hong Kong, bringing political unrest into the region. Leftist pro-communist sympathisers emerged from the shadows, orchestrating demonstrations against British colonial rule and riots against the local press. Having left China in the 1950's, just before the disastrous Great Leap Forward took hold, my father felt the situation in Hong Kong was too unstable and therefore made another move, this time to the west. He established himself in the UK before bringing the rest of the family to join him.

In the years before immigrating to the UK, and under the backdrop of terror plots in the streets of Hong Kong, I slept in my mother's room and had the luxury of playing with the family photographs sandwiched in-between her dressing table top and its glass cover. The photographs were of my father standing next to Big Ben or of my uncle standing against a communist monument in the streets of Guangzhou. One sporting a pair of Ray-Bans and white leather loafers, the other somewhat malnourished and wearing a grey uniform. As I rearranged the display, I also fictionalised my own stories behind these portraits.

At the time I was too young to understand the dualities that can be inherent within a photograph; how the public and the private or the personal and the political can co-exist within a family snapshot. Or how these attributes may be revealed through gestures, surroundings and particularities of clothing. As an artist I work with these dualities; both personal and national archives are often accessed as a point of departure for a lot of my projects.

I'm also interested in understanding where things come from. Things like body language I find very interesting. I often wonder if our behaviour stems from what we see in mass media, or the other way around. During the Cultural Revolution entertainment came via revolutionary opera, where every gesture and posture was nuanced, signalling a set of values that speaks about a trajectory and a cultural identity. It is interesting to see whether such gestures have stood the test of time, if these gestures become incorporated within the everyday of contemporary society. What does an indoctrination look like manifested in everyday life?

AMR:

The family photograph you showed of your cousin is very fascinating in this respect. The one where your cousin is holding the radio, looks like a family photograph and you described this as a 'staged' photograph. I understand this image to have been pivotal for you, it seems to document one thing but speak of something quite different, can you tell me about this?

DL: It was taken in the early 1970's, when China was still going through a programme under the term Cultural Revolution, otherwise also known as the Great Proletarian Cultural

Revolution. This revolution started in 1966, and ended when Mao Zedong died in 1976. The revolution was Mao's way of purifying China from capitalism and bourgeois ideologies. It was a decade of nation-wide self-inflicted turmoil and a time of utter chaos and violence. My uncle and auntie were targeted simply for being academics, and as punishment for this crime their entire family was dispersed into China's hinterlands for re-educational programmes. For example, the photograph of my cousin shows him in a rubber plantation in Hainan Island. At the time the island was inhabited by local ethnic minorities and the land mostly uncultivated. Today it is one of the most important holiday destinations for local tourists, due to its scenery and beaches.

My cousin was sent to labour camp at the age of nineteen, but I am guessing in the photograph he looks slightly older. I came across that photograph when I was six, a year before I emigrated to the west. When I arrived into the UK, I was introduced to so many new experiences such as drinking tea with milk, or hearing the sounds to pop music. It made me imagine my cousin's life back in China and what he might have heard coming out of the radio on his lap. It is only when I became an artist that I discovered the radio is fake. It was a brick painted as a radio, with a bamboo shoot stuck on to resemble an aerial. It was then that I realised an innocent candid snapshot destined for a family album can also be understood as a staged performance, used as a propaganda tool. It would simply be impossible during the revolution for most people to own a radio or to listen to one, as that would

be seen as bourgeois in the extreme, especially for those labelled as enemies of the state.



AMR:

The position of this particular image within the trajectory of the work is very fascinating as you explained that it also relates to the soundtrack used in another section of the piece. The image triggered a use of sound- from my side as an audience member of your talk, the inherent 'muteness' characteristic of any photograph in some way became amplified by the revelation in this case that one is looking at a radio made from brick and bamboo.

Later in the talk you showed another image that, when you explained what was actually represented, similarly jolted me to completely reconsider what I believed I was reading in the

image. This photograph is of a lawyer leaving court. The lawyer's clothes are shredded yet his body language is totally at odds with how one might think he would be feeling. For me this image is very shocking both for the content it represents but also for the fact that on a very different level it alerted me to preconceptions regarding how one reads performance documentation. The image reminds of and reveals mechanisms at play in the recording of certain types of live art and in particular the ways in which the gesture inherent in an action is extended through an approach to taking the photograph. There is a rawness to the image of the lawyer that you showed that is both triggered by the fact that it is 'real' (not staged) but also for the fact that it emulates a completely different type of image which exposes codes of communication inherent in some performance documentation.



DL:

Yes, I agree. There is another duality at play here between the photograph being a record of the actual event and simultaneously triggering something much more performative. The lawyer had stated that he recognised that power can be abused in the wrong hands and that this can occur anywhere, but he had not expected himself to be the victim of harassment

or violence. He had acted to represent his client by submitting documentation for a civil case in a district court. When he was informed that he did not have the required jurisdiction, the lawyer tried calling his client on his mobile phone. Police officers got nervous when seeing the mobile phone, their concern was that the lawyer might be using it for recording purposes. Things erupted when the lawyer refused to hand over the phone for inspection.

As far as Chinese law is concerned it is not illegal to use mobile phones inside a petition office however, the heavy handed 'body search' that ensued left the lawyer's clothes ripped apart. He is almost half naked but his stance outside court does not show defeat nor remorse. Quite the opposite- he performs a kind of defiant stance, communicating resoluteness and a confidence in the knowledge of the attention and outrage his image will attract. He fully exploited his own outlandishly ragged image as publicity and the photograph of him drew immediate noise on social media. It is as if his body language mirrors some of the gestures I have seen in the state engineered operas from the 1960's. Alternatively, he could have been adopting a very typical pose commonly seen in family portraits during the Cultural Revolution. In that period people posed by looking away from the camera, their heads slightly tilted upwards and eyes looking into the distance, as if in acknowledgment of the rising sun.

AMR:

I remember you speaking about the chance occurrence that you saw, whilst travelling on a bus where an activist group were performing a public work in the middle of the road. You explained that you followed up and worked with the same

group in rehearsal, and finally as participants within a public action. Each of these stages- what was actually seen, the rehearsal and the public event- casts an image where the gesture perhaps remains the same but the context in which this gesture is seen changes hugely. Can you tell me more about this process- was the assimilation and re-enacting of gesture that is evidenced within photographs and video, an integral element within the development of the work?

DL:

This was back in 2009 when I was invited to be one of four international artists in residence at a state funded institutional gallery in Southern China. During the residency I had no specific intentions of what work I wanted to develop. Instead, I simply wanted to absorb what was going on in the everyday life of the city and to respond to whatever I saw. On a bus journey to visit a local artist and professor I saw a group of about thirty people aged in their mid-fifties to retirement age, all performing a paper burning ritualistic dance which I immediately recognised as something usually performed at a funeral. What triggered my curiosity was the fact the group performed this in the middle of a busy dual carriageway, as drivers steered their vehicles to avoid potential tragedies.

I got off the bus to ask why they didn't take their rituals onto the pavement where it would be much safer. At that precise moment there was an absolute unity in everyone pointing at the same spot, exacting their fingers to the very place of their ancestry, where they once lived. It became clear their history had been erased and replaced by the dual carriageway, and in the ensuing conversations I learnt that they had received no compensation and turned to activism as result.



Their finger pointing became a point of departure for a live action I wanted the group to participate in. The idea was to create a kind of flash mob where we would enter an underground metro as individuals, before coming together at one specific moment in time, shouting and accusing each other of corruption. In the editing stage I inserted film stills from 1950's-1960's propaganda movies, selecting stills of very specific and pivotal moments in which the main protagonists who were usually victims and peasants, were at the very precise moment of uprising.



AMR:

Another aspect that surfaced through seeing the documentation within the context of your talk related to how time is represented. Within the range of documentation utilised time moves backwards when the images speak of history and forwards when the contemporary participants reclaim and reference gesture inherent in the film stills. These different elements move the viewer both backwards and forwards in time. Can you speak about the ways in which you utilise photography and video both to emulate and bring into the present past events as well as to document actions that bring these events into the present?

DL:

I guess this has something to do with my interest in evidence of a history. I use this interest as a base from which to make new work. In the case of the activist group, there is no past as that had been wiped out by developers. So something had to be documented as a kind of reference point to go forwards. I am also thinking that in a lot of my work I usually already know what I want to do in advance even though I am based in the UK. I then travel all the way to China to get my material. So, all I am doing is setting out some conditions to enable me to facilitate the action or the performance. For example, the rehearsals allowed me to facilitate the action on the metro for *Crescendo*. Conversations with individual activists in Hong Kong reactivated their memories of recent histories which they restaged by mapping out everyday items placed onto their table tops which I could photograph. In some ways this is reminiscent of myself toying with my mum's old photographs on her dressing table. The Hong Kong activists did not all self-record themselves during the Umbrella Movement, and so the act of restaging what they experienced, and then my

documentation of it, hopefully helps give voice to a history that might go unnoticed. So in a way performance acts as an agent for reminiscing, just as the group on the dual carriage way performed their annual ritual, years after their homes had been erased.



AMR:

These photographs in which activists map out scenarios through the laying out of objects on a table open up questions regarding the mechanics through which one 'reads' content of an image. Can you tell me more about this sequence?

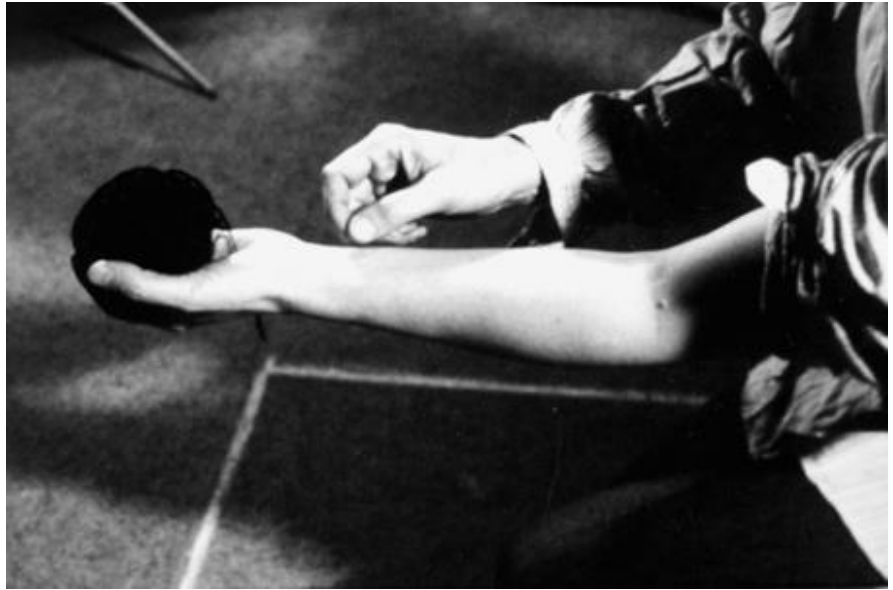
DL:

I was not present in Hong Kong during the Umbrella Movement and, by the time I visited, there had already been almost a three-year gap. Yet, when speaking to people who had been on the streets during the civil disobedience, I could sense pent up emotions that had not dissipated. And so I collaborated with some of the activists in a participatory photography project, where they would re-enact whatever

they saw or experienced at first hand. We could not do this in the street for obvious reasons, and so substituted exact locations and landmarks by doing table top recreations of these events using objects, almost like still-life photography. These photographs were created by the participants using whatever was lying on their tables, using everyday personal objects as a form or representation. It felt like a kind of performance but one that did not require human presence. The series of images appear fairly eclectic, where a clash of tv remote controls have been used to represent a collision with the police; a pen poking through a piece of cooking foil to express a smashed window; a splatter of yogurt to mirror being pepper sprayed and so on and so forth.

AMR:

Both this sense of images operating 'across' time within your practice and the discussion of how gesture resurfaces across genres, in your case for example from film still or political propaganda imagery into live work brings me back to my earlier research and collaboration with the photographer Françoise Masson who photographed of the actions of Gina Pane. Seen in the context of the photographer's archive there are revealing factors that seem very fascinating; for example, since a 35mm film has 36 exposures at times one would see that the recording of an action ended mid-film but the photographer would continue to use the rest of the film for whatever the next job might be. In this way within a contact print one can see performance images which have become 'seminal' in art historical terms, directly up against photographs of a generally more mundane subject matter but demonstrating the same approach of the photographer to 'framing' composition and so on.



I was fascinated by what I perceived as overlaps between Masson's day job (shooting jewellery and commercial assignments) and the work she did with Pane which utilised controlled photographic lighting and photographic equipment that had to get moved about during a live performance and between the audience and performer.

Other types of 'subsidiary' images are also found in the archive that are revealing of process: Masson had kept the 'light tests' she made with Pane in advance of an action. These images have a very curious resonance since they are carefully lit framed up sections of the body 'before the cut', in one instance we see Pane's left arm outstretched whilst the gesture of her hand indicates the holding of a small object such as a pin or razor blade just above her other wrist.

DL:

Masson's work of Pane's actions brings into question as always, the photographer's role. The uncanny likeness of the

photographs of Pane when compared to her commercial work to me seem quite self-conscious, especially in comparison to the perhaps more standardised ways of documenting performative work. With Masson it is as if her own self-expression is important, although I'm aware from you that she was highly directed by Pane. I feel as if the somewhat cumbersome nature of staging with lights and tripod presents Pane's actions as something more heightened, as the details are clearer and the image sharper. We see more, and in graphic detail. These are typically the modus operandi of a commercial advertising photographer. If such a photographer was photographing an expensive watch, we somehow get more than just a watch. We get the feeling of it, the shininess of the surface, the luxuriousness by way of the model's body expression and so on.

Just like the lawyer's self-awareness at the point of noticing himself being photographed Pane absolutely knows of Masson's presence. It is not the case that Masson is somewhere in the background hidden away. Pre-arranged agreements would have been made for the collaboration. And just like the lawyer's self-awareness allowed him to switch from victim to performance mode, I wonder if Pane performed at an altogether much more sensational level, spurred on by the presence of the camera and lights, like actors do at the command of the director?

There's a way in which the act of image making through photography can sometimes heighten an experience, both for performer and for an audience. I question whether the lawyer standing outside the district court would pose in such a way had there not been anyone photographing him. It is as if the

awareness of being photographed allowed the lawyer to understand the magnitude of what had happened to him. This recognition is evident within him physically expressing himself through gesture and body language which speaks volumes. I then wonder to what extent we are influenced by the mass media all around us. Images in magazines, advertising and the media might penetrate our sub conscience influencing our behaviour pattern and our means of self-expression through our bodies. By our bodies, I am referring to subconsciously walking, standing, and moving in particular ways because we've seen it in a magazine or in a commercial, which gives a kind of validation, because the media is reputable, or that it stands for something or acts as a kind of aspiration.



AMR:

I felt very excited to explore the influence of the conventions of a commercial shoot (as evidenced in the photographs themselves with the light tests reinforcing the planning process) because I felt this showed Pane to be considerably more open in approach than many of her contemporaries and

also attuned to the ways in which these images would later reproduce well in print. I've had opportunity to write, speak and develop a project with the photographer Françoise Masson as ways of responding to and assimilating the research. The response to my fascination with these borders between commercial and performance photography proved to be very provocative to an audience engaged within performance who saw my observations as 'belittling' as I shifted emphasis from the intentions and signification of the artist's action to the modes of production and dissemination. I perceived this opening up of consideration of aspects outside of the frame to be liberating and offering up a way of considering the action pictured as being influenced by and part of a wider set of contexts. The book I wrote with Françoise Masson and the talks given about this subject were better received by an art audience than a specific 'live art' audience. An art audience would value the conceptual underpinning but also the context of pop artists so directly utilising the commercial seemed to do away with the question of one art form such as performance being more pure or important than another. In the reception of your own work how has your bringing together of these supposedly polemically different 'genres' such as news reportage or documentary, fine art photography, political propaganda and domestic photography been received?

DL:

The emergence of pop art in the west from the mid 1950's corresponds to China's use of propaganda art in the form of cinema, posters, theatre and pocket-sized comics in the same decade through to the 1970's. There seemed to be a parallel universe emerging at the time in a shared interest of mass media, in mechanical reproduction and repetition. Pop artists

had recognised and identified Edward Bernays as a key figure in articulating how society is shaped and functions through advertising, public relations and propaganda. It is as though Monroe and Mao could not be themselves without mass reproduction, or that their very identity had been shaped by PR and advertising, elevating them to iconic symbols. The minute detail of their gestures distilled through photography, super magnified and multiplied, and the repetition of their portraits resides in society's subconscious.

Crescendo drew criticism when exhibited in Hong Kong back in 2010, soon after I had completed my residency in China. A British expat questioned the authenticity of the work. He wanted me to explain why I was interested in exposing issues of corruption as he felt this did not exist in China. What followed was a lengthy debate about media, the meaning of the word and its close association with the notion of mediation. On the other hand, a couple of women from mainland China questioned my motives, suggesting that perhaps I was pandering to a western audience's pre-existing views of China. And so, the interest here, is who has been influenced by what? Is it me as artist who is influenced by the way China is talked about in western media, or is it that the expat and the Chinese couple have been informed by the mass media they have been consuming?

The relationship between photography, science, documentation, record and evidence is seeped within a past acknowledgement and belief that things are being factually and truthfully represented. Pane's sense of generosity about the constitution of performance is situated within the wider realms of contemporary art practices, where things are

perhaps more fluid, less clearly defined, where simple labelling and easy classification is resisted, and boundaries of authenticity is blurred. The points of reference within artistic productions can be cited from a multitude of sources and the role of photography and of the photographer sit within this dialogue.