

Dis-simulation by Laura Malacart (10', split screen video, sound, 2005-6)



Background on the work

WATCH THE FILM

In September 2005 an emergency services exercise took place in Milan on the wake of the London July bombings. The event was heavily publicised and a large amount of media attended joined by the media team of the police. Crowds flooded North Station Square to assist at the spectacle - the atmosphere electrified by the uncertainty about the format of the event and its morbid nature.

Upon witnessing the spectacle with a video camera, Laura Malacart reflects on the nature of contemporary media representation. *Dis-simulation* explores the nature of public places and the performative actions of bodies inhabiting them, via a reference to the classic film *The Battle of Algiers*, which provides the conceptual link to the second set of images on the split screen: a salsa lesson taking place in London.

Dis-simulation stands for the re-presentation of an event that never took place, featuring two rehearsals. It features a split screen projection, performance and live sound in collaboration with Dan Hayhurst.



Abridged Paper: Newsreel, Documentary and the State of Emergency as Simulacrum

The paper addresses the representational mode of the newsreel in the context of post 9/11 aesthetics. As transparency, signifies non-mediation, media corporations become exempt from the critique generally applied to the authoring of images. The responsibility of a political bias is insidiously eschewed.

The formal construction of the piece is designed to critique it: the current topicality of terrorism and leisure are collapsed formally through the use of the split screen and bear witness to a genealogy within film history.

Dis-simulation does not pretend to be a documentary: its format locates it in an experimental context of critical art practice, its split screen is self-conscious and so are the non-narrative mode and the formulation of a complex soundscape.

Form is therefore used as critique, where the two environments invoke a proposition: why such assimilation? How does the viewer make sense of such marriage? Is it meant to be provocative or merely descriptive?

At times the two environments appear collapsed, the horizons temporarily fuse and the people transgress their respective boundaries as if by osmosis. Other times the spaces are distinct and operate in a dialectical mode.

The two spaces invoke a performative mode, where they be seen to function as the enactment of social relationships, Bill Nichols refers to the subject of documentary as 'social actor'.

Spectatorship is called into question, representation is layered: the event is simultaneously recorded by police, media, passers-by and 'balcony' spectators. A series of internal gazes multiply and reflect back onto the viewer: the notion of spectatorship itself becomes spectacle.

Sound is designed to navigate the viewer into a range of realities within the two spaces [...]

The issue for documentary practice is: what is the contractual relationship that the viewer undertakes in the consumption of a work of moving image that makes claims to represent some aspects of reality? [...] Current debates assume the co-existence of reality and fictionality. [...]

Yet the newsreel amateur footage slips away from such debates [...] let's think of the Zapruder 16mm footage of Kennedy's killing [...] the film is a token of the assassination 'shot' by an 'innocent' bystander.

The paper highlight the conceptual and ontological distinction between the document and the documentary [...]