

# Chapter 6/ Liveness, Performance and the Permanent Frame

Mike Leggett

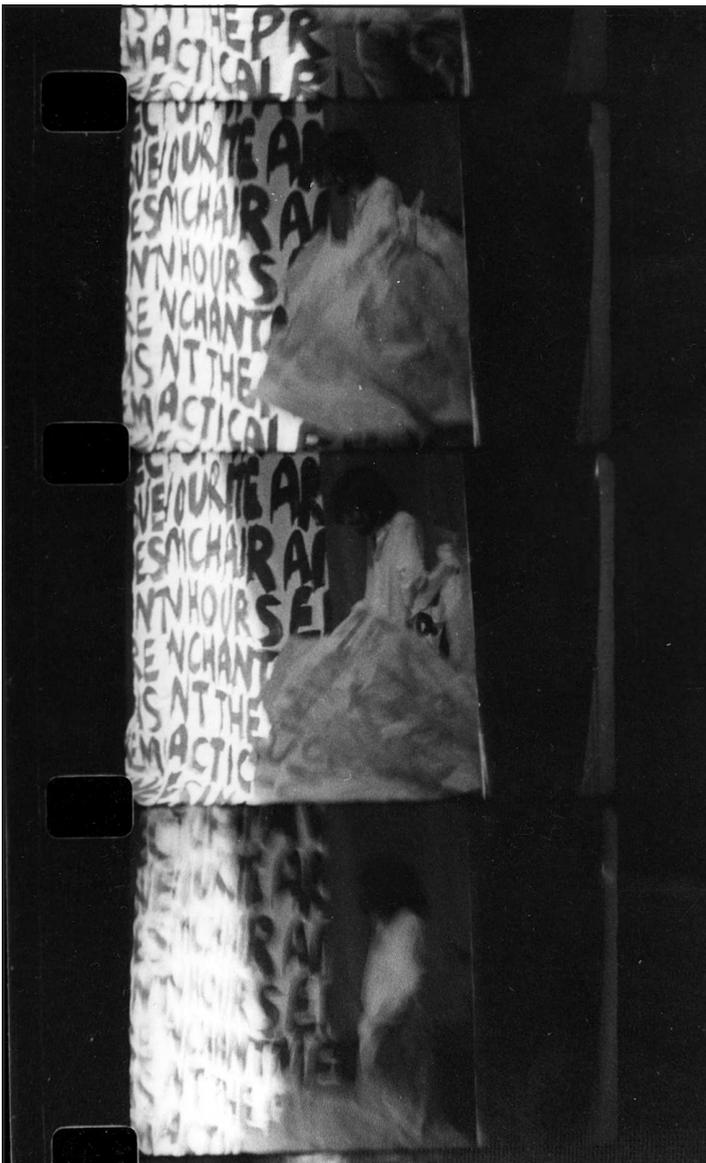
## Introduction

This chapter recalls film, video and photographic records of performance events from the 1970s, emerging today as objects of permanence: of the gestural, ephemeral and spontaneous. Does restoration of analogue media from the period into the digital domain and the reconstruction of live performance extend performances as objects of study? As objects, are the ideas of these artists compromised? Are context, place and presence central to the experience of these earlier works? What part does the discourse at the time play, when it is retrieved, relived, reframed?

These questions form the basis of extensive research by historians and indeed practice by artists. Marcel Duchamp, in making the art object *L.H.O.O.Q.* initially in 1919, made ready *La Gioconda* for multiple reframing of an original framing by Leonardo da Vinci of a painting

referring to encounters with *Lisa del Giocondo* in a setting of the artist's choosing, recording, or recalling or restating the performance of that encounter. What remains in the case of both works, together with all their many reproductions, are re-enactments of states of mind and states of consciousness, of the artists' practice displayed on canvas and other surfaces, of the respondents to these objects, the audiences and the legions of interpreters.

Essentially, another question is, are time-based arts as objects of study regarded differently from the artefacts of the visual and fine arts? We are culturally familiar with the repertory of traditional time-based arts – music, dance, theatre – and the technologies developed in each case to enable their re-performance (or revival as they quaintly call it) on score, choreographic notation and playscript. Do the contemporary technologies of digital video in all its forms, including the Web and mobile devices, by appealing to spontaneity and informality,



actually encourage and provoke the reframing of the original into a new presence, thereby evoking the certainties of ceremony and redefining context within the moment of performance?

In this brief introduction to the topic I will outline three of the performance events before examining them for shifts in emphasis from the artists' original intentions and expectations. I will refer to my collaborative work with artist Ian Breakwell on the *Unword*, *Unsculpt* and *One* performance projects in the 70s, the use of moving picture technologies in their execution and the re-presentation of these works in digital media, including the contemporary format of the Digital Versatile Disc (DVD). I will consider if these documents constitute the proto-dissolution of the notions of the traditional artist as hero and if their representation in public spaces and the contemporary audience context extends or distorts the ideas and concepts of the initiators. In the guise of performer and witness to the events documented I will address the words of the art historian, Eve Kalyva: 'I want to note how documentation affects understanding the historical condition of art. By relocating photographs, texts, and performances in space and time, documentation reconfigures meaning as much as matter.'<sup>1</sup>

## Unword

In the case of the *Unword* performance series by Ian Breakwell, the ephemeral nature of the first performance, *Unword 1*, in a space capable of accommodating no more than ten people, *required* the photographic record of the event. As a painter and collagist to that point in his career, Breakwell's milieu was that of gallerists and collectors, from whom many practitioners were retreating at the time, Breakwell included, if only to reconsider further positions from which to make a living. As Victoria Worsley has observed in an extended catalogue essay for *Unword*:

Action-based art's transience was resistant to commercialisation but there

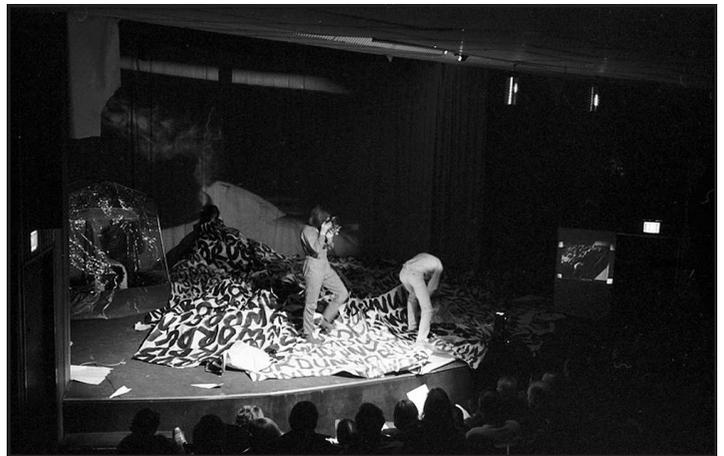
Fig. 1. Upper, *Unword 1*;  
Lower, *Unword 2*, 16mm filmstrip.



Fig. 2. Upper, the *Unword 4* Swansea performance, Breakwell (centre) and Leggett; Lower, the *Unword 3* Bristol performance, Leggett (centre) and Breakwell; with the analysis projector and image to the right of stage.

was still a need for an objectification of the process, a need to leave a trace, largely through documentation. This desire did not come from the art market (although ultimately it led to commercial exchange) but from the artists themselves.<sup>2</sup>

The photographs of *Unword 1* were subsequently enlarged to 1500 x 1000mm panels (Figure 1, upper), as artworks by Breakwell. As the person who took the photographs, my contribution was that of a trained photographer, with a Leica 35mm camera and wide-angle lens<sup>3</sup> and some experience as a 'photojournalist' or, more precisely, recorder of actuality. The presence of the photographer became embedded in subsequent renditions of the performance series, commencing at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in October 1969 (see Exhibit A, Description of the *Unword 2* performance at the ICA), when a 16mm Bolex film camera was used instead of the stills camera. The longer duration of this version of the event required more picture exposures than the thirty-six possible on a roll of 35mm film. The Bolex enabled up to 4000 individual frames to be exposed on a single 100-foot roll of film, with each frame being exposed at approximate two-



second intervals (Figure 1, lower). The series of images following laboratory processing were examined on an analysis projector, a piece of engineering equipment with which I had worked previously.<sup>4</sup> Subsequent performances included a borrowed analysis projector for screening the results at subsequent performances (in Swansea and Bristol in 1970), the projector running at two frames per second, in the front and to one side of the performance area (Figure 2, right). The Photographer, as named performer, thus generated a link as documenter between each of the perform-

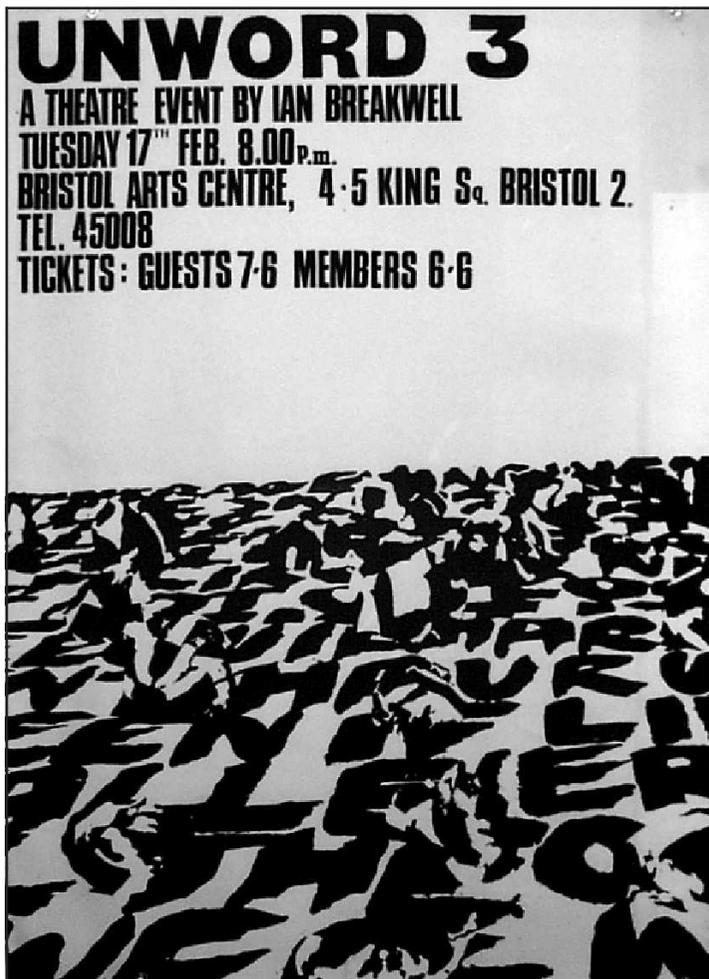


Fig. 3. *Unword* publicity – Left, silk-screened poster by Gerald Buchanan (80 cm x 50 cm); Right, A4 flyer, Mike Leggett Collection.

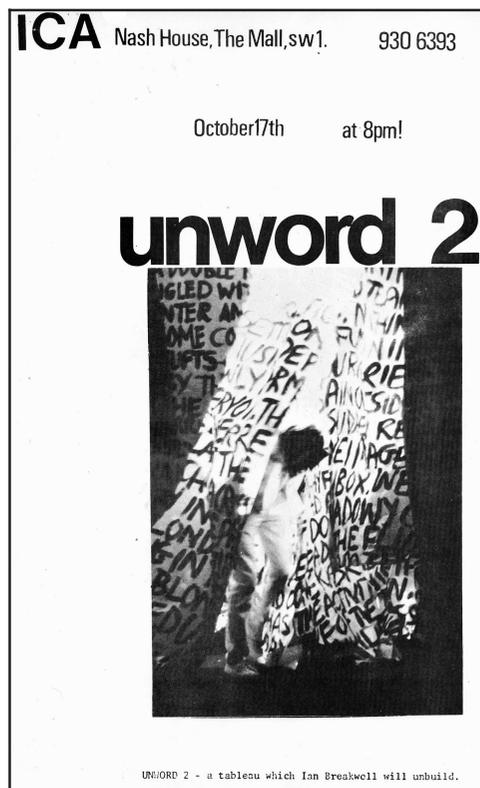
ances, with both the act of recording and presentation present in each of the two latter versions of the event.

Later, after the series had come to an end, the footage was edited to 'recreate' a filmic version of events that had occurred throughout the series to an approximate equivalent duration. The editing strategy was to follow documentary filmmaking convention and maintain a sense of continuity between one series of frames captured at one performance and another group of frames from another performance.<sup>5</sup> By incorporating different features from the performances the intention was to relate a narrative approximating to the events witnessed by the audiences, in the tradition of documentary filmmaking.

The final print was projected, again using the analysis projector, with the sound prepared from the various tapes used in the series, play-

ing from a quarter-inch spool-to-spool tape recorder. Because of the scarcity of the analysis projector and our inability to source one on demand, the film was publically screened once or twice before being stored away.<sup>6</sup>

In 2003 the footage was telecine-transferred to digital video and the process of restoring the original commenced using a non-linear editing software application.<sup>7</sup> Following capture from the tape to the computer hard disc the footage was initially 'stretched' on the editing timeline to slow movement down from twenty-five frames per second to the two frames per second of the original. The digitised quarter-inch sound tape was imported to the editing application and added to the picture track. A few adjustments were made to the sound track and to shots that were too bright or too dark, before the whole project was exported back to digital videotape. Digital versions of *Unword* were made from this for presentation exclusively as a large-screen installation, in an edition of two plus two artists' proofs, represented by Breakwell's gallerist, Anthony Reynolds Gallery.<sup>8</sup>





prepared statement in offering the works on display for sale,<sup>12</sup> and Breakwell's entry with his assistants in white coats to drape the artworks with word sheets, all of which was observed with a private-view hushed reverence, the destruction began. Initially this was carried out by the performers, but quite quickly as the physical effort became apparent, members of the audience began to help out. The development of agency within the audience will also be discussed later.

A few days later a sound recording was made with Breakwell, introduced by Leggett as an A.R.T. Newsreel.<sup>13</sup> The 16mm film documentation had a limited exhibition life as there was only about two minutes of material available, but screened together with the photographs gathered by two or three photographers present,<sup>14</sup> gave a good sense of the event's process for the benefit of students and others attending any of Breakwell's subsequent talks.

In 2004 following the restoration of the *Unword* film to digital video, work commenced on the *Unsculpt* materials. As the event had followed a pre-determined sequence of actions not fully documented in the film, my proposal to construct a collage that synthesised all the extant elements was accepted by Breakwell. Hilliard too agreed, also providing a contemporary recording of the statement he had used on the night.

With the advent of the wide-screen video format, the decision to work with a 16:9 ratio frame gave greater flexibility for the re-presentation of the visual material. The editing followed the sequence of actions comprising the event using visual evidence overlapping and layering on the screen, still photographs in movement within the frame and moving frames of film slowed down or speeded up. The final eight-minute digital film commences and ends with a sequence of stills of the exhibition component, prior to and following the event performance itself.

## One

10 February 1971 marked the first year of operation of the Angela Flowers Gallery in Lisle Street, Soho, in Central London, which was in

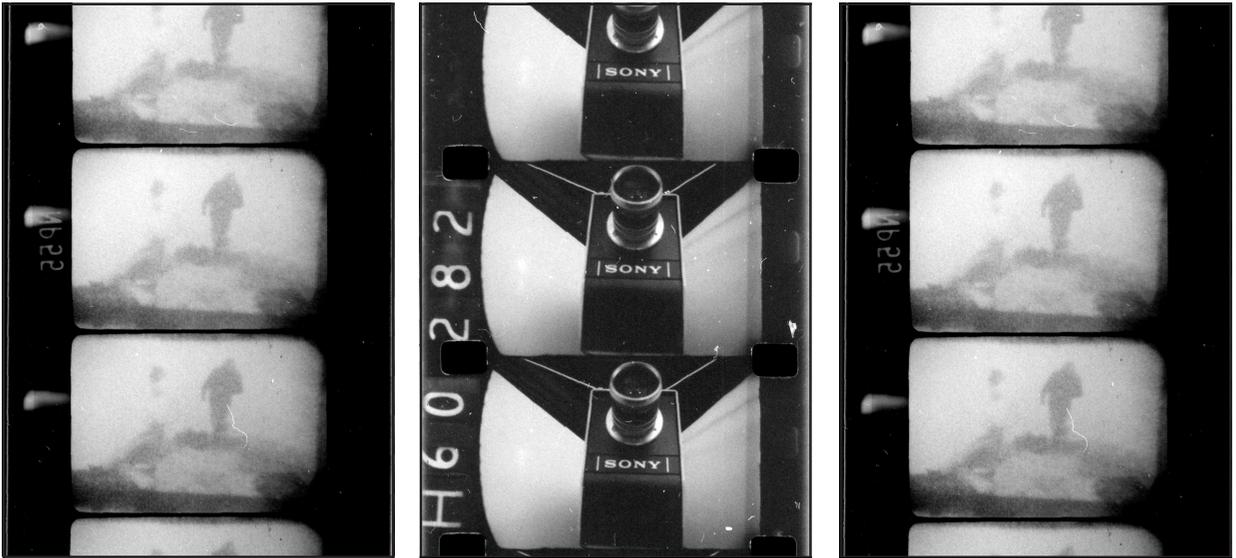
the process of moving to new premises. The occasion was marked with a performance event by one of the gallery's artists, Ian Breakwell. On the second floor of the gallery, a group of labourers shovelled earth over the course of an 'eight-hour day', each man continuously shovelling onto the adjacent man's mound of earth. Visitors and well-wishers came and went.

At street level in the window of the adjacent business was a television monitor relaying an image of the events on the floor above, captured by a video camera mounted in the corner of the ceiling. The image was indistinct but conveyed a sense of removed activity (Figure 4).

Meanwhile in every television shop window in the district, the BBC was relaying live footage of the activities of astronauts on the moon. By a curious coincidence, the Apollo 14 astronauts were shovelling rock samples on the surface of the moon whilst Breakwell's labourers were shovelling sodden lumps of mud on the floor of the Flowers Gallery. Gradually through the course of the day, as the all-white gallery space was reduced to a sea of mud, the video images relayed from each event became nearly indistinguishable from one another (Figure 4, right).

Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) loaned from the Centre for Advanced Television Studies (CATS) had made possible the placing of a monitor in a West End street with an image on its face that had not been pre-processed by an entity like NASA or the BBC. It was noted at the time that the action effectively challenged the monopolist situation of broadcast television, additionally making a mockery of one of its more extravagant and nauseous spectacles.<sup>15</sup> A video recorder was not available to tape the event but 16mm film was shot throughout the day and later assembled with a soundtrack into a twelve-minute version<sup>16</sup> projected the following year at the new gallery premises. A year later a proposal by the Arts Council of Great Britain to distribute the film foundered over the cost of making a print.<sup>17</sup>

Following the film's re-emergence in 2002, a telecine transfer to digital video enabled the digital reconstruction to be completed, with the removal of some later shots and a soundtrack completely reconstructed from most of the



original components, using the by now barely audible original track as a guide.

## Discussion

Understanding the 'historical condition'<sup>18</sup> of Breakwell's performance art from the late 60s to early 70s period, through documentation and the replaying of documents for contemporary audiences, will now be discussed.

Collaboration with other artists and volunteers was key to the development of Breakwell's performance work. My collaborations with Breakwell began in Bristol, where we had first met in 1966, and emerged from conversations conducted over periods of months leading to publically presented work, including *Buffet Car News*, *Fading Menu* and several exhibitions.<sup>19</sup> The first substantial jointly made work, the 16mm film *Sheet* (1970) commenced in 1969.<sup>20</sup> At weekends and holidays we would depart to a chosen location with a three-metre-square linen sheet, Bolex and tripod and shoot twenty seconds or so of the sheet *in situ*, arranged by Breakwell and shot by myself. It was a performance based on nuanced gesture and a consensual approach to an emerging ontology of motion picture image-making that, like the later editing process, developed as the material was projected and reviewed over the period of the film's making.

The three event performances already outlined, however, had been preconceived and

planned, with the ordering of the changes, tempos and durations carefully explained to the collaborating performers. There were sketches and words to aid in establishing the framework within which performers worked. The means of documenting the events, given the technology available to the artists both at the time and subsequently,<sup>21</sup> are core to an understanding of the reception of the artwork by audiences.

Breakwell's matter-of-fact description of UNWORD demonstrates his highly rational and calculated approach to a performance based on the principle of transformation through destruction. The multi-media absurd event was 'a collage of activity extending through any length of time' as part of an 'event-process'.<sup>22</sup>

Breakwell's intention extended beyond the performances themselves and the residual images on print and film. It included the distribution to audience members and participants of a questionnaire in which he affirmed:

The performance is but one stage in the event-process, a process encompassing gradual conception of idea/format, realisation of that conception through performance, and progression from there through documentation (e.g. photographs, photo-enlargements and film). I would like to develop this documentation process by collecting

Fig. 5. *One* film strips – left, the monitor viewed from the street of the image from the video camera (centre) suspended in the gallery ceiling; right, Apollo mission images.

reactions to the UNWORD series both by participants and witnesses.<sup>23</sup>

Breakwell posed four questions, which included the challenging, 'What was *Unword* about?' My responses to the questionnaire ran to four pages mixing description of each event with nuanced responses, including progression of the work and its documentation during development.<sup>24</sup>

The digital version of *Unword*, at this point in time (2010), can be screened at dimensions scaleable according to the need, from centimetres to several metres. The question can now be asked, as Kalyva has noted:

... is there a difference, and if so what is the difference, between viewing a performance and viewing its recording? Surely there is the factor of threat and keeping it under check, for presumably ... one can interfere with a performance; or to put it another way, the whole point of a performance is this conditional interaction.<sup>25</sup>

Conditional interaction refers to the physical distance between the point of consumption and the place of product(ion). The invisible fourth wall in theatre or cinema is the membrane through which the product is delivered, regardless of the state, or frame of mind, of the audience. The agency of each member of an audience is restricted – by custom – to removing oneself from the auditorium. The conditions for delivering performance-based art in the broadest cultural sense are similar to the conditions prevalent for other forms of consumption in the late-capitalist context: producers meet consumers' demands and expectations but on condition the consumer adopts the artist's *règle du jeu*. The arrangement is symbiotic, as by tradition it prevents confusion between the object and the context in which exchange takes place.

In the *Unword* series, the rules met the demand for events and sounds that departed from traditions of narrative, whilst a framing distance would be maintained by the physical delineation of the space. In other words, the audience would be spectators (of a spectacle) and not participants.<sup>26</sup> The film, and later digital documentation, as artworks in their own right,

similarly maintain a distancing frame, the membrane of the screen. With the liveness and the presence of the performer(s) removed, the condition of interaction changes the terms of individual agency: the screened image can be approached and appropriated into the physical space of the viewer. This in itself is dependent on varying degrees of authority for such physical interaction, right up to the most authoritative qualifying agency, that of ownership. The assumption is that the gallerist, the collector and the gallery visitor are able to encounter the work as the artist(s) intended, though agency of action has moved from the performer to the audience (or to the owner, with the ultimate agency of the destruction of the artwork.) The modality of encounter switches from one tradition to another, from that of theatre and cinema, where agency is limited, to that of the gallery, where agency in the physical act of viewing is essential. As Kalyva observes: 'This act exposes the limits of social constructs such as subject and object, galleries and spectators, not at the level of the *effect*, but of the mechanisms that create, enable, and sustain such constructs'.<sup>27</sup>

The distinct separation between performers and audience in *Unword*, with the audience seated or corralled at one end of the space, provided a 'closed studio' situation within which the Photographer could record the progress of each performance with the film camera. The concurrence of the process of both recording and re-presenting the events was echoed in another later performance, *The Institution*, in which a video camera linked to a monitor was employed to similar effect.<sup>28</sup>

Like the formality of the event itself, the subsequent editing of the three film records maintained the separation between the activity of performing and the activity of viewing the performance. The presence of an audience at each event is never visible on film, but neither too is that of the Photographer, the one performer who was visible to the audience for the entire duration of the piece. The images and sounds encountered in the *Unword* digital document, are related to each of the performances but they are not *of* the performances. Some associations can be drawn here with speech acts and the performative and 'Bakhtin's notion of dialogue ... where the condi-

tions of communication and the choices of speakers depend on what has already been said, the conditions of the conversation (situation, purpose, etc.) and the framework within which the speaker thinks he or she will be understood'.<sup>29</sup> This echoes some of Wittgenstein's 'language games' where 'the utterance cannot be separated from the speaker, or from the systems of meaning in which speaker and hearer are enmeshed'.<sup>30</sup> (This alternative description of the convergence of audience with performers also conjures the image of Breakwell enmeshed and wrestling with the word sheets used in the event, before their disposal.)

The audience entering the performance space anticipated an experience based not only on transgression of the norms of theatre but also on the novelty of someone known to be a visual artist working in a theatrical context. Similarly, visitors to a sculpture collection at the Henry Moore Institute do not expect to encounter the two-dimensional projected image of *Unword*, in a space reserved for three-dimensional objects. But nonetheless what is quickly understood is the relationship between the spatiality of their act of viewing – screen to viewer – and the hybrid spatiality of the images and sounds they observe. This 'social act of communication as participation and selection'<sup>31</sup> and the performative occurs through both the advance of motion picture technologies – in this case digital video and the video projector – and the willingness of the artists, Breakwell and Leggett, to experiment with the possibilities thereby afforded. The exhibiting institution both facilitates and validates the artwork, now independent of the original *Unword* series and able to become, as portable and reproducible media, an object of study. The art dealer is thereby able to exploit the artwork as an object of monetary worth, essential to the economics of collecting, the trading of rare objects and the vagaries of connoisseurship from which the benefits of income to the artists cannot be denied.

The placing of the audience in the two versions of *Unsculpt* – the performance and the digital video projection – advance the notion of individual agency as an important component of meaning being made from the experience of either form. As with *Unword*, planning and communication with performers and the tempo and



cueing of the stages, of entries and exits, was essential.

The intervention Hilliard and Breakwell were about to make with *Unsculpt* relied initially on establishing the audience in, for most of them, the familiar space of an art gallery vernissage. The A3 publicity flyer circulating announced 'a presentation of work' by the two artists with the words 'action space' underlined in Hilliard's 'Notes', contained on a panel in the centre of the sheet. The 'Notes' he paraphrased to begin the proceedings using a microphone and public address system, his image appearing on a video monitor to his left side (the new media technology of the period). Though sound was not recorded, the image and the events that followed were recorded to videotape, adding to the experience for the audience a novel and quite different way of *becoming* a part of the artwork. As the video camera panned around the room, images of both the performer and audience members were linked together within the frame. The familiar membrane between the televisual subject and audience dissolved as the camera continued to relay images throughout the ensuing evening.

The entrance of the three other performers (Breakwell, Deacon and Rice) had the effect of clearing away the audience from around the pieces of sculpture amongst which the crowd were standing as Hilliard spoke. Covering the objects with the *Unsculpt* word sheets (Figure 6) took some ten-to-fifteen minutes, the chatter from the crowd increasing, only ceasing at the point the first sledgehammer began to demolish the covered objects. But within minutes the

Fig. 6. First arrivals at the *Unsculpt* opening, London New Arts Lab, ground floor gallery / performance space, viewed towards the street. Breakwell's prints on the walls.

Fig. 7. Breakwell shrouds the sculpture with *Unsculpt* word sheets, Hilliard in background, view towards the cinema projection box.



physical effort of smashing wood and steel were taking a toll on the performers and individuals in the crowd from both genders began to provide them with respite (Figure 7). This was encouraged by several factors emerging as events progressed: the close proximity of performers and audience, due to the absence of a clear 'stage' area; the images on the video monitor dissolving the membrane between the two designated groupings; and even the coldness of the winter night in an unheated building that encouraged people to keep moving about and, in some cases, physically participate.

As the action began to draw to a close, with the debris being shifted to the skip outside in the street, so the crowd returned to the edges of the space to allow the new works, already heralded by Hilliard in the poster and during his speech, to be built. As the scaffolding poles were being bolted together and taking shape across the space, many gathered around the monitor to watch the playback from the videotape recording of the earlier events. Participation with and reflection upon the evening's activities by the viewers of the video, as part of an over-arching notion of performance, moved back and forth between the edges and centre(s) of the stage. Now events were moving toward the new work, establishing a fresh set of rela-

tionships between components and the site in which they were located. The proposition emerging was that art-making was moving away from the perfection of form of three-dimensional objects towards provisional and ephemeral visual concepts that foregrounded the presence of the individual within a place and encouraged physical interaction of the audience with(in) the artwork.

As Hilliard had determined at the planning stages in defining what the New Works were to be:

The 'object' is a kind a matrix, an intermediate stage between my 'performance' in the gallery and the resultant 'performance' of the spectators ... a formalised expression of my response to the environment resolved as participatory structures.<sup>32</sup>

The events that Breakwell had planned had brought an altogether different expression of how the object was to be regarded. The placing of the audience was anticipated not only in the physical arrangement of spaces for the evening and the events that were to occur but also through the organisation of image-makers, filmmaker and photographers, for the subsequent re-enactment through technology, of the trans-

gressing *Unsculpt* events. The realisation that images and speech can be placed in contexts productive for the making of knowledge has recently been described by Kalyva:

Understanding speech as an act can help us understand the *conditions* of the social creation of meaning and the *assumptions* we make in the process. Confronted with a polarised moral judgement of art between truth and entertainment, the work may risk its own presence ...<sup>33</sup>

The risk for Breakwell was worth taking. Groups of art students from this point on would see the images as part of Breakwell's program and practice of changing attitudes through the application of humour, irony and mockery of visual art institutions intent upon establishing good taste and orders of natural progression. Kalyva succinctly concludes:

By manipulating the authority of institutional discourse, and by inverting the temporal relation between presence and absence, acceptance and censorship, the act of eating one's words and disappearing one's work suspends the subject forever: the subject of the artist, and of the viewing subject of the spectator and of art.<sup>34</sup>

The inversions implied in the event produced curious resonances in the infamous *Crashed Cars* exhibition that followed in the IRAT gallery space during April, mounted by the writer and celebrity J.G. Ballard. Ballard records his incredulity at the smashed wrecks he had towed into the space being vandalised during the following weeks by visitors.

What he underestimated was the force of the reaction and the desire on the part of some visitors to continue with the process of destruction and desecration of the cars ... [confirming] Ballard's thesis that social relations between individuals were now increasingly complicated by our relationship with what he termed the 'technological landscape'.<sup>35</sup>

Breakwell and Hilliard's provocations of passive gallery goers had clearly encouraged visitors to the New Arts Lab to participate in what they discovered, though the main complication



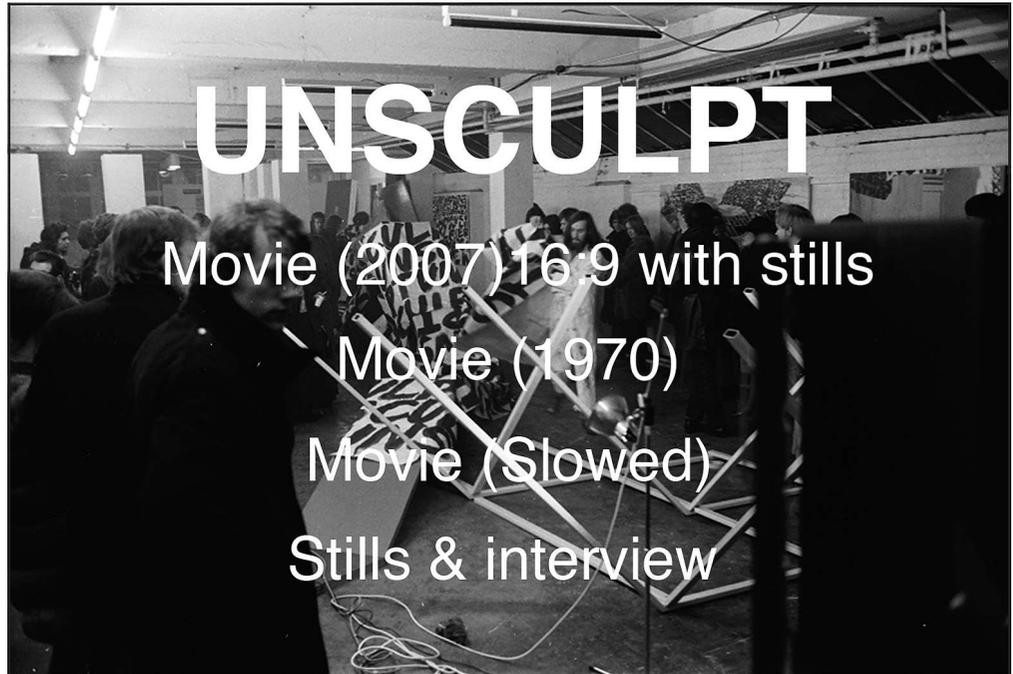
in the landscape presented to regular users of the Lab in Ballard's show was a pile of stinking cars virtually blocking access to the working areas.<sup>36</sup>

Fig. 8. *Unsculpt*, the destruction in full swing, the author in foreground with 16mm Bolex film camera.

The shift of all the extant *Unsculpt* material to digital video in 2004 – the videotape made on the night was lost, being recycled soon after the event<sup>37</sup> – enabled an interactive format to be designed, thus introducing further and unanticipated levels of performance participation for the viewing subject. An introductory menu (Figure 8) offers several options: to see and hear the eight-minute version, compiling film, photographs and sound in 16:9 aspect (2004), with the additional option of being able to 'skip' through to each of the sections (chapters) of the event; or to see the original 16mm film at twenty-four frames per second in 4:3 aspect; to see the 16mm film slowed by forty per cent to approximately ten frames per second; to see a 'slide show' of the original photographs and at the same time hear the complete unedited twelve-minute recording made in 1970 (see Exhibit B: The *Unsculpt* DVD Menu).

The digital video restoration and reconstruction of the *One* event film similarly produced a 'matrix' of objects, relayed by media formats over space and time, as recordings that enable a different condition of interaction and participation within the events of the day. For the contemporary audience interaction with the digital video is limited to selecting the format and size of the screen the work is viewed on, a significant factor in the post-reception of the artwork. In such circumstances, where the

Fig. 9. The *Unsculpt* DVD with four menu options superimposed over an image of the shrouding of the work, in the foreground right, the video monitor edge.



screen is encountered during the playing of the digital video, echoes the 'conditional interaction' of the original event, where the electronic connection between activity in the gallery and images on the monitor at street level create associations with the Apollo images on the television sets in the neighbouring streets. As Duncan White has subsequently observed, the aesthetics of expanded cinema, a developing mode of practice amongst filmmakers at the time, in deliberately separating the material of media images and their production as part of the performance and audience experience, found new spaces in the streets of London.

In many ways, *One* ... acts as an Expanded Cinema document. Gallery, video, film and performance meet within a context of cinematic production – as a socially codified set of experiences. The earth-bound transmission/production of the image is juxtaposed with the aura of heavenly (satellite) broadcasting and space travel. Again the way in which a form of reception gathers 'distances into itself in order to redistribute them according to its own program' becomes the material of the live viewing and its recording; the temporal and spatial arrangements built into the conditions of media reception again act as

the material of a practice that might be associated with Expanded Cinema.<sup>38</sup>

*One*, an 'object as a matrix', initiated as a performance, continued to develop during the day itself, and subsequently through the following years. The celebratory birthday event was tinged with irony, in which useless activity performed by labourers ended in cake-eating and champagne, involving the traditionally bizarre mix of rich and poor, collectors and artists, and terminating with the destruction of the floor and the exit of the gallery owner to new premises. A year later, a screening at the new Angela Flowers Gallery of the just completed 16mm film version occurred.<sup>39</sup> In this part of the matrix, moonshot images<sup>40</sup> had been added to the footage shot the year before, together with shots gathered using the analysis projector as a performance tool. In a darkened room, the projector throws the image onto a back-projection screen like a crude optical printer.<sup>41</sup> The screen and the projector are observed being operated by an unseen hand, the filmmaker in the act of manipulating the appearance of the images; the sequences of the Moon walkers and those of the labouring shovellers; the edges of the image and the horizon line on the Moon; the candles at the birthday and the lamp in the projector. The extension of performance

as filmic intervention included spoken reflections on the abstracted nature and ambiguities of the visual record that were themselves lost from the magnetic stripe, of which no duplicate or master was made.<sup>42</sup>

The restoration process continued the performance through to re-establishing a document for the present times, employing the affordances of digital technology. This included improving the appearance of many shots, being able to freeze-frame others to work together with the Breakwell voiceover, some parts of which were re-recorded by Breakwell in London. A reworking of the later sections were in response to the fact that the reflective words had been lost to electro-magnetic decay; beyond imagining what had been said, it was decided it was better to restore what was clearly evident. The record – the completed DVD – was premiered again at the Angela Flowers Gallery in 2004 and then, together with the digital transfer from the original faded 16mm film, a tape and DVD were lodged with Lux and the British Film and Video Artists' Study Collection for subsequent hire or study.

## Conclusion

The 'conditional interaction' described by Kalyva identifies the position of the observer and the limits of their participation within the ceremonies of cultural activity. The idea of 'situated action'<sup>43</sup> arising from Heidegger's *dasein*, of *being* (there, in the moment), are all useful in understanding how the event, whether formalised or quotidian, is more often than not intuitively framed by the participant who is in the process of sharing events as they happen. This is especially true for those events encountered in a cultural, rather than say industrial or commercial, precinct. Provisional reasoning, responses or interaction provide a context for understanding what is happening. As two passers-by to the window of Angela Flowers Gallery were heard to say to one another when inspecting the image on the monitor face: '*Es ist der Mond*' (It's the Moon), to which the other replied, '*Nein, es ist Kunst*' (No, it's art).

Conditional interaction applies differently upon encountering the restoration of analogue

media objects into the digital domain. Agency operates not only the machine delivering the sound and images, but also allows options for the scale, position and surrounding context for the screen itself. As objects of study, the ideas of the artists are compromised no more than comment and discussion following the original, live performance. The context, place and presence central to the experience of the earlier versions, come to be replaced by the conditions of interaction proposed by the existence of the document (the documentary) for study. Discourse from the time of the performances to the present, plays out through different channels – the liner notes essay for DVD, in exhibition catalogues, in books and through online resources, where it is retrieved, relived, reframed.

The contemporary technologies of digital video in all its forms – in galleries, on the Web, on mobile devices – in appealing to spontaneity and informality, encourages and provokes the reframing of the original event into a new presence. This extends the impetus initiated by the performers of a previous time, bringing about the certainty of ceremony and redefining context within the moment of performance.

In 1970 Breakwell posed four questions included the challenging, 'What was *Unword* about?' My part response, was that it was 'about how you can start at one point and keep working it until you've discovered a vanishing point.'<sup>44</sup> Back then it was impossible to predict that in 2010, with the ever-expanding affordances for descriptions of media and performance, the vanishing point would become a task of continuous exploration.

*Acknowledgement:* Ian Breakwell's creative and fraternal presence remains sorely missed and my appreciation is extended to his partner, Felicity Sparrow, for her comments. The Estate of Ian Breakwell is represented by Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London. With thanks to John Hilliard for his cooperation during the Unsculpt restoration, and to Eve Kalyva for stimulating correspondence during the preparation of this chapter.

### Exhibit A: Description of the *Unword 2* performance at the Institute for Contemporary Art (ICA) on 17 October 1969 (Ian Breakwell, c. 1969)

... The audience then passed through to the performance area to find it filled with seemingly impenetrable sheets of paper stretching from ceiling to floor (15 feet high) and covered with words (random extracts from Ian Breakwell's prose texts). (Figure 1.)

Two films were projected onto the front wall of words. The first film lasted three minutes and was called 'Language Lesson'; the second film, also lasting three minutes was called 'Bio-Mechanic Man'. A third film was then projected onto the sheets of words, a film demonstrating how to shear sheep; simultaneously a tape-recording of eye-sign test dialogue began to play. Both tape and film continued throughout the subsequent action.

During the subsequent action a film of an aero-engine destroying itself was run continuously onto a side wall in forward then in reverse, and gradually the film itself was physically destroyed by the projectionist.

Five minutes after the beginning of the tape and film, Breakwell appeared from out of the forest of words and slowly began to bite at the sheets and to tear down the sheets of words with his teeth. As he tore down a layer of words another would be revealed, until eventually he reached the back wall of the room, and the removal of the last sheets of words revealed a seated girl, her body completely enclosed in a white straightjacket. On the front of the straight-jacket were stapled a dress, stockings and shoes in the appropriate places; a hat was on her head. Her face remained expressionless.

The projected film-image, which had inevitably increased in size as each layer of word-sheets was removed, now covered the area of the back wall, which included the seated girl.

Breakwell pulled off the clothes, which were fastened to the girl's straightjacket. He nailed the clothes and hat in the outline of a figure onto the wall beside the seated girl. He then took the torn sheets of words, which covered the floor and stapled them to each other and to the girl's straightjacket until the girl and

the floor area were covered with words in a kind of robe which stretched to the feet of the audience.

Breakwell exited and John Hilliard entered wearing a polythene suit and carrying a crop-sprayer filled with black paint on his back; he sprayed the complete word-robe.<sup>45</sup>

### Exhibit B: The *Unsculpt* DVD Menu

This DVD, made in 2007, brings together those materials and uses four means of presentation:

1. Digital video composite in 16:9 format, with 16mm movie and stills made during the event at the Institute for Research in Art and Technology, (IRAT, or the new London Arts Lab) in February 1970 including an interview with Ian Breakwell made shortly after the event and the statement spoken by John Hilliard during the event, re-recorded by Hilliard in 2007. This digital video edited version brings together all the material in about the sequence it originally occurred, with the film 'slowed down' in several sections.

The material is also shown as individual components:

2. Movie (1970) running at 25 frames per second (fps) with a duration of 1m 25s.

The original 16mm footage was a 'roll end' of less than 100 feet in length, all that could be afforded at the time. The light in the gallery was also at a low level and in order to improve the exposure, the camera was run at the lower speed (12 fps) that also had the benefit of extending the duration of available film.

3. Movie (1970) showing at 10 fps with a duration of 3m 20s.

As most of the shot lengths were very brief, for reasons given above, this version is the same as at 2, slowed by about forty per cent to enable the movie to be viewed in more detail. (Option: spoken sound commentary by Mike Leggett in 2008,

identifying people visible, with reflections and comment on the occasion.)

4. Stills and Interviews, including all the still photographs extant at the time of the 2007

reconstruction, shown as a slide show, together with the unedited interview made with Ian Breakwell by Mike Leggett shortly after the event. (12 mins)

## Notes

1. Eve Kalyva, 'Textual Counterparts: A Performative Beyond Visual Attention?', *Intersections 35th Annual Conference*, Association of Art Historians, Manchester Metropolitan University, UK, 2–4 April 2009, p. 13.
2. Victoria Worsley, 'Ian Breakwell's UNWORD' (exhibition catalogue), Leeds: Henry Moore Institute, 2005.
3. A Leica M2 with 35mm lens and 400 ASA film was used at the Compendium bookshop in Camden Town, London.
4. The Spectro analysis projector was designed for the scientific analysis of usually slow-motion film produced by high speed filming of engineering events. One of the films projected on the word sheets was such a film, showing the slow-motion destruction of an Olympus jet engine compressor under test during development at the Bristol-Siddeley factory where Leggett worked from 1966 to 1968. The projector was designed to run at sixteen, eight, four and two frames per second, as well as freeze frame. In *Unword* it was used, in effect, to slow down the otherwise rapid passage of frames when projected on a normal projector at twenty-four frames per second.
5. 'The governing dictum whilst combining the three films into one was to remove all points of reference and discontinuity between the three films'; Mike Leggett, 'Statement of explanation' [of the *Unword* films], Breakwell/Leggett Archive, Henry Moore Institute, c. 1970.
6. An alternative was to use an optical printer to make a copy negative in which each frame was duplicated twelve times. The London Film-makers' Co-op workshop was at this time just establishing and it would be some years before an optical printer was to be acquired. Until that time, the process was prohibitively expensive to commission using the commercial laboratories.
7. Final Cut Pro, developed for the Macintosh computer, which the author had been using already for a decade.
8. An edition of *Unword* was acquired by the Henry Moore Institute at the Leeds and Bradford Art Gallery. This included a digibeta master videotape, DVD copies and copious photographs and texts, all signed by Breakwell; the digibeta master is used for copying to whatever exhibition media format is required.
9. One of the prepared tapes used in the performances, 'Ready-Observe', was edited from an original sound roll recorded for a science documentary made at the BBC, where Leggett worked from 1968 to 1971.
10. One of the assistants was Richard Deacon, who had been a student of Breakwell and Hilliard between 1969–70 when they were teaching at Somerset College of Art, Taunton, between 1968–73. The other assistant, Andrew Rice, was a student at St Martins Art School, who bore a remarkable physical resemblance to Breakwell, probably unintended.
11. Ian Breakwell 'Presentation of work by Ian Breakwell and John Hilliard at the London New Arts Laboratory: Feb 28 – Mar 21 1970', Breakwell/Leggett Archive, Henry Moore Institute, also published in 'John Hilliard and Ian Breakwell' in *Studio International*, September 1970, pp. 94–95. Breakwell's recollection in a recorded interview with Victoria Worsley included: 'The events of the opening, recorded up to this point on video-tape, were now played back to the "audience". At the same time Hilliard and the two assistants commenced the erection of a structure built of scaffold poles. As the last pole was positioned, the gallery lights were extinguished, and ultra-violet (black) lights were switched on. Hilliard then began to paint the scaffolding with fluorescent blue paint, so that the form emerged under the light as he proceeded. When the fluorescent structure was complete the opening of the exhibition terminated.'
12. John Hilliard poster statement, '*Unsculpt* Notes', London: Institute for Research in Art and Technology (IRAT), Tate Modern Collection / British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, 1970.
13. Intended as the first of a series of short reports documenting performance-based events. Unfortunately the series was short-lived, as the cost of paying for film and processing was rarely included in anyone's budgets and the cheaper-to-use portable video was a couple of years off. Stuart Brisley's 'Garage' event at the Edinburgh Festival in 1971 was one however, and Rose Finn-Kelsey's 'Flag' series was another.
14. Mick Stubbs and Andrew Walker, who shared Mike Leggett's camera.

15. Mike Leggett, *Video + Video/Film – Some Possibilities Suggested by Some Experience* (Exeter: Exeter College of Art & Design, 1973).
16. Without a proper budget, the soundtrack for the film was mixed onto a magnetic stripe on the side of the print, using a magnetic track-equipped projector. The method was not intended for permanence and led to the soundtrack's rapid deterioration. Like the *Unword* film, it was put to one side and emerged many years later at the bottom of a pile of cans that had been moved from Devon, to Bristol and then the roof of a house in Reigate, Surrey, from where it was recovered in 2002.
17. Mike Leggett, typescript letter dated 17.12.74 (London, 1974).
18. Kalyva, 'Textual Counterparts', p. 13; fn 1.
19. Breakwell was employed as caretaker at the Bristol Arts Centre, which in 1966 had a small theatre/cinema and gallery space.
20. Ian Breakwell and Mike Leggett, *Sheet*, 16mm, black and white, sound, 21 minutes, 1970. 'A film of architectural, indoor and countryside locations in which a three metre square white linen sheet appears within each location as a focal point. Sometimes like a billowing sail, at other times a discarded rag or a shroud.' (Ian Breakwell, *Ian Breakwell* (DVD), British Film Institute, 2007). The fascination with landscape and the ethereality of time is also explored in *Sheet*. Here the spectator's eye is focused by the insertion of a white sheet in the image. *Sheet*, which is one of the few films featured in the season that explores London's streets and buildings at that time, succeeds in leading the viewer to engage with place, atmosphere and duration.' (A.L. Rees, *Shoot, Shoot, Shoot: British Avant-Garde Film of the 1960s and 1970s* [DVD liner notes] London: Lux, 2006.)
21. The crisis of having the means to create documentation continues to the present, requiring a more or less continuous process of transposition from 'old media' to 'new media' as the material substrate of any medium succumbs to ageing and decay.
22. Worsley, 'Ian Breakwell's *Unword*'; Ian Breakwell's statements from 'John Hilliard and Ian Breakwell', *Studio International*, September 1970, p. 95.
23. Ian Breakwell (ed.), *Unword Questionnaire 28.4.1970* (London: Tate Archive / British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, 1970).
24. Leggett, 'Reply to *Unword* Questionnaire', in Breakwell, *Unword Questionnaire 28.4.1970*. At the time of writing, the whereabouts of other people's responses to the questionnaire are unknown, although it is hoped that further material will be found in the Tate Archive, deposited by Breakwell before his passing in 2005.
25. Eve Kalyva, email correspondence 26 May 2009.
26. 'Participatory theatre' was in vogue at this time amongst thespians and desperately avoided by visual artists developing a performance practice – depending on the *règle du jeu*.
27. Kalyva, 'Textual Counterparts', p. 15.
28. Mike Leggett, 'Early Video Art as Private Performance', conference paper, Re:live Media Art History Conference, University of Melbourne, Australia, 2009.
29. Eve Kalyva, 'Documenting Performance', *Reading (about)/Looking (at) Art: Image/Text Juxtapositions in Early British Conceptual Art*, PhD Thesis, University of Leeds, 2010, ms. pp. 7.
30. Paul Dourish *Where the Action Is: The Foundations of Embodied Interaction* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2001).
31. Ibid.
32. John Hilliard, '*Unsculpt* Notes' (London: Institute for Research in Art and Technology [IRAT], 1970).
33. Kalyva, 'Textual Counterparts', p. 15.
34. Ibid.
35. Simon Ford, 'A Psychopathic Hymn: J.G. Ballard's *Crashed Car* Exhibition of 1970', *Seconds* (September, 2005).
36. J.G. Ballard, though generously supporting IRAT as one of the Trustees – a condition of the licensed occupation of the building from the local Council – thereafter in his book *The Kindness of Women* (London: Harper Collins, 1991), made bitter and sardonic references to the New London Arts Lab and its users. By some irony, a copy of the book was discovered during the preparation of this essay in a second-hand bookshop in Canberra, Australia.
37. CATS, who managed the video equipment at IRAT, like all artist-run organisations at the time had no public funding, so materials used in the making of film or video works were at a premium. Although making art objects was viewed with suspicion by many users of the Lab (IRAT), the art of the ephemeral being elevated,

the tapes for videotape recorders at this time were expensive items and little remains of the works recorded on them before the tapes were reused.

38. Duncan White, 'Expanded Cinema in the 1970s: Cinema, Television and the Gallery', in *Expanded Cinema: The Live Record* (London: National Film Theatre, 2008).
39. The print was commissioned and paid for by the Angela Flowers Gallery.
40. The moon shot images used in the film were not captured during the Apollo 14 mission but one of the subsequent missions, Apollo 15–17.
41. An optical printer allows multiple frames to be printed from one frame of film, usually an automated process, in the case of *Unword*, printing twelve frames from each frame of the negative.
42. Ironically, the videotapes made of the early Moon landings including Apollo 11 have also succumbed to the ravages of time and have either faded or, in the majority, were simply re-used without (unbelievably!) archival copies being made, either by NASA or the BBC. A recent call went out to the world's media asking for remaining copies of tapes to be donated to NASA; conservation of time-based histories is an issue not confined only to artists.
43. Lucy Suchman, *Plans and Situated Actions: The Problem of Human–Machine Communication* (Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987).
44. Mike Leggett, 'Reply to Unword Questionnaire', in Ian Breakwell (ed.), *Unword Questionnaire 28.4.1970* (London: Tate Archive / British Artists' Film and Video Study Collection, 1970).
45. Text written by Ian Breakwell in the papers and photographs relating to Ian Breakwell and Mike Leggett's *Unword*, Acc. No. 2005.455, Leeds Museums & Galleries (Henry Moore Institute Archive).