



## Technoparticipation: Scrapbooks, stories and secrets

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In 1993, when I was aged 15 whilst at secondary school, I discovered *Dymaxion Chronofile*, architect Buckminster Fuller's very large scrapbook which he documented his life every 15 minutes from 1920 to 1983. Around the same time, my art teacher suggested that I keep a scrapbook of images. This reflective account explores how I have worked with imagery of pages from that very large scrapbook I kept when I was a teenager in the 1990s for just over five years – my personal private archived of images that in many ways helped to shape my understanding of (gay) male desire at a time when I felt too uncomfortable to come out as gay. The account begins with a poem I have written reflecting upon my motivations around the scrapbook and about the sociocultural context and time which it was produced in; 1990s homophobic suburban Britain. Fast forwarding from the early 1990s to 2021, the account then explains how I returned to my scrapbook as a source of inspiration for creating a poetry film as part of a body of work excavating my personal archive as an artist of over 25 years. The account then discusses how I made use of my scrapbook poetry film as part of *Technoparticipation* – an ongoing practice-as-research project that explores how technology becomes an additional performer/participant. In other words, how technology *participates*.

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## Introduction: The Scrapbook

In 1993, at a time when I was exploring my sexuality as a teenager, my schoolteacher suggested that I keep a scrapbook of images as a resource bank (Figures 1–6). The scrapbook far outlived my teacher’s initial suggestion and the finding, scrapping and juxtaposing of images together from a wide range of sources continued until 1998 by which time the scrapbook was 300 pages and extremely heavy. It wasn’t just one scrapbook; my scrapbook was several scrapbooks welded together to create a monument of my life at that time. In the same manner of Scottish poet Edwin Morgan’s love of scrapbooks, my scrapbooks were ‘a mixture of autobiography, documentary, and art’ (DigitisingMorgan, 2022).



Figure 1: Front cover of my scrapbook (1993-1998). Courtesy of Lee Campbell.



Figure 2: Double page spread of scrapbook. Photo: Lee Campbell.



Figure 3: Double page spread of scrapbook. Photo: Lee Campbell.



Figure 4: Double page spread of scrapbook. Photo: Lee Campbell.



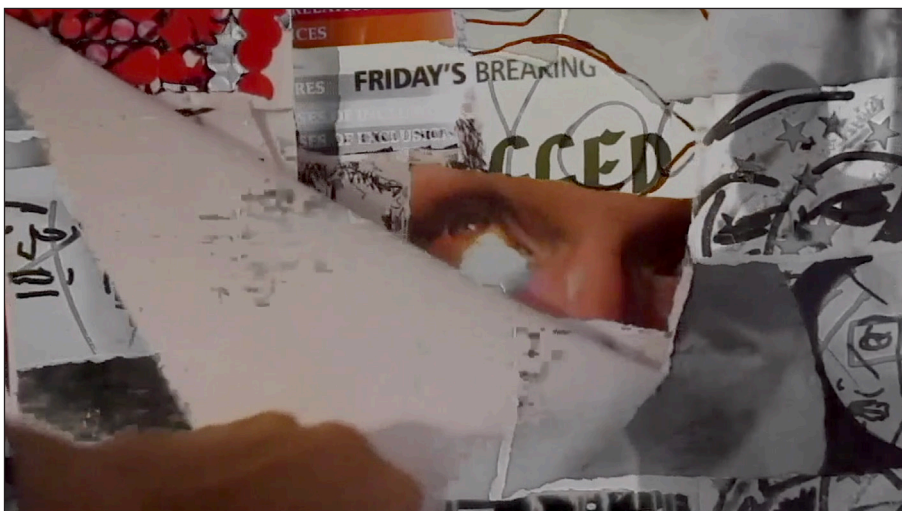
Figure 5: Double page spread of scrapbook. Photo: Lee Campbell.



## The Filmic Scrapbook

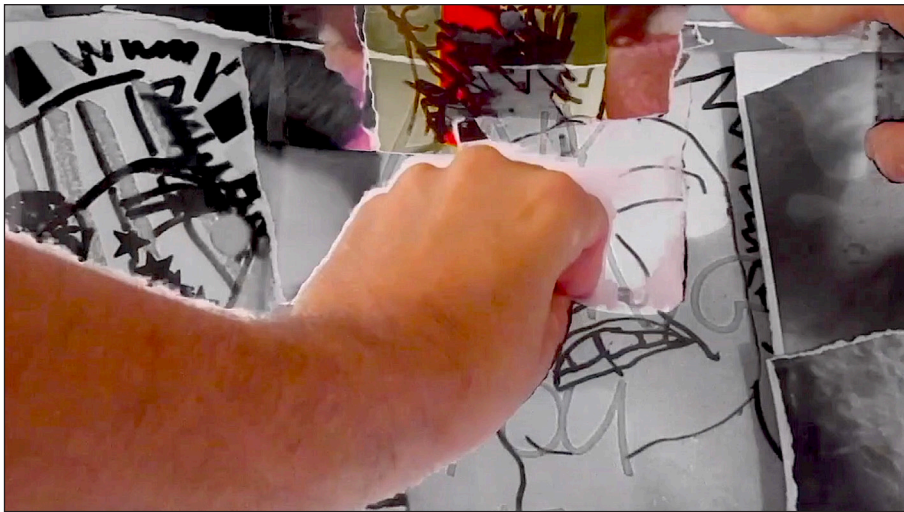
Beginning a perpetual process of making and remaking, constantly recycling myself, constantly re quoting myself to create a density, in late 2019, I began making a series of *Let Rip* films which reused/recycled bodies of my past artwork (Campbell, 2022b). These films used the rip as both metaphor, symbol and structure to build upon existing work and employed the action and sonic motif of ripping to create new forms out of 'old' practice and indeed show new versions of 'old' me (Figures 7–8).<sup>1</sup> The 'rip' in terms of this work could be defined as creating visual textures on screen, which both concealed as much as they revealed, and that ripping something apart did reveal certain things about my homosexuality. Inspired by Crawford Barton's home movies which documented his life as a child and then into adulthood with his male partner, *Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook* (2021) revisits my teenage scrapbook through the lens of my (now adult) queer eye. In *Reel in the Closet* (2015), the narrator talks about Barton's home movies that he made over many decades and says 'they're (Barton and his male partner) interested in the same things as everybody else but at the same time there's a definite queer eye behind the camera'. What could I learn about myself by revisiting the scrapbook?

Presenting an intimate history of sight (mine), of not seeing yourself (represented in mainstream pop culture) and discovering a part of yourself through seeing, *Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook* (2021) tapped into a lot of personal and political issues but mostly internalised homophobia (Figure 9). The voiceover is my voice reciting lines of poetry that I have written that look back in retrospect and reflect upon my life at the time of me producing the scrapbook. Each word or each phrase within the poem connects to different parts of the scrapbook imagery reflect upon how I understand the significance



**Figure 7:** Lee Campbell (dir.) *Let Rip: A Personal History of Seeing and Not Seeing*, 2019. United Kingdom © Lee Campbell Productions.

of that imagery now as an out gay man in my forties. Like layers of a painting, each page of the scrapbook imagery forms one layer juxtaposed with other pages/ layers of memory that collectively salvage and monumentalise what could otherwise be the detritus of my life. The rips and tears and the turned-up edges of the scrapbook printed material now as digitised images appear flat on the computer screen. Green-screen processes are again employed to achieve seductive surfaces to beckon the viewer to want to see them in real life thus making the reality of viewing the now-destroyed physical scrapbook in the flesh even more desirable.



**Figure 8:** Lee Campbell (dir.) *Let Rip: A Personal History of Seeing and Not Seeing*, 2019. United Kingdom © Lee Campbell Productions.



**Figure 9:** Lee Campbell, *Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook*. 2022. Promotional poster. Courtesy of Lee Campbell.

Extending Mike Mashon's idea that 'there's something very real and very visceral about a person shooting a very personal film' (in *Reel in the Closet* by Stu Maddox, 2015), the pages of my scrapbook in the film appear animated to give the impression of them ripping with subsequent pages coming through. But not so much ripping but more smudging out (Figures 10–12). On the one hand I am building the image and on the other hand ripping out the image – this is being seen from the image being built up whereas all the other times (in other films like *Let Rip: A Personal History...*). I am destroying the image.



Figure 10: Lee Campbell (dir.) *Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook*, 2022. United Kingdom © Lee Campbell Productions.



Figure 11: Lee Campbell (dir.) *Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook*, 2022. United Kingdom © Lee Campbell Productions.



Figure 12: Lee Campbell (dir.) *Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook*, 2022. United Kingdom © Lee Campbell Productions.

### The In-Between Scrapbook

In a recent interview between myself and Jane Glennie for *Moving Poems* magazine (Glennie, 2022), Jane asked, ‘How could Zoom performances during lockdown lead to a whole new kind of poetry film?’. Jane asked this in connection to how, as part of my ongoing practice-as-research project *Technoparticipation* (Campbell, 2022a, 2022c, 2017a, 2017b),<sup>2</sup> since late 2020, I have created a bridge between video, poetry and performance used Zoom’s green screen effect to create performative filmic backdrops (Figures 13–16). I aim to make a platform as deadening and flattening as Zoom have ‘life’ (I use the term ‘life’ as a paraphrase of a conversation that I had with Dr Mark Childs from Durham University after an iteration of *Clever at Seeing without Being Seen* at the Star and Shadow Cinema, Newcastle in November 2022). These performances are made possible (and only possible) by me using Zoom where I make full usage of the greenscreen ‘Add Video’ backdrop option and insert collaged versions of my previous poetry films including *Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook*. The Zoom performance version of this film was entitled *Let Rip: Dymaxion Homofile*, a play on words of Buckminster Fuller’s scrapbook *Dymaxion Chronofile* (Figure 17). As part of *SPHERE Festival 2021*, I was asked by host Aritra Chatterjee as part of an artist discussion I took part in, ‘Do you feel sad? Is virtual performance satisfying enough? Or is it just filling in the blanks right now?’ I remarked that I really missed the physicality/the hapticality of live performance in real life and although during my Zoom performances I do bring in physical props to perform with i.e. the cassette tape recorder in *Clever*, I was starting to feel that real urge to ‘get back’ to performing in the real word ‘proper’. For *transitstation voices* #3 in

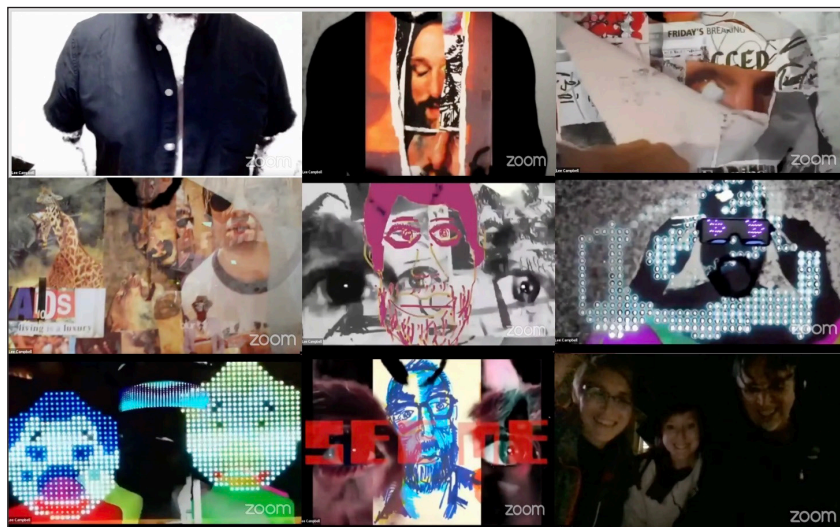
Summer 2021, an online event I was invited to perform in via Zoom, I printed out digital copies of pages of the scrapbook to use throughout the performance, the first time I had done so. I did not anticipate before the performance started exactly what I would do with them. The moment in the performance where I start to play with the pages of the scrapbook bought an exciting physicality back into the digital space – these pages that conjured up so many (difficult) memories for me. Pages of the scrapbook appearing digitally on screen as the green screen effect complexified by me engaging with the pages physically. Up to that point, much of the performance in terms of what I said and did, had been rehearsed but this moment with the pages was a breakthrough moment of off-the-cuff improvisation, serendipitous play, of exploring for the first time in front of an audience.



Figure 13: Lee Campbell, Clever at Seeing without Being Seen. 2021. Promotional poster. Courtesy of Lee Campbell.



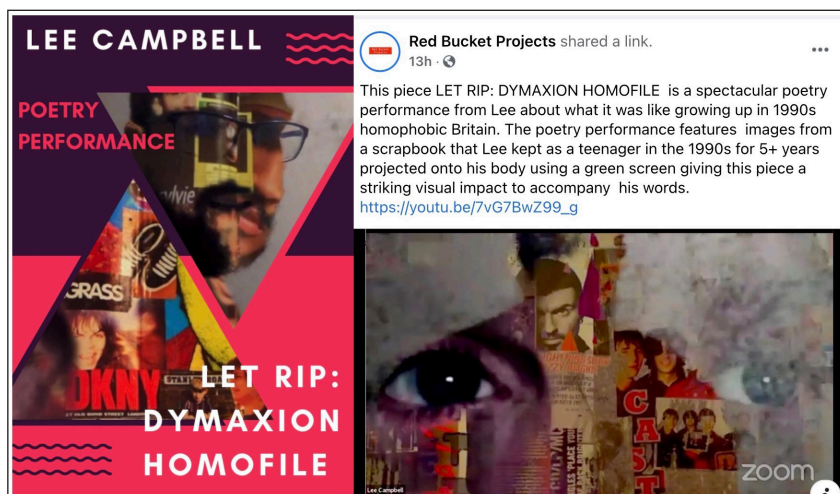
Figure 14: Lee Campbell, Clever at Seeing without Being Seen. 2021. Live Zoom performance. Courtesy of Lee Campbell.



**Figure 15:** Lee Campbell, *Clever at Seeing without Being Seen* 2022. Live Zoom performance for Re-connect Art Festival organised by Prague Biennale Foundation. Courtesy of Lee Campbell.



**Figure 16:** Lee Campbell, *Peer*. 2022. Live Zoom performance for Festival ECRÅ 5. (I am 'performing' in the bottom left hand window). Courtesy of Lee Campbell.



**Figure 17:** Promotion poster and screenshot, *Let Rip: Dymation Homofile* (2021). Courtesy of Red Bucket Projects.

I remember co-curator Charles' comments about how this moment created a different texture within the performance. Up to that moment the audience could hear pages being ripped, they could see images being ripped as part of the green screen (or in actual fact, being smudged out and replaced). The moment in the performance where I then ripped the physical pages seemed (even more) violent but for me it felt like a real moment of emancipation/potentially finally freeing myself from these images/from the memories (Figures 18–20). However, working with the images digitally, I knew that the images are not being destroyed (by ripping the materials (the paper) physically). The viewer knows that the image is being smudged/wiped out, but the image is still there because of technology (the image still exists digitally). But when it's the paper being ripped, the image is gone. As painter Andrew Bracey commented on this aspect of the work, 'There is an irrevocable harm. But as the image is digital I know that I can bring it back'. Whilst it felt good ripping the photocopies in a cathartic way during the performance as it felt like I was showing a sense of anger that ripped through the (in places) saccharine sentimentality of the accompanying poetry, maybe I would not have ripped the original scrapbook pages. Then again I did throw my scrapbook away and document its contents with a lo-res mobile phone camera rather than preserve it carefully. The 'physical rip' in the Zoom performance garnered such a positive response from the audience that I segued a section of it into the original *Teenage Scrapbook* poetry film to add a moment of recorded live Zoom 'interruption' into the flow of the film. Whilst it felt good ripping the photocopies in a cathartic way during the performance, as it felt like I was showing a sense of anger that ripped through the (in places) saccharine sentimentality of the accompanying poetry, maybe I would not have ripped the original scrapbook pages.

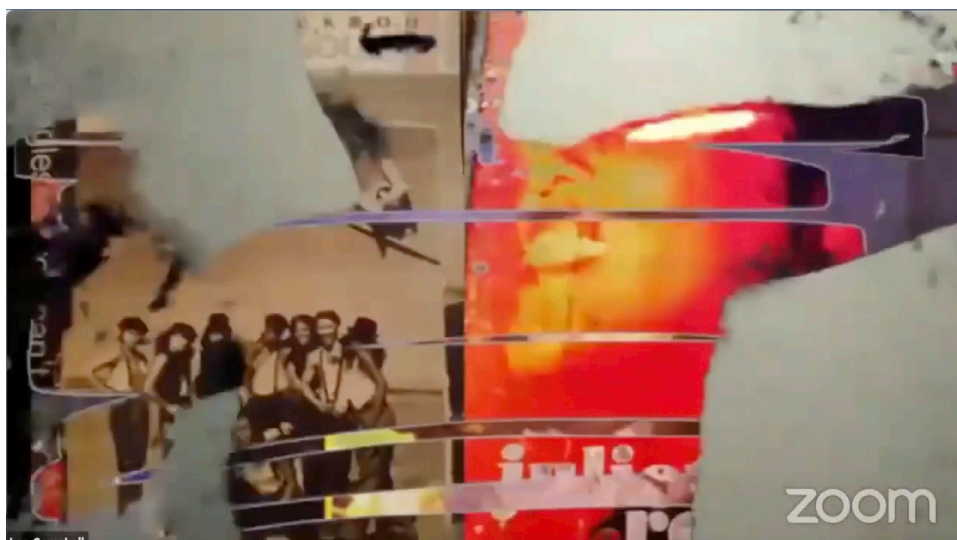


**Figure 18:** Lee Campbell, *Clever at Seeing without Being Seen*. 2021. Live Zoom performance. Courtesy of Lee Campbell.

Then again I did throw my scrapbook away and document its contents with a lo-res mobile phone camera rather than preserve it carefully. My scrapbook containing imagery that once held such importance in shaping my identity, now existing what Hito Steyerl may refer to as ripped (Steyerl, 2009) 'poor images'.



**Figure 19:** Lee Campbell, *Clever at Seeing without Being Seen*. 2021. Live Zoom performance. Courtesy of Lee Campbell.



**Figure 20:** Lee Campbell, *Clever at Seeing without Being Seen*. 2021. Live Zoom performance. Courtesy of Lee Campbell.

### The In Between Scrapbook

By October 2021, I was beginning to feel a bit ‘Zoom-ed out’ and as Covid-19 lockdown restrictions in the U.K eased, live solo performances that I made were held in physical space and not via Zoom. In September 2021, I was fortunate enough to undertake a two-day micro-residency at Theatre Deli, London where I was able to experiment with working with my scrapbook for the first time in physical space (previous iterations/experiments had only taken place using Zoom) (Figures 21–22). The residency concluded with me presenting a public work-in-progress showing combining live performance with me in the space as the performer, a soundtrack playing in the background including recorded piece of me speaking and moving imagery projection. Creating an internal psychological space for the audience members to witness, two sets of cameras/projectors were set up, one directly opposite me and one placed upside down meaning that the audience could see me constantly circling back on myself, making loops. The effect created a projection that is difficult to work out; I go one way but on screen I go the other. From previous iterations of this work on Zoom and now into reality, into the physical space, reversing the screen created a disruption that emphasises the disconnection between physical and screen life. Having all that backwards of what was going on, the movement made that disconnection really clear, underlining that somehow we have become so used to understanding everything through a screen.



**Figure 21:** Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook performance at Theatre Deli, London, 2021. Courtesy of Theatre Deli.



**Figure 22:** Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook performance at Theatre Deli, London, 2021. Courtesy of Theatre Deli.

The performance began by me putting down pieces of paper onto the floor. These were photocopies of the scrapbook. The audience start to question why I am putting photocopies with images printed on them on the floor so they can't see them. I put them down so precisely but every time I move they keep moving, I tread on them etc. There is a real delicacy in the way I tread and place them. This preciseness creates a weird discombobulating tension – I am creating a mess of paper on the floor but I do so really precisely. I make the audience wait; they can see that there are pictures underneath as I was put the photocopies down white side (back) up. I place the photocopy image face down so the audience may catch a glimpse of the image as I placed it down but all they could see as I build up layers of the paper on the floor, was a sea of white paper sheets. One audience member later remarked she loved that moment when the audience realise 'oh you've got to cover the floor to see the projection'. The audience could literally see me in the teenage scrapbook, me physically in the space, engaging with the material that the words/the language sits above that, me crawling around looking under those pieces of paper, turning them over and then not, looking for something and then not, hiding under the covers/under the photocopies, evoking some many metaphors. So physical, visceral, non-rational, material.

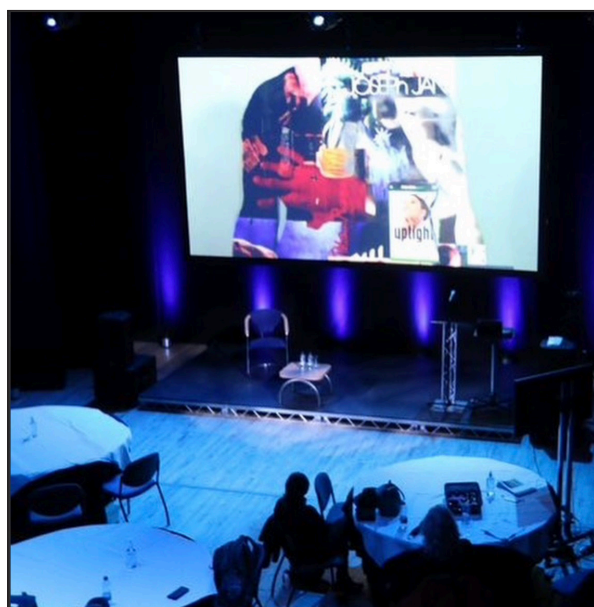
At moments in the performance, the audience could see me rip onscreen and see me rip physically at the same time. Key anecdotes of live spoken word interrupted the psychological flow where they stopped/interrupted my recorded voice. I break the fourth wall and speak directly to the audience. I set up a tension between language and weird ‘non-language’ behaviour which in the start the audience can’t really hear what I am saying as it goes through moments of being unclear then there’s moments of being clear, being rational with the clear spoken word moments of me speaking directly (not via recording) which isn’t rational obviously as there are all kinds of slips and gaps but there are words that the audience can hear but it’s layered with camp and innuendo whilst I am going through this strange visceral performance where I am crawling around on the floor. Whilst the audience think that the performance ends with a quick nasty rip (‘there are some moments of this I’d rather forget ... rip/skip’) and I throw two photocopies down and walk off the stage, I come back into the space and then go back and look at other pages to rediscover.

### **Future and (Return to Physical) Scrapbook**

During 2021 and 2022, I continued to create live Zoom performances of Scrapbook, often where I would perform the work in one space and then join an audience watching the performance immediately after in a space adjacent to engage in discussion with them about the work (Figures 23–24). Towards the middle of 2022, I kept thinking about an audience member comment made at my residency at Theatre Deli: ‘I was devastated that you threw the scrapbook away and you took bad Jpegs on a shitty phone. The emotional investment in these five years of the scrapbook now with just photos must be devastating’. This was paired with a conversation that I had with Dr Mark Childs from Durham University in late 2022 where we spoke about our generation as starting pre-Internet and now, we are post-Internet. We discussed our generation as (in the tradition of my 90s scrapbook) understanding the value in getting back to physical bricolage and the ‘smell of the glue’ in terms of a *Blue Peter* mentality of sticking things together with glue. For *Queer Diary*, Matthews Yard, Croydon (15/10/22), I remade a smaller version of my original scrapbook but this time, curating the images together to relate to specific lines of the poetry when read them out aloud.<sup>3</sup> When performing this work at *Live Art Club*, VSSL, London in November 2022, an audience member commented that they preferred this physical version of the work than a previous iteration of the work they had seen where I read out the poetry with the scrapbook moving imagery behind me. They commented that she loved seeing the difficulty and struggle that I had with turning the pages of the scrapbook at various points due to the pages being stuck together paired with the weight of me holding the very heavy scrapbook (Figures 25–27).



**Figure 23:** Lee Campbell, Clever at Seeing without Being Seen 2022. Live Zoom performance for 10th International Digital Storytelling Conference, Loughborough University. Courtesy of Storytelling Academy.



**Figure 24:** Lee Campbell, Clever at Seeing without Being Seen 2021. Live Zoom performance for Immersive Storytelling Conference, University of Nottingham. Courtesy of Susannah Goh.



**Figure 25:** Scrapbook poetry performance at The Word Zoo, The Others, London. December 2022. Courtesy of Pip McDonald.



**Figure 26:** Scrapbook poetry performance at Live Art Club, VSSL London. November 2022. Courtesy of Henri T.



**Figure 27:** Scrapbook poetry performance at Multipolyscriptoscribble, London. December 2022. Courtesy of Pip McDonald.

As part of my solo exhibition *Bona Polari!* at The Margate School in February 2022, a magical moment was when I performed my scrapbook poem with moving imagery behind me (Figure 28). The teacher who told me to keep the scrapbook, Sharon Cavalier, who I hadn't seen for 30 years since I left school in 1996, was in the audience. She hadn't changed a bit and she commented that neither had I after all these years. We shared a very poignant and emotional moment together after the performance had finished agreed not to leave it another 30 years before we met up again. The experience made me question what would it be for me to take that advice from Sharon today – take a book and collage some images into it? Would I repeat the process that I did? Would the process stop after two weeks? Or ten minutes? Would the imagery be different – I didn't know fully what I was doing then (in terms of selecting and 'curating' the imagery from magazine to corkboard to my original 1990 scrapbook) but it seems so obvious now. In some ways, I feel no different as a person looking at that 1990s scrapbook today than when I made it all those years ago but in other ways, it's almost like looking at another person and zone of feeling (hiding/closeting my homosexuality) that I am never going to revisit, that my teenage self is completely 'other' to me now. I feel that I am looking at these images as an outsider now. This just proves that even though we feel we know ourselves at a particular point in time, we are always reassessing everything. That's a very human quality in the work – it exposes our vulnerabilities but there also a lot of humour in the work as a means to communicate with the viewer.



**Figure 28:** Let Rip: Teenage Scrapbook performance at The Margate School, Margate, February 2022.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> To view the *Let Rip* films and Zoom performances referred to throughout this paper, please visit: <https://filmfreeway.com/LeeCampbell>.
- <sup>2</sup> To view a recording of my physical sketchbook poetry performance, please visit: [https://youtu.be/Nm\\_vCJASWhQ](https://youtu.be/Nm_vCJASWhQ).
- <sup>3</sup> To find out more about Technoparticipation, please visit: <https://leecampbelltechnoparticipation.blogspot.com>.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

## Biography

Dr Lee Campbell is an artist, performance poet, experimental filmmaker, writer, Senior Lecturer at University of the Arts London, and curator/founder of *Homo Humour*, the first of its kind project on contemporary queer male film and moving image practices that explore humour and LGBTQ+ storytelling and has screened all over the world since 2020. His experimental performance poetry films have been selected for many international film festivals since 2019. Lee had his first solo exhibition in North America of his poetry films, *See Me: Performance Poetry Films* at Fountain Street, Boston, Massachusetts, U.S.A (July 2022) and his film *SEE ME: A Walk Through London's Gay Soho 1994 and 2020* (2021) won Best Experimental Film at Ealing Film Festival, London 2022.

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