

# Production of the Documentary Film “The Second Body”: An Analysis of the Realities of Stunt Performers’ Lives in the Film Industry

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## Abstract

The documentary film “The Second Body”: An Analysis of the Reality of Stuntmen’s Lives in the Film Industry is an audio-visual work that explores the everyday realities of stunt performers, namely professionals who confront high physical risks yet receive limited recognition and inadequate protection within the Indonesian film industry. Through an observational approach and in-depth interviews with active stuntmen, stunt coordinators, and action film directors, this documentary reveals a series of structural issues faced by stunt performers, including the absence of safety standards, lack of health insurance, financial inequality, and minimal appreciation for their contributions to cinematic productions. This research employs the theories of media representation and the social construction of reality to examine how stuntmen are portrayed in media and how their professional realities are shaped through social interactions within the film industry. The production process consisted of three main stages, namely pre-production, production, and post-production, each designed to present an authentic depiction of the physical risks, mental pressures, and dedication embodied by stunt performers. The documentary demonstrates that although stuntmen play a crucial role in creating dynamic and visually compelling action sequences, their position remains overshadowed by leading actors, a dynamic that reinforces the structural inequality embedded within the industry. The film aspires to serve as an advocacy medium, encouraging the film industry to implement proper safety standards, fair compensation schemes, and more meaningful recognition for the stunt profession.

**Keywords:** Documentary Film, Media Representation, Social Construction, Stuntman, Workplace Safety

## 1. Introduction

A documentary film is an audiovisual work based on real-life facts and events. Generally, documentary films address issues relating to society, such as social, artistic, cultural and political matters, which are presented as an engaging narrative within an audiovisual format. A documentary film is a form of audiovisual work that records real or actual events without fabrication (Dara & Panjaitan, 2016). As a visual medium, a documentary film serves to produce a factual representation of a specific event or phenomenon. A documentary film is a non-fiction film that depicts real-life situations, with each individual expressing their feelings and experiences in situations as they are, without preparation, directly in front of the camera or interviewer. Documentaries are often filmed without a script and are rarely shown in cinemas that screen feature films. However, this type of film is frequently shown on television. Documentaries can be filmed on location as they are, or simply compiled from archived material (Marcel, 2010).

Producing a documentary film that focuses on raising issues regarding the profession of stuntmen who receive no recognition, health insurance, workplace safety, and financial inequality, all framed within the reality of a stuntman’s life in the film industry. This serves as an impetus for the film industry to provide recognition, fair compensation, and health protection for stuntmen. In studies of the creative



industries, workers in the cultural sector often find themselves in precarious working conditions, characterised by income uncertainty, a lack of social security, and unstable employment relationships (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Furthermore, Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2013) explain that creative workers often face covert exploitation because creative work is viewed as a passion, leading to the frequent neglect of labour protection aspects.

A stuntman or stunt performer is an individual who performs dangerous scenes in films, television programmes, or other performances. This profession has evolved alongside the growth of the entertainment industry, particularly within the action and martial arts genres. In Indonesia, the profession of stuntman began to develop alongside the popularity of action films from the 1970s onwards. According to Udeh Nans, a well-known Indonesian stuntman who gained fame for his role as a stunt double in the film *The Raid 2*, the profession of stuntman or stuntwoman in the Indonesian film industry is not widely sought after by the public, particularly among young people. This phenomenon can be understood through studies of the creative industries, which note that jobs in the cultural sector are often characterised by unstable working conditions, minimal social protection, and project-based work, thereby creating economic uncertainty for workers (Gill & Pratt, 2008). Furthermore, within the context of the entertainment media, the representation of certain professions is often unbalanced, meaning that those working behind the scenes tend to be less well-known to the public and less sought after (Baruah et al., 2022).

In the United States, however, this profession is held in high regard. Hollywood regards stuntmen as unsung heroes. They willingly perform stunts for a film even though their faces are not captured on camera. Recognition of this profession is growing, as seen at the 2024 Academy Awards, where actors Emily Blunt and Ryan Gosling paid special tribute to the stunt community, calling them “unsung heroes”. Indeed, due to the high risks involved, this profession has its own training schools known as stunt parks. Stunt parks are not only found in the United States but also in Australia and Thailand. These academies are established to provide training and classes for stuntmen. Consequently, the existence of stunt training institutions such as stunt parks also indicates that the profession of stuntman in some countries has developed in a more professional manner and is recognised as a high-risk occupation requiring specialised training and occupational safety protection. This is relevant to the findings of Russell et al. (2024), which indicate that stunt performers face a risk of serious injury, particularly head trauma, making training systems and a culture of workplace safety essential to reduce accidents.

In Indonesia, the majority of stuntmen come from a background in martial arts or physical training, as this profession demands physical prowess, stamina, and combat choreography skills. One widely recognised example is the actor and stuntman Iko Uwais, who has a background in the martial art of *pencah silat*. Iko Uwais’s success through the film *The Raid* (2011) demonstrates that martial arts skills make a significant contribution to action film production. Films such as “*The Raid*” have helped to strengthen the position of stuntmen within both the national and international film industries, as action sequences require physical skills that rely not only on the actors but also on professional choreography and stunt work.

The film industry would not be complete without the presence of stuntmen. They are the individuals who dare to take great risks to deliver breathtaking action sequences. According to data from the Screen Actors Guild in 1982 and 1984, it was recorded that around 53 per cent of film cast members who suffered accidents during filming were stuntmen. The most common accidents include falls from height and collisions. These findings stem from the context of the film industry outside Indonesia. Furthermore, recent academic research also reinforces that stunt performers are vulnerable to serious injuries, including head trauma and concussion, influenced by the intensity of physical work

and the work culture within film production (Senn et al., 2023). Indeed, in some cases, stunt performers are reluctant to report injuries due to professional pressure and concerns about losing their jobs (Russell et al., 2024). This indicates that the issue of stuntmen's occupational safety is not only related to physical risks but also to work systems and industry protections that are not yet fully adequate.

On the other hand, in Indonesia itself, there is currently no official data available regarding the number of stuntmen or the accidents they experience. Nevertheless, with the entertainment industry continuing to advance, ideally the risk of accidents can be minimised. The hope is that the profession of stuntman will no longer be synonymous with risking one's life. Behind the spectacular stunts performed by stunt professionals, who often assume significant personal risk for the production of films, there exist various occupational concerns that affect individuals working in this field. The concept of safety climate explains that workplace safety levels are influenced by workers' perceptions of safety priorities within an organisation; consequently, work systems that do not prioritise safety increase the likelihood of accidents (Zohar, 1980). Neal and Griffin (2006) also emphasise that the relationship between safety climate, safety motivation, and safe work behaviour directly influences workplace accident rates. Consequently, the hope is that the stuntman profession will no longer be synonymous with risking one's life, but rather understood as a professional occupation with established safety standards.

One such issue is the lack of recognition for this profession. In fact, at the 2020 Academy Awards, stunt performers expressed their dissatisfaction with the awards ceremony, as there remains no specific category to acknowledge their contributions to the film industry. Although the Academy had previously collaborated with stunt coordinator Jack Gill to discuss this possibility, they stipulated that for the creation of a new award category, there must be at least 100 professional members in the field to allow for formal evaluation. This phenomenon highlights an imbalance in the film industry's award system, where on-screen performers are more frequently recognised than those working behind the scenes. Hesmondhalgh and Baker (2013) explain that in the creative industries, professional recognition is often uneven because the industry structure tends to highlight public figures over production support staff.

Stunt performers are often looked down upon because they merely stand in for the lead actors before disappearing behind the scenes, even though they willingly risk their lives for a single scene. Back in 2017, John Bernecker, a stuntman, died from severe head injuries. In the series "The Walking Dead", he was required to jump from a balcony and fall from a height of over six metres. Furthermore, most recently, on 9 July 2024, a stuntman was involved in an accident whilst performing a scene riding a motorbike at high speed, fleeing from a car in pursuit. The stuntman fell from his motorbike; this accident occurred whilst the production team of the Superman film was filming on a bridge in Cleveland.

In his book "Hollywood Stunt Performers, 1910s-1970: A Biographical Dictionary", Freese explains that although stuntmen's performances have undergone a carefully planned choreographic process and are aided by supporting technology, their work remains high-risk and potentially dangerous. Consequently, accidents are a common occurrence in the life of a stuntman. Serious injury and even death are not uncommon in this profession. Ironically, many of them lack health insurance or occupational protection, such as specialised accident insurance, leaving them to bear the medical costs themselves in the event of an incident. This finding is supported by academic research indicating that stunt performers face a risk of physical trauma, particularly head injuries and concussions, due to extreme activities such as falls, collisions, and impacts during production (Senn et al., 2023).

Within the Indonesian film industry, structural protections for stunt performers remain critically inadequate. According to Majid, a stunt coordinator from Piranha Stunt, the majority of production houses in Indonesia have not established systematic safety measures for stuntmen during the

production process. Protective responses are generally reactive rather than preventive, with assistance provided only after an incident has occurred, rather than through prior arrangements such as dedicated medical teams, safety protocols, or guaranteed occupational coverage. Although stuntmen are rarely covered by formal insurance, production houses typically assume a degree of informal responsibility by offering first aid and facilitating access to medical facilities in the event of injury. Nevertheless, this ad hoc approach falls considerably short of the structured occupational safety frameworks that the high-risk nature of stunt work demands, reflecting a broader pattern of institutional neglect towards behind-the-scenes workers in the Indonesian film industry.

The profession of a stuntman is a high-risk occupation that demands specialised technical skills, ranging from action choreography and mastery of falling techniques to body control in extreme scenes. Nevertheless, the compensation they receive is often not commensurate with the dangers they face. Unlike lead actors who merely simulate dangerous scenes, stuntmen directly perform these actions, making them more vulnerable to serious injury or even loss of life. Research indicates that stunt performers face a high risk of physical injury, particularly head trauma and concussion, due to the intensity of their work and the demands of dangerous stunts in film and television productions (Senn et al., 2023).

In the Hollywood film industry, stuntmen are paid relatively high salaries, with an average annual income of around USD 70,000, equivalent to Rp1.02 billion. For novice stuntmen, the annual income ranges from USD 5,000, or around Rp72.92 million. In contrast, in Indonesia, stuntmen's earnings are significantly lower. For film projects, daily rates range from Rp1,000,000, whilst for commercial productions they can reach between Rp1,500,000 and Rp2,000,000 per day. As for soap operas, daily wages range from Rp500,000 to Rp700,000. This comparison highlights a significant disparity between the national and global film industries regarding the recognition of the stuntman profession.

This issue reflects inequality within the entertainment industry, where stuntmen performing dangerous stunts often receive lower pay than leading actors. Despite facing the risk of serious injury or even loss of life, appreciation for this profession remains minimal. This situation highlights structural inequalities within the creative industries, where behind-the-scenes workers frequently do not receive economic or symbolic recognition commensurate with their contributions (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2013). This issue is of particular concern to stunt performers who have contributed extensively behind the scenes. In light of the issues outlined above, the documentary film titled "The Second Body: An Analysis of the Reality of Stuntmen's Lives in the Film Industry" seeks to offer a more in-depth exploration of their lives and struggles.

In the research and production of this documentary film, the author has placed particular emphasis on stuntmen in Indonesia, specifically in the Yogyakarta region, which is known as a hub for the independent film community and a breeding ground for local stunt groups. Yogyakarta was chosen because it possesses a dynamic production ecosystem, yet still exhibits various limitations regarding safety standards, recognition and protection for stuntmen. It is anticipated that this documentary film will present these issues in an engaging manner and encourage the film industry to more fully recognize the role of stunt performers, as well as to provide more appropriate rights in terms of professional recognition, occupational health protection, and financial well-being.

Against this backdrop, the present study is grounded in the recognition that the stuntman profession in Indonesia occupies a paradoxical position: indispensable to the film industry yet systematically undervalued, underprotected, and underrepresented. While existing scholarship has examined precarious labour in the creative industries broadly, empirical attention to the specific conditions of stunt performers within the Indonesian context remains scarce. This study therefore seeks to address that gap by producing a documentary film as both a research output and an advocacy

instrument. Drawing on the theories of media representation and the social construction of reality, the study examines how the lived realities of stuntmen are shaped, sustained, and obscured within the structural dynamics of the Indonesian film industry. Through observational documentation and in-depth interviews conducted in Yogyakarta, the research aims to construct an authentic portrayal of the physical risks, psychological pressures, and professional vulnerabilities confronting stunt performers. Ultimately, this study aspires not only to contribute to academic discourse on labour conditions in the Indonesian creative industries, but also to stimulate meaningful reform in the areas of occupational safety, fair compensation, and professional recognition for stuntmen as integral contributors to cinematic production.

## 2. Methods

The research method employed is the case study, with the focus of the study on the realities of a stuntman's life in film production, particularly in relation to occupational safety, professional recognition and welfare. The case study was chosen because it allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon in depth and within its context, thereby enabling a comprehensive portrayal of the conditions faced by stuntmen in accordance with the situations and working environments they experience. Yin (2009) explains that case studies are particularly appropriate when research seeks to understand contemporary phenomena within a real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and its context are not clearly defined. Furthermore, Stake and Visse (1995) emphasises that case studies aim to provide a deep understanding of a specific case through detailed exploration of the research subjects' activities, experiences, and social conditions. Consequently, the case study method is considered relevant for uncovering the reality of stuntmen as high-risk workers within the complex structure of the film industry.

Data collection was conducted using several techniques, namely in-depth interviews, direct observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted with stuntmen as the primary research subjects, as well as relevant parties involved in the film production process, such as stunt coordinators, production crews, and other relevant stakeholders. These interviews aim to explore the personal experiences, perspectives, and working realities of stuntmen within the film industry. The in-depth interview technique was chosen as it enables the researcher to obtain rich data regarding the subjective experiences and social meanings constructed by the informants regarding their profession (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Cresswell (2008) also explains that interviews in qualitative research serve as a primary strategy for gaining an in-depth understanding of individuals' perceptions and experiences within the context of their lives.

Observation was conducted directly by the researcher by observing stuntmen's activities during training and production, in order to gain a contextual understanding of the working conditions and risks faced. Observation is considered important as it provides a realistic picture of work behaviour, patterns of interaction, and situations that cannot always be fully explained through interviews (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). In addition, data collection was also carried out through documentation in the form of photographs, videos, and production archives relating to stuntmen's activities. This documentation serves as supporting data that reinforces the results of the interviews and observations, whilst also forming part of the visual material in the documentary film.

This film employs an observational and expository documentary style. The cinematography adopts a simple yet intimate approach. The camera makes extensive use of handheld techniques to capture spontaneous and natural moments, as well as close-ups to reveal the subjects' facial expressions in depth. According to Rabiger (2014), the use of handheld techniques in documentary films can create

a sense of emotional closeness, convey realism, and make the audience feel as though they are directly within the recorded situation. The observational style in documentaries emphasises the recording of events naturally with minimal intervention, thereby presenting social reality in a more authentic manner. Meanwhile, the expository mode emphasises the use of narration or voice-over to build an argument and clarify the film's message to the audience (Nichols, 2024).

The title "The Second Body" was chosen as a philosophical representation of the identity and position of the stuntman within the film industry. In the world of cinema, the stuntman functions as a substitute body, a "second body", that takes on the physical risks that would otherwise be borne by the lead actor. Philosophically, "The Second Body" reflects the relationship between the body, role, and courage. Stuntmen perform work that demands full physical engagement, where every physical action becomes an act of sacrifice to create a visual illusion for the audience. Their bodies are both instruments of art and vessels of risk. They face the potential for loss, injury, and even real threats to their safety, yet remain unseen faces within the film's narrative.

The documentary "The Second Body" was produced through three main stages: pre-production, production, and post-production.

1. Pre-production involves in-depth research, developing the narrative concept, selecting interviewees, technical planning, budgeting, and distribution strategies.
2. Production focuses on observational filming to capture the daily reality of stuntmen in various contexts, including training and interviews. This stage also requires readiness to face external challenges such as weather and location conditions.
3. Post-production involves visual and audio editing, including footage selection, storyboarding, colour grading, sound processing, and the addition of graphics, to ensure the final product aligns with the concept established from the outset.

### 3. Results and Discussion

In the Indonesian film industry, stunt performers play a vital role in bringing high-risk scenes to life, thereby enhancing the narrative and visual impact of films. However, the reality on the ground suggests that the profession of stunt performer remains undervalued, both structurally and symbolically. This situation aligns with studies of the creative industries, which indicate that behind-the-scenes workers often face a disparity in recognition compared to those appearing in public, despite their significant contribution to the final production (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2011).

Based on interviews and observations, stuntmen are generally involved in the production process from the rehearsal stage through to the actual filming. During the preparation phase, stuntmen practice scene choreography, coordinate technical aspects with the lead actors, and simulate dangerous scenes. However, at this stage, limitations in safety support facilities are still evident, such as a lack of standard protective equipment and the absence of standardized safety procedures. This indicates that occupational safety has not yet become a top priority in some film production practices.

During the production phase, stuntmen perform high-risk scenes, such as fight sequences, falls from heights, and crash scenes. The physical risks faced are often not commensurate with the compensation system received. Production and research findings indicate that some stuntmen do not receive clear written employment contracts, nor are they provided with health insurance or work-related insurance. These conditions reveal a disparity between the risks of the work and the protection provided by the production company.

Beyond safety and financial aspects, research findings also reveal a lack of symbolic recognition for the stuntman profession. Stuntmen are rarely explicitly mentioned in film promotions or industry

awards. Their role is largely understood as a technical aspect of production, rather than as creative contributors to the art form. This representation reinforces the position of stuntmen as ‘invisible workers’ within the film industry.

In terms of working relationships, stuntmen generally work based on personal networks and individual trust, rather than through a structured professional management system. This reliance on informal relationships weakens stuntmen’s bargaining position, particularly in negotiations regarding pay, working hours, and safety standards. These conditions indicate that the structure of the film industry has not yet fully prioritized the protection of behind-the-scenes workers.

The research findings also reveal a critical awareness among stuntmen regarding the working conditions they face. Some stuntmen are aware of the risks involved, yet continue in the profession due to limited job options and a passion for the film industry. This awareness has not yet been fully translated into organized collective efforts to advocate for professional rights and protection, meaning structural issues continue to recur.

Through a documentary film approach, the findings of this study are not merely presented as data and descriptions, but are also visualized through the stuntmen’s direct experiences. The documentary “The Second Body” portrays the reality of stuntmen’s work in a more personal and human way, showcasing their daily lives, occupational risks, and their perspectives on the profession they pursue. Thus, the documentary serves as a medium for both representation and advocacy, shedding light on the working conditions of stuntmen that have long been overlooked.

Overall, the study’s findings indicate that the reality of stuntmen’s lives in the Indonesian film industry remains plagued by issues of workplace safety, professional recognition, and welfare. These conditions are not merely individual concerns but reflect structural issues within the film industry. Consequently, collective awareness among industry stakeholders and the public is required to foster the creation of a fairer, safer, and more humane working system for the stuntman profession.

#### 4. Conclusion

The research and production of the documentary “The Second Body”: An Analysis of the Reality of Stuntmen’s Lives in the Film Industry have yielded a number of key insights into the profession of stuntmen and their position within the structure of the Indonesian film industry. This documentary serves not only as an audiovisual work, but also as a medium for reflection on the long-neglected conditions behind the scenes. This documentary demonstrates that the profession of a stuntman is a demanding job requiring technical skills, physical strength, and high mental resilience. Stuntmen are physical actors who bring dangerous scenes to life, yet their contributions are often overshadowed by an industry narrative that prioritises leading actors and directors. This imbalance between workload, physical risk, and level of recognition is one of the fundamental issues in the world of stunt work.

Through a creative process and an observational approach, this documentary highlights that the lack of safety standards, the absence of occupational protection schemes, and economic uncertainty are structural issues that continue to overshadow this profession. Although the film industry continues to grow, the welfare of stuntmen has not seen a significant improvement, particularly within independent and regional production settings. This documentary demonstrates that Yogyakarta, as a research location, possesses unique dynamics. The city serves as a breeding ground for creative communities, including groups of stuntmen working across film genres. However, this creative spirit is not always matched by adequate professional support, meaning that stuntmen continue to rely on internal solidarity as their primary system of protection.

Artistically, this documentary film successfully fosters an emotional connection between the audience and its subjects. The visual approach, which places the body at the centre of the narrative, offers new insights into how physical labour becomes a language conveying risk, dedication, and the professional identity of stuntmen. It is this aesthetic portrayal of the body that lends depth of meaning and reinforces the documentary's advocacy. Based on the overall process and findings, it can be concluded that "The Second Body" is not merely a documentation of reality, but also a form of critique and a call to re-examine the position of stuntmen within the film industry. The film aims to encourage a broader discussion regarding the need for safety standards, recognition systems, and policies that are more favourable towards film workers who have long operated behind the scenes.

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