

DOUBLE AGENT

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PAWEŁ ALTHAMER/NOWOLIPIE GROUP

PHIL COLLINS

DORA GARCÍA

CHRISTOPH SCHLINGENSIEF

BARBARA VISSER

DONELLE WOOLFORD

ARTUR ŻMIJEWSKI

**CURATED BY CLAIRE BISHOP
AND MARK SLADEN**

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INTRODUCTION

Claire Bishop and Mark Sladen

This book has been produced to accompany the ICA exhibition *Double Agent*, an exhibition of collaborative projects in which the artists use other people as a medium. All of the works raise questions of performance and authorship, and in particular the issues of ethics and representation that ensue when the artist is no longer the central agent in his or her own work, but operates through a range of individuals, communities, and surrogates.

One of the starting points for the exhibition was the recent and conspicuous rise of interest in performance and performative gestures among contemporary artists. But today's generation of artists, unlike their precursors in the 1960s and '70s, do not necessarily privilege the live moment or their own body. Instead, they engage in mediation, delegation, and collaboration — strategies that work to undermine the idea of the authentic or authoritative artist, who is represented instead by a variety of figures. Such strategies can also promote unpredictability and risk, as the artist's agents may prove to be partial or unreliable. In some instances the use of third parties also raises ethical issues and questions of exploitation.

Double Agent presented seven artists, and included a range of media, among them video and live performance. After its debut at the ICA, the exhibition travelled to the Mead Gallery at Warwick Arts Centre and BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead. The text that follows describes the works by which the artists were represented in the exhibition, including special projects at the different venues. The book as a whole moves beyond the usual remit of an exhibition catalogue to include a variety of texts on the participating artists, installation shots from all three venues, as well as two contextual essays on delegation and performance in contemporary art by Claire Bishop and Nick Ridout.

PAWEŁ ALTHAMER / NOWOLIPIE GROUP

In the early '90s Paweł Althamer was among the first of a new generation of artists to produce events with non-professional performers; his early works involved collaborations with homeless men and women, gallery invigilators, and children. Much of Althamer's practice stems from his identification with marginal subjects, and comes to constitute an oblique form of self-portraiture. For over a decade, Althamer has led a ceramics class for the Nowolipie Group, an organisation in Warsaw for adults with multiple sclerosis and other disabilities. The experience provides a rich source of ideas for Althamer, for whom the educational process cuts two ways ("They teach me to be more mad!").

Double Agent included a display of ceramics by the group, as well as Althamer's video *D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself)* (2004), which documents a class with the Nowolipie Group and which was made in collaboration with Artur Żmijewski. One of the regular participants of the class is Rafał, who always makes clay biplanes, and *D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself)* depicts his fluctuating emotions — from enthusiasm to frustration — during the course of one session. This book includes a text on Althamer and Nowolipie Group and an account of a workshop that was held at BALTIC as part of its presentation of *Double Agent*.

PHIL COLLINS

Phil Collins frequently invites people to perform for a camera: to strip in a hotel room, to participate in a disco-dancing marathon, to recount their experience of appearing on reality television. The complicity that results between the artist and his performers is complex, since payment is rarely involved and both parties hope to gain something from the exchange.

At the ICA and BALTIC, Collins was represented by five images from *you'll never work in this town again* (2004–), a series of photographic portraits of curators, critics, dealers, collectors, and other figures in the art world. These individuals were photographed on the understanding that the image would be taken immediately after the artist had slapped each sitter hard around the face. The work can be seen both as a pre-emptive strike by the artist against those who have the capacity to make or break his career and as a shared moment of intimacy; it also reveals the narcissism of those who want to be in a work of art — even if it means physical pain. At the Mead Gallery Collins exhibited portraits, by street artists, of participants

in *the return of the real* (2007), his video installation of interviews with people whose lives have been adversely affected by reality television.

DORA GARCÍA

Dora García began making performance works, in which she used hired actors as a substitute for her own presence, in 2000. Some of her performances take place inside exhibitions, as in *Proxy/Coma* (2001), in which a woman lounges around the gallery space while being captured on surveillance cameras. Others blur into the outside world and can potentially last for years, as in *The Messenger* (2002), for which a performer (the ‘messenger’) must deliver a message in a foreign language — but to do so must search for someone who can identify and understand that language. In all of her works, García strikes a fragile balance between scripted behaviour and the performer’s interpretation of her instructions.

García was represented in *Double Agent* by *Instant Narrative (IN)* (2006–08), in which an observer is positioned within the exhibition space and makes notes on visitors to the exhibition — notes that are simultaneously projected onto the wall of the gallery. The resultant text forms a real-time story in which the viewers are the protagonists, but the authorship is a function of continual displacement — from the artist to the writer to the visitor. Selections from the text composed at the ICA and the Mead Gallery are reproduced in this book.

CHRISTOPH SCHLINGENSIEF

Artist, filmmaker, and theatre director Christoph Schlingensief was represented at the ICA and BALTIC by a video installation entitled *The African Twin Towers — Stairlift to Heaven* (2007). It centres on a short film that tells the story of a megalomaniac theatre director who wants to stage a version of the 9/11 story in a former German colony in Namibia. The invocation of colonialism and terrorism are typical of Schlingensief’s exploration of contemporary taboos, as is his use of myth and ritual — in this case drawing on Norse sagas and African shamanism — and the excessive and purgative manner in which he brings such elements together.

Equally characteristic of Schlingensief’s work is its collaborative and participatory quality. In the aforementioned film the roles are played by the artist, by the Fassbinder actress Irm Hermann, by local people, as well as by members of Schlingensief’s regular troupe of non-professional performers — many of whom have physical or

mental disabilities. Two of the artist’s regular collaborators can be seen in another film sequence included in the installation, which requires viewers to literally incorporate themselves into the work, as it is only visible at the top of a stairlift that cuts across the main projection. At the Mead Gallery Schlingensief was represented by the video installation *Freakstars 3000* (2004), a talent contest for the handicapped, which also features members of the artist’s ‘family’ of collaborators.

BARBARA VISSER

Barbara Visser explores issues of authority and authenticity, often taking an apparently untouchable icon as her starting point, and then proceeding to dismantle it through processes that include translation, copying, and re-enactment. Visser’s works include photographs in which pieces of modernist furniture are literally falling apart; a recorded performance that refers to the Lennon-Ono *Bed-In for Peace* at the Amsterdam Hilton in 1969; and — in the case of the work shown in *Double Agent* — a series of performances in which the authenticity of the artist’s own persona is brought into question.

In 1997 Visser staged a lecture in which — unknown to the audience — an actress stood in for the artist and received instructions from Visser via an earpiece. In 2004 Visser staged a second lecture with a new actress (who actually looked like the artist) to comment on footage of the first lecture. In 2007 Visser staged a third performance, presenting herself as a silhouette cast onto a screen on which a video of the previous event was projected, while dubbing the second actress’ voice. This latter performance is the basis of a video, *Last Lecture* (2007), which was presented in *Double Agent*. A transcript of the video is included in this book.

DONELLE WOOLFORD

As his contribution to the exhibition, Joe Scanlan presented Donelle Woolford, an up-and-coming young African-American artist and his former studio assistant. Scanlan had previously collaborated with Woolford on *The Massachusetts Wedding Bed* (2005), a press conference in which Woolford, Scanlan, and his brother lay in a queen-sized bed in an Amsterdam gallery and answered questions about being American. This work, as well as his presentation of Woolford in *Double Agent*, brings together several of Scanlan’s interests: the fine line between works of art and commercial products, the role of word-of-mouth and fabrication in the building of artistic reputation, and the relationship between myth-making and salesmanship.

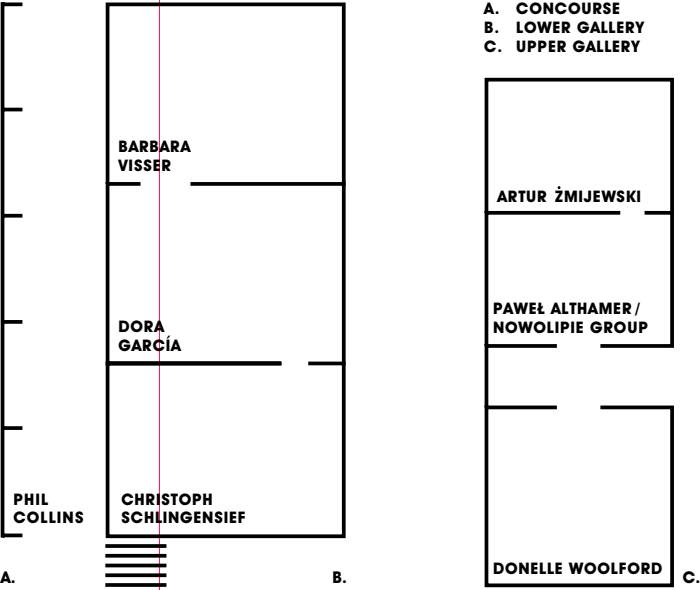
Woolford’s participation in *Double Agent* took the form of residencies in the exhibition’s three venues, in each of which she used one of the galleries as a studio to make her work — a studio that was also open to the public. During her residency at the ICA, where Woolford was present on Saturdays and Sundays, the artist made wooden assemblages that reference Cubism and which are designed to coincide with (and challenge) the one-hundredth anniversary of that movement. At the ICA Woolford also gave a short talk about her practice, her participation in *Double Agent*, and her ‘double life’ in London, followed by a discussion with the exhibition’s curators. A transcript of the latter event is reproduced in this book. Following her residency at the ICA, Woolford began working with and on paper, and during her residency at the Mead Gallery she also gave crits of local art students’ portfolios.

ARTUR ŻMIJEWSKI

Artur Żmijewski’s work frequently raises ethical questions about representation, particularly in relation to his constructed events and activities in which specific groups of people are invited to perform. One of his most controversial and potent videos depicts a group of deaf teenagers attempting to sing Maklakiewicz’s 1944 Polish Mass; another presents the Polish army marching naked in a dance studio.

The video *Them* (2007) documents a series of painting workshops organised by the artist. These events feature groups of Christians, Jews, Young Socialists, and Polish nationalists who are encouraged to create symbolic depiction of their values and to respond to each other’s paintings. Over the course of the workshops, tensions build between the groups and culminate in an explosive impasse. As in many of Żmijewski’s videos, the artist adopts an ambiguous role and it is never clear to what degree his participants are acting with their own agency or being manipulated to fulfil the requirements of his pre-planned narrative. This book contains a transcript of a debate concerning *Them* that was held after the video was screened in Poland for the first time.

EXHIBITION FLOORPLAN, ICA



PAWEŁ ALTHAMER/ NOWOLIPIE GROUP

EXHIBITED WORK

Persona, 2007 *
Ceramics, plywood, 120 x 100 x 205cm

Flight, 2007 *
Bronze, paint, wood, 50 x 47 x 40cm

Skulls, 2007 †
Ceramics, glass, steel, plywood, 100 x 33 x 25cm

Street Door, 2007 †
Bronze, wood, 220 x 90 x 85cm

D.I.Y. (Do it yourself), 2004
Video, 9:20 mins

Flight, 2008
Video, 13 mins

Flying Nature, 2008 §
Ceramics, wood, 40 x 40 x 150cm

Aviation Retro-style, 2008 §
Ceramics, wood, 150 x 50 x 50cm

* Exhibited at ICA and BALTIC only

† Exhibited at ICA and Mead only

§ Exhibited at BALTIC only

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT

A text by Claire Bishop discussing Paweł Althamer's relationship to the Nowolipie Group, and the workshop at the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in which all parties were involved.



Paweł Althamer / Nowolipie Group
Street Door, 2007



Paweł Althamer / Nowolipie Group
Persona, 2007 (and detail, left)



PAWEŁ ALTHAMER / NOWOLIPIE GROUP

Claire Bishop



Paweł Althamer with Artur Żmijewski
D.I.Y. (Do it yourself), 2004
Video still

For the last thirteen years, Polish artist Paweł Althamer has led a ceramics class in Warsaw for an organisation of adults with various disabilities, mental and physical, called The Nowolipie Group. Althamer began teaching the group in the early 1990s as a way to earn money after graduating from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts, but he continues with the class today despite his successful international career. Every Friday evening he leads the workshop, held in the Muranow district of Warsaw. However, as much as Althamer leads the Nowolipie Group classes, increasingly they seem to lead him. Althamer has always combined a sculptural, object-based practice with the construction of mildly disruptive social situations, and his work with the Nowolipie Group allows these two interests to converge. For example, in 2006 he invited them to make ceramics in the middle of the exhibition *Choices.pl*, a chaotic, process-based exhibition-as-studio that he co-curated with Artur Żmijewski.

One evening in November 2005 I visited the class, whose activities are always organised around a theme. Althamer immediately gave me a pair of brown overalls and sat me down amid the group, who were all working on castles of various types — fantastical, space age, minimal — save for one, who was sitting at the end of the table and making biplanes. I recognised this sturdy man with forlorn eyes and pursed lips to be Rafal, the protagonist of a ten-minute video by Althamer and Żmijewski called *D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself)* (2004). In keeping with Żmijewski's unflinching approach to documentary, *D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself)* is an unsentimental scrutiny of Rafal filmed during a relatively uneventful class. In the video he is positioned frontally, the camera almost too close to his

face, and he declares — in a decelerated but rhythmic intonation — his passion for making clay biplanes. He is evidently proud of his skills and his knowledge of different types of aircraft, but his focus is always in several places at once, and as much as he wants to hold forth about biplanes, he also seeks Althamer's attention.

Althamer began to exhibit the work of the Nowolipie Group in 2002 (in the 8th Baltic Triennial, Vilnius). I first encountered it in *Artists Favourites* at the ICA, a group exhibition in which artists selected their favourite work by other artists and exhibited it alongside a short statement explaining their selection. Althamer chose a small clay head of Nefertiti by Josef Skwarczewski. In his text, Althamer explained that he'd asked the class to create a free interpretation of Nefertiti as a way to think about therapy through beauty: "The effect stunned and amused me. I could never find myself capable of such invention and easiness. Small Nefertitis were created quickly, in great concentration, but not without problems (the hat falling off or the neck breaking). Seven representations were made and all art canons shattered. Beauty revealed itself in a shocking new way. Of all the sculptures, my favourite is the one made by Josef Skwarczewski." While the gesture of deciding to show this work is not in itself unusual — many exhibitions have elevated the amateur to the realm of the professional — Althamer's statement demonstrates that his criteria were based on a disruption of conventional aesthetics, a disruption made doubly poignant by the fact that the creator of this object could himself be argued to embody this marginal new beauty. The statement also allows us to read Althamer's pedagogic imposition of a weekly theme as a reconfiguration of seriality, the artistic operation more conventionally used in relation to another indexical medium, that of photography.

In the first Moscow Biennial, held in 2005, Althamer presented the group's maquette of the Quadriga, four rearing horses that can be found, life size, on a building close to the ceramics class. The aim is to make the work life-size, which will happen when the group has raised enough money through exhibiting the maquette internationally. It is evident that the creative traffic flows two ways between Althamer and the group. Rafal's obsession with biplanes has led the Nowolipie Group to produce a sculpture of a silver plane featuring their own portraits in the windows, and to realise his dream of flying over Warsaw in a biplane. The journey took place in February



Paweł Althamer / Nowolipie Group
Flying Nature, 2008

this year, with the group wearing sturdy grey overalls (emblazoned with embroidered badges) and pale blue woolly berets. It is recorded in a short video by Żmijewski titled *Winged* (2008). Despite the arduous effort of transporting the group into the plane, the journey seems to be a metaphor for a fantasy of freedom from physical restraint.

An important aspect of Althamer's social collaborations is his identification with the people he works with: children, the homeless, troublesome teenagers, the mentally or physically disabled. Crucially, however, these subjects are not perceived as the recipients of charitable action, as if art could be a cheap compensation for their handicaps. Like Joseph Beuys, Althamer believes in the creativity of everyone, but he unashamedly exploits this creativity to his own ends. During *Double Agent* at the ICA, several people expressed to me their distaste at his presentation of a group's work as his own practice. This, I think, is precisely the point. Althamer's 'social sculpture' — like that of Beuys — isn't just a set of intangible social relations, but actual physical objects allied more or less uncomfortably to a lucrative singular authorship. That collectors now buy these objects is not a sign of failure or the artist's compromised morals, but a mark of how effectively Althamer can mobilise a conventional situation into something far beyond its anticipated parameters. Without Althamer's eye to select the work and devise its modes of display, the clay objects would be unremarkable: just a parade of more-or-less wonky castles, biplanes, mountains, or Nefertitis. But when six ceramic skulls are arranged on a mirrored shelf, or a set of spindly figures are painted white and arranged precariously on a sloping white door-turned-table, or a single small fragile Nefertiti is exhibited like an archaeological discovery, a specific vision emerges that forms a continuity with the rest of Althamer's sculptural and socially oriented output. The uneasiness of the objects' display is a parallel for the social eccentricity of the group — this much is obvious — yet all of Althamer's work operates on the boundary of authorial control and collective unpredictability.

If the group's works are exploited (although this seems too severe a word), then art institutions in turn are exploited for the group. For the ICA opening reception, Althamer insisted that two of the Nowolipies (Rafal and Remegius) and a social worker be flown in to celebrate, further draining an already frayed budget. During the opening, Remegius, who prefers working in wood to clay,



Nowolipie Group workshop at BALTIC in 2008 (Remegius and Paweł)

was particularly excited by Donelle Woolford's studio and wanted to use the saws and offcuts to start making objects on the spot. When I approached Althamer about the possibility of an event to accompany *Double Agent*, a solution was immediately offered: he wanted to organise a workshop in which Rafal and Remegius would teach and he would be their assistant. ("Rafal doesn't believe he can teach a class, but if I tell him he can, he will be able to".) The language barrier would be overcome via a translator, but the key point was an inversion of positions between artist and pupils. In keeping with Althamer's previous educational endeavours, such as *Einstein Class* (a project to teach science experiments to juvenile delinquents, led by a maverick, unemployed science teacher), the workshop would reimagine the teacher's role from a conveyor of knowledge to a catalyst for unforeseeable experiences.

The workshop was finally realised at BALTIC on 19–20 April, with the Newcastle and Gateshead Multiple Sclerosis Society. A few hours into the class, Rafal stood up and recited his own poetry, an untranslatable combination of dada and hip-hop. On the first day, led by Rafal, the group were instructed to make clay biplanes. On day two, led by Remegius, they worked in wood. Althamer carefully lined up the objects on a table, a series of repetitions with variations, and designed two biomorphic wooden structures for their display. The resulting objects, arranged on spindly-legged plinths and all facing the same direction, were presented in *Double Agent* at the BALTIC between May and August. The authorship of the works is clearly unified by Althamer's recognition of obsession and his appreciation of idiosyncratic form, but diluted now into a network of surrogates: Rafal and Remegius and beyond.

PHIL COLLINS

EXHIBITED WORK

Exhibited at ICA and BALTIC

- you'll never work in this town again (amanda)*, 2006
- you'll never work in this town again (claire)*, 2006
- you'll never work in this town again (francesco)*, 2006
- you'll never work in this town again (mark)*, 2006
- you'll never work in this town again (vicky)*, 2006

All works:
From the series *you'll never work in this town again* (2004—)
Lambda print reverse-mounted behind Diasac, 140 x 100 cm

Exhibited at Mead

- the return of the real (george)*, 2007
- the return of the real (linda)*, 2007
- the return of the real (lindsay)*, 2007
- the return of the real (marc)*, 2007
- the return of the real (sue)*, 2007

All works:
Screenprint on Somerset Velvet cotton rag paper, 38 x 47 cm

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT

Phil Collins responds to questions about the relationship of his work to performance art and delegated authorship.



Phil Collins
you'll never work in this town again (mark), 2006



Phil Collins
you'll never work in this town again (claire), 2006



Phil Collins
Installation view, BALTIC, 2008

STAGING A TERRAIN OF SHARED DESIRE

Claire Bishop and Phil Collins



All images:
Phil Collins
free fotolab, 2004—
An itinerant photo lab and photographic collection

CLAIRE BISHOP:

Your work is usually framed in terms of an engagement with mediation — and with photography in particular. But it is equally possible to place it in relation to performance, specifically in the way in which the apparatus of mediation (camera, video, etc.) invites a performative presentation of the self. In this respect, a hallmark of your approach is getting other people to perform themselves for a fixed camera (baghdad screentests [2001], they shoot horses [2004], the world won't listen [2005–2007], even the return of the real [2005–2007]). How accurate is this suggestion that your work has a relationship to performance?

PHIL COLLINS:

As a student I was unwittingly exposed to a golden age of performance. It was the arse-end of the 1980s and the start of Major's grey Criminal Justice '90s, and the recession provoked some kind of last-gasp sputum-filled reaction from the live art community. And like a perspiring groupie I'd travel the country in search of a wrap: the jumble-sale pop psychosis of Forced Entertainment in *Marina and*



Lee or *Emmanuelle Enchanted*, hitch-hiking to Tramway to see the Wooster Group in *Brace Up!* or to Amsterdam for *House/Lights*; seeing Ballet C De La B Let's *Op Bach* and Rose English's *My Mathematics* at Queen Elizabeth Hall, Pina Bausch's *Café Müller* and *Nelken* in Edinburgh, Robert Pacitti's *Geek* at ICA, Michael Clark, Impact Theatre, Gob Squad, and a diet of durational live art and radical drag in double-helpings.

At Manchester I studied drama and film, with a focus on gender and sexuality, under Dr Stella Bruzzi, and in the mid-'90s taught film and performance theory by day and by night worked on live events with Max Factory's Sharon Smith and Felicity Croydon. We sallied round the country in a transit van launching our performances on an unsuspecting public. Smith and Croydon continue in a variety of guises to make incisive, alert, anarchic works, and their mapping of a particular form of rough-edged set improvisation remains an indelible influence on me.



As influential was Lisette Smits's program at Casco and the curatorial strategies she elaborated there, almost forgotten by the willful amnesiacs in their wretched stampede to make art in public spaces. But Smits, the intellectual/curatorial pin-up of the '90s and an original in a sea of black polo-necks and spec-savers, saw cultural production as part of the economic and political structures that govern a time. She also had in her arsenal wonderful style, almost agonizing thoughtfulness, and the need to agitate, to inhabit the public realm. The works she co-produced were on electronic billboards, restaurants, auction houses, television — all spaces to propose radical ideas.

I was also besotted with the work of Alex Bag, and when I first encountered *Fall '95*, *Cash for Chaos*, and *Unicorns and Rainbows* I felt that a train was reversing backwards and forwards over my head. And maybe someone reached down and turned my ignition. I was transfixed. These tapes represented something crucial for me not only in how they articulated performance but also in how they marshalled a savage critique that used available channels in such a devastating way.

So my interest in performance, in relation to both public space and to unscripted moments, comes out of a variety of transformations I underwent. And the performative impulse, or imperative, is almost always present in the shaping of any interaction within the work.

BISHOP:

The mechanism that you use in these videos is one of delegation, in which the responsibility for performance is handed over to the participants. What's at stake in this mechanism for you? Is it primarily political (sharing the creative process, giving everyday non-professionals creative agency) or artistic (giving rise to an aesthetic of unpredictability and risk)? Or something else again?

COLLINS:

"Something else again." What a great name for a show! About Beckett.

In their production, these projects are largely about unevenly staging a terrain of shared desire. I have never been motivated by the purely symbolic gesture, but rather by an idea's actualisation, its transmission, and the experience of it. This is where it intersects with questions of the wider public, and also of form, much as you might conceive an 'entrance' and a 'staging' in theatre. My relationship with my subjects, however, retains a devotional aspect. It sounds silly to say it, but this is very real, this feeling. I offer that which I wish I could do myself. And I gamble that the most compromised, barbed, and problematic exchanges are the ones which you might best respond to — the rules of the game. The offering up of the self, not in a utopian fashion, not in a collective experience, but in a way that readily understands the self-consciousness of our relationships — the highly individualized



awkwardness and its grim exploitation — is predicated on trespass and unction, the ignoble, the desperate, and our inability to connect without the troubling presence of a filter or a reason. Something Else Again.

BISHOP:

This mechanism of delegation can also be seen in your photographic projects, and nowhere more clearly than in free fotolab. At first glance this project resembles innumerable events produced under the auspices of gallery education programmes: the artist invites the public to take photographs, which are then presented within the gallery space. But unlike so many of these projects, which make claims to democratisation and shared authorship, you foreground the artist's role as ultimate editor: in free fotolab, participants hand over undeveloped rolls of 35-mm film, which you develop for them for free, on the understanding that you can select any of their images and present them as your work. While the project engages with the obsolescence of 35-mm film and the specific experience of using this medium (waiting to get the images developed, being unable to delete failed shots), I would like to approach it from another angle. What kind of authorship do you think this project constructs? Do you think of it as a collaboration, or identification, or as something less benign?

COLLINS:

The unforgivable omission at the centre of many social projects — the gift that I sanctimoniously bestow — is the exploitation of this same moment *ad infinitum* in service of the artist. No gift remains a gift when I henceforth publicise the giving. The reproduction in the catalogue, or the magazine, the exhibition (in all senses) of the selfless — or worse, 'hospitable' — event seems to me to be in complete contradistinction to the horsehair attitude in which it is so often represented. Which is a shame, since these questions, these economies, cut to the heart of the work in such wonderful ways.

free fotolab is about the death of 35-mm film and the disappearance of photo labs from our high streets. When I was a student I worked part-time in a photo lab in Belfast and I would linger over the photographs I saw like a half-starved lover, or at least like an over-eager neighbour at a post-holiday slide-show. These were photos that no one else could have taken but the hand that clicked the shutter. The sense of intimacy was appalling — and yet who could tear their eyes away from the ravishing of the net-curtain?

In digital photography the idea of representation (particularly of the self) revolves as much around the delete button as the shutter itself. The images rarely make it off the computer screen — if they ever even make it there. In film, unlike digital photography, we encounter the public



embarrassment of the photo lab (the name's Collins); the drama and temporal nature of process and development (an hour can feel like a day, a day like a week, a week like a year); and the tragic disappointments (but the moon looked enormous in your hand!).

And with 35 mm, particularly, a canister that idly, forbiddingly sits at the bottom of a drawer, possesses a latent threat. What, if anything, is on the film? And would you hand it over to a stranger to do whatever they liked with it? And, most importantly, don't you just *love* a bargain?

At this point, other than the pictures that accompany these words, there is no specific outcome for *free fotolab*. It remains a growing but

personal archive, pored over by myself, the collector, in the dim light of a dripping cellar on a wet Wednesday in Warrington, so yes, maybe it is something less benign. And as I study the photographs in each case it's impossible not to take such a protracted investment in the process, to—admittedly foolishly, hopelessly—attempt to position myself behind the camera, and to ask myself why on earth did someone take this picture. What was it they were looking at? Was it someone impatiently sitting out of frame? Were they hurriedly trying to finish a film? Sometimes we can see with exquisite clarity the point of the photograph. So much so it hurts. But ... Why flowers in Eindhoven? Why teenagers in Milton Keynes? Why funerals in Belgrade?



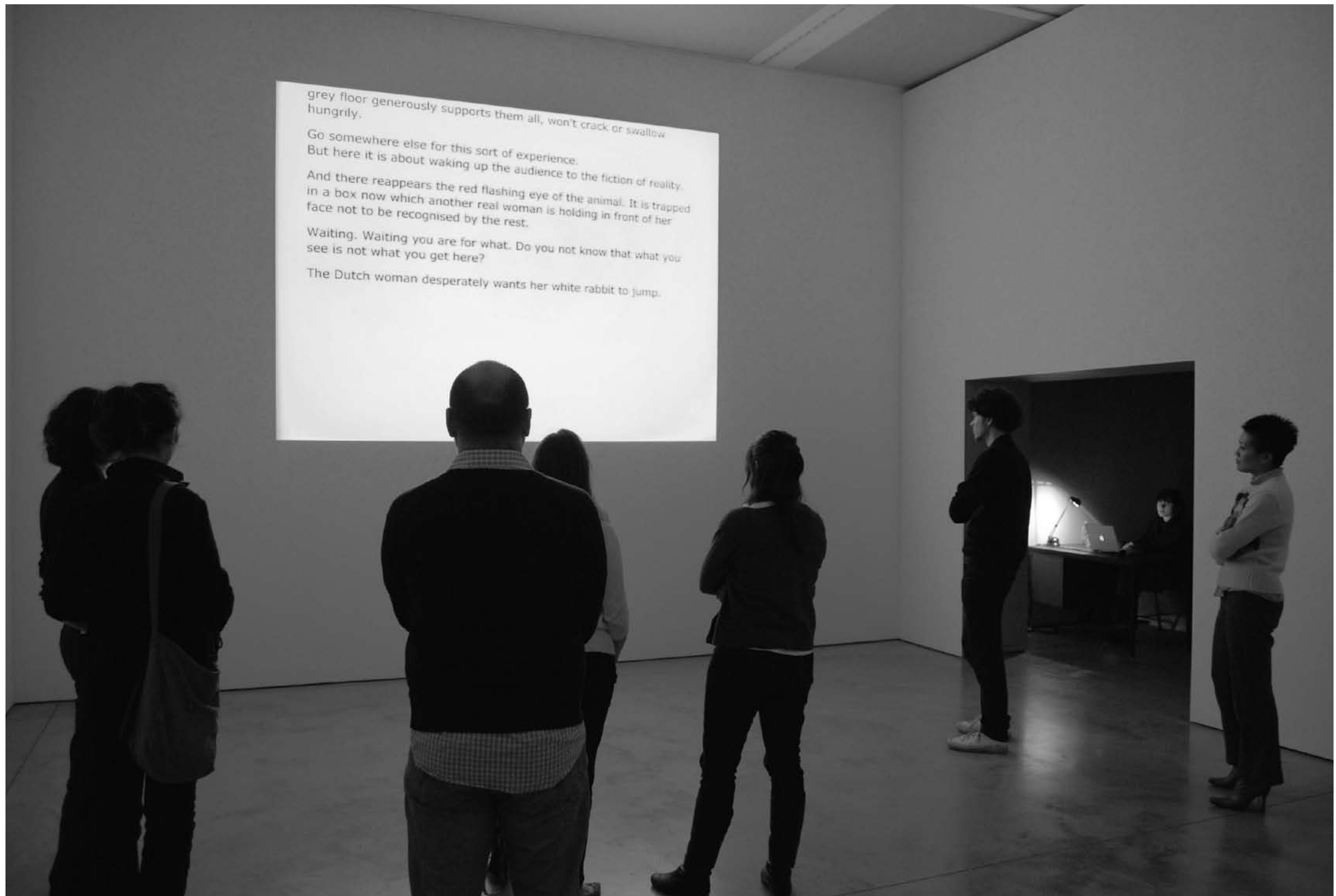
DORA GARCÍA

EXHIBITED WORK

Instant Narrative (IN), 2006-08
Performance, computer software, video projection

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT

Selections from the texts produced by the writers involved in *Instant Narrative (IN)* during its staging at the ICA and Mead Gallery.



Dora García
Instant Narrative (IN), 2006–08
This and the following spread: installation views, ICA, 2008



TRANSCRIPT OF **INSTANT NARRATIVE (IN), 2006–08**

(...) Two females discussing the work “I wonder if it’s different people” “typing” ‘do you like this job please answer?’ over there a short glance back at the screen and back this way they walk through the door and look at the computer diary, walks through the door into the darkness laughter, nodding, questions, she touches her mouth he puts the paper to his mouth as he considers the work a group, forms blocking the doorway, they become a unity, a human door, a shield, he looks at the computer screen, laughs, and asks “what are you doing”. He leaves and turns his back on the world repeating words... in her left ear... I listen... we are both confused hahahaha stripey top walks away black tie leans on the wall glasses, blond hair, clicks his knuckles, click click looks up again unaware, jeans, brown belt gold buckle, one ring fiddling hair dark hair, is she bored? swirls swirls walk through looking up inquisitively, red cardigan, red jacket, she likes the colour red maybe, bright yellow flicking through the pages of the guide as she looks up, fringe, brown hair, a smile appears, scarf placed on her bag, two females, glasses, short fringe, hands move as they talk, there is an ssssssss too many he said and then laughed, they hurriedly walk across “oh you are doing...” swivel round, it’s amazing! from a painting, he is a muse, a model, a pre-raphaelite? cupid? copper shining glittering in the light with the blue and the black it forms an Orient night sky as the dress moves the colours work together to make patterns of copper and midnight blue, they shake hands, good to see you and then disappear from view, pointing pointing laughing, almost giggling “yeah yeah” two people with the same coat walk past a smile, a polite smile and then walk off, copper dress is still there, shining brightly curly hair standing alone like being on stage nods, waves goodbye yawning answers phone “hello I’m in an exhibition”, the crowd has dispersed leaving only two figures in the room pointing over, she searches her bag and produces a book her friend he glances over gives a polite smile, acknowledging the scene, a cross tattoo, a skull,

she’s not writing it, are you? she is! can we give you tips? she moves her left foot and smirks, looks over aware, turns round one last glance before I leave, red halterneck, red stilettos, then a red cap walks past oh and red lipstick, striped tie, female leaning on the wall, brown boots, hands clasped in front of her, a group of three, male, white trainers, one hoodie, one scarf, one wearing a hat, did they come here for a chat? they don’t look at the screen at all, he takes his jacket off, two females, one taller than the other, smiling chatting fanning herself with the guide, the other holds the guide to her chin and they both laugh as they walk away, laughter, last glance, laughter, they disappear. copper dress is back, pink and black stripes, ’80s, leather jacket he carries his black helmet with him wherever he goes and emptiness three on one side, one on the other three friends, one sits alone a big grin appears on her face as she looks over, red tights, red red red, he tries to take a photo click and then checks the image on the monitor, tries to capture the scene, he asks for the details of the two females and writes it on a small pad again, he checks the image, is there enough light? more red tights enter the scene, red tights and red tights glance at each other laughter ensues light illuminates, radiates the dark world they look up in the same way that they would look at the sun in the winter, to feel some warmth on their face they search for answers as they look up, answers to questions that have answers. she speaks fast and moves slowly, “sorry” she says as she peers over at the computer screen and walks back into the large room, she is blocked from view by a new cluster of people, a group of heads look at the screen as the screen tells them “I don’t expect my audience to understand what they are looking at”. she holds her necklace for security. copper dress is back, yet again, now talking to a new group muck muck “how are you?” he strokes his stomach, wipes his forehead, touches his heart all with the same hand, red boots, hands in back pockets, tak tak tak across the room, he waits a while before he chooses to sit down, red boots is back now out of view, a tulip, a mulberry, a picture of red glasses all walk together on the same being. the emperor is back! in grey, he receives a smack from copper dress, she swivels, he leaves the room muck muck, she kisses the grey emperor, the Roman statue is alive for the night, three pairs a slide, hand on hip then a wave he scratches his ear then walks through, the group disperses as new ones arise to fill the void, a confident stride, hands folded, and again, then a sigh a nod hands on pockets as another hand across

the room scratches her head, trying to make some sense of the exhibit from the information given to her, the same hand then is placed on her stomach. is she hungry? (...) *You always need to remain interesting to a crowd.* One approaching obviously attracted by the laughter next door, the others follow and suddenly a lot of movement in the space. And moving from one foot to the other to shift the weight to endure to catch what'll be next. Writing about folding arms in front of the chest. Smiling knowingly she exchanges opinions with her companion. (...) The heavy chain is dangling dangerously from his hip. Has he come to arrest the boy who ate the sun? Perhaps he has also escaped already just like the hunter-boy earlier tonight. This is hide and seek, catch and run. Chain boy and sailor girl. Blue and white stripes. Recognized he's withdrawn undercover now to catch the two-dimensional woman, whisper her instructions comprehensibly in the dark space. (...) Always a good way to get attention: if in doubt moonwalk. He's back for the third time and off as swiftly as he came, hands clasped firmly on the bag, not satisfied he leaves "wondering why I put myself in this situation". She clasps her ticket, they slowly hover this way, with her other hand she eats something, what is it chocolate raisins mmm their movements mirror each other she stands calmly, looks to the left, a camera hiding in the bag doesn't get used enough, they want to be in both worlds at the same time, look here look back look here look back, hair in a loose ponytail dressed in shades of grey with some black helmet looks like a bowl he tugs at his jumper then places his hand in his left pocket scratches ear fold his arms and waits, they both wait one glances over as if to say 'is that it' they turn nod and laugh at the same time, they sit and move at the same time, such unity in their movements, impressive. They both place their feet under the stool, they discuss the work they can discuss the work they will discuss the work they shall discuss the work they discuss the work work wants to be discussed work needs to be discussed work has to be discussed, he does an imitation of running as he leaves the room then waits and peers, big black shiny bag swing the gloves Ferris wheel of the glove world "I want to hide behind the black curtain" plaits hand moves wool, they decide to sit for a while, this room has two benches so three sit two on one bench one on the other one remains standing alone for a while the boot has a buckle placed just above the heel placed there for decorative purposes one day it will stop being

decorative and have a purpose, another pair of boots will come along with straps placed in exactly the same spot so they can unite and become as one. "Oh if only that could it happen. I could finally step out of the misery of being a buckle with no strap, it is just so embarrassing. Nobody understands what I'm going through" "Nobody puts zips in for decorative purposes, why should buckles be any different" "OK so buttons are like that but there's no going back on that they are everywhere on bags, purses, even on hair but I'm not a button, I'm a buckle and I need a strap"! Buckle comes back for one last showing, almost pleading for someone something to help it out of its misery, if it could jump out of the brown boot right now it would if buckles could unbuckle themselves they would, but on their own they are useless, reduced to a shaped metal, pure decoration. "Hey buckle, why don't you buckle up", they say to me as they smirk under their breath. "Buckle up, huh, if only it were that easy" "It's so embarrassing, I'm so ashamed, I'm naked without a strap, how many buckles do you see without a strap in public... none I tell you I'm alone, but at least there's two of us, Buckles on the right foot, at least he understands what I'm going through he can share my misery, my pain, my torture. Whhhhhhyyyy?" "Hey Buckles are you listening? I think I've devised an escape plan, but we need to work together on this, are you listening buckles?" Buckles however takes no notices of Buckle's pleas: "Look Buckle, I don't know why you can't accept it, I'm happy here, I'm used to it, I don't think I could live with a strap anymore, what can I say I like brown boots, we're attached now". I don't really know what to... Atlantis not that cheap really laughter roars through the room but it's true... don't you wish you step into Atlantis when you go there, a paradise on earth. Atlantis, the place of magic of myths and legends not paintbrushes and off white paper, life is full of disappointments, layers warm and yellow girly giggles and papers flies yesssssss a checked behind they are hiding hatching a plan as they discuss their next move he stands alone a serious walk; hands clasped behind him, long straight stride, confident, knowing, decisive. Knows where he's going, what he's doing. He chooses not to sit, to stand is better, high heels black dancing tap tap slide an orange plastic bag, clasped rather than held like a normal plastic bag, you're writing this nods laughs nods for goodbye and leaves simple so simple bless you Buckles is still here!! Is that a sign? Glints of light reflect from it, desperate now for any type of attention small big Converse trainers, socks,

tights... it's all about couples tonight love is in the air... lalalalalala (...) His green collar corresponds rather well with the green thing crumpled up in his hand, the cuffs of a pair of blue jeans rolled up slightly although it's dry outside. To see the boots better, obviously! Or rather a practical reason indeed for there's a bicycle helmet in the hand as well. How accurate are these judgments? According to which pattern are they made and is there one at all? It seems sensible to start with colours and shapes and go from there. Play a game of free association: connecting what's otherwise disconnected and slide along a new trace each time. Glancing over with your yellow bag. Was it yellow? You disappeared so quickly. That's definitely another pattern: movement pattern into the dead angle. Yearning for security, aren't you? Aren't we all? Ah, once you've been found out, though, security is all lame. Yearning for security we all dream of adventures. Being a hero sometimes. Sorry, a heroine perhaps. Yellow the bag is indeed with pink sprinkles. And a scarf bought in Scotland on your trip there last month. Was it nice your last holiday? It's so cloudy today, where would you prefer to be? Hiding out in the dead area when there's a chance for making theatre from life. Snuck up along the dead wall you now peak around the corner and there's a cheeky expression on your face — are you happy you've bailed out? 'Literally retarded' — another woman admits repeatedly. We know her already. Don't worry. That one isn't real. There! Another slow one. Straight into the dead space as well. And forward slightly, reading. Finding out. Leaving already? Pretending — everyone so sneaky today. Back! Just fooling or what? Record. Same trajectory: In, along the back into corner, along side wall (dead) through to the next area and immediately back out again. How would it be if you had a thread tied to the back of your trousers? Which trace would you have left in here? In and out and in. That's a game you're playing. Back and forth. Undecidability, huh? It seems convincing though, well done. Leopard pattern on the back: another trace in the game. The leopard can appear unnoticed to sneak up on its prey. To conceal what's up your hands are placed casually into the back pockets. Off already again. Back to the patterns, though. Connecting otherwise disconnected details something else can take place. Zusammenhänge. Hanging together. Hanging out together. Hanging out alone. El azar. Coincidence. Coinciding. Taking place at once. Suddenly. We're all in the middle of it. Puzzle pieces. El azar. Coincidence. Coinciding.

Taking place together. Taking place at once. Suddenly. On one's own. He enters. Along he stands. Book in hand yet reading somewhere else. With the mind. Leopard back at his back! Careful she might jump. If you turn around now, she'll be gone. Glances. Observing two ways. The leopard wants something for she's again in the dark spot over there. Of course once it's said she must disappear. The loner now once through the arena. Could he be capable of taming that leopard? (Protagonists: 1. 'The leopard': a girl with leopard pattern on back of her jacket 2. 'The loner': tall blond guy, entering and leaving alone, seemingly no special interests) both off the stage.
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..... Leopard girl has enough. She's not coming anymore. New protagonists are needed. The show must go on, mustn't it? Waiting waiting for what the waitress can serve. Leopard girl sneaking around again in the space all of a sudden. So perhaps she has not yet stilled her hunger at last? Might it be that she's also waiting still for the perfect fish to catch? Snatch: gnaw it raw. Well, but who knows when this will happen — impatience is not on the list of things recommended. In fact, time doesn't matter for this is a white box with no apparent connection to the outside (although this has not yet been finally proven.) Be it as it is, fact is, the laws in here work differently. Performance occurs in the act of doing it. Rules are established in their making. That's why our question of 'patterns' might have been futile from the start. A dead-end road. Cul de sac. Protagonist: might she turn out as the fish we needed a little while ago? She's still familiarizing herself with the script. Protagonist: shy girl? Protagonist: thorough girl? Protagonist: curious girl? Needs to be decided. Can be left open. Can be done something else. What's been done: waiting. Definitely. Would you wait indefinitely? What would you wait indefinitely for? Thank you very much for your presence. Two bodies present. Presentation of two bodies. Two bodies presenting themselves. Two gifted bodies. Given their presence is real and of some duration. Third body. Two female bodies. She was so cold this morning so she wrapped herself up very well. Feet snuggled into thick fur. Protagonist: snow girl (white scarf and furry feet) Protagonist: timber man (denim jacket, dark hair) Winter girl, how did you like New York? Could you carry all the books home you bought there for cheap or was your bag a

present and you've got yet to go? Gone you're now. Timber man could construct you a timber boat. You could row to NYC with it and lie at the beach! Chain and hat and glasses. Turning backwards once, quickly. Have you ever been to New York, then? Protagonist: dead-end corner, disconnected hand waving one time. Seen from corner of eye. (...) Checking out. Moving arms. Tilting head. Waiting. Tilting head to other side, open mouth slightly, tipping feet. Cap guy enters in happy stride and straight through. Off. Will be back, no doubt. Camouflage pants is leaving; perhaps he's after the leopard. Couple entering (how do you know they are one?) Hard to say. Brother and sister? Hmm. Sometimes he balances on the outer sides of his feet when he's nervous. But now: brother and sister, definitely. Indefinitely nothing! Bending down, putting away, lifting up. Wondering, looking at each other. We? Brother and sister? Why, is our love affair so invisible? Ha! Gotcha, embarrassment makes people leave. Who would take their siblings into an art exhibition anyway, right? Interests are usually so different. Furry boots returned. (...) Where's your lover? She has slipped a hand-written note on the desk: 'White bag -> Marc Quinn art books.' Making connections, thank you. Who's Marc Quinn, though? Marc Quinn is a forty-seven-year-old Canadian artist. Marc Quinn is here with his wife now. They arrived half a minute ago, completely unexpected. Overwhelmed they must still read the program themselves. Marc Quinn and his wife are not jet-lagged after to long a trip. At least their cheerful faces don't betray exhaustion. Much rather, they are eager to have a really great time while here and to catch as much of the programs as possible. That's why they also turn back to reading the little thing again now — and that although there's a video to be watched. Now, Marc Quinn is showing his wife his friend Friedrich on the screen. Friedrich is thirty-five and earns his money with occasional acting jobs. Thanks to Marc Quinn's artful success, the married couple's schedule is very tight. So they don't have too much time to be hanging about in here and move on to the next playing field already. (...) the word can enter the page in varied manners one after the frog or before the lizard. The writer thinks and writes or writes and thinks later at home with a cup of tea in her hand? 3:15 and a half... forty-five minutes before the writer steps away from the computer and into her own story, driving a lorry in the opposite direction and out into the empty streets covered in flour and flowers. wait listen speak confused think two of the characters enter

the page again they look at the screen and are joined by the tall man they all look read listen think fly dance then they walk out in the same direction that they came. followed by the other couple and a ghost. then something strange happens. A white balloon enters the gallery she sits quite still and watches the writer she rocks back and forth and the floor she reads she is the most beautiful balloon. Perfect size, shape and pure white. She rolls around, turns her back to the writer. The writer plans to stand up and go and pick her up but wants to watch her for a moment. She is peaceful. I take the balloon and place it next to me on my desk. She sits perfectly. A tiny reflection of the writer's hands, the keyboard and the small light are visible in the center of the balloon. The balloon is the writer's favorite gift so far. It has a quality that sits so perfectly in her working space. In the empty white gallery. The writer takes some photos of her new friend. The balloon appears grey in the photos because of the darkness in here. But the writer describes the balloon as being totally white with that special smell that all balloons have. A smell from childhood. They sit side-by-side waiting listening and thinking clearly. The writer plays with her balloon and thinks about parties as a child. Mums and dads and children and clowns and videos and dresses and smiles and sweets and innocence. She wonders who guided the balloon into the gallery. Where it came from? A wedding a birthday a celebration? A woman walks in and takes something from her pocket she adjusts her fringe and stands to read she smiles slightly when she sees herself on screen then steps into a hidden corner she doesn't like the spotlight. She covers her face and makes a run for the next room. She places her belongings on the bench in front of her, blows her nose and unzips her black jacket. She sits next to her things and concentrates on the documentary. The shy woman stands to leave she looks back and laughs and waves at the writer who waves back. There are just fifteen minutes left of this story and the writer can't remember why it started or how it was supposed to end. Will there be anymore unexpected characters between now and the end? Three unexpected guests walk in the woman takes her scarf off the two men stand near the door as the woman walks around the room the man and woman meet in the middle and talk quietly he carries a huge camera he's a photographer and the two girls who have just entered are models here for a fashion shoot they talk in a corner the photographer smiles and the group notice the girls one

girl wears a huge hat that the photographer doesn't like very much. it doesn't quite fit the style of the shoot the photographer walks into the next room and is followed by the production team and the two models the models hang back they are shy to get to close, to annoy the photographer preparing to work. a couple enter the gallery a girl with long hair and her boyfriend. they stay for a very short time. leaving the gallery side by side speaking softly. a woman with bright yellow shoes walks in. these shoes are exactly what the photographer wanted in his photos he spots the shoes he wonders how he can get them he stands near the door and tells his assistant that she must get them the assistant laughs nervously she hates having to steal clothes for this rather difficult photographer she stands behind him wondering what to do next maybe she could convince him to use something else? they leave there is quite a group at the door and two more girls stand on the far wall a girl in red and a girl in black, who goes to the corner where she can hide with the tall man who just shows his face to the writer. how do these characters get in here without being noticed at the wrong time? they all leave the girl in red alone. she looks up through her dark-rimmed glasses smiling she looks down at her leaflet. flicks from the words on the page and those on the screen she tries to find something that makes sense. but she can't. she has entered the wrong book and now she has missed her chance to get into the other one in time. she'll have to stay here but how did her journey go so wrong? how did she end up here in the gallery at the ICA? she had a lead role in the screen play that she was supposed to be in. here she has a bit part... a supporting role. she left the house late that was the problem. she always leaves late it's in her nature. But in this city there's nothing more terrible than being late. she finds this so difficult. and now she's not only been late she's taken a wrong turn, too. the writer writes faster and faster the girl suddenly leaves she has remembered her correct path and she rushes to find it. she has it in mind and she can find it. she won't get to the screen play on time but at least she won't be stuck in this terrible book for any longer. the writer pauses... slightly insulted that everyone decided to leave so quickly. she pulls on her coat and prepares to step onto the page and out of the writer's seat. it's been a long and unexpected journey. a day full of ups and downs. two of the men from earlier walk in and out quickly. the writer is ready. sitting, each second seems to pass more and more slowly for her. (...) straight

through the first room they wander, in one big circle stopping only briefly to view the multiple screens and Donelle's desk into the second room they wander, walking slowly but passing with speed through the room and out nothing captures their attention today two girls come in there are two more they stop at the portraits for a while they talk and laugh slowly moving forwards two of them stand in front of the video not paying attention to the art pieces, just talking. One of them uses strong gestures. Now there is a girl standing in front of the screen, dressed in dark, the handbag on her shoulder. Another girl sits on the black bench watching the posters burning the girl in dark sits down, on the very right corner of the bench now there are three of them sitting on the bench another girl stands behind them there is a bag lying down on the ground next to the girl's feet it creates a strong elongated shadow the film is over, four girls stand up and move to another pieces they enter the other hall one of them is reading the exhibition handout one girl comes closer she reads and turns to the other side two of them sit down the others wander around they leave, but now there are two other visitors in the gallery the girl and a boy the girl's hair is covered they walk holding their hands they stand next to the studio installation for a while they speak the girl is explaining something to her friend the boy now stands behind the bench he has a backpack and wears glasses they both come closer and hug each other the girl points to the screen they laugh and leave another girl in black t-shirt and black tied hair is here she enters the hall she reads and looks towards the screen she stands there not moving she walks slowly closer she stops and goes to read the title of the art piece, of the screen she stands behind the projector and turns back goes around it and stops in front of the video now moves and sits down the steward leaves the hall the girl still is sitting on the left side of the bench, the bottle of water next to her she turns back her handbag on the right shoulder is rather big, so all the weight stands on the bench she turns back from time to time she takes her water and stands up she comes back two men enter they both wear shorts and t-shirts one is in black and another one is in a white t-shirt they walk around stop next to TV screens and then go to studio installation now they enter the other hall. The room is dimly lit, with evening light the white walls vast canvases, these canvases vary in tone, the darkest in the room to the left not at all white, a new colour altogether, it is a tone, an inky shadow compared to the bright white walls of the

room beyond it the screen is bright against it, its white glow blinding. The wall running towards the door however is not so overtaken in shadow it is lighter, more welcoming. Footsteps can be heard, a slow pacing across the gallery they are gone, or so faint that they can no longer be heard were they imagined, created to beak the silence within the two rooms. Of course the films run on, an endless loop of images projected onto the shadow-enveloped wall. Silently in front of this spectacle the bench is placed a small, plastic construction. Two approach, they enter she wears a bright turquoise skirt he, a smart jacket and tie. They stand behind the bench, observing the film before them. She sits, he stands. Almost a composition for a piece of work. He walks towards the wall of television screens, holding the empty glass in front of him he looks downwards towards the images on the lower screens he stands, perfectly still. Footsteps can be heard, from evening shoes, delicate heels. They stand beside each other they pass into the second room stand out of view but their footsteps still echo around the room. Two approach, more follow. One wears a blue dress, deep but not inky a blue the colour of a deep summer evening. He wears a light jacket, the bright light colour standing out within the dimly lit room there is talking and laughter three look towards the television screens they all vanish from sight two walk beside each other towards the lighter, third room. The writer empties his pockets onto the table and thinks about the sunlight he has left behind him. He never really wanted to take this job, but the money was good. And after starting it, it seemed to him a good way to stay alone. He thought he wanted loneliness. He thought it would help him. Of course, after some time the solitude overcame him. The room's hours were peaks of the wider tides of loneliness he felt outside. He found himself staring at an empty room. Writing about an empty room. He sits there now, thinking about the things that he has done today, and the number of times he has felt alone, standing in crowds. A summer of filled faces: filled so thick as to have no room left. His attention flickers between both films. The writer touches his head and begins to think he might have injured it. There is a dull pain there — a sluggishness to his thoughts. The writer stands, taking a break. He returns, and goes back to watching the air; listening to the silence. After a while the writer returns to the keyboard and begins looking for stimuli in the room to talk about. He has been here for so long. Everything has been worked through

by his fingers once before. He has been here for so long. Soon the room will be empty again. He is the last man left. Without him recording the nothing, there will be nothing. (...) Yesterday the writer felt old for the first time, and then lied about it in an art gallery. Honesty is so very difficult to find. Don't tell anybody, but the floor looks different today — worse; like it has been trampled upon with hooves and metal stiletto pins these last few days (and nights) which begs the obvious why... why, why has it taken until just a spattering of hours before the exhibition closes for good, for the creaks and little soil-lines to appear between the slats? what has happened in the last sixty-three hours to result in this new layer of flake and sliver upon what was, before, wooden panels almost metallic in their smooth and their gleam what little levers have been inserted via child-heels into the spaces between the pine? There were children on campus yesterday, squelching in shop doorways and falling out of buses and they had at least an hour each to kill — it is hardly surprising, then, that floors are showing damage everywhere the children must be blamed. A man has entered, pale hair, pale trousers, pale paper resting in a book under his elbow — his face reflects the light from a bank of screens, features unchanged except the whites of his eyes, blue then orange, then pale pink. He is no longer alone — he has two companions now, male in olive green standing ever in a shape of an ex, his friend teetering on the inside faces of her shoes, happy in a lack of balance but still reliant upon an arm bent at the elbow to make sense of the space. they move apart, and then back together, and then leave, like a smoothed cube of rolling flat faces, neither settled nor slipping but it is his personality which fills the room like the spread of the white of his hair across a matte pate — his jokes about paedophiles and tweed which settle like sediment only warmer the air is impressionistic this afternoon — it encourages conceits like larger spaces between words the room is suddenly full of noise without a centre — a malteaser of noise, and everybody suddenly seems to be wearing shorts and holding books with words on the front, the words say very little suddenly — abstractions forged out of the lines which define league tables and the easy-on-the-eye contrast of maroon and white, cherries and milk but the smell of as level leaves the room as quickly as it entered, and the breath of nothing descends again like mushroom foam it makes the light even more flat and underwhelming than socialist rhetoric forced

out in Polish — and so it falls to words — to words to find the burning, broiling core at the heart of the room which combines imagination and monotony in astonishing smudges with fourteen minutes left of dialogue between a computer and a mess of installation, it falls to words and none come and then the none that come are upset by the green plastic glow of a folder as a man enters — of all things, a folder — and the gallery's imagination begins to grind once more into conversation, his face comes into view, warm with a frown/smile — he is a man who walks in straight lines — and he disappears behind the wall of another room he only appears again at the far corner — a figure of broad, sweeping circles — a figure of grounded, grounded flight. he. disappears. today the empty gallery has an atmosphere of a finality. the last day of the show. the last day that this piece here and now will see any performers. all is coming to its end... outside people wander. but none enter. the gallery is a lonely space today. a bright green top and fly-away blonde curls approach the gallery, but turn away again. unknowingly teasing. 'and in those ruins anything would be possible: the most profound love, the most unspeakable crime'. these words jump out at me. hidden on the back of a card. found only by sheer luck/coincidence/turn of time... profound. they echo through the emptiness of the gallery reverberating off the walls a silent song in my head in this melancholy mood the gallery is full of ghosts. wandering memories from previous hours when performers walked through the space. my eyes trace the usual route. piercing the walls and the blind spots. my eyes trace unusual routes. following the ghosts ingrained in my memory precisely for their radical routes. a sudden burst of movement of black coats outside the stewards gather and prepare very seriously a young gentleman wanders around the gallery with bursting energy he bounded into the gallery, a friendly face, but for now he paces slowly and seriously standing tall and upright he stations himself in front of the second video, yet pays little attention to it, awaiting words instead, I expect he will be desiring prose, he responds with a gaze... someone watching him... a crossed pair of legs, tan feet peeking out behind an artificial white frame... and there he has it as dictated by the man himself he leaves with an eager pace, but not eager for the end, just an eager pace will he return for a final goodbye for it is known to my saddened heart that this man will be leaving for good and thus the goodbye must be final returning slowly and slyly back through the doorway he

glides across the floor before the projection and into the blind spot he hides a game? or is he just reoccupied PREoccupied is this what the piece is really? A game. For the performers always participate; some in a playful spritely manner, but many shy away. Is it a cruel game then. A bully's game. To be singled out and picked upon. The performer is without choice. Bullying some might say. Bullying indeed. But those who dance, who prance, who play hide and seek around the corners of the rooms are not being bullied. He sits. Watching. Watching the words on the wall appear. About him. And as he does he feels a terrible isolation. How awful the disconnection of everyone with lungs! A girl writes in another room. Words appear. They are transmitted from disk through wires to disk through bulb to wall. He reads unable to see her. They are six metres apart. How appropriate the spacing.

Authors: Roy Brendan, Amy Budd, Tom Jones, Amy McKelvie, Sophie Springer, Deniz Unal, Alys Williams (ICA); Ruth Burgon, Jennifer Greenland, James Harrington, Sara Kellett, Sam Kinchin-Smith, Egle Kulbokaite, Samual Sedgman, Helen Stevens, Liz Sunter, Sharlene Teo, Lianne Stimpson (Mead).

CHRISTOPH SCHLINGENSIEF

EXHIBITED WORK

Exhibited at ICA and BALTIC:

The African Twin Towers – Stairlift to Heaven, 2007

Mixed media installation, incorporating a projection of the film *The African Twin Towers*

Exhibited at Mead:

Freakstars 3000, 2004

Video, 75 mins

Installed at Mead on twelve video monitors

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT

Silvia Jestrović's essay explores the idea of 'hyper-authenticity' in Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria*, 2000.



Christoph Schlingensief
The African Twin Towers, 2007
Production still



Christoph Schlingensief
The African Twin Towers – Stairlift to Heaven, 2007
Installation view, ICA, 2008



Christoph Schlingensiefel
Freak Stars 3000, 2004
 Installation view, Mead Gallery, 2008

PERFORMING LIKE AN ASYLUM SEEKER: PARADOXES OF HYPER-AUTHENTICITY IN SCHLINGENSIEF'S *PLEASE LOVE AUSTRIA* Silvija Jestrović

German director Christoph Schlingensiefel confined asylum seekers in containers that were installed in a central square in Vienna, enabling the public to view their daily routines for a week via an Internet TV channel. Mimicking the format of the television reality show *Big Brother, Please Love Austria* (2000), a public project commissioned by Wiener Festwochen, asked the viewing public to cast their votes in a mock process where, after all the others had been eliminated, one asylum seeker would “win” the coveted prize: an Austrian spouse and the legal right to remain in the country. The project turned into a spectacle and engaged the public in a passionate political debate.

This project, neither located in the tradition of community works that rely on unmediated presence and on the sharing of experience, nor within the realm of mainstream theatre and drama that features fictionalised and often romanticised embodiments of exilic figures, belongs to a middle sphere of exilic performances. The public performance uses actual asylum seekers and illegal immigrants as a means of making political statements, playing out the ambiguity between the performativity of the staged and the theatricality of the authentic. It exemplifies the phenomenon that I will call here the ‘hyper-authentic’ — in which the authenticity of the subject is partly constructed through the gaze of the beholder. Although the project in question uses real asylum seekers as performers in an event that is indeed about exilic issues, the artistic framework is not always chosen or controlled by the performing subjects. Exilic voices and bodies are often subordinated, to a greater or lesser degree, to the artistic concept of the established Western director. Nevertheless, I would argue that the relationship between performance ethics and efficacy remains ambiguous and makes this case study difficult to dismiss as merely gratuitous exploitation.

THE HYPER-AUTHENTIC

The term hyper-authentic is inspired by Jean Baudrillard’s famous concept of the hyperreal. For Baudrillard, the hyperreal described a world of

simulations that no longer had original referents and thus brought into question the entire idea of authenticity.¹ To a large degree, that which is hyper-authentic embodies the expectations of the beholder and the tendency of the performing subject to meet those expectations. Like the hyper-real, the hyper-authentic is also produced through representation. While Baudrillard’s notion suggests that everything is placed on the same plane, making the relationship between the signifier and the signified obsolete, the hyper-authentic still carries the tensions between presence and representation, theatricality and performativity, immediacy and mediation. The use of the hyphen, indicating the tensions and somewhat paradoxical dualities inherent in the phenomenon of the hyper-authentic, suggests that the hyper-authentic has not yet fully rid itself of its semiotic roots.

Although the example I will consider here places asylum seekers in a situation where they are asked to perform themselves — in acts that often reveal the very paradoxes of authenticity — all is not turned into a Baudrillardian simulacrum. In the everyday performance of asylum, the relationship between the signifier (residence permit, work permit, visa, passport, and other legal documents) and the signified (the exile as performing subject/object) remains relevant. The meaning generated through this relationship between sign and referent has very real existential and material consequences, often becoming the deciding factor between permission to remain in the country and deportation.

The hyper-authentic, however, both in the performance of asylum and in its everyday reality, is still a mediated presence. Within the legal system, as in performance art, the exile is required to select, condense, and pitch his/her experience so that it comes across as convincing and valid. It is not only a matter of *being* an asylum seeker, a refugee, or an immigrant, but also of *performing* accordingly in order not to be considered bogus.² For Derrida, this is one of the central paradoxes of hospitality:

[...] the foreigner is first of all foreign to the legal language in which the duty of hospitality is formulated, the right to asylum, its limits, norms, policing, etc. He has to ask for hospitality in a language which by definition is not his own, the one imposed on him by the master of the house, the host, the king, the lord, the authorities, the nation, the State, the father, etc. This personage imposes on him translation into their own language, and that’s the first act of violence.³



Image from *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container* (dir. Paul Poet, 2002)

Hyper-authenticity is a translation strategy; it embodies the foreigner through the language of the host. The hyper-authentic takes place between the beholder's expectations and assumptions of what a 'real' asylum seeker is and the exile's need to meet these expectations and legitimise his/her status—to prove his/her own authenticity. By calling attention to the position of asylum seekers and illegal immigrants, the performance that this paper will examine both perpetuates and subverts the phenomenon of the hyper-authentic.

ASYLUM SEEKERS AS ÜBERMARIONETTES

Schlingensief is a well-known agent provocateur whose controversial films, performances, television work, and public art often push ambiguous subject matters to extremes, blur boundaries between artifice and reality, and probe socio-political contradictions. His toying with the notion of authenticity by using mentally disabled people in his short film *Freakstars 3000* (2004), engaging repentant neo-Nazis in his Zürich production of *Hamlet* (2001), and asylum seekers in *Please Love Austria* (2000) has sparked political and ethical debates in the German media. His work oscillates between being an effective new form of politically engaged art and a spectacle of simulated reality that, no matter how fierce the response, reproduces what it set out to scrutinize.

Please Love Austria was staged in Vienna and documented by filmmaker Paul Poet.⁴ Although the issues that it deals with have wider significance, the impetus for the project was related to a series

of electoral successes for Austria's far-right Freedom Party. Its leader, Jörg Haider, based his campaign on strong anti-immigration views that met with public approval widespread enough that, for the first time since the Second World War, a party of the extreme right became part of the Austrian government. One of the posters for the electoral campaign featured the overtly xenophobic term *überfremdung*, last employed by the Nazis, to describe a country overrun with foreigners. This rightward trend prompted the European Union to put Austria under diplomatic sanctions as a way of voicing its outrage not only over the specifics of the Freedom Party's anti-immigration approach, but also its checkered past, which includes strong Nazi ties. Schlingensief set up his project with a sense of political urgency as a means of exploring the ambiguities of the Austrian populace that, on the one hand, unmasked its xenophobic sentiments and cast its ballots overwhelmingly in favour of Haider, while, on the other, staged a wave of political protests against the Freedom Party and its anti-immigration campaign.

For one week, Schlingensief kept his asylum seekers confined in a container that resembled a detention centre and at the same time alluded to a concentration camp. Unlike the actual government-run detention centre for those seeking asylum, located on the outskirts of Vienna, Schlingensief's container stood in the heart of the city in Herbert-von-Karajan Square. It made for a stark contrast to the Staatsoper building's architectural grandeur. On top of the container a huge banner proclaimed FOREIGNERS OUT (AUSLÄNDER

RAUS). Cameras installed in the container enabled the public to constantly observe the asylum seekers and eventually to vote some of them out of the country in the style of the reality show *Big Brother*. Biographies of the protagonists, describing them in exaggerated cultural and racial stereotypes, were posted on the director's web sites. Schlingensief acted as a kind of emcee of the event, giving provocative, sometimes contradictory speeches and engaging debates with the public that in the course of the event grew increasingly heated—and in some instances physical.

The hyper-authenticity that the presence of the actual asylum seekers invoked within Schlingensief's constructed framework created a complex interplay between real and simulated that not only challenged the political views of Austrians, but also at times tested the intelligence of the viewing/participating public. Poet's documentary of the event catches some of the hilarity of the debates, such as the moment when an outraged elderly woman, whose opinions seemed to corroborate those of the Freedom Party, yells at Schlingensief to get out of Austria. "You artist!" she spits in a tone that makes the word *artist* sound derogatory. As her anger grows, her argument becomes increasingly confused, until finally she seems unable to distinguish where *art*, *artistry*, and *artificiality* ends and where reality begins. "You artist!" came out sounding like a swear word perhaps not only because the lady had a different political position, which the event was ridiculing, but also because she no longer knew precisely what her political view was.

Arguably, the most thought-provoking confusion of reality and perception took place when pro-immigrant activists took the provocation at face value and stormed the performance site. Climbing onto the container, they attempted to remove the Nazi slogan and to 'free' the asylum seekers. During the seven days of Schlingensief's event, passionate and aggressive reactions ensued mostly from adherents of right-wing values. On several occasions, security guards, employed to ensure the safety of the asylum seekers, had to intervene to protect the director. The asylum seekers remained relatively safe, up to the moment when the pacifist group came to 'save' them. It was only when the activists climbed on the container and tried to take it apart that the asylum seekers were in real danger and had to be evacuated. This episode is in a way a literal and most ironic illustration of Derrida's paradox of hospitality. It points to the close epistemological proximity

between terms *hospitality* and *hostility*, both of which are derived from the word *foreigner* (*hostis*)—those who are "welcomed as guest or as enemy".⁵ Schlingensief's provocation was not only a critique of a xenophobia that at times verged on Nazism, but it also exposed the naiveté of xenophobia's left-wing political opponents, whose acts of misplaced hospitality proved to be almost as dangerous.

The project has prompted ongoing debate and to some extent has become a morality play in the mind of the Austrian public. Schlingensief blurred the lines between the factual and the fabricated, confusing political positions once held firmly, exposing truisms as ambiguities, and making the familiar strange and uncanny. Although his work can, in a certain light, be seen to reflect Brechtian visions of a politically engaged theatre of *Verfremdung*, it does so through a very different set of devices and production ethics. In *Please Love Austria*, the concept of *Verfremdung* depends on the initially introduced axiom of authenticity. In other words, the asylum seekers need to be genuine, since the strategy of confusing facts and fabrication is key to Schlingensief's *Verfremdungseffekt* as a means of destabilising the public's preconceptions. If the people in the container are real asylum seekers, what else is real? Are some elements of their biographies real? Where are they taken after they are voted out of the country? Is their deportation real? What about the winner? Does he really get the money? Hyper-authenticity was stretched to its limits and turned into its own parody; it became an estrangement device.

To disguise their identities, most of the people held in the container wore wigs, hats, and sunglasses, which further turned the ideas of identity and authenticity into a masquerade. In one scene on the roof of the container, they took part in an obviously staged language class, trying to learn the language of their host country by mechanically repeating German words. In another scene, a tall black man with a blond wig danced to a German cabaret song that contained blatantly racist lyrics. Asked to perform their authenticity, the asylum seekers became, to some extent, actors in a drag show. This parody of authenticity echoes Judith Butler's concept of "subversive body acts", in which drag performances are seen as a means of exposing the construction of gender.⁶ In this case, however, the subversions of asylum identities were limited, since the people in the container were not in control of the performance. Rather it was Schlingensief who was the mediator between



Image from *Foreigners Out! Schlingensief's Container* (dir. Paul Poet, 2002)

the pseudo detention centre and the outside world, 'directing' most of the asylum seekers' "subversive body acts". Schlingensief used asylum seekers as *Übermarionettes*. More specifically, he used the exilic body as an artistic device, a metonymic embodiment strategy in a morality play staged for the outside world. At one point during the event, the Austrian Nobel laureate Elfriede Jelinek addressed the crowd assembled in front of the container and announced that she and the asylum seekers had put together a puppet show about asylum. This metatheatrical episode made overt the parallel between puppets and asylum seekers.

Schlingensief seemed fully aware of the ethical issues inherent in his project. At one point during an interview, he stares into Poet's camera and declares that after all was said and done, this was not a project that offered much to the asylum seekers involved, that in the end no one would be awarded a green card. In a way, the objectification of the asylum seekers in this project could be viewed as a deliberate representation of a representation—a mirroring of the way their personal and legal identities are embodied, represented, and instrumentalised in society. In that light, it could be argued that Schlingensief repeated and exaggerated the pattern of instrumentalisation of asylum seekers as a means of social critique—a form of counter-instrumentalisation. However, one of the key ethical dilemmas of the project lies in the scene during which the black man in a wig dances cheerfully to the beat of a racist German song. The question still remains: did the man speak German and could he understand the lyrics? An answer to that question would determine whether his dance was a "subversive body act" and a deliberately parodic performance of

hyper-authenticity or a manipulation on the part of the director that did little more than objectify and exploit its subject. Poet's documentary, as well as other available materials, focuses on the director and on the reactions of the public. The film includes Schlingensief talking at length about the project as well as brief interviews with critics, theorists, politicians, activists, collaborators, members of the public, and fellow artists. Interestingly, not one of the asylum seekers was asked to comment on the project and his/her involvement in it.

REPRESENTATION AND AMBIVALENCE

Schlingensief puts asylum seekers on display, making, as Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett has pointed out in her writing on live displays, "the status of a performer problematic, for people become signs of themselves".⁷ In *Please Love Austria* the asylum seekers move within an imposed mise-en-scène while someone else, someone with 'better' qualifications and 'proper' language skills, speaks in their name and on their behalf. Through such a representation much has been left unspoken in the relationship between artists and their subjects. Julia Kristeva finds a suppressed conflict underneath the silence of the exile:

When the foreigner—the speech-denying strategist—does not utter his conflict, he in return takes root in his own world of a rejected person whom no one is supposed to hear. The rooted one who is deaf to the conflict and the wanderer walled in by his conflict thus stand firmly, facing each other. It is a seemingly peaceful coexistence that hides the abyss.⁸

Within the given framework, asylum seekers have no room for resistance, for even the subversions of hyper-authenticity are part of the mise-en-scène. Schlingensief uses asylum seekers as devices to voice his own political concerns, while the main subjects of the debate are kept more or less off the table. The artist positions himself as a representative of the issue in question when the actual presence of an asylum seeker would better illustrate the point. The idea of subversion is understood as a mise-en-scène performed by exiles but directed and controlled by the artist. As I have suggested, the project's core ethical problems involve Schlingensief's use of subversive strategies as a means of representation, not allowing the performers to negotiate, fashion, and appropriate those strategies in ways they find most suited to their bodies, voices, and histories—not allowing the projects to aid exilic self-expression.

Nevertheless, it may be useful to look at this project from a slightly different angle. While Schlingensief's provocation indisputably objectifies asylum seekers by locking them in containers and covering the city centre in xenophobic slogans, the project not only alludes to reality television but also ominously echoes Austria's Nazi past and warns against its current right-wing trends. With all its ethical shortcomings, it is still a daring piece of politically engaged public art. The ambiguities of using, perpetuating, and eventually subverting the phenomenon of the hyper-authentic in this project suggests some potentially useful strategies that could be further explored in staging asylum and immigration outside the mainstream. Two aspects of this project might be particularly relevant: moving beyond narratives of victimisation and using spectacle to place issues of immigration in the centre of public debate. Schlingensief's project moves beyond the voyeuristic consumption of asylum narratives, where hardship and suffering happen to the Other in remote places of the world or in society's remote underworld. In such a constellation the figures of victimisers are usually equally distant and sufficiently different from the viewing public, so that the 'pleasure' in watching events in others' unfortunate lives is not disturbed. Schlingensief takes the process of watching to the point of absurdity by using the techniques of a reality television show. The public is entertained, but also confused and finally provoked and agitated. Parody and drag emerge here as the key strategies of staging asylum and of subverting stock responses to issues of immigration and xenophobia.

The project raises awareness of immigration issues and makes use of controversy in order to spark public debate. Schlingensief, by placing the container with asylum seekers in the heart of Austria's capital, positioned immigration issues as a crucial political question and a test of Austrian democracy. He used the city as a stage along the lines described by Krzysztof Wodiczko, a Polish-born émigré artist known for his politically charged public video projections:

The city operates as a monumental stage and a script in the theatre of our way of life, perpetuating our preconceived and outdated notions of identity and community, preserving the way we relate to each other, the way we perceive others and ourselves. [...] Media art, performance art, performative design: they must interfere with these everyday aesthetics if they wish to contribute ethically to a democratic process.⁹

At the end of Schlingensief's project, a number of theatre artists and other figures took to the stage in front of the container to share their views. One of the speakers pointed out that it was curious that all of the protests and debates took place in front of a fake detention centre, while there was an actual detention centre just a few kilometres away, on the outskirts of Vienna, where no one had ever ventured either to free asylum seekers or to demand their deportation. What is it that makes the performance of asylum more powerful than the reality of it? Guy Debord's seminal work, *The Society of the Spectacle*, opens with a quotation from Feuerbach that might provide an answer: "But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to essence... illusion *only* is sacred, truth *profane*."¹⁰ Further to this line of thought, perhaps the genuine needs to become hyper-authentic—the sign of itself—in order to call attention to itself and eventually carve out a space for intervention. This last point should not only be taken as a reiteration of the critique embodied in Debord's notion of the spectacular society, but also as a potential interventionist strategy of counter-appropriation that might deserve further exploration through staging asylum and immigration issues.

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¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila Farier Glaser, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994.

² In Britain eighty percent of refugees fail to meet the government's criteria for granting asylum. An article published in *The Observer*, for example, highlights the inability of the immigration system to recognize the experience of female asylum seekers:

About a third of all asylum seekers are female, yet campaigners argue that the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees does not take into account women's experiences. [...] Meanwhile, the fact that a woman in their initial interview might say she's been persecuted because she's the wife or sister of an activist, or because she was involved in low-level political activity such as hiding someone or cooking for political meetings, is sometimes not taken seriously. ("It is as if I'm Dead Already," *The Observer*, July 22, 2007)

³ Jacques Derrida, and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press, 2000, p.15.

⁴ Paul Poet, *Ausländer Raus! Schlingensiefs Container*, Monitorpop Entertainment, 2005.

⁵ Derrida and Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality*, p.45.

⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, London and New York: Routledge, 1990.

⁷ Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 'Objects of Ethnography,' in Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine (eds.), *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991, p.415.

⁸ Julia Kristeva, Leon S. Roudiez (trans). *Strangers to Ourselves*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, p.17.

⁹ Krzysztof Wodiczko, 'Open Transmission,' in Alan Read (ed.), *Architecturally Speaking: Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday*, London and New York: Routledge, 2000, p.88.

¹⁰ Guy Debord and Donald Nicholson-Smith (trans.), *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York: Zone Books, 1992, p.11.

BARBARA VISSER

EXHIBITED WORK

Last Lecture, 2007
Video projection, 20 mins

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT

A transcript of Visser's *Last Lecture*.

Barbara Visser
Last Lecture, 2007
Installation shot, Museum De Paviljoens, Almere, 2007



TRANSCRIPT OF *LAST LECTURE, 2007*

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:

Good evening.
My name is Barbara Visser.

Lecture on Lecture with Actress
takes place in Berlin in September, 2004.

The location is a small hangout
for art people called The Münz Club.

You can't see me, but I'm standing on the
other side of the wall behind the actress,

and I will be standing there for forty-five minutes.

I'm blocking the passageway to the toilets
and it's noisy as hell.

I'm standing facing a small door,
whispering a text into a microphone.

I've just started a performance
where I prompt an actress playing me.

From my dark spot, I am trying
to live up to my own ideas.

Speaking as clearly as I can,
I'm wondering if my words

are reaching the actress performing
on the other side of the wooden door.

A young art critic from Germany
has invited me for a show

with the ambiguous theme:
Funky Lessons—

the trouble with didactics,
and how it's tackled...

Art people from around Europe
have gathered here tonight

and they chit-chat about art matters.

They expect the Funkiest Lesson.

To meet their expectations, I'm presenting
them my troubled version of the truth.

Where will this lead to?
[actress suddenly stops speaking]

MODERATOR (1997):
Are there real experiences, other than the
everyday—

WOMAN 1 IN THE AUDIENCE:
What kind of contradiction is that?!

MODERATOR:
You don't see a contradiction there?

WOMAN 1 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Not at all, that's humbug.

MODERATOR:
For you everything is real?

WOMAN 1 IN THE AUDIENCE:
When I walk outside later on,
Isn't that a wonderful experience

being in the fresh air,
that's a real experience, it's just...

just splendid!

PERSON IN THE AUDIENCE:
Cars... fumes...!

WOMAN 1 IN THE AUDIENCE:
No, no, not at all. The street is being redone,
so there is none of that.

MODERATOR:
You don't make a distinction between
the real and the fictional then?

WOMAN 1 IN THE AUDIENCE:
When it concerns experiences, no.

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:
To force the actress to speak in a specific way



All images:
Barbara Visser
Last Lecture, 2007

I am overdoing the intonation
in this lecture about my work.

The actress follows without hesitation.

Of course she does,
she has no choice;

her failure is public, mine is private.
All eyes are on her.

And all ears too.

A known actress in Holland, she's
out of place here in this German setting

receiving English words in her
Dutch right ear, and repeating them.

MODERATOR:
I'll give Barbara the opportunity
to present her work now,
and tell us a bit about herself.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
OK. Thanks.

Good evening.
You're told my name is Barbara Visser

I am invited
to present my work here tonight.

From preliminary conversations —
about my work...

with the people organising this night

is this evening...
have we decided...

to dedicate tonight to the theme:

Reality as fiction.

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:
By now I am shouting my words into the
microphone, standing in this busy corridor

leading up to the toilets
in a bar called The Münz Club,

my words work their way through the space and
into the right ear of a tall, dark-haired woman.

Her name is Saskia,
and we first met a few weeks ago.

Saskia knows very little about my work,



but has agreed to be Barbara Visser for a night
and repeat what I am whispering in her ear.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
I'm in the convenient position...

where I can... start a videotape!

While the other members of the forum

mentally prepare

for the inextricable philosophical knot

they will be in later on.

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:
No one seems to notice the fact
that the brunette is an empty shell

repeating the words she receives
through a small device in her right ear.

To produce these words is easier this time
than in 1997; I have a written text in front of me

that I read aloud.
The actress registers and repeats

and I continue talking while
she listens and speaks at once.

They buy it.

Her pace and tone are so convincing
that the audience has no second thoughts.

Her behaviour is fine:
a stewardess in full action.

I tell Saskia a video clip is coming up

of my appearance in a Lithuanian soap series.
Our looks can be compared here.

The resemblance between the dark-
haired woman on stage and me is striking

and the audience is reassured.
They say to each other:

She hasn't changed a bit in seven years' time!

At this very moment it occurs to me
that one can also be too convincing.

Even her mistakes appear to be natural,

as if the robot has come to life.

WOMAN 2 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Can I ask you a question?

Can I ask you a question
about your performance here?

Did you prepare for that alone,
how you would act here —

your gestures, how you talk —

BLONDE ACTRESS:
Here?

WOMAN 2 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Or is it just the way you always behave?

BLONDE ACTRESS:
I am not in my most natural state here.

WOMAN 2 IN THE AUDIENCE:
What image did you have of your presence here,

what image of the artist
did you create to be seen here?

Did you rehearse with an actor,
and did you decide:

I am the artist and this is
what the evening will be like?

BLONDE ACTRESS:
It closely resembles my role
in the Lithuanian TV series

where I had to think about how
does one play oneself —

and what does an artist look like?

MAN 1 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Will this be aired on Lithuanian TV?

MODERATOR:
No, no. But please continue along this line —

Why this question?
Explain us that.

WOMAN 2 IN THE AUDIENCE:
With the nature of her work,

the codes she uses — it's clear to me —

I was afraid I would ask a rude question —

BLONDE ACTRESS:
Please do!

WOMAN 2 IN THE AUDIENCE:
I wanted to know how constructed
her presence here is.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
Do I appear to be myself to you?

WOMAN 2 IN THE AUDIENCE:
I don't know you.

My impression is that
everything you say and do here

has been preconceived.

MAN 2 IN THE AUDIENCE:
All human behaviour is coded,
even being a parent.

I heard that in Japan artists
always wear a French cap

to show their profession.

It's a trivial idea that
all human behaviour is coded...

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:
I wanted to create confusion
about the identity of the speaker

I am somewhat discouraged by
seeing how easily the audience complies

with the situation presented,
and wonder if this is a problem.

They're quietly leaning back in their chairs,
a little drunk, maybe.

MODERATOR:
You were talking about a real experience.

What do you mean by that, exactly.

WOMAN 3 IN THE AUDIENCE:
An orgasm, for example.



MODERATOR:
That counts as a real experience.
No one doubts that.

MODERATOR:
Another real experience over there-

WOMAN 4 IN THE AUDIENCE:
In the movie *Fatal Attraction*
There's a really scary scene

Where the murderess creeps up
behind the main character in the bathroom.

This has become a kind of reality to me.

When I'm at the campgrounds
I'm scared to go to the toilet —

This scene has really bothered me.

MODERATOR:
May I ask why you are all
laughing so much there, in the back?

MAN 3 IN THE AUDIENCE:
By listening to all these comments and stories,

one starts to wonder
what is true and what's made up

when someone here says something
it becomes fiction somehow.

MODERATOR:
And does it matter?

Does it matter
if these stories are true?

MAN 3 IN THE AUDIENCE:
No, but you start to listen to them
in a completely different way.

If you question this all the time

our whole presence here
starts to look like...

unreal... a play.

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:
Even without a moderator
a form of direction is called for.

From my dark passage I can pull a few
strings, and tell myself I'm in charge.

A play is not a play when the audience
doesn't know what they're looking at.

There are no fellow actors around for guidance,

only the screen, at which she's not allowed to look.

MODERATOR 2:
I would like to hear Barbara's opinion.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
I can say two things about it:

everything is fiction
and everything is reality!

MODERATOR 2:
That's settled then.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
And now we can all have a drink...

But I do agree with René

that it's all intertwined
and that the aim of the artist could be

to approach reality
as close as possible...

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:
Saskia's attention is starting to show flaws
because my directions are lost.

The activity in the passageway is loud, too loud.
She seems to manage anyway.

Her lines come out well enough, since
she knows how to believe in them

and transmit this belief to the people in front of her.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
...and I think that this
has had a great influence on me.

MAN 4 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Is it an inner confusion?

BLONDE ACTRESS:
Can you repeat that please??

MAN 4 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Is it confusion, in your emotions?

MODERATOR:
Did you say confusion?

MAN 4 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Yes.
It all boils down to emotions.

...his way of thinking and working
became more abstract

which merely enlarged the problem,

since this is such a
difficult area to go into...

...hates it, but it is
his entertainment, too.

...but for the artist
or anyone more intelligent—

BLONDE ACTRESS:
Are you saying
it used to be less complicated?

MAN 4 IN THE AUDIENCE:
I believe so.

These emotions were more defined.

We see it through the ages, in art too

the form has always changed.

Industrialisation, computers...
it all became very mental.

We see it in the arts—
for example in your work.

One notices the bewilderment in it.

That's something I feel strongly in you,
your confusion with it.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
And what kind of confusion is that?

MAN 4 IN THE AUDIENCE:
Your own personal one.

Because you perceive
fiction and reality as a mere chaos.

And you don't know how to deal with it.

BLONDE ACTRESS:
Something like that.

MAN IN THE AUDIENCE:
Of course you don't get it
because you're in the middle of it!

BLONDE ACTRESS:
And how!

MAN 4 IN THE AUDIENCE:
But that's OK,

we're all in the middle of it

we just don't like to admit it.

BRUNETTE ACTRESS:
The centre is a great place to be in

but what people forget when saying that

is that being in the centre

has one great disadvantage:

you cease to be a spectator
who watches from behind a black curtain.

Let's remain here, in the illusion that Barbara Visser

is a nice, brown-haired flight attendant
pretending to be an artist.

Why should an actor make this fiction credible
within the reality of the art world?

Don't question yourself in public!

Not all exposure is good exposure.

MODERATOR:
Barbara, is there anything to say about tonight's
great mystery?

BLONDE ACTRESS:
I think everyone is a big expert
in the field of fiction...

but hardly anyone knows what reality is.

All the better.

I want—she wants to end it like that.

DONELLE WOOLFORD

EXHIBITED WORK

Woolford's participation in *Double Agent* took the form of a temporary studio and residency. In addition the artist showed a number of pre-existing works at ICA and BALTIC.

Exhibited at ICA and BALTIC:

La Patisserie, n.d.

Journey to Osaka, n.d.

Sharrette, n.d.

Landscape with Cotton Field, n.d.

All works:

Wood scraps, latex paint, wood glue, screws

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT

Transcript of an artist's talk by Donelle Woolford, followed by a discussion between Woolford and the curators of *Double Agent*, held at the ICA in March 2008.



Donelle Woolford
installation view, BALTIC, 2008

DISCUSSION WITH DONELLE WOOLFORD AT THE ICA

MARK SLADEN: This discussion obviously coincides with the *Double Agent* exhibition, now on view at the ICA. It has been curated by Claire Bishop, a writer and academic, in collaboration with myself, Mark Sladen. I'm the Director of Exhibitions here at the ICA. We're also delighted to have here with us this afternoon Donelle Woolford, who is one of the artists in the exhibition. Donelle is an artist from New York who has exhibited in a number of international group exhibitions, such as last year's Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates. She's represented by Wallspace in New York and there is a bit of extra information on her in the gallery guide to the exhibition.

One of the central concerns of *Double Agent* is the use of mediation, delegation, and collaboration in contemporary art practice, and Donelle is here at the invitation of the artist Joe Scanlan. She is currently in residence in a temporary studio, which you've probably seen downstairs, where she's making sculptures; she's here on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. She's going to give a fifteen-minute presentation on her work that will be followed by a half-hour-long discussion between the three of us, in which Claire and I will attempt to situate Donelle's practice within the wider themes of performance and authorship in the exhibition, and then we'll take questions. I imagine the whole thing will probably last about an hour. But let's start with your presentation, Donelle.

DONELLE WOOLFORD: Good afternoon. Thank you for coming today to hear me talk about my work. First I want to thank Claire and Mark for inviting me to participate in *Double Agent*. It's been a great adventure to be a resident here and a fascinating experience for me to create work in a public venue. Okay, so: *Donelle Woolford: Exhibition Views*.



Last year I participated in the 8th Sharjah Biennial in the United Arab Emirates, and as in the exhibition downstairs the installation I presented was a remake of my studio. You can see here — just like downstairs — that I work at two desks, and I have wood. I inhabited this studio during the opening, which was an all-day affair. What was interesting here was that all of this wood was actually taken from a working studio in Sharjah. During the time that I was there I did a little research on the city and found that the Sheikh had decided to kick out the people who were working in the middle of Sharjah and make it into a kind of historical village, a fake antiquated town in place of the real one. All this wood was from a carpenter's studio that was no longer being used. And it had me ask the question: what is real if this town is filled with actors — like in Virginia, where we have something called Colonial Williamsburg? What is real, if the workers are no longer involved but actors are called in to play them? So I decided to make a fake studio in the middle of the museum and use the wood from this real studio that was deemed useless.



So, facing this studio is your usual gallery scene and it has my works on the wall, and that also begged the question, for me, of what *is* this space? What are we looking at? When you walk into a museum is this what you expect, or is it the space where the art is actually created? And for me it's important to have both sides of the table shown: the messy side that actually brings about the beauty on the pristine side. And I like the confusion that generates, how sometimes being presented with a view backstage is more interesting than what's on stage.



That's me in my studio.



Ah, yes. This... *[laughs]* This is when I met the Sheikh. And it's interesting because this picture captures a moment that I don't really remember... partly because I can't remember what was going through my head, just "I'm meeting a Sheikh! This is unbelievable!" And so you have your blinders on, like, "Ah! This is amazing!" But then I see the picture and it's funny to me because he really doesn't look like he's interested! He's the one in the middle, and next to him is his son, and then we have the two attendants on either side and they crack me up because they really — honestly — look like they're happy to meet me. And I read someplace that UNESCO calls Sharjah the cultural capital of the Middle East, and, you know, it's true he's really done a lot to bring art into the community. Whereas a lot of the other states there are associated with gambling and things like that, he's maintained Sharjah as a dry state and really, you know, about art. So that was me meeting a Sheikh!



Okay, this is in Paris, at Galerie Chez Valentin. This exhibition wasn't a recreation of my studio. It was actually more the kind of scene you expect when you walk into a gallery. I tend to use palm trees in my work, partly as a screen, so to say, like camouflage, and in this particular instance I added some modern chairs as well.



And with this view you can see better how the palm trees are acting as a screen but how also, with the chairs, they act as brackets to my paintings. And I guess to just mention a little bit about my work, the time period that I am influenced by mostly is the early twentieth-century, with the birth of the Cubist movement and the use of African masks, and how painters at that time were influenced by seeing these so-called 'primitive' aesthetics. So, for me, palm trees are a kind of camouflage but they also function as a sign of the exotic, the Other, in relation to my work. Additionally, trees have been around much longer than we have, well at least longer than painting and art and Cubism as we know it, and modern chairs come after that movement, so they do kind of frame my work in that way. They stand in for any number of tensions that were in the air at the time and perhaps contributed to the birth of Cubism, conflicts that might be summarized as Paul Gauguin versus the Wright Brothers. And lastly, and this is something that we just don't pay attention to a lot of the time: when you walk into galleries or loft spaces that are kind of stylish there are often palm trees, and they're almost irrelevant because they're not natural to the spaces where they are, they're not indigenous trees. So that's another reason why I use them in my work.



This show was at the beginning of this year in my native New York, at Wallspace, which is located in Chelsea. And this is again a very traditional gallery view. My work is on the wall again and I have the plant, not a tree this time but another very luscious, exotic plant, as you can see, a philodendron. Wallspace is a gorgeous gallery.



Now adjacent to this larger room is a smaller back room in which I made a kind of collage in space. And what I wanted was to have each of the objects that make up the collage consist of an exclusive material, each with exclusive properties and a distinct role to play. So there is fabric on the chair, and the steel armature, and wood, a plant with its particular elements — chlorophyll, soil, cellulose, the plastic pot — Plexiglas, a Malinese stool, an incandescent floor lamp, the digital projector, and, on the ceiling, a grow light. I kind of saw this as the boiler room for the main gallery.



And the projector, you'll see better here, projected different images from 1907, which is the year that Picasso painted *Demoiselles D'Avignon*. For example we have different African art and artefacts but also technology from that period. And all of this I did with a variety of research, some in-depth and some superficial, from reading Robert Rosenblum's *Pioneering Cubism* to doing Google searches on the Internet. And so that included automobiles from that time, early airplanes, and some documentation of plants from Africa that were discovered and catalogued by the museum of natural history in Paris. And also fashion: late Victorian capes, what men and women were wearing at that time. The way I see it, it was almost as if this was a primordial soup waiting for lightning to strike it and touch off the Cubist movement. Who knows, probably not, but at least it was all there, all the ingredients were there.



And so the next one is here. If you haven't seen the space downstairs, this is my studio again recreated. Every day I walk in there I *wish* my actual studio looked like this [*laughs*]. I want to take the view back with me to New York; it's such a beautiful building. And again I have two work tables and

various tools that I would use as I do my work. And if you've seen me here you'd see that I actually have been constructing pieces while I've been here.



This is another angle. Something that's not shown is that I have a nice couch — which everyone's welcome to sit on, and people have been sitting on — but it's something that didn't appear in the Sharjah Biennial. It really is representational of *my* time in the studio, because I don't necessarily spend most of my time making things. A lot of times I'm just dreaming or sketching or something where I need to take that time out and really recoup and figure out what the next step is.



And this is the corner where I or someone who's interested in my work could come and check out what I've made and just get a sense, away from the space, you know, what pieces might look like in a gallery setting. And again there's my plant — even though I make that statement, I still like to have them around. They are beautiful.



Oh, this is opening night! And that's Natasha from the marketing office. Yeah. It was a great night. People kept slipping beers in. It was a fantastic night for me, I loved it.



And just some of my works. Okay, *Still Life With Hanging Lamp*. Again, as you can see, most of my work is with wood.



And this is *Tabula Rasa*, which of course means blank slate.



And this is *Detonation*. This piece always reminds me of musical instruments exploding — hence the title. Because with an explosion you have a detonation but also when you explode instruments they become de-toned, so it's kind of a pun.



And this is *Sharette*, which is downstairs; a sharette is a space, usually an architecture office, where many people are working side by side in the same room under the watchful eye of a supervisor, so I think it was very appropriate for this review. Plus it's an old-fashioned word, it makes you think of rows of drafting tables and hanging lamps and precision drawing instruments, and I like that image.

CLAIRE BISHOP: OK.

WOOLFORD: I hope I didn't fly through that out of nerves!

BISHOP: No, no. That was great. Thank you very much, Donelle, for that presentation. I know that you're participating in this exhibition on the invitation of Joe Scanlan. So I wondered if you could you just clarify what your relationship is to Joe.

WOOLFORD: Well I've known Joe for many years. He was my first sculpture teacher at Yale, and for a little while afterwards I worked as his assistant.

SLADEN: And was that a useful experience?

WOOLFORD: Well, actually it was a great experience and great practice for becoming an artist. And it also allowed me to bide my time and see how things worked because I couldn't quite figure out how to insert myself in the art world. I guess in the beginning for me it just seemed very difficult as an unconnected, unknown artist from the South, and a black female in a predominantly white male environment. How could I make it happen? So originally what I planned to do was make myself invisible and don a mask and I started to pawn off my works under someone else. And after a while I just realised that being invisible was ridiculous, you know, with Joe promoting my works. First of all he's getting all the credit, but, as in any situation, you know, being an assistant you eventually want to break out on your own. And so I did and I pushed Donelle Woolford out there so she had her own space, her own work, and her own narrative.

BISHOP: So is that what you think you've been doing over the last year or so, inserting yourself into the art world by showing your work in studio installation format in Sharjah and here at the ICA?

WOOLFORD: Yeah, yeah. I think every young artist is a character ready to be consumed. You know when people see me they don't know if I'm real or not, but for me, perception is relative. I don't care if people think I'm a collaborator or an avatar or an actor.

SLADEN: So then what or who do you think you are?

WOOLFORD: Well, today I am Donelle Woolford. *[laughs]* Because I choose to be! That's my mantra.

And I'm fascinated by authenticity or the lack thereof: who's to say what's real or a performance? We all show different sides of ourselves and we all hide different sides of ourselves, and we choose an image based on other images and basically — like P. Diddy, Puff Daddy, or Sean Puffy Combs, or whatever he wants to be called now — it's just that: it's just a name and that's not what really matters. What really matters is how you put yourself out there. And that's what I'm doing: I'm putting Donelle Woolford out there with strength, with conviction, and with confidence. Oh, and, by the way, my name is Abigail Ramsay and I'm an actor hired by Joe Scanlan to play the role of Donelle Woolford, just as other actors have been hired to play her in different locations.

BISHOP: So Abigail, if I can call you Abigail, what's it like playing the role of a contemporary artist? Is it frustrating or exhilarating or testing?

WOOLFORD: *[laughs]* It's actually a lot of fun! I've had nothing but a great time doing this and being here and meeting people. It's been utterly fascinating to have a space in this museum and have people come up to you as an artist, expecting you to be an artist, and I guess almost like the awe that you get and the good wishes. It's been amazing and I've loved every moment of it.

BISHOP: I'm curious to find out what kind of directions Joe Scanlan gave you for performing Donelle?

WOOLFORD: Joe was fantastic, actually. We had, I guess, to set it up we had a very brief time, less than a month from when I got the role to when I came here. So it was a crash course in art. He sent me a long e-mail talking about different types of art like appropriation, collage, narrative art, identity art. He gave me different readings I had to do and different shows to attend. Unfortunately I did miss the Robert Prince —

BISHOP: Richard Prince.

WOOLFORD: — Thank you, the Richard Prince retrospective that was at the Guggenheim. But I did catch the Kara Walker exhibit, which was a beautiful example of I think it was identity art. And then we had a great field trip to the Met to look at their African art collection, which is extensive, and Joe came along and we just went through that and then saw a little bit of the works from Picasso and people of that time.

SLADEN: Could you talk a little bit about the audition process? I also understand Joe has particular ideas about styling you as well.

WOOLFORD: Yes, yes. Well, the audition process was *[laughs]* pretty fascinating. When I saw the ad I saw they wanted someone who knew a lot about art, and I was like, "Oh no! I'm not gonna do this! I know nothing about it". And then I eventually went, and each time I went I had to say something about art and I really thought I was making a fool of myself. But he's been very good at giving me a lot of information and honing what makes sense to people. So for my final audition I had to go to, I forget what it's called, but it's when critics come to your studio and grill you on your work. So I had a kind of mock set up of that and out of the whole experience I think that was the hardest thing that I had to do — though this comes close! But, you know, it's been very eye opening and he's been very patient with me through the whole thing. And as for styling he's very much into the image of what I look like and so, like, this jacket, which is Dries Van Noten, I've never heard of him in my life, but this was something that was very important that I should wear, as well as my fifteen-dollar glasses that I can't see out of at all *[laughs]* and my shoes, so this has been my uniform which has been very helpful in forming my character.

SLADEN: And can you say a little about your experience here at the ICA? I should add that one of the instructions that Joe gave us was to take Donelle out and insert her into other art world situations in London. So maybe you could say a bit about your experience in the gallery and also outside?

WOOLFORD: Well, my experience here has been great. People here have been really, really kind. There have been a few times that... well, everyone has that gallery guide and clearly that woman is not me! *[laughs]* It's been interesting dealing with it: from hearing that I've gained a lot of weight *[laughs]* to people staring at it and staring at me for a while in the corner, and then finally coming up to me and saying, "Are you the artist?" and I say, "Yeah!" and they say, "Oh, yeah, of course, of course, yeah" — so that's been kind of fun. But for the most part people have been very generous and I've really enjoyed my time. And I went out with Mark a few times and it was like going out with a rock star I have to say. I loved it! *[laughs]* But of the different events that I've been to, I think the most fun was going out to the dinner with them.

SLADEN: We went to a dinner at White Cube for the opening for Mario Garcia Torres's show. I thought this might be a good one to go to as some of you might have seen the lecture that he gave at Frieze last year that was also about using the idea of a fictional author. I called up White Cube in advance and spilled the beans about who she was, and then it became a fascinating dynamic over dinner — people who knew and didn't know — and it played itself out in a very interesting way. Whereas other situations we've been in, like going to the Derek Jarman opening at the Serpentine, one just felt that any edge the project might have just got lost in that sea of people. But I was corresponding with Joe and he thought that was quite good because it was a classic situation for a young artist to be in, lost in an ocean of gamesmanship and activity.

BISHOP: Can I ask about the difference between taking instructions from an artist and taking instructions from a theatre director?

WOOLFORD: You know, it's interesting because the two don't exist in the same world. From a theatre director you have the script and that informs you first and foremost — what and who your character is. By contrast, in this environment your character becomes... how does Joe see it? How do I see it? Who's this woman? How did the last woman play it? Whereas in theatre, a director shapes something that already exists and we all have an understanding of the characters in a play and how the play unfolds. With this situation it was very improvisational and we never quite knew what was going to happen next. The best advice that he gave me was to ask myself, when I look at a work, and particularly when I look at my work, how does it hit me *here*, how do I feel about it? Not what do I think of the history, or how do I think about it politically (which is how I was approaching it before), but what it actually *feels* like here when I look at it. And that always brings me back to the idea that, okay, I inhabit this role.

SLADEN: And do you think his idea of Donelle Woolford and yours are very different?

WOOLFORD: You know, he gave me carte blanche, I have to say *[laughs]*. He really did. I think a great example is the fact that in the guide it says I'm from Conyers and then another place it says I'm from Cleveland, and then he says, "It's okay, just say you're from New York". So other than 'This is what

she wears', he never said this is the way she acts in this situation, he left that up to me.

SLADEN: Because she's changed, hasn't she? She has got older for instance and not just with the passage of time. I mean in previous outings Donelle was in her early twenties and now she's supposed to be a little older than that.

BISHOP: I think it's also telling that Joe is an artist and not a theatre director and the emphasis is on the *visuality* of Donelle: what she's wearing is important, how she looks in the space and what the space looks like that she's operating in. There's much less emphasis on motivation for the character.

WOOLFORD: That's a very interesting point. Yeah, I mean, he did say, "Think about if you were in a situation that was tough, how would you react?" But for the most part it was what I looked like. And I have to say, the uniform came very late in the process. A lot of my groundwork was actually going to museums and meeting people and just finding out a lot about art.

SLADEN: One thing I've always assumed about this project is that there's an element of satire in it; there's a satire of political correctness in the art world, there's a satire of the cult of youth in the art world. What's your opinion about how ethnicity and gender come into this role and do you think your understanding of its dynamic in those areas is different from Joe's?

BISHOP: I should add that Joe Scanlan is a white male artist and Donelle Woolford is a black female artist.

WOOLFORD: We never really spoke about that. I think it's one of those things that some people look at and see, as opposed to me experiencing it. And I think it wasn't my business to worry about that. My concerns were creating a human being, reacting in a way that was human, and being a character that people understood. So the politics is a difficult question because it takes me out of the character. But I remember not wanting to tell my friends who are very political that I was doing it. But when I did eventually tell them they all thought that it was great that I was going out and getting the chance to play a character that is potentially full and in an exotic location. So it reminds me of Hattie McDaniels in *Gone with the Wind*:

she won the Oscar playing—I can't remember the character, but she was the mamie role—and she got a lot of flack for doing that. She always said that she preferred making \$70,000 for playing a maid instead of \$7 for being one. And I think there's a point where people make that decision for themselves—that it can't be about the political experience, but rather it has to be about your human experience.

SLADEN: I think now we're going to snake away into a more general discussion about the show as whole. And one thing I wanted to bring up with Claire is how you think Donelle relates to the issues around performance that we wanted to explore in the show as a whole.

BISHOP: One of the premises of this show, which forms part of my research for a book I'm writing, concerns a difference in performance art from the late sixties and early seventies and what's happened in the last ten or fifteen years. In the earlier paradigm, artists used their own bodies in body and performance art. Their own body is the site of authenticity and meaning; they act upon their own bodies as material and medium. In the last ten to fifteen years we've seen a notable shift away from this paradigm towards artists 'outsourcing' or delegating this work of performance to other people. This was an operation that I wanted to explore through a number of contemporary practices, to look at the ways in which this displacement of authorship takes place in performance but also through other mediums such as video, film, ceramics (in the case of Paweł Althamer), and installation (in the case of Donelle). That's why these people have been assembled in the ICA in this particular way.

I've had a number of reactions to this exhibition, both in the press and from people talking with me, that assumed it relates to my previous writing about relational aesthetics and participation. But it doesn't at all; for me this is a completely separate issue. *Double Agent* is not about viewer interactivity but about a mechanism of delegation, of outsourcing performance to other people. Something that *does* connect it to my previous writing is an interest in works of art and projects that are ethically uncomfortable, rather than a model I've criticised in the past (particularly in relationship to relational aesthetics) that presupposes a harmonious community of respect and understanding and togetherness. I'm more interested in projects that are barbed in some way, and I think

that the satirical element that Mark has pointed to in the Donelle Woolford project picks up on that: there are moments of discomfort for both the actress who's playing Donelle and the audience. On the opening night, a lot of people were completely convinced that this was an artist who had set up a studio in the space. So there's an element of deception there that's more or less convincing and more or less troubling.

SLADEN: And as well as this notion of delegated performance there are also a lot of questions around authorship that the exhibition brings up, specifically around unreliable narrators. There are a few projects which have fictive authors: Donelle is one, but the Barbara Visser film downstairs also involves multiple layers of deception. We wanted to do seven quite distinct projects to show different aspects of this field. I even think someone like Paweł Althamer is an unreliable author within his own work. He's quite unplaceable within the Nowolipie Group, for instance. I wondered if you could say something more about that.

BISHOP: Okay, it's tricky to talk about Paweł specifically. Something I've become aware of since the show has gone up is that although displaced authorship seems to be a theme within many of these works, the idea that the authorship is entirely removed in them is misleading because in fact there is a very strong sense of authorship behind each of these projects. That's what makes the best of them compelling: there's an openness that takes place within a highly controlled framework.

AUDIENCE MEMBER (POLLY STAPLE): Can I ask a question? Can you just say a bit more about that?

BISHOP: Yes, okay. This is something I'm trying to wrestle with and articulate at the moment. Some of the art of the present decade that interests me most involves an artist who has set up a particular structure within which they can anticipate what will take place—but it's not tightly controlled or directed. So the works by Paweł and Artur Żmijewski are both classic examples of this, and come out of the way in which they were taught by Grzegorz Kowalski at the Warsaw Art Academy in the early '90s. He had an experimental way of teaching that was based around the idea of 'open form'—which was opposed to 'closed form', i.e. structures and situations that allow no space for the viewer's participation. This meant that his teaching involved setting up the rules of a game, but how the

action by the individual artists unfolded was subject to enormous variation. And I can see both Żmijewski and Althamer using that technique in their works in *Double Agent*: setting up a structure and then watching it unfold. You can see that very clearly in Żmijewski's *Them*, in which he sets up a series of combative painting workshops with four groups that have disparate ideologies. To an extent you know that he knows the outcome is going to be complete nihilistic conflagration, but he has no specific control over what people are saying or how they are going to react in that context. Does that make sense?

STAPLE: Yeah. I've got some questions, but shall I wait until the end?

SLADEN: Let's throw it open.

STAPLE: All the way though this discussion, my desire as an audience member is to know what's at stake with Joe Scanlan with this piece. Who is Joe Scanlan? And what does it mean to him in terms of artistic strategy to develop this project? Even though I also am very aware of an unreliable director and know what's going on with the piece, I still—

BISHOP: You still want to pin it on an author and find out their intention?

STAPLE: Yes, which is why I'm suggesting that what the piece builds up is... As much as exploding myths about authorship it also reinforces them by mythologising Joe Scanlan. I know Joe Scanlan is a real artist. So that's interesting to me and I almost want Joe Scanlan to be on stage as well.

SLADEN: I was looking through my correspondence this morning and I found this rather interesting comment that Joe made about Donelle. He said: "She's a fully-fledged artist in her own right: she has a body and opinions and a developing oeuvre. Her only drawback is that by conventional measures she is not real. My role is that I invented her, just like any other author who invents a character whom they hope will enter the public imagination. I guess the big difference is that unlike a character within the framework of a novel or play that has a beginning, middle, and end, Donelle is not fixed. Rather her character is still unfolding, still being written, even as she moves through the stage of the art world, with all its characters and props. I am also on stage, partially

hidden behind the bookcase or potted palm, furiously making scenes and lines and props to hand to her just before she needs them.”

BISHOP: What I was dreading at the last talk I did here was somebody buying the whole situation as we’d presented it to them and asking me, “Well, why did you invite Joe Scanlan in the first place? Surely there was something about his work that fit within the context of this show that he then delegated to Donelle Woolford.” And I wouldn’t be able to answer that because I think this project stands at a distance from his other work.

STAPLE: That would be one of my questions as well, if Joe Scanlan were on stage. At what point did he decide to develop the Donelle Woolford project and how does that relate to his other work? And also where does the Donelle Woolford project go? Because there must be a saturation point when it doesn’t work anymore because everyone knows how it works. So it’s like the Pierre Huyghe *Ann Lee* character — there’s a ceremonial killing off. I suppose what I’m intrigued about is a wider story as to why this trend?

BISHOP: I’ve raised this question with a few people who write about theatre and performance and they support my use of the word ‘outsourced’ because it connects to economic changes that took place in the ’90s regarding the outsourcing or offshoring of labour. I’ve realised there are many words we can use to describe this mechanism, but outsourcing evokes an era of flexible working systems and economic globalisation. I don’t yet know to what extent artistic practice dovetails with those trends or is critical of them, but I think it’s significant that they are contemporaneous with these shifts.

SLADEN: Could we take some more questions? Or we’ll go back to Polly. Any questions about any of the pieces?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What would happen if we’d just carried on sitting here and the exposure hadn’t occurred? What if we didn’t know, and assumed we’d just got a fattened up version of Donelle sitting there. Why expose?

SLADEN: I think it becomes more interesting in a controlled exposure of Donelle. At least that’s been my experience.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: If people remain in pig ignorance then?

SLADEN: People in the art world are incredibly trusting. It’s a very nice, consensual environment and I was initially rather disappointed by how straight everyone took Donelle, that no one was really questioning it. So at that point I started to tell a few people, just to try to get a rumour circulating, and I think that the project becomes most interesting when it starts to break down. If it’s a flawless façade then I don’t think it operates.

BISHOP: But tell me how *you* experienced the first half of this talk. Would you like more discussion about wooden Cubist assemblages?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well there was something about these introductions — the Arabs, they certainly looked real, were they real?

WOOLFORD: It was, yes. They were.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I mean, does this place actually exist?

WOOLFORD: Yeah! Sharjah.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So somebody, not necessarily you, someone went there, a previous artist?

BISHOP: Donelle went there. OK, anyone else?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a question for Abigail. How much do you think you actually become the artist in the piece? If you’re left without a script, you become the only creator of the piece. You might not be a visual artist but as a performer you step into that role and take over that part and Joe steps back.

WOOLFORD: Well, yeah, because Joe’s not here, the reactions have to come from me and I suppose if I’ve been doing it for five years then I could definitely say, “This is where Donelle is stepping forward”. But doing it for about two months, you know, she’s not a different person from myself, and she can’t be because I’d be second guessing every move I made.

SLADEN: I should also say that the exhibition is going to tour to two other venues: the Mead Gallery in Warwick Arts Centre and the BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead. And there are

other actresses or agents playing Donelle, some of whom may be with us this afternoon.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I’m not even sure if the original character of the artist exists, does she? Or is she completely fictitious?

BISHOP: What do you mean the original character: Joe Scanlan or Donelle Woolford?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Donelle Woolford. Does she actually exist in her own right?

BISHOP: Donelle exists.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: So Abi, have you ever met her?

WOOLFORD: I guess I’ve met her through her work. I’ve met her through Joe. She’s not a body to meet. She exists, but...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is she just an idea?

BISHOP: I think the thing that Mark read out from Joe is beautiful, and that it says it all.

SLADEN: Any more questions that we can dodge?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did you say you’re not worried about ethics?

BISHOP: Okay, this obviously needs a little bit of refining. It’s clear that ethics and politics come into any artistic judgement. What I meant is that I’m critical of liberal humanist ethical positions that have re-emerged in philosophical and literary thinking since the ’90s under the pressure of identity politics and political correctness. And I’m more interested in retrieving theoretical anti-humanism from the French ’68 tradition. The recent writing of Badiou, Rancière, and Žižek is where I would align myself with regard to contemporary ethics rather than with the diluted forms of Levinas that concern responsibility and respect and acknowledgment of the Other. Does that make sense?

STAPLE: So you think a defining feature of the post-relational aesthetics moment is antagonism? I’m thinking of that in relation to Chantal Mouffe, who you mentioned in your article.

BISHOP: Yes, I did use antagonism as a way of criti-

cising relational aesthetics, but I wouldn’t want to turn it into an operative principle to describe all contemporary art. I think some people would like me to do that but I’m a bit resistant to it.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Can I go back one step to the unreliability of the narrator? Ultimately, if that is built into Donelle’s character, then it only functions to the point of revelation. I’m only coming across this fresh today. I thought I was coming to a curators’ talk, so is the fraudulence built into your manner or the frame?

BISHOP: I’m not quite clear what you’re asking.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: This afternoon during the talk you made a revelation. And is that built into the presentation of the character when you’re not making that explicit revelation? I mean for me as an audience member visiting downstairs...

BISHOP: Well, some people read the gallery guide very astutely and pick up on it by making the links from Dora García to Barbara Visser and then coming upstairs and they completely understand. It’s also hinted at through the tone of our language in the gallery guide: last weekend somebody drew my attention to one phrase, “up and coming”, which we would never use in relation to the other artists.

SLADEN: That came from the press officer who wrote the press release. I was going to delete that phrase but then I decided to leave it in because it’s slightly destabilising: if people are looking out for clues I think that is a clue. And there are other clues in there, when I described this talk I wrote that Donelle was going to talk about her “double life in London”. And I think Joe does seed discrepancies into the project — for instance about Donelle’s age. You could probably Google her and find several different birth dates for her on the web if you really had the time.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What is Joe’s previous work about?

BISHOP: He’s primarily a sculptor. The work concerns economic systems and the circulation of goods not just within the art market but also within a broader market arena. He’s got a very good website called thingsthatfall.com; for example, one of his projects is artist-designed coffins that you can buy, and the web pages take you through a whole Amazon-style shopping-basket mechanism

to have the work shipped to you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Is it possible that Joe Scanlan is actually here?

SLADEN: I like the way that everyone is becoming less trusting. I think if we've achieved one thing with this exhibition we've done that.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Could it be that Joe Scanlan is not a white male at all, but a white female, or the curator?

SLADEN: We did think about having a third fictional curator for the show.

STAPLE: One more question. Do you know if, when Joe Scanlan is invited to talk about his own work, at another institution, not necessarily in conjunction with a show, do you know whether he talks about this project?

BISHOP: No, I don't know that. But certainly on his website Donelle Woolford is one of many projects you can click onto, so you can easily source it as his work. But I don't know what he says in an artist-talk situation.

SLADEN: Maybe one more question before we wrap up?

BISHOP: There's one more thing that Joe wanted me to ask Donelle: as an outsider functioning within this gallery but outside the art world, what behaviour or mannerisms have you observed while looking at the art world? What did you find that you needed to incorporate into your character to become more convincing?

WOOLFORD: I used the word generous before to describe the audience but I think a lot of artists that I've come across are generous in a very soft way. It's just so delicate, very welcoming. It's so hard to describe and I feel really almost foolish saying it but there is something that's just very open that I really appreciate compared to coming across a group of actors, which can be a little in-your-face sometimes.

STAPLE: One last question. It's about the desires of the institution. I was foxed, but when I received the invitation card for the show it was also the point when I became suspicious of the project. I suddenly thought, "I can't believe it, the ICA are promoting this show with this extremely good

looking young black woman artist I'd never heard of—they've gone and found some girl in New York". But that also dovetailed with my understanding of the ICA wanting to promote itself to a kind of young and hip audience.

BISHOP: That is such a great point. I would be deeply suspicious if I received an invitation card with that image: We're not being shown the artist's work but rather the artist bending over a desk with her bum out in these little cute shorts.

STAPLE: I'd be curious to know at what point you chose that image.

SLADEN: It was when we realised that part of Joe's desire was to disseminate images of Donelle that I thought that the card would be a good vehicle for that.

BISHOP: Joe is interested in her also being a virtual avatar around London. So that even when Abigail is commuting from Chiswick to the ICA, it's a theatre without a frame: some people are seeing Donelle but they don't even know she's Donelle. And one way in which to seed that idea is to have her on the publicity material of the exhibition.

STAPLE: Your point about the visuality is really interesting. Because even though Abigail is really good, it's the moment when the visuality starts to creep in, with that card, that's really powerful.

SLADEN: Well, unless there are any questions that anyone is dying to ask, let's wrap it up.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Why have you revealed it at all, so some people would know and some people wouldn't? Why even expose it, why not just allow some phrases within notes to allow people to pick up on it?

SLADEN: Well, we should probably say that in the middle section of the event, after Abigail gave the PowerPoint presentation, the first few questions were actually scripted by Joe from an interview with Donelle that was partly written by Raimundas Malasaukas. So you could say it was *his* decision to reveal her because we were reading from a script that he conceived.

BISHOP: But I like the way it's generated more doubt about Joe's identity. This is for me the most productive part of the day.



Joe Scanlan and Donelle Woolford in the latter's studio at the ICA, 2008

ARTUR ŻMIJEWSKI

EXHIBITED WORK

Them, 2007
Video, 27 mins

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXT

Transcript of a public discussion between Żmijewski and the participants involved in the making of *Them*, following the first screening of the work in Poland.





All images:
Artur Żmijewski
Them, 2007
Video stills

ARTUR ŻMIJEWSKI AND *THEM* (2007)

The following is the transcript of a public discussion held as the opening event of the Warsaw Museum of Modern Art in November 2007. It followed a lecture by Claire Bishop and the first public screening in Poland of Artur Żmijewski's *Them* (2007), a twenty-seven-minute video documenting a series of painting workshops organised by the artist. The workshops involved four disparate ideological groups (Christians, Jews, Young Socialists, and Polish Nationalists) who were encouraged to respond to each group's symbolic depiction of its values. Over the course of the video, tensions between the groups increase and culminate in an explosive impasse. As in many of Żmijewski's videos, the artist adopts an ambiguous role and it is never clear to what degree his participants are acting with their own agency or being manipulated to fulfil the requirements of his pre-planned narrative.

Many of the participants in Żmijewski's *Them* were present for the screening, where they saw his completed work for the first time. The heated discussion that ensued effectively restaged the ideological confrontation once more, but now with the artist—and art itself—as a focus of attack. Żmijewski is called to account for his actions and intentions in producing this work. As such, the debate provides a singular account of participants being given a chance to respond, and shows the types of friction that emerge between the delegating artist and those who perform on his/her behalf.

JOANNA MYTKOWSKA: Artur, could you tell us the origins of the idea for this workshop?

ARTUR ŻMIJEWSKI: The idea of meetings, or games, in which four groups of differently minded people participate, originated in the academy studio of Grzegorz Kowalski, or perhaps even that of Oskar Hansen. Those were games in which the participants were supposed to communicate without words. That is, instead of telling various things verbally, they did so using visual actions—instruments from the field of art. This language

was deployed here. These people first present their views, explicated in the form of four symbolic performances, and then get my permission to rewrite, edit, modify, and interfere with the other groups' symbolic identifications. From time to time they comment on what they've done, but basically it's the action, the event that matters. Political action, to be clear.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Did you encounter any problems getting people to participate? Did anyone refuse? What was people's attitude towards the project?

MYTKOWSKA: I think this question is best answered by Tomek Fudala, who is handling the microphone.

ŻMIJEWSKI: Tomek was my assistant and basically took care of finding the participants. He knows best how much that cost him.

TOMEK FUDALA: Well, it really wasn't easy to get all those people together. I guess the most interesting encounter we had when searching for the would-be participants was the one in the Radio Maryja office in Kawęczyn with the lady we wanted to invite, the director of that office. When Artur told her about the idea of the workshop (that it is to confront people of different views), she asked us, "But why should I meet people with different views when I can meet those that have the same?" That was a crucial reply. We encountered that attitude virtually every day. In fact, we invited the participants here today. I don't know whether anyone's arrived.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a question for Artur Żmijewski about the role he played, because he is invisible in the film.

ŻMIJEWSKI: I am supposed to be invisible in the film, and my role was the role that Joanna plays here at this table, that is, the role of a moderator. I was supposed to moderate the discussion, to give the floor to people, to make sure that those who haven't yet spoken and are waiting for their turn are eventually allowed to take the floor. My role was also to encourage those people, the participants, to act, and to tell them that they should carry out and express what they fantasise about, even if it seems too far-reaching for them.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have two questions. The first one is about your attitude. Did you know from the



very beginning how such a workshop would end? Did you know it would result in such incredible aggression? And the second question: did the participants ever meet again after the workshop was concluded? Because what I see in the film suggests each group left the workshop feeling great hatred and aversion towards each other.

ŻMIJEWSKI: They ran away because the situation got somewhat dangerous, somewhat unhealthy, but there was one more meeting to tidy the place up.

PARTICIPANT: Excuse me, but I was there. I participated in the last two meetings. I was actually quite active. But I can't really see myself in the film. Perhaps I wasn't photogenic enough? You edited the film according to your own concept; you didn't show the image presented by the Catholics at the end. Why? Well, because you disagreed with what I did. You imposed your own concept and cut out the most interesting parts. [applause] And as regards the tidying up, this was also very interesting.... The act of removing the cross, of removing the gates of the house, which I actually still have at home, I didn't throw them away... I disagree with the deletion of that final part. The end part was very important. Only the smoke remained, and that wasn't the point. The point was the tidying up.

A lot could be seen there, but you cut it out—in fact, you didn't see anything in that workshop. That's what I think: you didn't see anything, you didn't notice the most important things, all because you disagreed with me.

ŻMIJEWSKI: I respect your position, of course, but I have the impression you were present in the video, because I think it was you who cut the T-shirts.

PARTICIPANT: I did.

ŻMIJEWSKI: And the point was also for your identification to be a group identification. And I admit that the selection and the narrative presented here are absolutely my choice as an author and that it was me who decided the ultimate shape of this story.

CLAIRE BISHOP: Żmijewski has set up the situation and it's entirely his prerogative to create a narrative out of that. The fact that there is a narrative is part of its strength as a work of art: it is concise and compelling, unlike a CCTV camera. As such the work presents a complex model of authorship. The artist is more akin to a director or a producer or—as Żmijewski says, a mediator or a moderator—and his responsibility is to that work

of art rather than to producing an entirely truthful seventy-hour documentary, even if such a truthfulness were possible to capture. Every story is partial.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I am a little bit confused. Is the artist saying that he's an artist because of the event that happened or because of the film that was made? I feel that he says that he's an artist because he set in motion the sequence of events that we see on the film, which he didn't have a lot of control over once they were set into motion. But, if he created a film—which I think he did—he had total control over it. So, which is the art, the event that happened or the film that we saw?

ŻMIJEWSKI: I think it's neither the film nor the event that I organised. Rather, the situation is that the art catches up with me, tells its story, colonises me, says "this is art". I am an artist because I operate in the field of art. That's where I'm most active and where I'm most fulfilled; that's where I've been given a place to speak from and that's from where I'm heard. So if I was to say why this is art, I'd say it's precisely because art catches up with me, claiming what I do.

MYTKOWSKA: Do we have any more questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a question for Claire, but in the context of the question from a moment ago. What is 'delegation'? Because the idea of delegation appeared time and again in your lecture. So what's the essence of that delegation? What is being delegated in all these projects? This is seemingly an obvious and banal question, but I'm interested in power because it hasn't been mentioned thus far. And in the context of the term 'delegation', the concept of power is quite important. Foucault says that we have two kinds of power, or two ways of thinking about power. We have economic power, as he calls it, where power is something you can transfer or pass on, like a ball. And there's political power, which is based on relationships and you can't delegate it in any way, it's simply between the various points or centres in a relational structure. And so my question would be, in what sense do you talk about delegation? What does it mean after the participants have left the museum, after the artist has completed the project, which, however, he then confines to the museum again—not physically, of course, but institutionally.

BISHOP: Thank you. This is a really good question,

and I didn't know about that distinction in Foucault. It's true that I used this word 'delegate' in a very loose sense. I have a number of other terms like 'subcontract' and 'outsource' as synonyms and I haven't fully worked out which one of them is the most appropriate. What intrigues me in these works of art is the way in which power and authority is not displaced but something akin to agency is: the participants are always operating within parameters that are set up by the artist. I am interested in what results in the tension between an artist setting up a structure and the unpredictability of what happens with individual agencies as they escape the artist's control. For me this approach has more aesthetic and political potency than more activist-based participatory works in which the structure is left open and in fact the artist often makes a great fuss about not imposing a structure. From an aesthetic point of view, this openness, which many people consider to be a 'truly' participatory collaborative art, leads to very boring art. Politically, I think it is also misguided, because it places an emphasis on consensus rather than on antagonism and the negotiation of different positions.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I have a question for Mr Żmijewski about whether the idea was to create lines of conflict between the participating groups, and if so, what were those lines of conflict?

ŻMIJEWSKI: The idea was, in fact, to cause conflict. It depended on the situation, which would be completely neutral in order to erase the ideological context in which these groups function. My idea was precisely for those ideological positions and lines of conflict to be clearly defined. These four groups in fact broke down into two. Though it may not be so obvious, the Catholic Action allied with the All-Polish Youth, and the left-wing radicals allied quite naturally with the Jewish group. That's more or less how the alliances looked. During the informal part of the meeting, those divisions became less distinct. When the All-Poles and the Jews would start a discussion, they didn't have much to say to each other, they actually even tried to borrow stuff from each other: books, brochures, and so on. So the division was constructed and in that formal situation it worked very well. Just as I wanted, I managed to provoke an antagonism between the groups.

PARTICIPANT: As someone who participated in one of the meetings, I'd like to nod in agreement with

the lady from the Catholic Action. I also didn't have the impression that the film faithfully depicted what had taken place during that workshop, because while the church was in fact set on fire, the fire was put out by virtually all the participants together, which you can't see in the film. There are many, many cases like this. I understand it's not a documentary about the workshop, so perhaps it'd be worth noting (in the closing credits, for instance) that it's a work of art rather than a documentary. As a participant, I must also disagree with the author that the antagonism divided into two groups. What I think was most interesting for me was that we sat together and talked, that we had a discussion about our views, including those we shared. I think it was a discussion based on a lot of mutual respect. We had very convergent views, but we talked, and I think that if we are to view this as a work of art, a workshop, then it was a very valuable workshop in terms of teaching dialogue between differently minded groups. It's really like the author said, that we wanted to go for a beer together, which we actually later did. But he said we didn't talk outside the workshop, we talked during the workshop. And I want to say that I very much appreciate the fact that I took part in this project.

ŽMIJEWSKI: I'd like to add something to this com-

ment. Much more happened than is shown, because when a filmmaker makes a documentary or a reporter makes a documentary for television, they don't show everything they've shot. This is absolutely impossible. There's always a selection; choices have to be made. But that doesn't stop what's been shown here today from being a documentary. It's true that I took the experience from you and transformed it into a cinematic form. I took everything away from you, took everything that was alive, everything that happened, all that excess, all those conversations, experiences, and so on — and transformed them into something that, I hope, captures at least to some extent the atmosphere of those events.

PARTICIPANT: Even though I'm not satisfied with the visual result, I wouldn't say the workshop was pointless. What was its point? To release negative emotions. To express them in the various visual forms, as all that dirt. Because it was dirt, it wasn't a Leonardo masterpiece. Let's not be deluded, it isn't beautiful — it's ugly, it's bad, it's a complete disaster. But that disaster was spewed out and that, I guess, was what the workshop was about.

ŽMIJEWSKI: I could add that the point wasn't to make it pretty, the point was to make it communi-



cative. The only objective of your activities was for you to develop effective communication.

PARTICIPANT: To clear the emotions?

ŽMIJEWSKI: What you call clearing the emotions I'd call appropriating the political, that is, acting politically. A space was created of political exchange, a political dispute.

PARTICIPANT: This is the effect of this film for you, the knowledge that it has generated?

ŽMIJEWSKI: There are two effects. One is what these two participants have just said, which concerns that which can't be seen, can't be verbalised: the encounters, the conversations. The Catholic Action ladies — correct me if I'm wrong — probably saw Jews in person for the first time in their lives.

PARTICIPANT: That's true.

ŽMIJEWSKI: Well, so these are the intangible effects that can't be shown. The second effect is the film that you've just viewed and which was an attempt to appropriate politicality, to democratise politics on a scale on which it is inaccessible.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I'd like to ask about an effect that seems unexpected. I don't know how it looked before editing, but the liberals seemed to radicalise themselves more, in terms of reversible and irreversible actions: painting, painting over, and then painting over again. Throwing things out of the window, setting things on fire. My question to Artur Žmijewski: did you expect such extreme gestures to be made, and by this and not another group in the film, during the workshop?

ŽMIJEWSKI: I fantasised about it. Finding a final solution to the question of radical coalition is a fantasy that found its fulfilment here. Someone asked me who wins in such a situation where four groups meet in a small room, and that person answered the question themselves — the winner is the strongest, most radical group. And my question is this: was the act of burning that object really a victory? I feel it's not necessarily so, precisely because it's irreversible.

MYTKOWSKA: Next question, please.

PARTICIPANT: I'd like to ask one more question, of Mr Žmijewski this time, regarding appropriation.

Perhaps we all view this film through the filter of our own experiences, but I've seen the film for a second time now and again I see a certain thing. I don't understand why you say that this is a space that made it possible to appropriate certain political codes and symbols. The very powerful message that I get again is that those symbols appropriated us instead. There's very little of us in the film, as people who spoke with those symbols, those stereotypes, those slogans. Perhaps it all happened in between, outside the frame, outside that which ultimately made it to the screen, and which, it's true, has been quite heavily edited. The very powerful message that this film sends is that I'm watching people who are entangled in those stereotypes and who not only are unable to free themselves of them, but that these stereotypes are actually accelerated and consolidated.

ŽMIJEWSKI: Indeed the participants seem, onscreen, to be very heavily embroiled in symbols, those symbolic representations that identify them. Things happened during the workshop that I don't want to denigrate and which seemed extremely interesting to me: it was enough to draw a cross on a piece of paper for it to become a real cross, something worth defending, worth fighting for. I think it's clear in this film that something which is absolutely conventional, made *ad hoc* during a couple of sessions, is transferred using some very simple means, into the sphere of the sacred and immediately becomes worth defending, worth saving. The lady who's present here, for instance — you took the cross home with you, didn't you? Some elements of the symbolic reality were extracted from that space and saved from annihilation. My idea was to start from a very clearly defined point, very stereotypically and very simply. Then we were to go deeply into all that which constrains us, which entangles us, which doesn't allow us to see the other without the filter of the stereotype, without that lens that narrates the other's presence to us according to the Catholic, or national, or liberal narratives that we subscribe to.

Whereas I had the idea that all that would eventually be annihilated in the end, and something like that indeed happens. I view the act of setting those objects on fire at the end as an opening, meaning that the symbolic reality indeed gets partly annihilated, erased. And there's no next step, we don't know what happens next. And that's how films end, too: a man and a woman meet, there are many perturbations, and they live happily ever

after. But what we've said about politicality here I treat absolutely seriously and maintain that a kind of small political area can really be created using purely artistic means and gestures.

PARTICIPANT: I'd like to disagree again as a participant. We were there. The Catholic Action lady was supposed to act like a Catholic Action lady and hence the attachment to those symbols. We acted that way, because we thought that's what we had been invited for, and if I'm to act differently, then why should I participate in this workshop? Which in terms of the workshop is important for me, but you can't blame... can't say that it's the participants who pull towards those symbols. They were invited, after all, and those were the circumstances in which they functioned.

MYTKOWSKA: If I may respond to your comment, it seems to me that the meaning of this film is not only that it records your experiences, but that it also provides those who didn't participate in the workshops with some very important knowledge, and that's a different kind of experience. It seems to me to be very valuable, and that's why we are discussing this film here: it sought to provide some important knowledge about group intolerance, which isn't such a well-known cliché after all, and about how a conflict can or cannot be solved. This conflict exists and won't disappear even if we've had elections. The film provided many pieces of information that are beyond the participants' experience. This seems to me to be a value and is another plane on which we should be discussing this film.

ŻMIJEWSKI: I think the question is to what extent this film depicts what the participants felt and what happened during the workshop, and to what extent it shows what the author wanted to show.

MYTKOWSKA: I guess we've reached the wall with this discussion. Are there any more questions?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It seems to me that besides the groups that had been invited by the artist to participate in the film there is one more group, and it's the group represented by the artist himself. The artist pursues his own goals in this project, and these goals are in fact the goals that art itself pursues. What it is to represent serves art and nothing else. The storyline of this film also suggests that whatever happens, the author will do what he deems right anyway. That's how it seems to me.

The work is based on two different planes—the participants and the people interested in art, and irrespective of what this project is about, these two planes suggest that this film in fact remains in the sphere of the gallery.

ŻMIJEWSKI: I'd like to reverse the question that you asked, and ask what you need art for. Why did you come here and why do I so often meet with this kind of opinion from people who say "I'm interested in this, these things interest me so I come and watch"? Why do people so often belittle the effort that artists make? And the intellectual, moral, social, economic risk that they take? I don't want this to sound overly dramatic, but I do reverse the question: why do you need art? What do you need it for?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You asked me why we don't appreciate the risk that artists take, right? Because the question about what I need art for eludes me.

ŻMIJEWSKI: You've listened to my rather detailed explanations on this and now we're turning circles with this question, that is, returning to the ...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You asked me why we don't appreciate the risk and I don't see any risks here. If the audience here was comprised of those people you had invited to take part in your project and those to whom the art at the Warsaw Museum of Modern Art is addressed, then there'd be a risk, because you'd have to confront an audience that is not familiar with the contemporary art discourse at all. Then there'd be a risk. But as long as the whole thing remains confined to here, there's no risk at all. The artist did his own thing, carried out his goals, and didn't rise above any divisions. He simply did his job in this project.

ŻMIJEWSKI: The artist's role is to do his own thing.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But the role of those social groups is also to do their own thing. The artist doesn't really differ in any way from those people who represent their views there. He also defends his position. He is no different from the left-wing or right-wing groups that do their own thing. He does not stand above the divisions either, but rather tries to pursue his agenda. What does it serve except artists and the contemporary art audience? We can view it here, in the enclave of the gallery. We can view it and feel safe because we know who the target audience of this film really is.



AUDIENCE MEMBER: I must say I don't understand this division between the contemporary art audience and everyone else. Art is not an enclave that serves the vague goals of just one group, but it more or less successfully serves everyone, and institutions don't protect artists, this isn't their purpose...

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I don't see any risk in this film.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: What kind of risk do you mean? Is the artist supposed to go to the front like the war reporter? The point is the *intellectual* risk that the artist takes, not the risk that he may get one in the head if someone disagrees with his views.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The film's reception by the workshop's actual participants, their disappointment, suggests a clear division between the contemporary art audience and the rest, the uninitiated. I think this division is very clear, and that the artist represents some position here, just like

the other groups. We shouldn't judge whether his position is more or less valuable than the other ones, more or less intellectual, with greater or lesser potential. He simply represents a certain social group just like the other people do. What I wanted to say is that besides the groups invited to participate there's also the group represented by the artist himself. That's my observation.

ŻMIJEWSKI: Well, I represent myself. I set myself a task, to create a narrative. We talked about creating a political space for those people, didn't you hear that?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, but I represent my position now...

ŻMIJEWSKI: Please, tell me why you viewed this film. What do you need art for if you then try to discredit it? What's so attractive in this?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: This film is very attractive, that's another matter. It's very attractive and nice to watch, but that's a different story.

ŻMIJEWSKI: So what's artificial here?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Well, the film is visually attractive and that perhaps makes it somewhat artificial.

MYTKOWSKA: Do we have any more questions? But only urgent ones, because I think we should be slowly concluding this meeting.

AUDIENCE: Very briefly, as a viewer, having viewed this film and having listened to this discussion, it's the only moment, I guess, when we can listen to the artist and the participants themselves... It's very valuable, and now my question is whether this was a documentary, or a feature where the closing credits should list the actors? This is my question.

MYTKOWSKA: Do I correctly understand this question? I understand that you're asking about whether the persons who participated in this film are respected and present enough, whether they are co-participants?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No, no, I'm not negating Mr Żmijewski's role in any way as an artist and as a filmmaker or visual artist. But how did Mr Żmijewski approach this issue?

ŻMIJEWSKI: Let me say it once again: it's for real, it really happened, this is not a fantasy, this is not fiction, I didn't invent it, didn't write any script. I only came up with the original idea, the original situation in which I placed the members of the four invited groups. Everything that happened there was their doing, and that's why this isn't a feature film. It's a documentary, a bit like a television documentary — very easy, very simple, showing events that really took place. Is this a satisfying answer?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: But you'll admit that you're also an actor in this documentary, that you're a participant.

ŻMIJEWSKI: I don't know. Do you want me to say that the film had a script? That I had it written down, that I manipulated everything?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: No, no, the film shows that...

ŻMIJEWSKI: That it's a fiction, where I do everything for my own purpose, a manipulated narrative?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: It's the part that happened. It's not about what happened afterwards, it's about what can be seen. Another matter is that the very form of the workshop encouraged conflict between the participants.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The point, I think, is that it's one film, but you could make four out of it, each group would present its vision, that'd be more realistic, and now we have only one vision. And it's a very shallow one.

MYTKOWSKA: I'd like to thank everyone present. I think it was an important debate, a very important point of departure for the museum, which is geared precisely towards this kind of operating format. I thank the audience, and I thank Claire Bishop and Artur Żmijewski for participating in this discussion.



CONTEXTUAL
MATERIAL

OUTSOURCING AUTHENTICITY? DELEGATED PERFORMANCE IN CONTEMPORARY ART

Claire Bishop

I. INTRODUCTION

Performances produced by visual artists have shifted significantly in the last decade. Instead of artists using their own bodies as the medium and material, with a corresponding emphasis on physical and psychological authenticity and oppositional transgression, as was the case in the 1960s and '70s, today's artists do not necessarily privilege the live moment or their own body. Rather, they engage in strategies of mediation that include delegation, re-enactment, and collaboration. One only has to think of recent works by Tino Sehgal, Elmgreen and Dragset, Artur Żmijewski, Tania Bruguera, Phil Collins, Roman Ondak, Johanna Billing, Jeremy Deller, and Dora García, to name only a few, in order to appreciate the distinctiveness of this shift. In the works of these artists, performance is delegated—or, to use more managerial language, 'outsourced'—to other performers. These people may be specialists or nonprofessionals, paid or unpaid, but they undertake the job of being present and performing at a particular time in a particular place on behalf of the artist, and following their instructions. Although the use of actors and performers has a long history in traditional theatre and classical music, what distinguishes this trend in visual art is the frequency with which performance is delegated to non-professional people who are asked to *perform themselves*.¹ In tandem with post-structuralist critiques of presence, delegated performance also differs from its '70s-era forbears in its modes of distribution: it can be mediated through video or exist in the gallery for the duration of an exhibition—both strategies that reduce the intensity of a one-off performance. This shift raises a number of questions about the present-day status of performance art, authorship, and, inevitably, the ethics of representation: when an artist uses other people's bodies as the medium of his or her work, the results can often prompt accusations of exploitation or manipulation. This essay aims to explore this tendency more closely, and to reflect on some of the

issues it raises around authorship and authenticity, and to provide a broader historical and cultural framework for understanding its development.

2. THE 1990S

To recap: I would like to assert that artists of the late '60s and early '70s—for example, Marina Abramovic, Chris Burden, Vito Acconci, and Gina Pane—turned to their own bodies as the privileged site of artistic action. Authorship and authenticity were bound together in the irreducible singularity of the individual performer. The artists' bodies are indices of authorship, even while they also carry a broader symbolic or metaphorical meaning as icons of gender and ethnicity and (in the case of some artists) the constructed, fragile, or performative nature of this identity.² Today their bodies also function art historically, as signs of an artistic practice that consciously placed itself at one remove from the market: in Western Europe and North America, performance and body art of the late '60s and early '70s frequently stood as a refusal of the portable object and the circulation of commodities.³ This trajectory of performance and body art could be reductively summarised—both through the artists' own accounts and its critical reception—as grounded in the phenomenological immediacy of the live body, its singular authenticity, and its aim to chafe against the institutional frameworks through which the commodity object circulates. The presence of documentary photography and video does nothing to reduce the overall stakes of this authentic, indexical relation between the artist and their work of art.⁴ This convergence between visual art and performance in the '70s began to drift apart in the '80s: in the work of Adrian Piper, Coco Fusco, Orlan, and the early efforts of Andrea Fraser, the artists remain the central performers, but they make a point of discursively embodying multiple and/or fictional identities.⁵ By the late '90s, the idea of an authentic artist-performer seems to be an anachronism, associated with figures like Stelarc and Franko B,⁶ and much of what is known in the UK as 'live art'.⁷

At the same time, in the early '90s, particularly in Europe, there began to be a shift away from this paradigm. Artists started to pay or persuade other people to undertake their performances. Authenticity was relocated from the *singular* body of the artist to the *collective* authenticity of the social body, particularly when those performers constituted an economic, gendered or racialised Other. This change can be seen, for example, in the



Maurizio Cattelan
AC Furniture Sud (Southern Suppliers FC), 1991
Collage



Paweł Althamer
Observer, 1992
Performance



Paweł Althamer
Untitled, 1994
Installation view at *Germinations 8*, Zachęta Gallery, 1994

early works of Maurizio Cattelan and Paweł Althamer. Cattelan's *Southern Suppliers FC* (1991) marks a significant change of tone from identity-based works of the '80s: the artist assembled a football team of North African immigrants to play local football matches (all of which they lost), in shirts emblazoned with the name of a fictional sponsor Rauss (the German word for 'get out', as in the phrase *ausländer raus*, or 'foreigners out'). The title alludes to immigrant labour, but also to the trend, then debated in the Italian press, of hiring foreign footballers to play in Italian teams. Cattelan's gesture draws a contrast between two types of foreign labour at different ends of the economic spectrum — star footballers are rarely perceived in the same terms as working-class immigrants — but without any discernable shred of Marxist rhetoric: through this work, Cattelan fulfills the megalomaniac male dream of owning a football club, and apparently insults the players by dressing them in shirts emblazoned Rauss. At the same time, he nevertheless produces a confusing image: the word *Rauss*, when combined with the startling photograph of an all-black Italian football team, has an ambiguous, provocative potency, especially when it circulates in the media, since it seems to actualise the unspoken fear of being deluged by immigrants from outside 'fortress Europe'. *Southern Suppliers FC* is therefore social sculpture as cynical performance, inserted into the real-time social system of a football league.⁸ As such, Francesco Bonami seems to put too worthy a spin on the work when he claims that Cattelan aimed "for a democratic new way to play the artist, whilst remaining central to the work as the coach and manager of the teams."⁹ At a push, *Southern Suppliers FC* could be said to share the performance limelight, but from all other perspectives it is highly manipulative and far from straightforward in its political message.

Paweł Althamer, by contrast, demonstrates a different approach to delegation: more minimal and discreet, and — in a manner that is perhaps typical of artists from ex-Socialist countries — less interested in the mass media as a site for intervention. *Observer* (1992) is a series of photographs that document a performance with homeless people in Warsaw, each of whom was asked to wear a sticker bearing word *observer*. Although the homeless men were labelled (like works of art) and did not undertake any actions other than their usual activities — gestures that would not usually be considered to constitute a performance, such as sitting on a bench — they inverted the



Annika Eriksson
Copenhagen Postmen's Orchestra, 1996
Video still



Jeremy Deller / Williams Fairey Band
Acid Brass, 1997



Elmgreen and Dragset
TRY, 1996
Three men on rugs, ghettoblaster, walkman, stereo headphones, books, magazines and music selected by the performers, fridge with beer cans
Installation view at *Between You and Me*, Overgaden, Copenhagen

conventional relationship between actor and audience. Warsaw continued its activities oblivious to the fact that it was being watched as a real-time film played out for the benefit of this disenfranchised audience. Althamer's untitled project for the 1994 exhibition *Germinations* at Zachęta Gallery in Warsaw pursued this line of investigation on an indoor stage: one of the gallery's female invigilators was invited to bring to her workplace a series of objects that would make her environment more comfortable and relaxing. The resulting tableau staged the invigilator as a minimal performer in the gallery. Rather than being the unnoticed observer of visitors to an exhibition, she became the focus of their attention as a live portrait or living sculpture. Althamer's subsequent works are frequently based on identification with so-called marginal subjects, such as children (including his own), the homeless, and a group of adults with physical and mental disabilities called The Nowolipie Group. Althamer treads ambiguously between coercion and collaboration, and has coined the phrase 'directed reality' to describe an approach in which the artist's predetermined premise or structure unfolds with the unpredictable agency of his participants.¹⁰

This tendency to 'delegate' performance gathers pace in the mid '90s, most spectacularly in the work of Vanessa Beecroft (1993–), but also with Annika Eriksson's *Copenhagen Postmen's Orchestra* (1996) and Jeremy Deller's *Acid Brass* (1997), two projects that invite workers' bands to perform recent pop music in their own idiom. (The Copenhagen Postmen's Orchestra played a song by the British trip-hop group Portishead, while the Williams Fairey Brass Band interpreted a selection of acid house tracks.) Eriksson's event resulted in a five-minute video, while Deller's has become numerous live performances, a CD, and a diagram elaborately connecting these two forms of regional working-class music. Beyond the aesthetic frisson of mixing two types of popular music, part of the appeal of both projects lies in the fact that the artists employ real bands. They are not professionals or actors hired to play electronic music on brass instruments, but apparently authentic working-class collaborators who have agreed to participate in an artistic experiment — a rather formal one in the case of Eriksson (the camera remains static throughout the video), more research-led in the case of Deller.¹¹ The bands perform their public persona (determined by their employment) and come to exemplify a collectively shared passion (in this case, performing music), which has been a recurrent theme in both artists' work. Throughout the '90s one finds



Santiago Sierra
GROUP OF PEOPLE FACING THE WALL AND PERSON FACING INTO A
CORNER, Lisson Gallery, London, October 2002

examples of artists bringing a live presence to the gallery through the use of other people, such as Elmgreen and Dragset's *Try* (1997), in which three casually dressed young men lounge on rugs in the gallery, listening to headphones and reading. The men seem to be sculptural objects of desire, perhaps surrogates for the artists themselves, who were a couple at the time. A hallmark of all the works made at this time is the light and humorous way in which the delegated performers come to signify class, race, age, or gender. These bodies seem to be a metonymic shorthand for politicised identity, but the fact that it is not the artists' own bodies being staged means that this politics is pursued with a cool irony and distance.

A rupture with this mood arrived in 1999 with the work of Spanish artist Santiago Sierra. Prior to 1999, Sierra's work derived from a forceful combination of minimalism and urban intervention; over the course of that year his work shifted from installations produced by low-paid workers to displays of the workers themselves, foregrounding the economic transactions on which these installations depend.¹² Many of these early performances involve finding people who were willing to undertake banal or humiliating tasks for the minimum wage. Since these projects frequently take place in countries already at the thin end of globalisation, most notably in Latin America, Sierra's works are stripped of the light humour that accompanies many of the projects mentioned above. Since 2000, Sierra has produced variations on this model: paying people to stand in a line, to have their hair dyed blond, to receive a tattoo, or to sit inside a box or behind a wall for days on end. As such, he has been heavily criticised for merely repeating the inequities of capitalism, and more specifically of globalisation, in which rich countries 'outsource' or

'offshore' labour to low-paid workers in developing countries. My concern here is not to question the ethical validity of Sierra's gestures, but to draw attention to the *economic* operation through which they are realised: performance is outsourced via a financial transaction that places the artist at arm's length from the viewer's phenomenological confrontation with the performer. Sierra seems at pains to make the details of each payment part of the work's identity, turning economics into one of his primary mediums.¹³

In recent years, this financial arrangement has become increasingly essential to the realisation of delegated performance: Elmgreen and Dragset paid twelve unemployed men and women to dress as invigilators and guard an empty gallery (*Reguarding the Guards* [2005]), Tino Sehgal paid children to describe his back catalogue of works at the Frieze Art Fair (*This is Right* [2003]), Tania Bruguera paid blind people to wear military uniforms and stand in front of the Palace of Culture in Warsaw (*Consummated Revolution* [2008]). This brings us to one of the most important differences between performance and body art circa 1970 and present-day delegated performance. If performance in the '60s and '70s was produced quickly and inexpensively, since the artist's own body was the cheapest form of material,¹⁴ delegated performance, by contrast, is a luxury game.¹⁵ It is telling that it takes place primarily in the West, and that art fairs and biennials are the primary sites of its consumption. Whereas once performance art sought to break with the art market by dematerialising the work of art into ephemeral events, today certain strands of delegated performance could be argued to recapitulate the artwork's commodification by taking advantage of this genre's ability — due precisely to its liveness — to excite media attention, which in turn heightens the value of the event. As Philip Auslander has argued, "Despite the claim... that performance's evanescence allows it to escape commodification, it is performance's very evanescence that gives it value in terms of cultural prestige."¹⁶ We have arrived at a complex scenario in which mediation and immediacy frequently seem inextricable.¹⁷

3. HISTORICAL PRECURSORS: LIVE

INSTALLATIONS VS CONSTRUCTED SITUATIONS

I have drawn two lines here: one between art of the late '60s and that of the present decade, and a second between art of the West and (implicitly) its peripheries. Although I would like to argue that delegated performance is a new phenomenon,

its historical precursors can be found in the '60s, and predominantly in cities outside the western centres of art production. We can see it in the tendency for making collective clothing, as in Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* (1965), Lygia Pape's *Divisor* (1968), or Lygia Clark's *Collective Body* (1968).¹⁸ And yet, with the exception of Oiticica, none of these works directly emphasise the *social* specificity of the people who perform. Oiticica's *Parangolés* — strangely weighted capes made of poor materials that encouraged exaggerated movements when dancing — were produced in collaboration with samba dancers from the Mangueira *favela*. Oiticica invited these dancers to produce situations of disruption: for example, for the opening of an exhibition at Museu de Arte Moderna in Rio de Janeiro in 1965, the dancers appeared in *Parangolés* and danced through the galleries.¹⁹ However, none of these precursors involve the financial transaction so essential to today's outsourced performance. In this regard, the most direct precursors for the contemporary use of people as an art material are to be found not in Brazil in the '60s but in Argentina. Although participatory art in the form of Happenings and Actions occurs throughout Europe and North America in this decade, it differs from the self-reflexive and almost brutal tenor of delegated performance in Argentina, where working- and lower middle-class people were hired directly to be material for works of art.

Oscar Bony's *La Familia Obrera* (*The Worker's Family*) (1968) is an important example.²⁰ The work comprises a family — an Argentinian man, woman, and child — sitting on a platform, and was first shown at the exhibition *Experiencias 68* at the Instituto di Tella in Buenos Aires. The family responded to a job advertisement in the local newspaper, and were paid to sit on a plinth throughout the opening hours of the exhibition. They were accompanied by a recording of everyday sounds made in the home of the same family, and an information label explaining that "Luis Ricardo Rodríguez, a professional die-caster, is earning twice his usual wages just for staying on show with his wife and son". In photographic documentation of the project, the Rodríguez family are shown self-absorbed, reading books to pass the time of day while visitors examine them. The reality was less static: the family was constantly shifting position in the middle of the Hall — eating, smoking, reading, and talking amid the audience's largely adverse response; the child in particular found it hard to stay put on the plinth and often ran around the exhibition.²¹ The work clearly plays on the

conventions of figurative art in a socialist realist tradition, as well as ideas of monumental statuary: elevating an everyday family to the dignity of exemplary representation or ideal.²² However, the use of a real family as models for this task complicates such a reading: although the family is literally and symbolically elevated via the plinth, there is a class discrepancy between the performers and viewers, since the former were subject to the scrutiny of a primarily middle-class audience who came to inspect them.

Several complaints were brought against the show, including the accusation that Bony's *La Familia Obrera* would have been more effective if shown within a labour union; for this critic, exhibiting the work in a gallery showed a refusal to communicate with a non-specialist public.²³ But Bony preferred to address this relationship dialectically. Instead of taking art to the masses, Bony brought a fragment of the masses ('the real') into the exhibition — a gesture comparable to Robert Smithson's 'non-sites' of the same year, in which fragments of the unbound natural environment (stones, slate, etc.) are removed from their original habitat and displayed in the gallery in geometrical containers. Bony's other concern was dematerialisation — the predominant theme of *Experiencias 68* as a whole, influenced by Oscar Masotta's lecture *After Pop, We Dematerialise*, presented at the Instituto di Tella in 1967.²⁴ In this lecture, Masotta proposed that the materials of traditional painting and sculpture should be replaced by the 'dematerialised' realm of mass communications media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines, posters, etc). Paradoxically, then, Bony's living family is both a dematerialised event (ephemeral, time-based, circulating in the media) and yet also irrefutably material, since the Rodríguez family were present on the plinth throughout the exhibition. This conjunction of indexical presence and media circulation arguably forms a blueprint for contemporary delegated performance, particularly 'art fair art' that consorts with, indeed encourages, media attention.²⁵

When interviewed in 1998, at the time of restaging *La Familia Obrera*, Bony confessed that he still didn't know how to describe the work, since it existed as both an idea and a concrete realisation: he referred to it as a 'conceptual proposition' since a group of people can't be the material of the work.... It wasn't a performance, because it hasn't got a script; it isn't body art; there's no clear category for this work, and I really like, the fact that not even I can find a precise categorisation. I find



Oscar Bony
La Familia Obrera, 1968, and audience during *Experiencias '68*, Instituto Torcuato Di Tella, Buenos Aires

the fact that there is a certain feeling of *being on the limit* extremely important.²⁶

To me, this feeling of “being on the limit” refers not only to the collapse of reality and representation in this work, but also to the ethical unease produced by the class antagonism that characterised its conditions of reception. It imposed upon liberal viewers a sense of shame; as one critic wrote in a review of Bony’s work, “the shared humiliation of looking at these people who have been paid in order to let themselves be seen”.²⁷ This complex dynamic was certainly present in Bony’s mind when he referred to his role in this piece as a ‘torturer’ — for him, *La Familia Obrera* was based less on politics than on the production of moral unease: “it is obvious that the work was based on ethics, for exposing them [the workers] to ridicule made me feel uncomfortable”.²⁸

The closest referent for Bony’s work — and one that was not lost on the art press at that time — was Masotta’s 1966 happening in which twenty elderly, lower middle class people were paid to stand in a storage room, in front of an audience, and be subjected to fire-extinguishers, a high-pitched deafening sound, and blinding white light. Masotta’s title — *To Conjure the Spirit of an Image* — borrowed its name from Jean-Jacques Lebel’s happening *To Conjure the Spirit of Catastrophe* (1962), but its content was more indebted to a work by La Monte Young that the Argentinian artist had experienced in New York earlier that year.²⁹ Masotta encouraged the participants to dress as poor people, because he felt that the process of acting would enable them to be more than merely passive objects.³⁰ In other words, he invited non-professional actors to dress and act as the social class beneath them. Masotta’s article *I Committed a Happening* (1967) begins by explaining his choice of title: the artist had been criticised for ‘concocting’ a Happening when the correct Leftist position would have been to abstain from Happenings altogether (since they were synonymous with media attention) and instead to address real political problems (such as hunger).³¹ This false option of “either Happenings or Left politics” (p.191) made Masotta feel unsettled, so the title of his essay — *I Committed a Happening* — performs an ironic confession of guilt. The rest of the article narrates the work’s realisation, but his presentation of a false alternative — art or real politics — is one frequently levelled at artists today, particularly if their work is based on collaboration with ‘underprivileged’ constituencies but does not appear demonstrably ameliorative.



Oscar Masotta
To Conjure the Spirit of an Image, 1966

As in Bony’s *La Familia Obrera*, Masotta’s *To Conjure the Spirit of an Image* also foregrounded the economic circuit in which the work was implicated. At the beginning of the event the artist announced to the audience members — who had each paid 200 Pesos to attend — that he would be paying his elderly participants 600 Pesos each. Describing the participants, he noted that they paid him much more attention after he increased their fee to 600 Pesos from the 400 Pesos originally offered: “I felt a bit cynical”, he wrote, “but neither did I wish to have too many illusions. I didn’t want to demonise myself for this social act of manipulation which in real society happens every day” (p.199). Masotta’s cycle of payment and spectatorship, then, is deliberately positioned in relation to a larger, more pervasive context of exploitation. The artist describes turning the glaring spotlights onto the elderly participants in a manner that foregrounds everyone’s consent:

Against the white wall, their spirit shamed and flattened out by the white light, next to each other in a line, the old people were rigid, ready to *let themselves be looked at* for an hour.

The electronic sound lent greater immobility to the scene. I looked toward the audience: they too, in stillness, *looked at* the old people. (p.200) Masotta’s anxiety seems to concern precisely the

uncomfortable power dynamic of the spectatorial relation induced by the fact of payment: the elderly participants allow themselves to be objectified, and the audience members allow the event to proceed by remaining in their places.³² The conclusion to Masotta’s text is revealing. He describes how the happening peturbed his friends on the left, who wished to know what it meant. Masotta’s answer was succinct: “an act of social sadism made explicit” (p.200).³³

It is significant that the coercive approach to performance proposed by Bony is predominantly sculptural: one might say that it is a *tableau* rather than a situation. Masotta, by contrast, describes his happening as an event passing out of his control: handing out earplugs to the performers, he noticed the audience streaming in: “Something had begun, and I felt as though something had slipped loose without my consent, a mechanism had gone into motion” (p.200). If sculptural stasis is a hallmark of some of the more notorious forms of delegated performance today (think of Santiago Sierra, or Elmgreen and Dragset), for many critics this is also a source of such performances’ moral ambiguity. Rather than presenting people in a manner over which they have some degree of agency, subjects are directed by the artist to fulfill primarily formal requirements: standing in a



Graciela Carnevale
Action for the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental*, Rosario, October 1968

line, wearing certain clothes, behaving in a particular way. A further unease, which is far harder to define, comes from a sense that the participants are being requested to *perform themselves*: they are asked to signify a larger socio-economic demographic, for which they stand as an authentic metonymic fragment. It is telling that the most radical performance works created in Argentina after those of Bony and Masotta operated, by contrast, on the *audience* as the privileged material of artistic action. The *Ciclo de Arte Experimental*, a series of ten performance-based events organised by artists in Rosario from May to October 1968, shows a clear development from *live installations* (in which people are placed on display within a gallery) to *constructed situations* in which a more open-ended scenario unfolds without the artist's direct or total control.³⁴

Many of these events appropriated social forms, behaviours, and relations and, as Ana Longoni has argued, most were based on a common idea: “working on the audience as the privileged material of artistic action.”³⁵ The eighth action, conceived by Edouardo Favario, played with the authoritative conventions of the gallery: he shut down the exhibition space and put up a notice instructing

visitors how to find the work, in another part of the city. The most striking of these events took place at the end of the cycle on 7 October 1968, and was devised by Graciela Carnevale.³⁶ The artist describes the work as follows:

The work consists of first preparing a totally empty room, with totally empty walls; one of the walls, which was made of glass, had to be covered in order to achieve a suitably neutral space for the work to take place. In this room the participating audience, which has come together by chance for the opening, has been locked in. I have taken prisoners. The point is to allow people to enter and to prevent them from leaving. (...) There is no possibility of escape, in fact the spectators have no choice; they are obliged, violently, to participate. Their positive or negative reaction is always a form of participation. *The end of the work, as unpredictable for the viewer as it is for me, is nevertheless intended: will the spectator tolerate the situation passively? Will an unexpected event — help from the outside — rescue him from being locked in? Or will he proceed violently to break the glass?*³⁷

After an hour, the visitors trapped inside the gallery removed the posters that had been placed on the windows to prevent communication with those outside. Excitement — and the sense that this was all a joke — inevitably turned to frustration, but, contrary to Carnevale's hopes, no one inside the gallery took action. Eventually it was a person on the exterior who smashed a window open, and the private view attendees emerged to freedom through the ragged glass orifice. Some of the people present nevertheless believed that the rescuer had ruined a work and began hitting him over the head with an umbrella. The police arrived and — making a connection between the event and the first anniversary of Che Guevara's arrest — closed down the event and with it the rest of the *Cycle of Experimental Art*.

Although Carnevale's action does not delegate performance to others, I have chosen to mention it here because it is paradigmatic for any discussion about authorial control, risk, and unpredictability. Carnevale's lack of control within an apparently tightly structured framework is the source of her action's aesthetic and political efficacy: on a formal level, it replicated an existing situation of political oppression whose extremity necessitated an equally bold response. Like Masotta and Bony, Carnevale did not have any ethical reservations about her intervention: producing an equation between the micro-oppression of the

action and the macro-oppression of Argentinian society under the dictatorship of General Onganía, her situation enacted the same antagonistic division of the social as the latter, but in order to thematise oppression while also leaving open a space for unpredictable interruptions of agency.³⁸

4. OUTSOURCING AUTHENTICITY

Since the events of the *Ciclo de Arte Experimental* operate upon the audience as privileged material, rather than hiring specific people to be seen by others, I am reluctant to refer to them as ‘delegated’ or ‘outsourced’ performances. Instead, I would suggest that this phrase be reserved for contemporary iterations of the tendency to hire other people as performers, particularly in art since the early '90s. That these developments have taken place in parallel with managerial changes in the economy at large is not irrelevant. ‘Outsourcing’, which refers to the logical evolution of businesses ‘subcontracting’ certain activities to other companies, became a buzzword in the early '90s.³⁹ Outsourcing is the wholesale divesting of important but non-core activities to other businesses, from customer service call-centres to financial analysis and research.⁴⁰ With the growth of economic globalisation during the past fifteen years, ‘offshore outsourcing’ refers — with not altogether positive connotations — to the use of hired labour and ‘virtual companies’ in developing countries.⁴¹ For business theorists, outsourcing is presented as a tool for maximising profits, but, curiously, all guides to this subject emphasise the importance of trust: companies give responsibility for some aspect of their production to another company, with all the risks and benefits that this shared responsibility entails. For those more sceptical of globalisation, outsourcing is little more than a legal loophole that allows national and multi-national companies to absolve themselves of the legal responsibility for labour conditions in geographically remote contexts.⁴² In the light of the present discussion, it is telling that all the textbooks on outsourcing agree that its primary aim is to ‘improve performance’.⁴³

But if outsourcing is one of the most significant tropes of economic globalisation, just as delegated performance is among the most characteristic modes of today's visual art performance, then it is also necessary to ask what the differences might be between these concurrent tendencies. Repeatedly in the literature on economic outsourcing we find the same message: delegating business involves relinquishing some (but not total) control, yet the



Phil Collins
dünya dinlemiyor, 2005
Still from one of three channels of a colour video installation with sound
(*the world won't listen*, 2004–07)

stakes — increased profits — are always dependent on *minimising risk*. I would argue that outsourced performance in an artistic context is at its best when, conversely, it *exacerbates* this risk, when the relationship between artist, performer, and viewer is ever more improvisatory and contingent. This is not to say that the resulting work will be more wholesomely collaborative or co-authored, although this may be a result. This leads me to a provisional definition of the difference between live installation and constructed situations. The former will follow, more or less accurately, the effect anticipated by the artist: the actions of participants are to a large extent circumscribed in advance, the emphasis is on form, and unpredictability is minimised — as with actors performing a play. The constructed situation, by contrast, knowingly courts the risk of failure: its form and procedure are dependent upon actions that unravel within a set of partially supplied co-ordinates, and which may not even materialise.⁴⁴ Despite this distinction, I would be reluctant to formalise such an opposition between the supposedly authentic ‘situation’ and the compromised ‘live installation’, as well as to endorse an ethical value system that privileges the active over the passive performer/participant. The aesthetic and political advantages of delegation are more important than the complex question of what constitutes ethical superiority vis-à-vis the performing subject's agency and degree of self-representation.

As an extension of this argument, I would propose that there is no compelling distinction today between live work and its presentation as documentation, since the latter presupposes and includes the former. The best video works continue to testify to the relentlessly idiosyncratic



Artur Żmijewski
Singing Lesson 1, 2001
 Video still

presence of the singular human being in ways that are just as awkward, painful, and exhilarating as encountering a live performer in the gallery, but they complicate this by suggesting the formative role of mediation in the construction of this authentic subject.⁴⁵ Some of the most compelling examples of outsourced performance are those that permit ‘authenticity’ (subjects that are engaged, passionate, fragile, complex) to emerge within situations of intense artificiality. Phil Collins’s *the world won’t listen* (2005–2007), a video trilogy produced in Bogotá, Istanbul, and Indonesia that depicts young fans of The Smiths passionately singing karaoke to a soundtrack of this British band, is an instance of contemporary delegated performance in which the artist (a longtime fan of The Smiths) finds a community of alter-egos by tracking the global reach of his favourite group from the ’80s. The videos take the form of a still camera trained on each performer, who is positioned against a kitsch backdrop (a sunset beach or an alpine view), fantasy vistas that parallel the escapism of karaoke itself. The results are profoundly affecting, particularly the video filmed in Istanbul, where a young woman with glittery eye shadow sings an emotionally devastating

version of ‘Rubber Ring’. Since the video exploits the seductiveness of popular music, it inevitably invites comparisons with MTV and reality shows such as *Pop Idol*, but the simplicity of Collins’s documentation is stark and uncontrived when contrasted with televised performance. No one is competing for a prize, and there are no judges to reinforce normative standards of success. Indeed, by any conventional musical standards, most of the performances are failures.

The work of Polish artist Artur Żmijewski often revolves around the devising and recording of excruciating situations. In Żmijewski’s video *The Singing Lesson I* (2001), a group of deaf students is filmed singing the Kyrie to Maklakiewicz’s 1944 Polish Mass in a Warsaw church. The opening shot is staggeringly hard: an image of the church interior, all elegant neoclassical symmetry, is offset by the cacophonous distorted voice of a young girl, clearly uncomfortable with being centre stage as the main performer. She is surrounded by fellow students who, unable to hear her efforts, chat with one another in sign language. Although Żmijewski’s editing draws constant attention to the contrast between the choir and their environment, suggesting that religious

paradigms of perfection continue to inform our ideas of beauty, his work derives its stark potency from the fact that this near unthinkable social experiment actually took place. To have presented the work live would be too extreme an experience (for both the performers and the audience); video, by contrast, allows Żmijewski to direct the viewer’s attention away from the individuals in order to draw out larger points about religion, harmony, community, and communication. Like Collins’s *the world won’t listen*, *The Singing Lesson* asks us to devise new criteria for performance.

In these situations, the staged and the spontaneous are fused to the point where it is difficult to establish what ‘unmediated’ behaviour might be. Directorial control is essential to these works and yet the outcome is entirely dependent on the ability of the performers to surpass the artist’s (and the viewer’s) expectations.⁴⁶ This argument can also be inverted: even with Tino Sehgal, who rejects photographic documentation altogether, the almost hermetic artificiality of his staged situations performed live in the gallery serves to foreground the excruciating inauthenticity of our spontaneous behaviour. This is particularly true of works that require spoken interaction with his performers (a term Sehgal rejects in favour of ‘interpreters’). In *This Progress* (2006), the viewer is led through the gallery in turn by four different performers of increasing age and engaged in discussions about the meaning of progress, development, and utopia. You hear yourself speaking in clichés, unable to break the conceptual structure that the artist has set in place. *This objective of that object* (2004) also places the viewer within a trap: as you enter the gallery, five people have their backs turned to you and encourage a discussion about subjectivity and objectivity. Their words sound depersonalised and any contribution you make to this discussion feels appallingly empty and hollow, as does the banal debate performed live in front of you.⁴⁷ Although Sehgal’s work proudly declares its dematerialised performativity by renouncing photographic reproduction, it seems actively to tear apart any equation between liveness and authenticity; indeed, the very fact that the work runs continually in the space for the duration of the exhibition, by any number of interpreters, erodes any residual attachment to an original or ideal ‘performance’.

This confusion, if not total collapse, of the live and recorded, spontaneous and scripted, is in part a corollary of mediation theory that emerged in the late ’70s. Though formulated most

comprehensively by Jean Baudrillard, it has developed more recently in the realm of performance studies through critiques of Peggy Phelan’s influential argument that performance is ontologically live and impossible to mediate.⁴⁸ When surveying delegated performances of the last decade, during which time the live and spontaneous seems to hold decreasing significance for artists, this goes in two directions. The first is an amplification of *artificiality*, where artists employ actors to perform in ways that serve to generate ambiguity and complicate the boundary between fiction and reality, authentic and staged. Joe Scanlan’s project to insert into the art world a young, ambitious black artist called Donelle Woolford is a good example, since it elides two types of delegation, professional (job identity) and personal (gender/race identity). The second direction is an amplification of *authenticity*, which is relocated away from the artist and onto the social group (regardless of whether these people are actually present in a space or mediated by video). Elmgreen and Dragset’s *Reg(u)arding the Guards*, hiring twelve unemployed men and women, is one example of this tendency.⁴⁹ Like Bony’s *La Familia Obrera*, this social group is reified as a representation of itself, and the authentic presence of the artist is displaced onto the presence of what Silvija Jestrović has referred to as a ‘hyper-authentic’ social group. Alluding to Baudrillard’s concept of the ‘hyperreal’, Jestrović proposes the term ‘hyper-authentic’ as a descriptor for works in which the authenticity of the subject is constructed through the artist as director and through the gaze of the beholder, rather than by the subjects themselves.⁵⁰ The hyper-authentic is that which is *doubly* present, doubly authentic: both presence and representation, signifier and signified. It is this hyper-authenticity that differentiates much ’60s- and ’70s-era work from delegated performance of the present decade.

It will be argued that I still have not addressed the ethical question of delegated performance. In previous essays I have argued against reducing a work of art to judgements of humanist ethical criteria, in other words, against drawing an equation between a conventionally agreed ‘good’ model of collaboration and a resulting ‘good art’. Recently, Dave Beech has argued for a distinction between participation and collaboration: participants are subject to the parameters of the artist’s project, while collaboration involves co-authorship and decisions over key structural features of the work.⁵¹ I would agree with this distinction, but not with Beech’s desire to translate it into a



Elmgreen and Dragset
Reg(u)arding the Guards, 2005
 Installation view, Bergen Kunsthall, 2005

binding set of value judgments when applied to art. Manipulation and coercion do not invalidate a work if it exists in critical dialogue with a larger social and political context, as can be seen in some of the works discussed in this essay. In this respect, it is worth noting the frequency with which delegating artists adopt strategies of mimicry or over-identification that are not subject to the false binary of critical/complicit.⁵² For example, it can be argued that Collins and Żmijewski appropriate the rules of reality television, but they redirect it to entirely different ends: despite their artistic control, their representations are aimed at revealing an authentically creative subject: one that exists outside conventional criteria, and is constructed through mediation, despite post-structuralist critiques of the authentic self. Looking at their works through a reductively humanist framework of reification ensures that the greater import of their work is misunderstood.⁵³

In the most compelling examples of ‘delegated performance’, then, a series of paradoxical operations is at work. Authorship is put into question through an emphatically authored event: the artist delegates control of the work to his or her performers, who act with more or less agency in a highly constructed yet high-risk situation. Power is both derailed and reclaimed through this gesture of delegation, since the artist temporarily

loses control over the event, before returning to select and circulate its representation through a documentary photograph or edited video. Finally, and most complicatedly, authenticity is deferred and yet amplified by the indexical presence of a particular social group (regardless of whether this is live or mediated); their presence collapses presentation and representation, and relocates authenticity away from the singular artist (who masturbates, is shot, is naked, etc.) and onto the collective otherness of the performers who represent an authentic socio-political issue (homelessness, immigration, disability, etc.). But this authenticity is not deployed in a straightforward manner: although the works take their significance from the fact that the performers metonymically signify an ‘issue’, artists often use this authenticity to question subjectivity and assert its imbrication in constructedness, fiction, even alienation.⁵⁴ The performing subjects are reified (decontextualised, and laden with other attributes) precisely in order to thematise contemporary reification, authenticity, and (in some cases) ethics itself. In this light, the risk of superficiality that accompanies the reductive branding or packaging of social identities (‘the unemployed’, ‘the blind’, ‘children’, ‘brass band players’) should always be set against the dominant modes of mediatic representation against which these works so frequently

battle.⁵⁵ The criteria for judging this work should not be its exploitation of the performers, but rather its resistant stance towards the society in which it finds itself and the modes of subjectivity produced therein. This, for me, is the dividing line between the facile gestures of so much ‘art fair art’ and those more troubling works that struggle to articulate difficult material through the use of conventionally unexposed constituencies. At their best, delegated performances produce disruptive events that testify to a shared reality between viewers and performers, and that throw into question agreed ways of thinking about subjectivity, ethics, and economics. At their worst they produce the mere spectacle of participation: staged reality designed for the media, rather than paradoxically mediated presence.

¹ This will be the main focus of this essay. However, there are examples of artists outsourcing performance to experts (such as opera singers in *Sediments Sentiments (Figures of Speech)* [2007] by Allora and Calzadilla or sprinters in *Work no.850* [2008] by Martin Creed). In this essay I will not be focusing on such a use of professionals or experts, nor will I be accounting for the use of actors in works of art, as found (for example) in the videos of James Coleman or Gerard Byrne. Nor will I discuss the rise of re-enacted performance as a historical and artistic problem, although this tendency — like that of delegation — is partly a corollary of performance art’s institutionalisation, as recent exhibitions have indicated. Take, for example, *A Little Bit of History Repeated* (Kunst-Werke, Berlin, 2001), *A Short History of Performance* (Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 2001–2006), *Life, Once More* (Witte de With, Rotterdam, 2005), *Again for Tomorrow* (Royal College of Art, London, 2006), *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary Art* (Kunst-Werke, 2007), *Re-enactments* (DHC/ART Foundation, Montreal, 2008), and, of course, Marina Abramovic’s series of re-enactments *Seven Easy Pieces* (Guggenheim New York, 2006).

² Vito Acconci’s *Conversions* (1971) or Ana Mendieta’s *Facial Hair Transplant* (1972) would be good examples. Judith Butler’s theory of gender as assumed and ‘performative’ has had numerous applications to body art; see, for example, Amelia Jones, *Body Art/Performing the Subject*, Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 1998.

³ As such, it was an artistic form particularly appealing to female artists who had nothing to lose by asserting an independent practice outside the male-dominated circuits of the market and museum system. As Vito Acconci has observed, “performance in the 70s was inherently feminist art” (Acconci, in Richard Prince, ‘Vito Acconci’, *Bomb Magazine*, Summer 1991, p. 53). RoseLee Goldberg adds: “Unconcerned about the established art world, where they had little clout anyway, many women gravitated towards performance because it was a medium ungoverned by conventional art world protocol; the studio visit, the gallery show, the critical review, the curatorial nod.” (Goldberg, *Performance! Live Art Since 1960*, New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1998, p. 129.) A quick survey of performance and body art from this period reveals that the majority of works by female artists took place in alternative spaces or public space, while male artists (Acconci and Burden included) tended to perform within commercial galleries.

⁴ Abramovic described how she re-recorded the video documentation of several works, such as *Art Must Be Beautiful/Artist Must Be Beautiful* (1975), in order to improve their appearance. Marina Abramovic, ‘Seven Easy Pieces, or How to Perform’, Frieze Art Fair, 13 October 2006.

⁵ With these particular artists in mind, it is worth noting Jon McKenzie’s argument that in the ‘80s, “critical theory gradually took on the efficacy that artists, activists, and scholars had long attributed to the body”. McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*, London: Routledge, 2001, p.40.

⁶ However, Amelia Jones has argued that Stelarc represents a dissolution of the body in new technologies and thus a ‘posthuman’ condition. I would contest that this represents a significant shift in performance from the ‘70s paradigm, as attention is still focused upon the singular and authentically suffering artist, despite being the subject of technological dispersal. See Jones, ‘Dispersed Subjects and the Demise of the “Individual”: 1990s bodies in/as art’, chapter five of *Body Art/Performing the Subject*.

⁷ The phrase ‘live art’ arose in the UK to describe the separation of experimental performance from visual art. This division is derived as much from separate sources of funding (i.e., different panels within Arts Council England) and separate points of dissemination (through festivals rather than galleries) as it does from any common characteristics in the work itself; indeed one could argue that live art’s position is not defined positively (e.g., by shared attributes) but negatively in relation to mainstream ‘high’ culture. On its website, the Live Art Development Agency, founded in London in 1999, maintains that “The term Live Art is not a description of an artform or discipline, but a cultural strategy to include experimental processes and experiential practices that might otherwise be excluded from established curatorial, cultural and critical frameworks. Live Art is a framing device for a catalogue of approaches to the possibilities of liveness by artists who chose to work across, in between, and at the edges of more traditional artistic forms.” http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about_us/what_is_live_art.html (last accessed 17 October 2008).

⁸ Cattelan’s other works of the ‘90s also play with a displacement of the artist’s identity: *Super No! (1992)* comprises fifty drawings of the artist based on descriptions given by his friends and acquaintances and drawn by police composite portrait sketchers. Here the act of description and production is delegated to the kind of artist whose skills are not typically valued in the contemporary art world.

⁹ Francesco Bonami, in *Maurizio Cattelan*, London: Phaidon, revised edition, 2003, p.58. Bonami makes excessive claims for this work’s political potential: the artist certainly redefines his centrality, but to

speak of this as having democratic ambitions seems to misread the tenor of Cattelán's provocative output.

10 See Paweł Althamer, '1000 Words', *Artforum*, May 2006, pp.268–69.

11 Significantly, Deller's collaboration has now become part of the Fairye Band's repertoire and features on their website. See <http://www.faireyband.com/acidbrass.html> (last accessed 17 October 2008)

12 The development of Sierra's work follows a clear path through 1999, from *24 blocks of concrete constantly moved during a day's work by paid workers* (Los Angeles, July), in which the workers are not seen but their presence and payment is made known to us, to *People Paid to Remain inside Cardboard Boxes* (G&T Building, Guatemala City, August), in which the minimalist logic of embodied perception is literalised in the concealed presence of low-paid workers, a metaphor for their 'invisibility' in society. The first work in which the participants are rendered visible is *450 Paid People* (Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City, October), and culminates in a work that continues to be inflammatory: *250cm line tattooed on 6 paid people* (Espacio Aglutinador, Havana, December). Sierra's projects have a relentless, aggressive quality that has been sharply criticised across the political spectrum.

13 In each of Sierra's publications, works are documented in black-and-white photographs, the artwork title, a brief caption that explains where and when the performance took place, and information about how much the participants were paid. See, for example, "*Person paid to remain inside the trunk of a car*, Limerick City Art Gallery, Limerick, Ireland, March 2000. This piece was produced during the inauguration of the fourth EV+A Biennial, at the entrance to its main site. A vehicle was parked at the gallery's entrance and a person was put into its trunk. The person was paid 30 Irish pounds, about 40 dollars. Nobody noticed his presence, since he was put into the trunk before the public's arrival at the opening." *Santiago Sierra, Works 2002–1990*, Birmingham, UK: Ikon Gallery, 2002, p.84.

14 Performance was "a democratic mode, where young artists who did not have access to art galleries or enough money to produce studio art for exhibition could show their work quickly to other artists in the community." Dan Graham, 'Performance: End of the 60s', in *Two-Way Mirror Power*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999, p143.

15 Tino Sehgal has contrasted the cost of his works to the cost of exhibiting a steel sculpture by Richard Serra: if the Serra is initially expensive to install, that cost does not increase during the course of the exhibition; conversely, the costs of Sehgal's art mount every day. (Tino Sehgal, discussion at the ICA, London, 19 November 2004). The comparison to Serra is telling: Sehgal resists the term performance and instead conceives of his work as sculpture, since it is present in the gallery space for the entire duration of the exhibition. The largest drains on the budget for *Double Agent* were the ongoing performances by Joe Scanlan (*Donelle Woolford*) and Dora García (*Instant Narrative [IN]*). The concept of duration in performance has shifted from a solitary, quasi-existential test for the singular artist to an economic gesture inextricable from contractual employment.

16 Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999, p.58. He continues: "Even within our hyper-mediatized culture, far more symbolic capital is attached to live events than to mediatized ones".

17 The work of Tino Sehgal is exemplary here: despite the fact that he refuses photographic documentation, Sehgal's work benefits from a different sort of publicity, word-of-mouth hype.

18 *Parangolé* is a neologism (like many of Otíccica's titles), a slang term loosely translatable as "an animated situation and sudden confusion and/or agitation between people".

19 The artist Rubens Gerchman recalled that "This was the first time that the common people entered the Museu de Arte Moderna of Rio de Janeiro... He entered the museum with the members of Mangueira Hill and everybody followed him. They tried to expel him but Otíccica started screaming that if black people could not enter the museum, that this was racism." Gerchman, cited in Claudia Calirman, 'Naked Man: Flaming Chickens: A Brief History of Brazilian Performance Art', in Deborah Cullen, ed., *Arte Jf Vida: Actions by Artists of the Americas 1960–2000*, New York: El Museo del Barrio, 2008, p.102.

20 Bony's *La Familia Obrera* is one that—in line with the current trend for the historical recovery of precursors of relational art—has recently been restaged in *Instituto Di Tella Experiencias 68* (Fundación Proa, Buenos Aires, 1998). *Worthless (Invaluable)* (Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana, 2000), and *Inverted Utopias* (Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, 2004). Other examples of this historical recovery include the multiple restagings across Europe and the US of Martha Rosler's *Garage Sale* (1977), Ian Wilson's 'Discussions' and the Wrong Gallery's restaging of Gino de Domenici's *Second Possibility of Mortality (The Universe is Motionless)* (1972). The latter work, in which a person affected by Down's Syndrome, seated on a chair, gazes at a beach ball and a rock placed on the ground before him/her, was restaged at the Frieze Art Fair in 2006.

21 Source: Email conversation with Roberto Jacoby, 17 January 2006.

22 At the time, however, it was framed within contemporary discussions around Pop art. The critic from *Revista Primera Plana* thought that *La Familia Obrera* "brought the destiny of pop art to a close". See *Instituto Di Tella Experiencias 68*, p. 78 (my translation).

23 Verbitsky, *Arte y Política*, cited in *Instituto Di Tella Experiencias 68*, p.78

24 It is worth noting that Lucy Lippard visited Argentina in 1968, but she does not credit Masotta for the term 'dematerialisation', which became the key thesis of her 1973 publication *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art Object 1966–1972*.

25 Jack Bankowsky has coined the term 'art fair art' to designate a mode of performance in which the spectacular and economic context of the art fair is integral to the work's meaning, but against which the artist's gestures provide a mild point of friction. Bankowsky defines 'art fair art' as post-Pop performance that trades equally on conceptual dematerialisation and public relations. Warholian in inspiration, art fair art suggests that critique cannot stand at a pure distance from the "point-of-purchase universe", and makes "the fair—its mechanisms and machinations—the subject, if not the central plotline, of its play." In other words, art fair art concerns a self-reflexive approach to art's circulation and consumption in a commercial environment.

Bankowsky, 'Tent Community', *Artforum*, October 2005, pp. 228–232. Typical examples of 'art fair art' from the Frieze Art Fair in London (one of the leading forums for this tendency) might include Elmgreen and Dragset's doubling of the booth of their Berlin gallery Klosterfelde, complete with identical works of art and a lookalike dealer (2005); Richard Prince's *Untitled (Original)* (2007), a yellow sports car attended by a busty female model; and numerous performances staged by the Wrong Gallery, such as Paola Pivi's *100 Chinese* (1998–2005), one hundred identically dressed Chinese people standing in the gallery's booth.

26 Bony, cited in *Instituto Di Tella Experiencias 68*, p. 79. My translation and emphasis.

27 *Revista Análisis*, cited in *Instituto Di Tella Experiencias 68*, p.76.

28 Bony interviewed in *La Maga* magazine, Buenos Aires, June 16, 1993, p. 11; cited in Ana Longoni and Mariano Mestman, *Avant-Garde and Politics in Argentine '68: The Itinerary Towards Tucuman Arde*, PhD thesis, p. 80.

29 La Monte Young's work involved a continuous indecipherable noise: its "exasperating electronic endlessness" induced Masotta to a higher awareness of vision and consciousness. Masotta, 'I committed a happening', in Katzenstein (ed), *Listen, Here, Now!: Argentine Art of the 1960s: Writings of the Avant-garde*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2004, p. 195.

30 "I told them that they should dress as poor people, but they shouldn't use make-up. They didn't all obey me completely; the only way not to totally be objects, totally passive, I thought, was for them to do something related to the profession of an actor." Masotta, 'I Committed a Happening', in Katzenstein (ed), *Listen, Here, Now!*, p. 200.

31 Oscar Masotta, 'I Committed a Happening', in Katzenstein (ed), *Listen, Here, Now!* pp.191–201.

32 This sense of being transfixed by a spectacle recently came to my mind when a friend recounted how she and only three others walked out of Vanessa Beecroft's 2006 performance *VB59* at the National Gallery, London. For this performance, approximately thirty black models were draped on a table, half naked or clothed in fruit and flowers, at which the fashion company Louis Vuitton held a dinner for 100 guests.

33 It is important to note that Masotta was responsible for introducing the work of Jacques Lacan to the Argentinian psychoanalytic community in the early '60s and was the most influential figure in psychoanalysis in that country. He was also a key point of contact between psychoanalysis and contemporary art at the Instituto Di Tella: "The Di Tella was one of the bridges between psychoanalysis and cultural modernisation. They shared the same public, the expanded middle class with its fascination with modernity. Most people who went to the Di Tella's exhibits were readers of *Primera Plana*, a magazine that played an important role in diffusing psychoanalysis and promoting modern culture in general. Well-known psychoanalysts attended the Di Tella's exhibits and some of them bought artworks they saw there. Moreover, analysts as highly visible as Enrique Pichon Riviere participated in some of the Institute's most controversial functions. Pichon was featured in the media providing psychoanalytic interpretations of 'happenings' and other artistic experiences. People who developed a theoretical interest in psychoanalysis, such as Oscar Masotta [...] also developed close links to the Institute. For the intellectually progressive middle class, the Instituto Di Tella and psychoanalysis were part of the same complex enterprise of cultural modernisation." Mariano Ben Plotkin. *Freud in the Pampas: The Emergence and Development of a Psychoanalytic Culture in Argentina*, Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 80.

34 I have chosen the phrase 'constructed situations' in direct reference to the Situationist International's aim to produce alternatives to the

portable and commodifiable work of art. The constructed situation was a participatory event that aimed to transform everyday life into a "higher, passionate nature", for example through non-competitive games or through *dérives* (meandering through the city while paying attention to its changing environments). A key difference between Debord's conception of the constructed situation and the works I am discussing is the attachment of the latter to the institution of art. Debord, by contrast, wanted art to be overcome by reality in order to render everyday life less alienated. See Guy Debord, 'Towards a Situationist International', 1957, in Claire Bishop, ed., *Participation*, London and Cambridge, MA: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006, pp.96–101.

35 Longoni, *Avant-Garde and Politics in Argentine '68*, p. 109. She then argues that the central ideas concerned "a withdrawal from institutional spaces, the search for a new language and for new audiences, spectators' integration in the material aspects of the work and, above all, ideas to merge art with the praxis of life" (p. 113).

36 This action has undergone considerable reassessment in recent years, and formed a central component of Documenta 12, 2007. It was presented in Roger Buergel's exhibition *The Government in Luneberg*, Rotterdam, Barcelona, and Vienna, 2003–2005; WHW's *Collective Creativity*, Fridericianum, Kassel, 2005; *Again, For Tomorrow*, Royal College of Art, London, 2006; Charles Esche and Will Bradley's *Forms of Resistance*, Van Abbe Museum, Eindhoven, 2007.

37 Carnevale, in Katzenstein, *Listen, Here, Now!*, p.299. My emphasis.

38 The question arises as to what extent this political context is the reason why the Argentinian scene in particular gave rise to such anti-humanist forms of art. One could speculate that this type of work emerges in Argentina as a result of the country's strong history of Lacanian psychoanalysis, with an obvious figure of overlap in Masotta. Although I am wary of using psychoanalysis to describe a mechanism in artistic production, one could say that the ethical position represented by these artists is close to an anti-humanist Lacanian ethics of 'do not give ground to your desire': in other words, sustaining a fidelity to one's singular vision or desire, despite all the painful consequences—including the fact that it may not conform to society's normative expectations of good or proper behaviour. Lacanian ethics advocates what is truthful and right for the individual subject, rather than acting for the eyes and expectations of the Big Other. See Lacan, *Seminar VII: The Ethics of Psychoanalysis (1959–1960)*, London: Tavistock/Routledge, 1992.

39 Subcontracting is defined as handing over specialist jobs (such as accounting or the fabrication of specialised components) to companies outside a business.

40 The first book on outsourcing in the British Library catalogue dates from 1993. "Outsourcing started to become fashionable in the late 1980s. However, it very much came of age in the 1990s, and certainly became a normal part of corporate life by the turn of the century... And now global outsourcing is on everyone's mind." Per Jenster, Henrik Stener Pedersen, Patricia Plackett, and David Hussey, *Outsourcing/Insourcing: Can vendors make money from the new relationship opportunities?* Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2005, p. ix.

41 "What China has become to manufacturing, India has become to the new world of business process outsourcing (BPO)—which includes everything from payroll to billing to IT support." Steven Schifferes, 'Globalisation shakes the world', BBC News, Sunday 21 January 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/6279679.stm> (last accessed 23 October 2008)

42 Some of the advantages of outsourcing include: no sick leave or holiday cover; no staff training; no salaries, taxes, or pension contributions.

43 "...outsourcing is just one tool of many in the performance improvement armoury", Robert White and Barry James, *The Outsourcing Manual*, Gower Publishing/Lucidus Ltd, 1996, p. xiv. It's worth noting that there has been considerable opposition to outsourcing in the US, most notably during the 2004 presidential campaign, when the White House came under pressure to limit outsourcing in order to protect domestic business. See N. Gregory Mankiw and Phillip Swagel, *The Politics and Economics of Offshore Outsourcing*, Working Paper 12398, National Bureau of Economic Research, Inc., 2006.

44 During the production of *Double Agent*, we attempted to commission a new work from Phil Collins. His proposal, *Ghost Rider*, involved hiring a ghost writer to write a feature on ghost writers, which would appear in *The Guardian* newspaper, signed by Phil Collins. The resulting article was considered unsuitable by Collins in both its tone and content, and the feature did not go to press.

45 What surprises me always is how acutely this singular presence comes across, even when the performers' bodies are ostensibly perfect—as in the female models of a Vanessa Beecroft performance, restlessly struggling to keep balance on top of their Manolo Blahnik heels. Of course, this fascination alone is not enough to justify her work, but it complicates an easy dismissal of it.

46 Artur Zmijewski: "You can say I decide where the plot is to

begin—and life takes it from there. Only this means a loss of control, or only partial control over the course of events. Therefore the answer is that things always get out of control—I do not know what the film is going to look like, I do not work with actors that imitate reality. I have no script. My protagonists are unpredictable and their behaviour is beyond my control. So I set things in motion and the action unfolds—but at the same time I try not to run aground, so I am alert and try to correct the course a little. It is interesting because it is a voyage into the unknown. There is no plan—no script—I do not know where the trip ends." 'Terror of the Normal: Sebastian Cichocki interviews Artur Żmijewski', *Tauber Bach*, Leipzig: Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, 2003, p. 112.

47 This is not to say that Sehgal's work is a failure; on the contrary it can be fascinating, especially when one takes into account the oral and performative procedures that the artist imposes on institutions who wish to acquire his work.

48 Phelan's argument can be summarised in these sentences: "Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance." Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London: Routledge, 1993, p. 146.

49 There is still an important distinction to be made between video and photography. All the mediated examples of delegated performance I have been referring to use video or film, a time-based medium that retains a sense of duration and performance, unlike static photo-conceptualism in which the performance was never public. This is why I am not including within this genealogy early examples such as Sophie Calle's *The Sleepers* (1979).

50 Silvija Jestrović, 'Performing Like an Asylum Seeker: Paradoxes of Hyper-Authenticity', *Research in Drama Education* Vol. 13, No.2, June 2008, pp. 159–70, and reprinted in slightly altered form in the present volume. She takes the term from Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal, but while Baudrillard's notion "suggests that everything is placed on the same plane, making the relationship between the signifier and the signified obsolete, the hyper-authentic still carries the tensions between presence and representation, theatricality and performativity, immediacy and mediation".

51 Dave Beech, 'Include Me Out', *Art Monthly*, April 2008, pp. 1–4: "the participant typically is not cast as an agent of critique or subversion but rather as one who is invited to accept the parameters of the art project [...] participation always involves a specific invitation and a specific formation of the participant's subjectivity, even when the artist asks them simply to be themselves. [...] Collaborators, however, are distinct from participants insofar as they share authorial rights over the artwork that permit them, among other things, to make fundamental decisions about the key structural features of the work. That is, collaborators have rights that are withheld from participants" (p.3).

52 For a good overview of overidentification, see BAVO/Gideon Boie, Matthias Pauwels [eds], *Cultural Activism Today: The Art of Overidentification*, Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Episode Publishers, 2007.

53 In his essay 'Private Morality, Immoral World', Zygmunt Bauman has argued against this tendency to focus on 'micro-ethics' (individuals) rather than 'macro-ethics' (global politics), and this distinction can readily be applied to the widespread willingness to judge works of art on solely ethical grounds. Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualised Society*, Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 2001, p. 194.

54 One of the earliest examples of this genre is Philippe Parreno's project *No More Reality* (1991–93), which included a children's demonstration featuring placards bearing the slogan 'No More Reality' and a four-minute video of this action (*No More Reality [Demonstration]*, 1991). Interviewed about the project, Parreno asks: "What happens when the image breaks into reality? When there is no difference between signifier and signified? [...] instead of virtual reality, real virtuality. [...] Reality is manipulable and constantly manipulated. To say 'No More Reality' is to undertake a process of re-creation, or reinvention of reality. [...] Today, I still have this idea that there is fundamental difference between the real, the image and commentary. I am looking for time-space zones where these three elements can be apprehended simultaneously. Indeed that I think is one enormous difference between our epoch and the previous one: the refusal to hierarchise the three modes of experience". See Parreno, 'Virtualité Réelle', *Art Press*, No. 208, December 1995, p. 41.

55 As Phil Collins's *Return of the Real* (2006–2007) makes so abundantly clear, reality television depends upon the merciless shoehorning of participants to fit stereotypical characters in clichéd narratives whose predictability is designed to attract high viewing figures.

PERFORMANCE IN THE SERVICE ECONOMY: OUTSOURCING AND DELEGATION

Nicholas Ridout

I really don't like getting my hair cut. This has nothing to do with the ever more limited style options available to the balding academic, nor is it even, really, a result of my reluctance to experience all over again the weirdly unpleasant physical sensation of having my ears bent forwards so as to permit the cutting of a neat line above and around them. I really don't like that at all. But the real reason for my infrequent attendance at the hairdressers is the affective discomfort I experience from the performance of paid services. I find the intimacy of my encounter with the person performing these services very difficult. Whatever pleasure there might be in the experience of a brief scalp massage during the application of shampoo is massively outweighed by the ghastliness of a situation in which acts I have commissioned are performed in my presence. My relations with taxi drivers are similarly compromised, but haircuts are worse — far, far worse — because of the intimacy of physical contact involved in the labour performed.

I think it is as a result of similar feelings, arising for similar reasons, that for many years I only ever bought shoes while travelling abroad. Or, more precisely, when travelling in countries where I did not have complete fluency in the language spoken there. The reason for this, I think, is that I found the social interactions involved in selecting, trying on, and then buying shoes rather awkward, and so the language barriers created by attempting to buy shoes in, say, Belgium, created an additional layer of awkwardness that usefully masked the more fundamental difficulty of the experience. Any borderline sociopathic behaviour on my part would be attributed to my struggles with language. My blushes would be interpreted as the embarrassment of a linguistic incompetent rather than those of someone profoundly lacking in life skills.

Both of these social phobias are related, I think, to the particular ways in which I experience discomfort and take pleasure in theatre — another situation in which paid professional services are performed in my presence. I've argued before

that various forms of theatrical failure or undoing bring about moments of affective discomfort that we may experience as simultaneously pleasurable and painful, and that part of this slightly masochistic experience has to do with a relationship to labour. In moments of theatrical undoing — such as when actors slip or seem to slip momentarily out of character — we apprehend something of our relationship to labour in an acute sense of our position as consumer in the presence of a producer who is working for us and at our behest.

I have suggested that such moments realise a possibility for encounter between producer and consumer embedded throughout the theatre of modernity (in which people in their leisure time sit in the dark watching people working in the light). What I am hoping to do in the future is to develop a more precise understanding of the ways in which these affects are produced and experienced in a historical moment marked by the emergence of an economy dominated by the production of services rather than goods, and to find out what value there might be in an inquiry that considered theatre itself as an example of such services.

I want to suggest that while theatrical failure tends to highlight the presence of this uncomfortable relationship, the relationship is present, and just as uncomfortable, even when theatre is succeeding (whatever that might mean, as if it were possible for theatre to succeed), and that the affect of discomfort experienced in theatricalised encounters in a service economy is intrinsic to those encounters rather than a byproduct of their malfunction. It is as though the central purpose of what we might call 'the total situation of the haircut' is to produce or at least occasion my dis-ease. And, to make a theoretical leap away from the apparent ground of experience, it is as though the construction of bourgeois subjectivity in the age of the service economy takes place by means of the calibration of a certain self-disgust in relation to labour, and related and acute discomforts around the theatrical mediation of economic relations.

Certain instances of contemporary performance suggest that this process has now become the subject matter of the work itself: the fact that theatre and performance participate in a market in services is now thematised within the work. I am thinking in particular of two recent productions, Mammalian Diving Reflex's *Haircuts by Children* and Rimini Protokoll's *Call Cutta in a Box*. In the first piece, children between the ages of about eight and twelve are trained in salon hairdressing and



Mammalian Diving Reflex
Haircuts by Children, 2006
Performance

then offer haircuts to the public in a professional hairdressing salon. In the second piece, individual members of the public pay to enter an office in which, shortly after their arrival, the telephone rings. On the other end of the line is someone in a call centre in Calcutta, and a conversation ensues that moves between the protocols of the typical call-centre encounter and more personal exchanges and constitutes the performance.

The occasion for these reflections was a paper prepared for Performance Studies International #14 in Copenhagen, in August, 2008, as part of a panel put together in response to *Double Agent* and entitled *Outsourcing Performance*. In preparing that paper I was able to outsource elements of it, and various subcontracted contributions, solicited for that occasion, remain part of this revised version of the paper. In addition, my thoughts about the relationship between performance and the service economy draw upon ideas developed by Jon Erickson in *The Fate of the Object* (1995), in which he articulates a historic shift from artistic production that involves “expressive labour” to work that is characterised by “conceptual investment”, or from “modern object” to “postmodern sign”. Erickson identifies this shift as “cognate with the shift to fiscal capitalism and a so-called postindustrial information society”. I want to develop this historical observation to suggest that contemporary performance practice does more than reflect shifts in the operations of capital and labour. It participates actively in the logics of the service economy. Further, precisely because it is a part, rather than a reflection, of this economy, it becomes possible for performance to enact some kind of critique of its procedures.



Rimini Protokoll
Call Cutta in a Box, 2008
Performance

One of my Copenhagen sub-contractees, Theron Schmidt, observed that “[t]he introductory editorial to a recent issue of *Parachute*, a contemporary art journal, recognises a new postindustrial society which ‘has almost entirely emancipated humans from the production of objects and from an economy based on the circulation of objects and commodities and has given rise to an economy that is ever more immaterial’”. This editorial (written by Chantal Pontbriand) seems to me a bizarre overstatement of the situation. Schmidt goes on to question the use of the term “emancipated” in this claim, noting that waged and unwaged slavery remains the norm for many (if not most) of the world’s inhabitants. I’d also ask what planet it is on which the circulation of objects and commodities has come to an end. I see a world full of objects and commodities, circulating away. Schmidt suggests that this language may have something to do with the idea, propagated by art theorists rather than economists, that the movement towards “dematerialization” in the art of the 1960s somehow “anticipated the increasingly immaterial economy”. Of course, as Erickson has shown, this movement in the art of the ’60s was part of that process, rather than its foreshadowing, but I think Schmidt is nonetheless right about the language: such claims seek to reinstate contemporary art as an avant-garde practice, anticipating rather than following or participating in wider social and economic processes. For me part of the problem lies in the use of the term immaterial to describe the outcome of these changes in economic activity. Erickson argues persuasively that there is a problem with the term postindustrial as applied to an economy heavily dependent upon information

technology: computers still need to be manufactured in industrial processes, and we continue to drive in our industrial cars to our industrial steel-and-glass offices to carry out all our supposedly immaterial labour. I think we need to reconsider the use of the term immaterial at the same time.

Italian political theorists, writing in a tradition established in the ’70s under the banner of *Operaismo* (Workerism), have developed what seems to me to be a valuable account of the new structures of work in a postindustrial service economy. Theorists such as Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, and Paolo Virno have established the importance of what they call ‘immaterial labour’: work that does not produce goods, but instead produces social relations, communication, the movement of information. This is the labour of the service and the knowledge economies. Michael Hardt, writing with Negri, further suggests, drawing on feminist scholarship on gender and work, that much of this service economy work is ultimately concerned with emotion, that it is what he calls ‘affective labour’. In their most famous collaborative project, *Empire*, Hardt and Negri summarise their understanding of this new form of work, stating simply that “what affective labour produces are social networks, forms of community” and that, as a result of an economy increasingly built around such relations, “cooperation is completely immanent to the labouring activity itself”.

Virno pursues a similar line of thought, proposing that the kind of expertise in immaterial and affective labour that today’s workforce is required to acquire constitutes a form of personal virtuosity, which he compares directly to the virtuosity of the performing artist. “The affinity between a pianist and a waiter”, writes Virno, “which Marx had foreseen, finds an unexpected confirmation in the epoch in which all wage labour has something in common with the ‘performing artist’”. Virno characterises this work as “servile virtuosity”. Lazzarato also identifies a connection between artistic practice and the service economy. He claims that “the split between conception and execution, between labour and creativity, between author and audience, is transcended within the labour process”. I’d like to suggest that the split that Virno sees being transcended is one that is perhaps most visible in the divided sociality of the traditional theatre set-up, and one which all manner of radical innovation in performance has sought to eradicate or transcend.

Lazzarato continues his analysis of immaterial labour by suggesting that it is through her

work that the contemporary immaterial labourer becomes a subject. This occurs in a dialectical movement whereby the worker is required to invest his or her subjectivity in the communication and cooperation necessary to the labour process while also producing in the process the social relations in which he or she will always find themselves. Along with a feeling of autonomy and freedom comes a deep subjectification. The free autonomous immaterial labourers increasingly find themselves working in “small and sometimes very small ‘productive units’ (often consisting of only one individual)” that are often “organised for specific ad hoc projects”. In this way, Lazzarato argues, “life becomes inseparable from work”. It is the role of this kind of labour, he claims, “to promote continual innovation in the forms and conditions of communication”. In other words, the perfect model for the immaterial labourer is in fact the live artist, working alone or in ad hoc project groups, constantly seeking new ways of making communication and creating social relations, and wholly invested, personally, in a work that is, in fact, his or her very own life.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the inauguration of a shift from an industrial/theatrical model of artistic production to one in which the performance of services predominated. This shift is perhaps most evident in those theatrical innovations that sought or seek to reconfigure the relation between stage and auditorium (or, as we might now say, between production and consumption). It is there in all the attempts at activating audience participation, all efforts to generate feedback loops between audience and performers, all moves towards what Lazzarato characterised as the transcendence of author/audience divisions on the scene of labour. It is perhaps more evident in recent developments in immersive theatrical experiences, such as Blast Theory’s *Uncle Roy All Around You*, or in the proliferation of one-to-one performance events, or, perhaps most explicitly (in more than one sense of the word) in Felix Rückert’s *Secret Service*, in which individual ticket holders are invited to undress alone to their underwear to be subjected to mild S&M treatments such as nipple clamps and flogging. It is, of course, also a feature of works such as Rimini Protokoll’s *Call Cutta in a Box* and Mammalian Diving Reflex’s *Haircuts by Children*.

We are all familiar, I imagine, with the kinds of arguments developed around the emergence of alternatives to gallery- and object-based art from the ’60s onwards — from site-specificity to

conceptualism to various forms of performance. One rather standard line of argument about such work, and one which still holds some currency at least within the world of performance, is the idea that these alternatives might all be understood in terms of an attempt to exit the market. Peggy Phelan's work is typical in its claim that the evanescence of performance represents a way of avoiding capture within circuits of economic exchange. It seems to me that this kind of argument misrecognizes the nature of economic exchange, in which the focus on the commodity precludes attention to an economy of services. The exit from the art market—a market in manufactures—is not an exit from the market as such, but merely a relocation of operations from a market in goods to a market in services. As such it looks like a smart move, especially in the United States and the UK, where, as Manuel Castells has shown, the expansion of the service economy at the expense of manufacturing began earlier than in other G7 countries.

My argument, then, is not that contemporary art and performance is mirroring the development in consumer capitalism from a market in goods to a market in services, nor that it is anticipating such a development, but rather than it constitutes a particular instance of that development in itself. It does not stand outside this development, neither spatially, as in a reflection theory, nor temporally, as in the anticipation thesis. This is a significant distinction, partly because it avoids the kind of generalisation of which Pontbriand's editorial is a typical example. As an instance of a particular kind of development in economic relations, the kind of performance I am thinking about is not required to stand in for a totality of economic relations. The emergence of service economy performance is not evidence of the complete replacement of the manufacturing economy by a service economy, but simply an example of service provision, worthy of consideration as part of an ensemble of economic relations, rather than as a paradigm of economic relations in toto.

Joe Kelleher responded to my outsourcing requests in advance of the Copenhagen conference by making some distinctions between delegation and outsourcing, which I now propose to develop in the interests of understanding certain affective responses to what I will call the 'theatrical' mediation involved in such practices. Responding to a question as to whether he had ever delegated a performance, Kelleher responded,

I thought the answer to this one might be yes, such as in theatre-making situations in

which you ask someone to stand over there and wave their arms about like so. But now I'm not sure. I might only call that delegating if the arm-waving is to be done—and seen to be done—on my behalf. That is to say, if this gesture is somehow an extension of my self-expression, or if it is something that I myself am presumed to be doing, or something with my 'signature' upon it (however the notion of signature might be understood). And I can't remember any instances of doing that, although I am sure there must have been lots.

In response to a further question—"Have you ever outsourced work, or taken on subcontracts?"—Kelleher replied:

I thought also the immediate answer to this one was 'yes' but again I'm not sure. I've done work that other people have passed on to me to do, through situations for instance in which they have been indisposed and recommended me for the task. Indeed, quite a lot of work comes my way in that fashion. I've also recommended others and passed on work in the same sort of way. But is that out-sourcing? I'm thinking that it makes a difference if one does this work in one's own name or not. Or at least, it makes some difference if the out-sourcer continues to receive some sort of credit (or blame), whether financial or some other sort. Have I ever asked someone to do work on my behalf, or done work on behalf of another? Like Cyrano de Bergerac? To woo in another's name. That would be proper outsourcing, the sort of outsourcing that involves one's whole self, body and soul, present and proximate, desiring and pretending to desire.

Kelleher's responses provoke, in me, a consideration of the distinctions to be made between delegation and outsourcing. Let's look at this in the terms he suggests, of credit and blame, and let's do so from the perspective of the recipient or consumer of a delegated or outsourced performance. Two examples spring to mind, and both are transport-related. The first involves situations in which you are at an airport and there is or has been a problem with your flight. The airline responsible for operating the flight has sub-contracted all its operations at your location to a third party, usually called Servis Air, or something of that sort. You are looking for someone to blame, or, at least, you are looking for someone or some corporate entity to step forward and sort things out, to repair whatever perceived breach has taken place in your smooth consumption of the services purchased.

Somehow Servis Air won't do. They're not actually responsible for what happened, and, you suspect, that, as agents or representatives, they lack sufficient affective investment in the transaction to feel any pressing obligation to do anything about it. No one here is going to involve his or her whole self, body and soul, in the reparation of this service failure. The bottom line is, as the old phrase has it, that you want to talk to the organ-grinder and not to the monkey. I suspect, of course, that our belief in the organ-grinder and his or her willingness to involve themselves body and soul in the enterprise is entirely misplaced, and that in reality the organ-grinder is no more passionately engaged than the monkey. What interests me in this situation is the persistence of the feeling that the monkey just won't do. Here we have an example of outsourcing that does not achieve the condition of delegation, at least by Kelleher's criteria.

A similar but slightly more abstract situation furnishes my second example. This time you are at a train station. The train, predictably enough, is late, and this fact is acknowledged, again predictably enough, through a recorded announcement broadcast around the station's PA system. What is odd, on this occasion, is that instead of the familiar formula in which a well-modulated and supposedly calming voice assures us that "Thames Trains wishes to apologise for any inconvenience caused", we get an announcement in which the recorded voice claims "I apologise for any inconvenience caused". This infelicitous performative really wound me up. The 'apology' could not reasonably be interpreted as a wholehearted, sincere, or, to use Kelleher's terms, "present and proximate" apology. It had been made in advance; it bore no relation to the specific situation in which it was being deployed. But the aspiration to such presence expressed through the anomalous use of the first-person singular involved a pretence of being in the here-and-now, and of taking, in that here and now, a singular and particular responsibility for the failure of service. The gap between this rhetorical gesture of personal responsibility and the outsourced form of its delivery from a non-specific time and place to the specific instant of today's delayed departure evacuated the apology of all efficacy. Because it seemed to be pretending, in a wholly futile manner, to be there for us, the disembodied voice from the past exposed a further failure—that of an attempt at full delegation.

Let me extend this to a brief consideration of theatre, where I think we continue to experience confusion over the nature of delegation and

outsourcing. Theatre is, most of the time, a kind of delegated performance, in which actors or performers appear as representatives of or stand-ins for others and in which they carry out their actions as agents of higher powers, such as authors and directors. When a theatrical performance seeks to disrupt this familiar system of representation—such as, for example, someone appears on stage either as themselves or in such a way as to lay claim to a specific identity whose story or plight is being dramatised—a muddle often breaks out. This might be considered as a confusion between outsourcing and delegation, in which the right to present the representation of a certain identity is assumed to belong only to those actors or performers who can claim the authentic possession of that identity, so that they may plausibly and perhaps legitimately make the public claim that 'this is my story'. This confusion arises out of a misrecognition of the function of theatre—albeit a misrecognition that much theatre and theatrical criticism has sought to encourage. Even when theatre is making no claim about the authenticity of its performers in respect of the story or situation they are representing, it tends to make the implicit and inclusive claim, addressed to the audience, that 'this is our story': the story enacted, such as the story of the House of Atreus or the tragedy of Oedipus, is the story of the polis that is supposedly gathered in the theatre. But at one and the same time the structure of the theatre itself makes the exact opposite claim, that 'this is not our story'.

This establishment of minimal distance is, I think, one of the preconditions of theatrical representation and so pervasive that even when the performers enacting the representation really are the very people they purport to represent, they are, in the theatre, only delegates at best, even if they achieve the fully desiring position that Joe Kelleher identifies with Cyrano de Bergerac. So when I get upset about Servis Air or Thames Trains I am reacting against a theatrical relation, or, to put it in economic terms, against commodification itself. Performance in the service economy discloses the full commodification of human action. Far from being the paradigm of authentic self-expression, performance reveals itself as exemplary commodity (it commodifies action, not just things) and as the site for a critique of its own commodifying processes.

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COLOPHON

EXHIBITION

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Curated by Claire Bishop and Mark Sladen

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The exhibition toured to:
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BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead,
21 May – 17 Aug 2008

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