

Next day. Same time. Same place.¹

Lorna: I'm not sure how to answer your question. While it's difficult to pin down the point of origin of any curatorial project, I'd been thinking for some time about Judy's work with rehearsal. The prototype presentation of *And So Departed (Again)* at her home and her exhibition of a 'backstage' environment at the Belkin Satellite seemed to mark an important shifting point in her work. This roughly coincided with reading an article she published in Public 25 called *Just Try It: Thoughts on Art and Science Experiments*. In it she talks about the catch-all phrase of 'experimental' to describe the increased valuation of 'process, idea, action, structure, situation and performance' over the discrete "autonomous" art object in 20th century art. Her precise breaking apart of the processes of performing an act – entrances, rehearsals, the document – and the technique of repetition and looping as a way of emphasizing our reference to time, set up some echoes with production here and elsewhere.

Jonathan: (*nods*) Yes, but that's not what I–

Lorna: Returning twice to *Catriona Jeffries Catriona*,² in order to see what had changed in Geoffrey's installation, it struck me that he appealed to the part of viewing art that is about *anticipating* – in the sense of establishing a set of parameters that his actions could transform into variations, like the decision to re-enact a Schneeman performance wearing a black wig. I had seen Pierre Hugue's work at the Pompidou in 2000, which re-made certain scenes from the film *Dog Day Afternoon* in collaboration with the bank robber. Then the performance collective Norma produced *Dog Day Afternoon* for Kathleen Ritter's project, *Expect Delays*.³ As the artists occupied a new city park for eight hours, visually mimicking the idealized public of the architect's rendering by playing Frisbee and eating lunch, they repeated lines from the film, making for a very unsettling stroll for the park users as they overheard the dialogue. As an avid viewer of all of these projects, I found myself looped, rewound and replayed in several locations and at different times.

Jonathan: (*shuffles in chair, nods again*) Hhm. Yes, absolutely. Well with what you were saying earlier about Althea Thauberger, and then of course the Igor Santizo and Clint Burnham posters that were part of the *Docudrama* series here at the Front. Also, Barb Choit and Erica Redling curated *Drive into the Sunset*, which was an exhibition about film props and road movies, as part of that same series. When I did the *Records*, which included costumes Jason McLean had designed for *July Fourth Toilet*, I really felt the work had a strong relationship with the practices of Geoffrey Farmer and John Bock, both of whom I was interested in working with. Vish Jugdeo too, who constructs sets of sorts. But, sorry – before I ran to get more coffee, I think you were going to talk about Dickinson.

Lorna: Colleen Brown at Artspeak pointed out Rod Dickinson's Milgram Re-enactment.⁴ We had been talking about working together on a series of projects, a plan that was cut short by my decision to leave the centre to work independently. She put me on to an interview with Rod that very much influenced my thinking. In an email conversation with Tessa Laird,⁵ Rod placed his practice of creating crop circles in opposition to the hype and speculation surrounding contemporary UK production at that time. He said, "As far as I can see the art community here is mostly composed of very industrious and committed artists who are surrounded by mostly stupid (and often wealthy) art dealers, gallery owners etc. who pretend to know a lot about art and operate a kind of nightmare, conservative, pre-capitalist feudal economy in which artists are the lowest in the food chain. Ironic since British art is so often cited (here) as being at the cutting edge of culture. Do I make work for these people? Not likely. Here's to carving out a better space for artists to occupy." His idea of his practice as creating or reconfiguring political economies for culture has an interesting relationship to his investigations of the performance of power, such as his work with the speeches of Jim Jones, or his reenactment of Milgram's Obedience to Authority experiments. He systematically picks apart the techniques of persuasion, using historical flash points and controversies, and insistently reminds us of being in history.

Jonathan: Dickinson seems to be taking a cue from science in particular. I guess I mean the theatrics within science, but there is also an aspect to his practice that is about how knowledge is affirmed that I think

1 Stage direction: Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot*.

2 http://www.catrionajeffries.com/c_past_0110_gf.html

3 http://www.artspeak.ca/exhibitions/event_detail.html?event_id=24

4 <http://www.milgramreenactment.org/>

5 <http://www.fusionanomaly.net>

is interesting. This is maybe an obvious statement in relation to The Milgram Re-enactment, of which the original was literally a scientific experiment, but I mean it in relation to his other work as well. I'm thinking of the crop circles, Waco Texas, and now more recently with the bombing of the observatory in Greenwich. There is a forensic quality to these works. Even coming up with possibilities – the *what would happen if* belonging to the same inquiry as *is this what happened?* Dickinson's re-constructed realities raise questions to do with epistemology. I think that the infamous 1989 cold fusion experiments of Stanley Pons and Martin Fleischmann is interesting in relation to Dickinson's work. The cold fusion case was fraught with some really dramatic elements – the controversy that the two scientists had allegedly broken an agreement with another team, who had been working along similar lines, so that they could publish their findings first. This bit of turmoil and the effects their announcement had on the stock market initially overshadowed the fact that no one had been able to reproduce their experiment with the same results. And still, though their experiment has been largely derided as a hoax or at least bad science, there are numerous internet sites that chalk the failure to things like air pressure or humidity. How credible these claims are, I have no idea. I'm guessing not very. It's a pretty enticing idea.

Pause. He drinks from a glass of water.

Lorna: (*taking an apple from the table*)⁶ In an interview with Charlie Gere in *From Studio to Situation*⁷ Rod suggests that Milgram was really an artist – a brilliant dramatist, a proto-situationist. Milgram did the “Small World” research that led to the idea of six degrees of separation between any two individuals. This idea was made into a film with Donald Sutherland and Stockard Channing pretending to not know Will Smith. Rod is not adding to the discourse of social science in re-enacting the Obedience to Authority experiment, not adding any relevant data. He said that reviewing the footage from the original experiment, which is not been widely seen, he was compelled by the acute distress of the subjects of the experiment – the ones delivering the electric shocks. They were caught in an extreme moral dilemma – neither sadistic nor blithely following orders. The experiment was a fiction, a way to induce a dramatic truth. It also had ‘truth value’ to those who believe in science. And maybe the re-enactment was a way to focus on how a truth, dramatic or otherwise, is constructed. Certainly technology amplifies the act – the bogus machine that delivers the shocks, the original film ‘document’, the filming of the performed re-enactment – sifting through the residues – forensics indeed.

Jonathan: I am also reminded of the practices of Tim Lee or of Sarah Masecar. Lee re-enacts a Beastie Boys song in the manner of Bruce Nauman as a way of pointing to the historical relevance of both performative video and the way racial politics have been negotiated in Hip Hop. Masecar's ‘remades’ – objects she had disassembled and reassembled – are a kind of performance as well, only one we do not see. Szuper Gallery's work is overt as a performance in one sense, but I also see their practice as a form of simple investigation through occupation. That is, by occupying a space or role, without a lot of purchase on it, they seem to be trying to ‘figure it out’. In their video work *Contemporary Art*, for instance, they occupy the offices of Bloomberg's in London, and though they use the space in the way that we suppose it should be – they talk on the phone, hold meetings, eat in the cafeteria, et cetera, there is also a palpable sense that *they don't belong there*. They are listless, even confused, and the equipment doesn't work as it probably should. Coffee cups overflow, and so on. We see this rupture in their other work as well. They don't make particularly good police officers or day traders either.

Lorna: (*putting the apple back*).⁸ Yeah, there is a hesitation about the act. (*glances off to one side*.) Like Judy's piece about entrances and exits, where she ‘enters’ the performance again and again in different ways – a kind of hovering on the cusp of an act that ‘counts’, or an uncertainty about where action begins and ends. *The Extras* placed the extras and the audience in that uncertainty as well. In the documentation of their work, the boundaries of performing and watching are unclear – for instance, some Bloomberg employees impersonated themselves in *Contemporary Art* They were absorbed into the concept of Szuper Gallery, or perhaps occupied by them/it. It has the feeling of a rehearsal – the mechanics of a performance are pushed into the foreground – the performers looking to one another for cues, improvising over the false moves, the decision-making is placed very much in the present. Like a cocktail party.

⁶ Stage direction: Bertoldt Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*

⁷ Doherty, Claire, *From Studio to Situation*, London: Black Dog Publishing, 2004

⁸ Stage direction: Bertoldt Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*

Jonathan: (removes a piece of thread from his shirt cuff.)

I'm very interested in this aspect of inhabiting roles. A commonly understood difference between performance art and theatre, is that in theatre you're *playing someone*, whereas in performance art... (He tries to flick the thread off of his finger, but it sticks.)

Uhh.. (still distracted) in performance art – well there – generally we assume that the artist is *being themselves*... not so much even acting as themselves. I mean, I guess they aren't necessarily *themselves*, but they aren't putting on a role in the same way. (flustered. He still can't get the thread off his finger. More flicking) ... yeah... so in the case of the Bloomberg employees, that becomes interesting. Extras, for that matter occupy a space that can be closer to their own persona, maybe closer to how a performance artist occupies a space. I mean, it's sort of a joke to have an extra ask "yeah, but what is my *motivation* in this scene?" They're not asked to *be* as much as *do*. Walk slowly, run away in fright. They don't need to put on a back-story in the same way, and maybe retain a bit more of themselves as a result. (finally wipes the thread on his shoe, sits upright). In Mark Lewis's *The Pitch*, he says something like "Extras can forget that they're not meant to be there. They might look at the star of the film, or even straight to camera and happens a lot."

Lorna: Yeah, hovering between self-consciousness and invisibility. Being, or being in character. (Laughing.) I heard a story about a fashion photographer that told a model, when she was offering opinions about camera angles and so forth, that she was only there to reflect light. The Extras, in their reflective clothing, with reflective placards, directed to enact a series of generic gestures of protest, take this idea to its logical conclusion. They were there to form a visual effect – the audience seemed to place more weight on the speakers in the piece. This affirmed the tendency to privilege language or text as the location of meaning.

Room 302 plays with this relationship – the five channel audio component of the installation does all the work in recording the space of the courtroom, the location of the players, and altering the exhibition space, while the video is a stationary document. But the text intentionally breaks down the meaning of what is being said – for instance, parts of the script that are taken from courtroom transcripts leave out key words that are crucial to the understanding of the listener. We hear the directors, Judy and Geoffrey, behind us in the space of the gallery, outside the frame of the video. The audio dismantles and reassembles the courtroom in a parallel way to the collision of courtroom set dressing that is piled in the gallery. The pile looks ponderous initially, then, we recognize it as a set of flats used to trick out Room 302 for film shoots. Having the foley microphone occupy the role of one of the courtroom characters is a similar visual joke. It might be the clearest point of convergence of the two artists' practices. Do you think?

Jonathan: The foley microphone, or the whole foley area? Yeah – I agree with that. The assemblage of props at once become sculpture, a character, and in a way, architecture. If we focus on that area within the courtroom drama, we see the use of repetition – and I'm talking about the cabbage/decapitation bit here – which I associate with Judy in particular, and the assemblage of props as a way to build narrative, which I believe one could attribute to Geoffrey's practice. Of course these links may be totally unfounded, and I think a successful component of their collaboration is that it is largely difficult to trace the elements of their piece back to the two of them as individuals. I agree there is an interesting link between the kind of deconstructions, collapses and confusions that occur in their script with the literal deconstruction and 'cubist' assemblage of the courtroom set, and I think a possible third element is the collapse and reworking of authorship in the piece. The moments where the actors are asked to switch speaking parts strike me as a humorous reference to this. (pause) But I want to go back to something you said earlier, which had to do with Szuper Gallery's works about extras. There is a sort of tricky question about agency and subjectivity when it comes with to do with extras. I think.. uhh.. I think it has something to do with foregrounding the background. It strikes me as a delicate thing to call attention to the background without it flipping into the foreground, which possibly defeats the purpose. Or perhaps it doesn't. I'm not sure that I'm being clear, but I guess... Well I've been thinking about architecture since the talk at Emily Carr and wishing that we'd addressed it more directly. I think I said something about the mechanics of theatre when we were talking about the curatorial premise for this series, but in retrospect I should have brought up architecture. There is a very direct way that all three groups of artists pay attention to architecture in their work. Also, if it is not too crass to momentarily consider extras as a kind of architectural detail – a sort of set dressing, if you will – then this whole thing of extras looking into the camera becomes quite interesting. In Szuper Gallery's *Contemporary Art*, they use audio clips from *Apocalypse Now*, which includes the scene where Coppola, appearing in a cameo as a TV producer shouts at the soldiers "Don't look at the camera! Just go by like you're fighting! Like you're fighting! Don't look at the camera! This is for television! Just go through, go *through!*" These are really Brechtian moments – where 'the background' asserts its subjectivity.

Lorna: Yes, the architecture performs in all the work. Time also plays a role – real time, historical time, mediated time. *(pause)* Antonia Hirsch's *Pulse*, which uses Coordinated Universal Time, and *Recovery* which recovers the 29 minutes lost to progress in establishing Standard Time in Canada, place the most essential feature of 'background', time itself, into historical specificity. Her work gives time a particular economy and a political identity.*(pause)* *Greenwich Degree Zero* confounds time - presenting an inaccurate historical re-enactment as a way to talk about the present and the past simultaneously.

Jonathan: Yeah, well I think that's an interesting link between Antonia Hirsch's work and *Greenwich Degree Zero*, in that I think Antonia explores the standardization of time as a particular hegemony at the service of capitalism. An anarchist atta—

A large crash is heard from backstage. Jonathan jumps a bit and falls off his chair. More crashes, then a pause. Jonathan and Lorna exchange puzzled looks. Someone in the wings is whistling a couple of bars of a tune that could possibly be Wagner's Parsifal. From the other side of the stage we hear a voice cry out:

Voice: Hey, hey, watch it!

A sandbag on a rope swings across the stage, and from the sounds of it, crashes into something made of glass. There is more commotion backstage in what sounds to be a domino effect of equipment and props falling down. Finally a rope is released, and half of the curtain falls down in a clump, obscuring all but the back of Lorna's chair. A stocky man with dark hair and glasses walks calmly out to fiddle with the curtain. He looks off-stage and then back to the audience [if there is any], and announces emphatically:

Man: Fire. *(louder)* Fire. *(still louder)* Fire!

The audience [if there is any] doesn't seem to react, shifting slightly in their chairs. The man, showing only mild irritation, returns to fiddling with the curtain. Finally he untangles the cords and slowly lowers the second half of the curtain.

Curtain