

The

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Introduction

Performance Anxiety

“We would just get an idea and once you started on the idea it would lend itself to gags and natural trouble of any kind. There was no format.”

-Buster Keaton

I am inspired by the way Buster Keaton considers performance as an idea leading to “natural trouble”. It conjures the kind of controlled chaos that I envisioned when I put out the call for this year’s *Curatorial Incubator, v.11 – Stop with the performance already!* I did not expect the subtle considerations – indeed almost redefinitions - of the idea of performance itself that emerged from the research undertaken by each of the emerging curators in this year’s program.

Zach Pearl looks at that Hollywood stand-by, the Screen Test and in his investigation of this format finds artists engaged in what he calls, “...(an) empirical study in self-inflicted trauma” but not individual masochism but a collective trauma that the artist shares with the audience through the durational insistence of the performance itself. Yaël Filipovic’s *Set tongues wagging [set tuhng wag-ging]* finds works that reveal how language itself performs within what she calls, “...politically charged conversations.” Finally, the program assembled by Neal MacInnes posits a “...reaction to contemporary video performance having moved to the limit ...” and proposes an alternative: that architecture and urban landscapes reveal power structures and social anxieties as clearly as their human masters.

In the summer of 2013, *The Curatorial Incubator* participants attended workshops with eminently qualified performance professionals Jon Davies and Johanna Householder. Davies is the Associate Curator at Oakville Galleries who, in his former position at the Power Plant, curated a major survey of video/performance

wunderkind Ryan Trecartin in 2010. Performance art maven Householder is one of the founders of the 7a*11d International Festival of Performance Art in addition to being an internationally respected performance artist herself. To round out the workshop presentations, Vtape Distribution Director Wanda Vanderstoop provided participants with practical information about assembling their final programs for exhibition. Then the extensive research phase began for all three, culminating in the crafting of a public program accompanied by a curatorial essay. Throughout the writing phase of *The Curatorial Incubator* participants were each assigned a professional within the field of media arts to act as editor for their curatorial essay. Artist and academic Jean-Paul Kelly worked with Zach Pearl; performance artist and OCADU professor Johanna Householder with Neal MacInnes; and artist and PhD candidate at UQAM, Nelson Henricks with Yaël Filipovic.

As usual, this year's *Curatorial Incubator* has been a communal effort with contributions from all of the Vtape staff. I extend my appreciation to Erik Martinson, Submission and Outreach Coordinator for his assistance with artist liaison and installation; Kim Tomczak, Restoration & Collections Management Director and the technical assistant Brian Gotro for providing excellent screening compilations of each program; Distribution Director Wanda Vanderstoop for her above mentioned practical skill-sharing as well as on-going advice and support throughout the locating phase of each curators' program; Natalie Dunlop, Distribution Assistant for keeping the preview access open for this year's Incubatees; to Chris Gehman and Deirdre Logue for providing all the administrative and back-up necessary to allow us to continue to provide the public with exciting and challenging programs of video art like *The Curatorial Incubator*. And finally, I extend my thanks to the three young curators for their truly surprising 'takes' on the subject of performance and its relation to the moving image.

Lisa Steele, Creative Director Vtape



Set Tongues Wagging

[sɛt tuhng wag • ging]

BY YAËL FILIPOVIC

A curious event happens when we listen to someone speak. The voice, intention, context, history, biases, and emotion behind someone's words collide into a complex form. In this way are we asked to listen in more ways than one. And sometimes, words themselves need to be disregarded entirely in the process. Over the last year I have listened intently to Stephen Harper's words in hopes of understanding his strategic intentions; the withdrawn words of young victims of violence in an effort to fathom their states of mind; the emotions and struggles felt by indigenous activists through their chants; the changes in my best friend's words since the time I have known her; and the ways in which the words of my friend's children mimic their own. We have been taught that words are the ideal form of communication, yet with each experience words continue to fail me. They have been merely a distraction from the cultural baggage, political context, historical ramifications, body language, and many other much more potent forms of non-verbal communication in my everyday life. However, they remain a vital part of who we are. This remains clear as we have yet to embrace the potential for a post-literacy world.

From a young age, the school system has enforced language as an emancipatory force. Within nation building, the homogenization of language is a tool for the creation of a united national identity that is essentially regulated. The instrumentalization of language can thus also be traced in the enacting of imperial rule, violent forms of colonization, and the imbalances of power. Such relationships we create between language and nationalism make it difficult to reconcile the simultaneously fluid and fixed nature of language.

Through performance the artists of this programme point us to the multiple layers, barriers, and tools of language and to what are ultimately politically charged conversations. Each of the performances results in a different experience with language either based in identity politics, nationalism, colonialism, or independence.

In *Guided Truth (2011)*, Jorge Lozano recounts an experience on public transit while reading the newspaper. The collective silence of public transit is highlighted, as Lozano's thoughts are typed out and scrolling on the bottom of the screen. His internal dialogue mimics that of the newspaper text he is reading in both typeface and animation. Lozano's internal dialogue remains muted and reminds us of our misguided notions of public etiquette in public space. As he recounts finding out that Canada has bombed Libya, his struggle with digesting this news is made clear through the repetition of his words and the inversion of his phrases and questions. The unfathomable understanding of the resulting trauma from a dropped bomb



Guided Truth, 2011

is immediately contrasted with the mundane environment Lozano finds himself in – that of public transit. Struggling to reconcile his allegiance to both countries, Lozano decides to return home and abandon his responsibilities for the day. His internal dialogue reveals complex layers of emotions, nationalism, and even pragmatism. This work leads us to consider if the depth and complexity of such violent news can be represented through a simple and factual language.

Taking two nationalistic texts, the Canadian (French and English) and Polish national anthems, artist Kinga Araya attempts to read them aloud as a non-native speaker to all three languages in *National Anthem (2002)*. Three anonymous male voices correct Araya's pronunciations in English, French and Polish. As overlaps in pronunciation occurs, the texts begin to sound more and more absurd. Through this over stimulation, it becomes almost impossible to focus on the meaning of the texts Araya is trying to pronounce. Visually, two mouths with bright red lipstick are interchangeably swallowing an endless piece of twisted cloth that is entering one mouth from the other. In addition, a third mouth is displayed in the top right hand corner pronouncing each word. Each representing one of the three languages spoken, these bright red lips of the artist are mimicking the absurdity of this exercise by being forced to swallow and/or vomit politically charged words that although are symbolically critical texts often have no meaning for immigrants and

non-native speakers. The concern highlighted in this work towards pronunciation is additionally representative of the ways in which languages struggle with alienating nationalistic aims.

Through her performance as Kermit the Frog, Jess Dobkin embodies the famous Muppet in her rendition of his signature song “It’s not easy being green”. Entirely naked and painted green except for a triangle on her vagina, Dobkin comes on stage followed by her puppeteer, Lex Vaughn, who is dressed as Jim Henson. This live-recorded performance *Being Green (2011)* shows Vaughn approach her Muppet, put on a rubber glove and insert her hand inside Dobkin who sits slumped on a stool. As Dobkin gets fisted she comes to life and both performers lip-synch to the famous tune. “It’s not that easy being green; Having to spend each day the color of the leaves. When I think it could be nicer being red, or yellow or gold- or something much more colorful like that.” The performance is extremely vulnerable and physical. Yet one cannot help but wonder, why is Dobkin singing a song about self-acceptance? The provocative performance makes many references to body image, sexuality, queer, and femininity through the physical and aesthetic choices of the artist and thereby forever changes our experience of this childhood song by politically charging each word.

Sylvie Boisseau and Frank Westermeyer’s *The Free Man (2001)* offers a case-study of freedom of choice as exemplified through the video’s 23 brief scenes where Westermeyer verbally makes a decision within a 24-hour period. As we watch the path he is choosing – similar to a choose-your-own-adventure book - it becomes clear that his decisions are solely responses to other’s around him, instead of being out his own volition. In addition, many of his choices are quite banal and seem to have little reference to or impact on his freedom as an individual. Westermeyer’s choices instead become devoid of meaning, interest, or purpose but rather a chore forced upon the modern man. Through this we begin to see language to loose its dire need for our survival but rather tool with wasted potential.

The musical serenade of Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay in *Je changerais d’avis (2000)* mimics a multifaceted online news page with simultaneously streaming information on multiple channels. However, the artist has replaced varied news stories with multilingual representations of a love song. Offered in French, English, German and sign language, Ramsay attempts to communicate with his viewers an emotional message. However, the augmentation of communication tools he uses seems to do the exact opposite by overwhelming the viewer and making it impossible



Being Green, 2011

to focus on any one channel. As Ramsay becomes more emotional within one of the channel projections, it is difficult to not interpret this emotion as simulated due to the aloofness of the online news page structure. Has the access to multiple forms of communication rendered us desensitized to pure emotions?

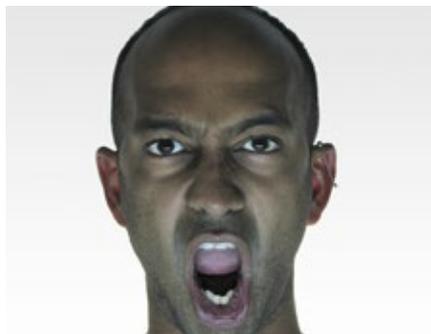
In *Training to Speak (1991)*, artist Chuleenan Svetvilas discusses with her immigrant parents the decision to raise their children in Buffalo, New York and teaching them to speak English as their first language. Svetvilas illustrates the interchangeability as well as ruptures in languages as she asks her parents to answer in English (their second language) to questions she asks in Thai (her second language). This candid conversation offers two important reflections: that of questions towards the use of language as a tool for cultural integration as well as the subtleties in language that can be lost in translation.

Silence can be a powerful gesture. Brendan Fernandes' *Devil's Noise (2011)* places at the forefront questions of language as a tool for oppression. The title of

this work refers to a sign carried by a young protester during the student protest of 1976 in South Africa – “We will not speak your devil tongue”. Students used silence as a means of protest against enforcement of the Afrikaans language in the school system in order to acknowledge their history of oppression. Fernandes references this contested event to explore the use of language as a means for political identity and control. In a close-up of his face, the artist makes extreme facial gestures that resemble grimaces and which are accompanied by white noise. In addition, a red text scrolls a poem across his mouth. As the raw editing between facial expressions, white noise and text increases in speed; the images take on an animalistic gesture. Through this response to the 1976 South Africa protests Fernandes creates a strong argument for the vital political relationship between silence and power.

In Saskia Holmkvist’s *Interview with Saskia Holmkvist (2005)* the artist plays with perceptions to reveal to the viewer the subtle ways in which sincerity in language can easily be manipulated. In this interview of the artist, a media relations expert is training the artist to speak about her work with both genuineness and authority. As Holmkvist is asked to repeat a short statement several times with adjustments to her body language, posture, voice and other characteristics, the viewer slowly realizes that the interview itself is a carefully constructed performance. In addition, the inclusion of the technical crew active in the filming of this interview within the image creates a parallel to reality television’s efforts to merge fact and fiction. This work by Holmkvist quickly dismantles our relationship to language as an idealistic communication tool with the realization that performance, honesty, and context all directly controls our perception of language.

All around the world, languages are rapidly disappearing as standardized and dominant languages take precedence in our society through the demands of globalization. Whose interests are being served through such changes? We see language changing around us on a daily basis. From the enforcement of language laws in Quebec, to the creation of new slangs and multi-language convergences, our speech is alive and constantly evolving. We even have a specialized language for texting and sex-ting. However, language is not only a signifier of our cultural, social and geographically based identities but also a political tool that can be used to silence, homogenize, and control us. In this way can the words we communicate with represent both a tool and a barrier. They can render us weary, jaded, and resentful as it becomes clearer that we cannot necessarily trust each other with this communication tool. Our desires to communicate are ultimately limited through the politics of language. Questioning what and how we choose to speak will have a considerable impact in how we define and create our future.



Devil's Noise, 2011

Program Notes

Set tongues wagging [set tuhng wag • ging]

Yaël Filipovic

February 8 - March 7, 2014

Curator's Bio:

Yaël Filipovic is an education curator. Her work combines her interests in art, action-research, community engagement, and pedagogy. Recent work includes curatorial projects at Modern Fuel Artist-Run Centre (Kingston, ON), Room 321 (Banff, AB), and University of Toronto Art Centre. She has also developed education programs for the 2014 Manif d'Art (Quebec City Biennial), Walter Phillips Gallery (Banff, AB) and Foreman Art Gallery (Sherbrooke, QC).

Title: Guided Truth	Artist: Jorge Lozano	Time: 3:33
Date: 2011	Description: Artist Jorge Lozano recounts the experience of reading a newspaper on public transit while on his way to work which announces that Canada has bombed Libya.	

Artist Bio:

Jorge Lozano has been working as a film and video artist for the last 20 years and has achieved national and international recognition. His films and experimental work have been exhibited and presented at international festivals and galleries such as the Toronto International Film Festival, the Sundance Film Festival, and many others. He has expanded his practice to the organization of many cultural and art events including the creation of aluCine, the Toronto Latin Film + Media Arts Festival.

Title: National Anthem	Artist: Kinga Araya	Time: 4:30
Date: 2003	Description: Taking three nationalistic texts, the Canadian (French and English) and Polish national anthems, artist Kinga Araya attempts to read them aloud as a non-native speaker of all three languages.	

Artist Bio:

Kinga Araya was born and raised in Poland. She arrived in Canada in 1990 and acquired her Master of Fine Arts at York University in Toronto (1998) and doctoral studies in the Special Individualized Program at Concordia University in Montréal (2004). Araya has shown her works in numerous national and international solo and group exhibitions, film, video and performance art festivals in Canada, USA, Poland, England, Yugoslavia, Italy, France, Spain, and Australia.

Title: Being Green	Artist: Jess Dobkin	Time: 3:30
Date: 2011	Description: This documentation of a live performance shows Dobkin performing a provocative rendition of Kermit the Frog's infamous song "It's not Easy Being Green".	

Artist Bio:

Touring internationally, Jess Dobkin has performed, lectured and conducted performance art workshops in the US, Canada, Germany, Belgium, and the UK. Her performances have been presented at renowned avant-garde venues in New York including P.S.122, The Kitchen, LaMama, Dixon Place, and the Joyce SoHo. In Toronto, her work has been presented at The Power Plant, YYY Artists' Outlet, the WARC Gallery, SPIN Gallery, Buddies In Bad Times Theatre, the Inside/Out Festival, and other venues.

Title: The Free Man (Der freie Mensch)	Artist: Sylvie Boisseau & Frank Westermeyer	Time: 4:00
Date: 2001	Description: In 23 brief scenes, the video acts as a record of every decision Westermeyer makes within a 24-hour period and questions whether enacting one's free will is pleasurable or tedious.	

Artist Bio:

Sylvie Boisseau & Frank Westermeyer are a Franco-German couple who live and work between Düsseldorf, Germany and Geneva, Switzerland. They have been working together since 1996 and have realized several interventions in public space. Their videos have been shown internationally at film and media art festivals like Exis, Seoul; Filmwoche Duisburg; International Short film festival Hamburg; Cinematexas, USA; Red Bank Film Festival, USA; Biennial of Moving Images, Geneva and many others.

Title: Je Changerais d'Avis	Artist: Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay	Time: 4:00
Date: 2000	Description: Offered simultaneously in French, English, German, and sign language, Nemerofsky Ramsay attempts to perform a poignant love song through a multifaceted online news page.	

Artist Bio:

Benny Nemerofsky Ramsay is a Montréal-born artist and diarist. Since 1999 his work has involved video, performance and print. He has exhibited in diverse contexts across Canada, Europe and Asia and has won prizes at festivals in Canada, Germany, Poland and Portugal. His work is part of numerous private collections as well as the collection of the National Gallery of Canada. He currently divides himself between Canada and Europe.

Title: Training to Speak	Artist: Chuleenan Svetvilas	Time: 10:00
Date: 1991	Description: In this work, Svetvilas illustrates the interchangeability, as well as rupture in language, when she asks her parents to respond in English (their second language) to questions she asks in Thai (her second language).	

Artist Bio: Chuleenan Svetvilas is a video-maker and visual artist who was born in upstate New York and currently resides in Los Angeles.

Title: Devil's Noise	Artist: Brendan Fernandes	Time: 2:10
Date: 2011	Description: This work investigates the student protests of 1976 in South Africa and questions how language can act as a way to oppress and control people.	

Artist Bio: Born in Kenya of Indian descent, Brendan Fernandes is a multidisciplinary artist, who examines issues of cultural displacement and migration through installations, video, sculpture and dance. He completed the Independent Study Program of the Whitney Museum of American Art (2007) and earned his MFA in 2005 from The University of Western Ontario and his BFA from York University in 2002. His work has been exhibited nationally and internationally, and he is currently based between Toronto and New York.

Title: Interview with Saskia Holmkvist	Artist: Saskia Holmkvist	Time: 8:40
Date: 2005	Description: In this interview, the artist mixes our perception of fact and fiction in an attempt to dismantle our belief in language as an idealistic communication tool.	

Artist Bio: Saskia Holmkvist is an artist from Stockholm, Sweden, working mainly with video. She has worked in different disciplines from performance to site-specific projects to film. In her work she employs conceptual and methodological points of view borrowed from artistic and academic practices such as journalism, theater, documentary and psychology.



An Architecture of Performance

BY NEAL MACINNES

In considering video art and performance within the context of the thematic cue, Stop with the performance already!, I struggled with the notion as the theme suggested a reaction to contemporary video performance having moved to the limit of something, reaching a point where we are confronted with a question: In performance and the contemporary world, where else might we go from here? This led me to wonder about the possibilities of work that eschews human performers as a central focus and I found myself turning to a somewhat literal interpretation of stopping with performance. This turn means exploring work that has a disembodiment effect, suggestive of the structures around us as being haunted with power.

Wanting to approach this notion of disembodiment but resistant to anthropomorphizing architectural objects, I began to think about a definition of performance that included space and place as well as the temporal nature of video as a unified performance-like body. In this way, the structure and the architecture of a space has always been an integral part of the image on screen, forming the boundaries of the artists' mise en scène, and yet this bounding nature does not make the space just a container for human performers. The space can also be understood as enacting performance in its own right. The artist uses these bounds - her camera, her POV, and the screened image that results - to unveil, using these mechanisms as evidence of a disembodied performance. In this unveiling the artist makes of the architecture and the landscape a performer as communicative as any human and envelops us, the viewers, within the world on the screen.

What I am after in exploring this unveiling is a way of understanding how space, architecture, and the urban landscape—literal structures of our society—might come to operate in a performance-like way to reflect the societal anxieties made more apparent since 2007. It was at this point, at the beginning of the Global Financial Crisis¹, that Western society became haunted by the further troubles of globalization, not usually so viscerally felt in that context. The power inscribed upon the architecture of Western society was made apparent as the housing market in the United States collapsed and people's dream homes, the very structures in which they lived, became domestic nightmares and physical projections of so much socio-political anxiety.

The horror trope of the haunted house, a space of anxiety-riddled psychological projection, provides a useful illustration of how our architecture and landscape might come to enact performance. There are many interesting examples of movies effectively using this trope such as *The Haunting* or the more recent *Paranormal Activity*

series. But, the finest example is perhaps Kubrick's adaptation of *The Shining*. In *The Shining* The Overlook Hotel, the haunted architecture, functions as if a character itself, a performance-like mirror, reflecting back and amplifying the anxiety in Jack Nicholson's Jack Torrance until he is driven mad and murderous. Not long ago I came across a collection of production stills from *The Shining*. Within the collection were a couple pictures of The Overlook Hotel, its façade resting against wooden scaffolding, doors and windows opening to nothing but air. The image on the screen allows the viewer and the artist to project the rest of the equation and create the connections required to enact performance. As in The Overlook Hotel, built on the backlot of an English film studio, the structures around us seem little more than a façade until enacting performance to mirror our hopes, dreams, memories, and anxieties. It is that space, thin as air until enacted, that artists can use video and its mechanisms of unveiling.

Judith Shatin's and Robert Arnold's video *Rotunda (2009)*, recounts a full year presented in a single day-to-night cycle and features the iconic Rotunda at The University of Virginia² as it overlooks all of the activity on the green. Recorded in the year prior to the Financial Collapse, as we see day turn to night and listen to individuals recount their experience of The Rotunda it becomes clear that its presence is that of a performer, a protagonist and antagonist, a living monument in the minds of those at the university. The Rotunda's historical connection to US ideology and identity, having been designed by Thomas Jefferson, is also worth noting in that the video contains as much anxious talk about its symbolic role as it does veneration. The monumental Roman columns, made small by the removed camera angle, lend much to the metaphor of an empire in turmoil, a collective psyche anxious about becoming merely archaeological in the globalized landscape.

Temps Mort (2012), by Kyath Battie, re-imagines an institutional landscape as a mysterious and quasi-futuristic space devoid of human presence. Like *Rotunda*, Battie's video uses the institutional setting of a university as a core presence in the work. Whereas *Rotunda* looks anxiously back to the past and wonders about the future, *Temps Mort*, suggests its own future, disconnecting the space of the institution from its function. Battie explores the spaces that make up the video using the stillness of the camera and a soundtrack made up of sounds from the sci-fi horror classic *Alien* to allow the empty environment to perform and communicate this isolating projection of the future.

Parade (2013), by Oliver Husain, shows us a constructed world built out of the



Rotunda, 2009



Temps Mort, 2012

urban dreams that are sold to us by advertisers seeking to define a pervasive notion of domestic bliss. Husain constructs an urban landscape using these bits of the advertising that surrounds us and mixes it with a digitally constructed world. By highlighting this blight on the urban landscape and moving the viewer through it, he allows the constructed environment to take precedence over the shallow characters that occupy it. The environment becomes the primary performer, and is more than able to bear that communicative burden, which, as in Battie's work, hints at what may actually be less a benign dream than a future nightmare.

Finally, *Remember Carthage (2013)* is an open-ended narrative about the tenuous link between place and memory. Jon Rafman and Rosa Aiello lead us on a journey through a world constructed from fragments. Created entirely with images and graphics from video games and virtual worlds, Rafman's and Aiello's video makes apparent the links between space, place, and time as they coincide in an environment where the landscape is everything and we look back and forward for a Carthage that may or may not have ever existed.

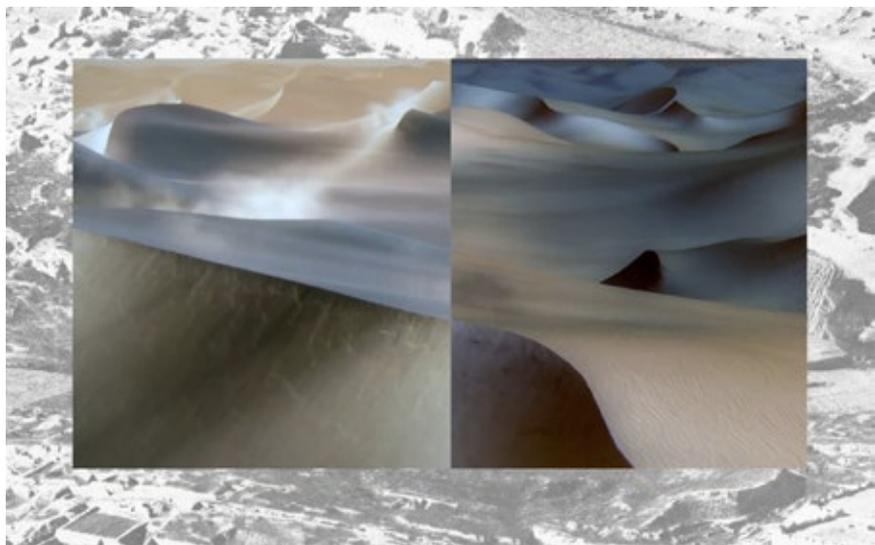
The structures and spaces in which we all reside are haunted by the socio-political power inscribed upon them, and when they are able to perform, that power is unveiled.

All of the artists' videos discussed above are haunted in this way, performance-like architecture and landscape acting on some level as mirrors to reflect back, distort, and amplify the anxiety of our time. It occurs to me that, unlike *The Shining*, this haunting does not always manifest in a violent breakdown but might antagonize to more meaningful ends. Anxiety with a purpose, to greater understanding, and here is where I am again caught thinking about the past and the future, monumental Roman columns and what they mean, from a green in Virginia to a virtual place in constant flux each suggestive of the way our structures and landscape enact performance and envelop the viewer in the world they circumscribe. The anxiety this power provokes is the reasonable response to the contemporary moment and in *Rotunda*, *Temps Mort*, *Parade*, and *Remember Carthage*, we can see that as spaces are privileged as performance-like in their own right, they become tools of the video artist to use for her own performance of the contemporary world.

Endnotes

¹ In China, sometimes called The Western Financial Crisis.

² One of 21 UNESCO world heritage sites in the United States.



Remember Carthage, 2013

Program Notes

An Architecture of Performance

Neal MacInnes

March 8 - April 5, 2014

Curator's Bio:

Neal MacInnes is co-founder of the art journal #3 (www.journal3.org) and works in arts education as well as digital media. He has previously worked for The Royal College of Art, The Department of Art Digital Media Research Lab at Goldsmiths, and in programming for the Toronto International Film Festival. He currently works at OCADU.

Title: Rotunda	Artists: Judith Shatin & Robert Arnold	Time: 15:00
Date: 2009	Description: <i>Rotunda</i> takes place over a 24 hour period pieced together from scenes captured throughout an entire year. The work was created from over 300,000 images of the Jefferson's Lawn and Rotunda at the University of Virginia, and from sounds and interviews collected during that year. The work highlights the iconic Rotunda's presence in the minds of those at the university.	

Artists' Bios:

Judith Shatin is a composer and sound artist whose musical practice engages our social, cultural, and physical environments. She draws on expanded instrumental palettes and a cornucopia of the sounding world, from machines in a deep coal mine, to the calls of animals, the shuttle of a wooden loom, a lawnmower racing up a lawn. Timbral explora-

tion and dynamic narrative design are fundamental to her compositional design, while collaboration with musicians, artists and communities are central to her musical life. (via www.judithshatin.com)

~

Robert Arnold is an experimental filmmaker and academic. Currently a professor of film at Montana State University his past works include *Triptych*, *The Morphology of Desire* and *Travelogue*.

Title: Temps Mort	Artists: Kyath Battie	Time: 7:02
Date: 2012	Description: <i>Temps Mort</i> is an exploration of empty spaces from a large University, specifically spaces that seem to have a technological and architectural patina or age to them, in effect, offering a sense of science fiction-like ambiance. This ambiance is created using the stillness of the camera and a soundtrack made up of sounds from, the sci-fi horror classic, <i>Alien</i> .	

Artists' Bios:

Filmmaker and experimental media artist, Kyath Battie makes non-fiction and installation based work focusing on landscapes, architectural spaces, mysteries and sound design. She teaches video production in the Department of Multimedia & Communication Studies at McMaster University.

Title: Parade	Artists: Oliver Husain	Time: 10:51
Date: 2013	Description: <i>Parade</i> shows a constructed world built out of the urban dreams that are sold to us by advertisers seeking to define a pervasive notion of domestic bliss. Husain constructs an urban landscape using bits of the advertising that surround us and mixes them with a digital construction reminiscent of an empty video game world.	

Artists' Bios:

Oliver Husain is a filmmaker and installation artist. Addressing a dialogue between images and objecthood, Oliver Husain's projects often begin with a portrait of a person or place. He uses a wide range of cinematic languages and visual codes—such as dance, puppetry, and animation—to disassemble and subvert fixed readings of the original material. Translated into cinema and gallery spaces, his installations, performances and film projects set up narratives that charm or fold the viewers into questioning their role as a spectator or subject.

Title: Remember Carthage	Artists: Jon Rafman & Rosa Aiello	Time: 13:43
Date: 2013	Description: <i>Remember Carthage</i> is an open-ended narrative about a journey and the tenuous link between place and memory. The work leads us through spaces constructed from fragments, from a ship to a desert, everything created with images and graphics from video games and virtual worlds.	

Artists' Bios:

Jon Rafman is an artist and filmmaker born in Montreal. He received a BA in philosophy and literature from McGill University and his MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He has exhibited at the New Museum, the Palais de Tokyo, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Rome, The Fridericianum, and the Saatchi Gallery and his work has been featured in *Modern Painters*, *Frieze*, *The New York Times*, and *Artforum*. Inspired by the rich contradictions that technology presents, Rafman engages with the effects of digital media on everyday experience, individual consciousness, and social and cultural memory.

~

Rosa Aiello is a writer and artist dealing with the limits of language, reason, and Humanness. She is currently using CG video to explore the relationship between representations of the human body, materiality, and affective responses to capitalism. Her work has been shown at the New Museum, The Modern Institute in Glasgow, on Tank.tv, and, this winter, at Triple Canopy, in New York.



Screen Test

BY ZACH PEARL

The appearance does not hide the essence, it reveals it; it is the essence.
- Jean-Paul Sartre

A screen test is a film-industry method to test the suitability of an actor for a potential role. Typically, the actor is provided with a portion of the script and instructed to perform for the camera. These recordings often capture visceral moments, as the pressure of the audition promotes exaggeration and disclosure. Later, multiple screen tests are compiled into a single reel and evaluated by the casting director and production crew. The intensity of the original performances is mediated by their transfiguration from flesh and blood to a two-dimensional, backlit image. Uncomfortable and grotesque¹ moments of unrehearsed performances are subdued through flattening and miniaturization. Yet the processing of the image (its compression, scaling, resolution) contrasts and complements its emotional content: errors, hesitation, and breaks in character are transfigured by the prescriptive requirements in the production of what we see on screen. The ambiguous oscillation between pure performance (the role) and performativity (the act of playing the role) produces a fragile but visible threshold joining fiction and reality.

The video performances in this program are not screen tests in this traditional sense. None were shot under the context of an audition or portray a character per se. However, each performance does reveal itself to be a test—a challenge to bridge a carefully constructed reality and awkward moments of intensely human behaviour. By enacting uncomfortable tasks for the camera, the artists featured in Screen Test ask the viewer to witness their human foibles and the subjectivities of being. The evident difficulty of enduring the tasks performed in each video betrays the authorial image of the artist and destabilizes the viewing experience. Mediated by the restraints of their medium, the artists are restored as earnestly human subjects, delivering frank and honest engagements with the camera and the viewer. Adding to this effect is an intimate, almost claustrophobic aesthetic in all seven of the works. The reoccurrence of the ‘close-up’ and the ‘single-shot’ connect a spectrum of unsettling scenarios, ranging from weeping to brutally honest monologues. When used in combination, these formal qualities create a microscopic condition. The space of the viewer is tight—pulled in and locked in—purposely brought too close for comfort. This confrontational negotiation with the image and, subsequently, the screen’s condensation of fiction and reality, amplifies these scenarios into the realm of the uncanny. The axiom of the ‘screen test’ becomes evident as the more basic challenge to endure the works and engage their subversive contents.

This notion of the test, however, can be extended further. Each work could easily be

reframed as an empirical study in self-inflicted trauma. This is not to imply that the artists or their practices are masochistic. Instead, they should be thought of as distinct exercises in physical and psychological distress. The traumatic aspect of each emerges in the act of viewing—in the durational nature of performance itself. The concept of trauma here shifts from its usual connotation of personal affliction to a more collective dimension, where spectatorship is key to its sensibility. Accordingly, these traumatic trajectories are nuanced, initially obscured and revealed over time. Although, the physical peril implicit in some works make the possibility of trauma more apparent than others: in Tom Sherman's *Hyperventilation* (2011), the artist, isolated before the camera, asphyxiates himself until passing out. There is nothing else but Sherman in the frame, and his lunging toward the camera while rapidly inhaling and exhaling creates a pervasive anxiety. The next breath always seems to be the last before he blacks out. This action sustained challenges the viewer to remain unaffected by such a blatant, bodily gesture.

Physical distress is also central to Marisa Hoicka's *Insides Out: Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes* (2012) and Erin Hael's *Souvenir* (2013). *Insides Out* confronts us with on screen croppings of the artist's body, bound or encased in treacherous foreign substances. Connotations of blood, mucous and feces run rampant as Hoicka wriggles and wobbles, exploring the textural and kinetic qualities of her aberrant dressings. As her body struggles to move, the viewer struggles to make sense of what is organic and what is synthetic. *Souvenir* shows Hael being slapped across the face repeatedly. Her assailant is never seen. No dialogue is exchanged. Only her face fills the frame, and sporadically a hand enters to strike her cheek. Although the assumption that the artist is consenting to the act makes the experience less alarming, over five minutes one realizes—watching her sideway glances, her lip clenching, her skin becoming pink—that the artist may have lost control over the intensity of her own performance.

Rodney Werden's *Say* (1978) presents another spectacular, ethical predicament. The artist performs as a voice off-camera commanding a young stationary actress to repeat words after him. Gradually, his word choices begin to infer images of bodily movements and sexual pleasure. As the actress's face becomes visibly more unsettled and aware of her manipulation the viewer grows equally unsettled by their complicity as witness. The question arises: who is really being manipulated here? What seems at first to be an innocent exercise takes on a perverse complexion.

This triangular power dynamic is less aggressive but equally present in Zeesy Powers'



Insides Out: Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes, 2012



Say, 1978

ERIN—I Will Tell You Exactly What I Think Of You (2013). Part of a larger series of videos published to her YouTube channel, *I Will Tell You...*, is predicated on a complete stranger sitting outside the frame as the artist gives a litany of first impressions—all of them unrehearsed and point-blank. *ERIN* is a special case, however. Typically, the ‘patron’ of the performance is present. In *ERIN*, as Powers explains on its YouTube page, she received the request via e-mail and the message states, “cannot make it live or in person”, but to “lay it on me”. What follows is a parabola with vulnerability at its base and offensive at its apex. In the background, a visual stream of consciousness plays itself out using found Internet imagery. Sometimes these backgrounds strike a strange parallel with what’s being said. Others are pure automatism. What results is a frantic interplay of signifiers between Powers’ monologue, the assemblage of imagery flickering behind her and the invisibility of the subject matter—*Erin*.

Other traumatic instants exist still, in reliving painful or unfulfilled memories. Tad Hozumi’s *Thinking About Someone While Listening to Mariah Carey (date?)* is a willful display of unabashed emotion. Hozumi, clad in headphones, thinks about someone (presumably a past romance) and alternates between a stoic stare directly into the camera and a scrunched face of teary anguish. For the length of Mariah Carey’s “Always Be My Baby” (1996) the viewer is front-row to an emotional ride, witnessing Hozumi decompose to an intense psychological breakdown. Again, the traumatic aspect of the piece is ironically not found in the gesture itself. Watching Hozumi in mental and emotional pain is clearly difficult to ‘enjoy’. Yet, our disconcert primarily arises when he gazes out uncertain of and exerted by his own performance. His effort in sustaining this awkward interaction is palpable. Crying and self-deprecation are reframed as forms of labour and the emotional potential of the piece is transfigured by the visible mechanics of its production. A sense of ambivalence towards the artificial nature of the act begins to supplant any sympathy reserved in the viewer.

In Paul Wong’s *Perfect Day (2007)* the artist is also encountered as a desperate figure re-living a memory through music; in this case, Lou Reed’s ironically somber “Perfect Day” (1972). Promenading through his apartment half-naked and high on a mixture of cocaine and heroine, Wong films himself on a maddening domestic quest to locate the song in his CD collection. Frequent movement of the camera evokes a sense of anxiety throughout the seven-minute video, but also suggests Wong is experiencing a kind of ecstasy in the throes of his melodramatic sequence. Accenting this are hackneyed transition filters that infuse the narrative with comic relief and satire. Each element works to envisage an inner world that is vibrantly self-indulgent, reveling in its spectacular trauma. This welcome debauchery proves to be its most radical



ERIN, 2013

making—an exhibitionist, self-interest in continually constructing one’s image.

In a medium so closely associated with publicity and distribution, the construction of identity in video performance supposes alterity. It relies on a parlous splicing of spaces and times, a bifurcation. Again, the screen should be recognized as the conduit for these congruent channels of perception. Its membranous qualities provide just enough circulation to permit different understandings of time and space to temporarily cohere. However, the function of the screen is also, ironically, to largely operate unseen, camouflaged by the very images it projects. In this way, it distracts us from its essence by its appearance. As a means of visual communication, the screen’s appearance is its essence. Hidden by its two-fold condition as aesthetic artefact (a “window onto the world”) and technical instrument (communication device), the screen pre-occupies the senses and distances viewers from recognizing other, equally fascinating paradoxes unfolding before their eyes.

When screened with an audience the arresting content and paradoxical junctures in these works become most present. While the screen undoubtedly privileges visuality, the presence of multiple viewers is required to visualize the properties of the work into social realities. The shared viewing space represents the final strata of tests residing in this program. The publicized screen test is a challenge to endure various forms of trauma together—a dare to maintain our critical distance and achieve reconciliation in our solidarity.



Perfect Day, 2007

and potentially traumatic characteristic, for it champions the narcissistic facet of art. Flashes of anxiety and doubt, sympathy and disinterest must not only be registered and re-negotiated on an individual level but also collectively. The shared viewing environment effaces expectations and aligns these representations as personal yet political (and therefore public) opportunities for affiliation and recognition. Screen Test calls upon both its performers and its audience to meet in the mercurial middle, at the nexus of the screen, where identities and actions are not so clearly partitioned.



Perfect Day, 2007

Endnotes

¹ I am using grotesque here in the purest etymological sense, which means to exist liminally between recognizable forms. For the case of the actor, this indicates a sensible blur occurring between the character and the person playing the character. The earliest use of grotesque in this sense came about to describe the animal and human hybrids occasionally found in the Christian frescoes of Southern Italy.

² This is an allusion to Jacques Rancière's idea of the distribution of the sensible, in which political regimes dictate the division between what is sayable and what is visible. I reference it here to suggest that the role of the spectator, when viewing these works, is a political one.

Works Cited

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Program Notes

Screen Test

Zack Pearl

January 11 - February 7, 2014

Curator's Bio:

Zach Pearl is a freelance designer and independent curator. He teaches in both art and design at OCADU in Toronto and co-produces KAP-SULA—an online art criticism publication founded in Spring 2013. Zach holds a BFA in Illustration & Graphic Design from the Minneapolis College of Art & Design, and an MFA in Curatorial Practice from OCADU. Since relocating to Toronto, he's helped to produce exhibitions for the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Textile Museum of Canada & the Gladstone Hotel.

Title: Hyperventilation	Artists: Tom Sherman	Time: 8:30
Date: 2011	Description: The artist re-enacts his first-ever work on video—hyperventilating on-camera until passing out—effectively bridging four decades of his practice.	

Artists' Bios:

Tom Sherman is an artist and writer. He works in video, radio and live performance, and writes all manner of texts. His interdisciplinary work has been exhibited internationally, including shows at the National Gal-

lery of Canada, the Vancouver Art Gallery, the Musee d'art contemporain, the Museum of Modern Art and Ars Electronica. He is a professor in the Department of Transmedia at Syracuse University in New York, but considers the South Shore of Nova Scotia his home.

Title: Say	Artists: Rodney Werden	Time: 3:00
Date: 1978	Description: A stationary woman is asked to repeat a series of suggestive words as commanded by a voice off-camera.	

Artists' Bios:

Born in Toronto in 1946, Rodney Werden is an acclaimed photographer, video artist and provocateur. Exploring difficult themes of gender, repression and sadomasochism, his work is considered both radical and seminal in the history of Canadian media arts.

Title: Insides Out: Head, Shoulders Knees & Toes	Artist: Marisa Hoicka	Time: 7:40
Date: 2012	Description: Blurring the lines between the inside, outside and functions of the body, this piece is both an homage to 1970s body performance art and extending the boundaries of the body.	

Artist Bio:

Marisa Hoicka is an artist working in a variety of media including paint-

ing, performance art, fibres, installation and video. Most recently Hoicka's video "This is Not a Test" was screened at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. Hoicka holds a BFA in Studio Arts from Concordia University in Montreal, and her video work is represented by Vtape in Toronto.

Title: Souvenir	Artist: Erin Hael	Time: 4:53
Date: 2013	Description: The artist submits to being slapped repeatedly across the face by a hand off-camera. Her assailant is never seen...	

Artist Bio:

Erin Hael is a Brooklyn-based new media and performance artist with a background in film and video production. She received her MFA from the University of Minnesota in 2012 and studied under renowned performance artist Rachel Rosenthal in Los Angeles, CA after receiving the Graduate Research Partnership Program Fellowship in 2011.

Title: Perfect Day	Artist: Paul Wong	Time: 7:30
Date: 2007	Description: The artist records himself at home proudly indulging in the happiness of a drug-inspired 'perfect' day.	

Artist Bio:

Paul Wong is a media-maestro making art for site specific spaces and screens of all sizes. Born in Prince Rupert, BC in 1954, Wong has shown and produced projects throughout North America, Europe and Asia. His works are in many public collections including the National Gallery of Canada, the Museum of Modern Art (New York) and the Vancouver Art Gallery. Wong was also the winner of the 1992 Bell Canada Award in Video Art for outstanding contributions to his field.

Title: ERIN—I Will Tell You Exactly What I Think Of You	Artist: Zeesy Powers	Time: 5:40
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Date: 2013	Description: The artist delivers a litany of first impressions about a stranger, in response to an e-mail request to, “lay it on me”.
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Artist Bio:

Zeesy Powers is a Toronto-based interdisciplinary artist. She graduated from OCADU and has consistently produced compelling works of art. Her oeuvre spans various mediums including video, performance, drawing and painting. Since 2007, her project *I Will Tell You Exactly What I Think of You* has been performed in Berlin, Los Angeles, Montreal, New York and Toronto, and will be mounted again this spring in Vancouver. She is currently in development for Common Fate, a new projection work for ten dancers.

Title: Thinking About Someone While Listening to Mariah Carey	Artist: Tad Hozumi	Time: 4:25
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Date: 2009	Description: An intensely intimate recording of the artist listening to the hit Mariah Carey song, “Always Be My Baby” (1996).
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Artist Bio:

Tad Hozumi is a Japanese-Canadian installation and video artist based in Toronto. He graduated from OCADU in 2007 with a major in sculpture and installation. Hozumi’s work is largely autobiographic and centres on the dilemma of relating human emotion and subjective experience.

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