

COMMUNION BEN JUDD

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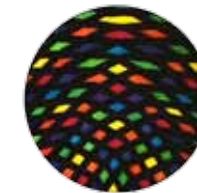
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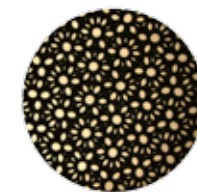
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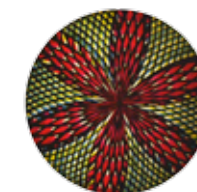
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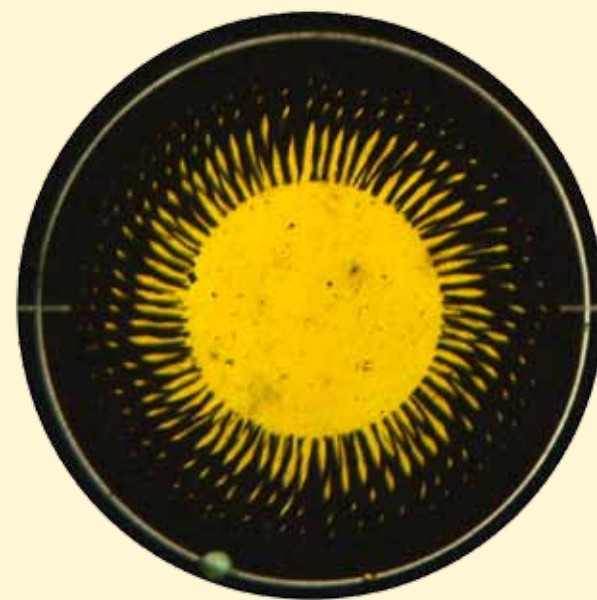
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Being in Two Minds

Emma Cocker

The phrase “being in two minds” can be used somewhat pejoratively, signalling towards the dithering indecision of an individual unable to reach a clear and definitive position, struggling to arrive at a conclusion one way or the other. It might refer to a state of mind where opinions have yet to settle, where things still remain up in the air. Or else, it is a position inhabited in tactical terms like the bet hedged to keep one’s options open; a form of equivocation for avoiding commitment (by not electing for any single option) or alternatively for protecting oneself against the wrong choice (by electing for more than one). However, within Ben Judd’s practice the condition of being in two minds operates in critical—rather than cynical—terms; it is performed by moving from one position to another as a commitment made to keep an open mind. Judd is an artist whose work interrogates the complex ritual performances and social practices that surround various closed communities or structures of belief, through an ongoing investigation into the relationship between persuasion and delusion, scepticism and faith. Whether gaining covert entry into various marginalised societal groups or establishing his own models of temporary community, the artist’s position often appears ambiguous. Located at the threshold between belonging and not belonging or between immersion and separation, in a number of projects Judd seems simultaneously to inhabit the position of participant and observer, believer and non-believer, host and guest. By occupying more than one position—or the contradictory position of ‘being both’—the artist’s role remains somehow undeclared, unresolved, or at times even willfully ambivalent. For Judd, remaining undecided or non-committal—‘being in two minds’—emerges as part of a critical practice intent on disrupting the binary relationship between yes/no, between either/or.

In his earlier video work, Judd adopted various personae in order to infiltrate particular communities who in turn seemed separated from the larger societal group. Working undercover, Judd managed to gain entry into the coded and regulated orders of various marginalised or sub-cultural collectives—a group of Morris dancers or trainspotters, or a clandestine amateur photography club united by their shared fascination with f-stops and g-strings. Judd closely observes the activities of these groups, mirroring their position of simultaneously belonging and not belonging; of alienation and involvement; of connection (within one context) and yet disconnection (from another). Occupying the dual role of insider *and* outsider, Judd often



I Love, single-channel video, 7:40 min, London, UK, 2003

inhabits the same space and gestures as the group that he has infiltrated but in a way that is inconsistent with—even potentially antagonistic to—their activities. In the video *I Love*, 2003, for example, Judd joins a group of middle-aged photographers gathered in an anonymous basement for the dubious purposes of a glamour photography shoot. The focus of the photographers’ attention remains unseen; Judd’s lens inverts or mirrors back their gaze making *them* his subject. Rather than photographing the rented glamour model (presumably) like the others, Judd turns his attention towards observing the men’s furtive gestures with close, relentless scrutiny. The artist’s voiceover describes each recorded movement with a level of detail that is intense and yet also banal; he appears seemingly captivated yet perhaps also a little repelled by the unfolding events. Whilst Judd does

not want to blow his cover and be revealed as an impostor, his actions ensure that he remains perilously close to being exposed.

Within a number of projects, Judd appears to be fascinated with what might be described as ‘outsider’ groups—trainspotters, mystics, witches, Morris dancers—attempting to gain entry into these ‘communities’ and access experiences from which he would otherwise be blocked. However, the experiences he seeks are not those simply gleaned from inhabiting (or territorialising) the space of the other; instead, his interest lies in the process of exiting or becoming dislocated from his own habitual positionality or belief structure. Irit Rogoff adopts the term “fieldwork” to describe those anthropologically informed models within art practice where there is “recognition of exiting one’s own paradigms in order to encounter some form of difference and of doing so with an articulated sense of self consciousness about who is doing the encountering”.¹ For Rogoff, this enterprise of “complicitous field work” involves striving for a kind of “dual positionality” or “existential doubleness”, a term borrowed from Georges Marcus to describe the critical state of “‘being spatially located in an inside and paradigmatically on the outside’—the unresolved tension of being both embedded and living out the problematic and at the same time (being) perfectly able to analyse it and see through it”.² Judd occupies the critical position of being both inside and outside the communities or situations that he encounters, of being within and yet also remaining without. Whilst the artist’s simultaneous inhabitation of the position of participant and observer might appear “quasi-anthropological”, his role is often less like that of the ethnographer and rather more akin to the liminal status of an initiate or novice within a ritual performance or rite of passage. Like the ritual initiate, Judd is somehow granted partial access to the unspoken codes and customs of a particular community but has not yet sworn allegiance to or been fully indoctrinated into their beliefs. This shift from the position of ethnographer to initiate transforms Judd’s role from being one of perceived power and authority to one of diminished or reduced status; he often appears vulnerable and awkward as he negotiates the rules of an unfamiliar context.

The oscillation between the role of ‘knowing’ ethnographer and ‘unknowing’ initiate complicates Judd’s work, making it difficult to ascertain where the power resides within the relationships that he constructs. The initiate also has a strangely exempted status within ritual

performance. According to anthropologist Victor Turner, “novices are, in fact, temporarily undefined, beyond the normative structure. This weakens them, since they have no rights over others. But it also liberates them from structural obligations.”³ He observes that during the liminal or transitional phase of any ritual activity, the characteristics and laws of the dominant social structure are collapsed momentarily as “the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity”.⁴ Here, their novice status is equally ambiguous: “they are at once no longer classified and not yet classified”.⁵ In assuming a role akin to the initiate, Judd shifts his position from one of being “both” towards one of being “neither”, “no longer” neutral observer whilst “not yet” converted into a full member of the respective “group”. Within Judd’s practice, positions become staked out only in order that they might then be moved between. The artist locates himself at the fulcrum where one position begins to slip into another, the shimmering point where fixed identities begin to waver. Judd’s initiate status is further explored in work where he aligns himself with various occult or spiritualist groups in order to try to become a believer, for example, by attempting to develop his psychic skills as a clairvoyant or as the producer of spirit portraits. In the video *Close to You*, 2008, the artist is observed participating in an assembly where amateur spirit mediums are afforded the opportunity to test out their novice powers. As they are seated in the community hall, Judd appears to share the others’ anticipation as they wait their turn, nervously preparing for their ‘go’ at conjuring communication with ‘the other side’. The video seemingly captures the artist’s endeavour to be convinced or rather be convincing, whilst questioning the situation in which he finds himself. Yet, whilst Judd remained in control of (even manipulating) the double-position he held in earlier work, in *Close to You* he appears to explore the point at which a position might shift involuntarily as one way of viewing the world collapses into or is overlapped with another. As Judd takes to the stage, we witness him struggle with two competing positions or belief systems. His is the uneasy experience of a non-believer required to believe, requiring in turn that others are convinced by his newly found clairvoyant capabilities.

Judd’s performance is not a sham however; he appears to wholly inhabit his designated role such that it becomes played out as authentic experience. The artist adopts a character or appears as a ‘double’ whose encounters might be partially fictionalised or staged but are none-the-less irrevocably, experientially real. Role-play offers a mode of meaningful or ethical inhabitation where positions other to one’s own can be actively tested out, performed *as if*.⁶ The apparent contradiction of a non-believer practising clairvoyance should not then be mistaken for cynicism or the empty act of the charlatan preacher. Rather, Judd’s inconsistency reflects a genuine attempt to bring the notion of a single position into doubt, to rupture the logic of one position through its proximity to another. By temporarily inhabiting a peripheral or marginal position, Judd pushes his own belief system beyond its habitual limits, in turn enabling other peripheries or horizons to come into view. In doing so, he reveals the presence of different realities or questions that perhaps could not have been perceived from a single standpoint. The artist’s capacity for inhabiting inconsistent roles demonstrates the fluid and interchangeable manner by which divergent (or multiple) positions can be adopted and then relinquished. Unfamiliar positions become tested through a form of *dépaysement*, a way of momentarily escaping one’s habitual belief structure to gain a different perspective to one’s own. Judd’s failure to commit to any single position is a tactic for keeping an open mind, which requires an empathetic or ethical approach,

the capacity for being able to recognise and respect the alterity of the other. In presenting the co-existence of contradictory positions, the artist refuses to synthesise difference or to reconcile incompatible registers of belief within any singular model, for example, by deeming one as irrational. The work does not prove or disprove any particular doctrine or belief; rather in bringing two contrasting systems into dialogue, Judd demonstrates how both are constructs that are perhaps equally delusional or dogmatic, deficient or restricting.

Judd further interrogated the tensions between belief and non-belief during a residency in Cali, Colombia, bringing his own scepticism radically into question by visiting a witch for a cleansing ritual. In the resulting video, *I Will Heal You*, 2007, the artist is witnessed as he participates in an intense staged ceremony where he is required to strip and rub his body with limes and eggs, before being circled by a ring of flames fuelled by the witch’s application of pure alcohol and broken incantations.

Judd appears distinctly unsettled by the ritual; undoubtedly there are moments when his performance of

a role or character (*performing* artist) begins to slip and the event—and its potential threat—is experienced for real. Though the ceremony is entered into voluntarily within the context of an artistic practice, there are moments when unexpected things appear to actually happen. As with his experience of practicing clairvoyance, Judd describes a sense of not being able to know for sure whether certain indefinable or unnameable sensations were the work of the occult or of persuasion. The encounter with something inconsistent with one’s own beliefs reveals the limits of one particular system of knowledge, jeopardising its authority by creating an anomaly that exists fleetingly beyond its territorialising grasp. The fluctuation between belief and doubt further complicates the possibility of arriving at any single answer; each is perpetually undercut by the momentary glimmer of the other. Judd’s performances oscillate between authentic engagement and pretence, between the desire to create a fiction of mythic proportion and deflate it in the same instance.

Within his practice, the question of belief is not perceived in binary terms from the perspective of either the believer or sceptic, but becomes occupied as a site of paradox, of synchronous and potentially contradictory possibilities. Judd’s quest is for something beyond (or inconsistent with) the terms of what he already knows or believes, which can only be apprehended by bringing the familiar or habitual into doubt, into crisis. However, Judd appears to want to believe and also *not* believe simultaneously; his quest is perhaps one that he hopes in turn will fail, remain thwarted.

The inconsistency of both wanting and *not* wanting (to believe) might correspond to what Slavoj Žižek describes as “the subject’s inability or unreadiness to fully confront the consequences of its desire: the price of happiness is that the subject remains stuck in the inconsistency of its desire. Happiness is thus... dreaming about things we do not really want.”⁷ In his essay, “The Paradox of the End”, philosopher Iddo Landau also explores the paradoxical endeavour of striving for something in the hope of not achieving it. He argues that whilst goals provide individual purpose, achieving the goal can result in “a sense of insignificance and emptiness (where) we feel that in



I Will Heal You, performance and single-channel video, 12:12 min, Cali, Colombia, 2007



Verónica Mardel with model of the *I Will Heal You* temple, Cali, Colombia, 2007

attaining the goal we have lost the meaningfulness and balance we experienced while we were striving toward it... the struggle is more gratifying than the achievement of the end".⁸ Landau suggests that the solution to the paradox of both wanting and not wanting something might be to stipulate a transcendent end that would be impossible to attain or alternatively that, "we ought to try and not try to achieve our ends, at one and the same time.... We should try, then, both to realise and not to realise our goals."⁹ Judd further tested the push/pull dynamic of the 'try/not try' paradigm during his residency in Colombia by founding the contradictory movement *I Will Heal You*, in part as a response to his various encounters with Verónica Mardel, a local woman who had already initiated her own one-person quasi-religious organisation called The Ministry of Universal Culture.

Judd's proposed movement—echoing his own position in other work—embodied his desire to occupy a dual position, one of simultaneously saying "yes" and "no". Judd worked slavishly to make his prospective movement convincing—

commissioning the design of buildings, clothes, artefacts and objects for the movement's inaugural public launch—before deflating his own rhetoric. The movement's manifesto was overtly inconsistent. Judd promised a glimpse of nirvana at the same time stating that the movement was nothing but a construct or sham; simultaneously urging people to join his "community to come" whilst warning them to stay away. For Judd, the movement encapsulated the idea of "setting up the possibility of something otherworldly or magical at the same time dismantling the possibility of this ever happening".¹⁰

Judd's role began to shift further from initiate to initiator during his residency at the Banff Centre in Canada, 2009. The artist invited a number of 'guests'—including a shaman and a spirit medium—to help facilitate his own encounter with the Canadian institute. Judd asked his visitors to respond to the Banff Centre, providing an alternative interpretation of the site in contrast to the sanctioned and authorised perspective of the Centre's staff and publicity brochures. Most compelling perhaps is Judd's encounter with the shaman witnessed in the video *The Symbol*, 2009, where both practices (artistic and shamanic) appear to circle one another, testing out each other's logic whilst trying not to break the 'spell' that enables them to momentarily suspend their suspicion or disbelief. Judd is shown how to tune into an ancient frequency of communication



The Symbol, performance and single-channel video, 8:49 min, Banff, Canada, 2009

at Banff; he is required to walk barefoot across a snow-laden forest before being instructed to place his head firmly against one of the trees in order to hear its 'message'. It is unclear whether this initiation is a genuine shamanic ritual or simply a game in which Judd's commitment and supposed belief is tested to its limit. At times, roles become blurred or begin to fray. The official, ceremonial language of the shaman periodically slips to reveal a sense of the individual, whose own doubts and questions about Judd's project become ventriloquised through the voices of the spirits that he is purporting to mediate. Judd

is interested in this slippage, in the multiplicity of positions that an individual inhabits daily, even when they are appearing to perform a rather fixed or predetermined role. Within Judd's practice,

different positions or situations are tested out in order to bring the notion of a single or stable sense of 'self' in doubt, into crisis, or for proposing the possibility of a more mutable subjectivity.

Judd's own attempts to join or infiltrate (however momentarily) the closed order of specific societal groupings run parallel to a series of projects in which he has tried to establish the very conditions for emergent forms of occult or ritual community to arise. Increasingly, his work has addressed how temporary forms of community or collectivity might be inaugurated through certain kinds of ritualised practice. Notions of membership, affiliation and allegiance were first put under pressure within projects such as The Brotherhood of Subterranea at Kunstbunker, Nuremberg, 2008, a curatorial assemblage of artists modelled on the idea of an underground sect or secret society, or within the quasi-religious movement *I Will Heal You*. With content often gleaned from existing rituals (for example, the use of Wiccan ritual in the performance *Observance*, 2009), from the writing of mystics, visionaries and eccentrics (including the eighteenth-century scientist and mystic Emanuel Swedenborg in *Concerning the Difference Between the Delights of Pleasure and True Happiness*, 2010), or from politician's speeches evacuated of all political specificity (*Polyrhythm*, 2009, and *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 2011), in recent work Judd has worked closely with actors, musicians and choreographers to create heightened experiences of 'togetherness' or 'harmony', where disparate voices and bodies merge in the collective expression of song, spoken word or dance. In the performance *Polyrhythm* a group of individuals break rank from the collective mass of commuters and passersby in Union Square, New York City, their musical refrains and spoken dialogue gradually converging as a unified whole. Or in *Ensemble*, 2013, select members of a gallery audience erupt spontaneously into broken fragments of arpeggio and fractured movement, joining together to form a single choreographic event before eventually dissipating back into the crowd.

Turner uses the phrase "existential or spontaneous communitas" to describe the acute experience of community or 'oneness' encountered by individuals engaged in those forms of collective action often related to the liminal phase of ritual or rites of passage. He refers to the altered affective states within communitas as "flow experiences" where the individual becomes "totally absorbed into a single synchronised fluid event".¹¹ Communitas emerges through temporary and optional immersion in a collective experience—typically characterised by performed anonymity, homogeneity and submissiveness—where the relinquishing or yielding of certain 'structural' habits and behaviours affords the individual access to another realm of being. On one level, Judd's performances seem to advocate the transformative potential of the art experience, its capacity (like ritual performance) for producing moments of ecstatic communitas or shared experience, in turn enabling access to 'higher' realms of being. Perhaps one might view Judd's work as an attempt to create a heightened expression of "temporary invented community", a term used by Miwon Kwon to describe those specific social configurations "newly constituted and rendered operational through the coordination of the art work itself".¹² Similarly, in "WE: Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations", Irit Rogoff explores the "emergent possibilities for the exchange of shared perspectives or insights or subjectivities" made possible through encounters within art practice.¹³ She points to how "performative collectivity, one that is produced in the very act of being together in the same space and compelled by similar edicts, might just alert us to a form of mutuality which cannot be recognised in the normative modes of shared beliefs, interests or

kinship”.¹⁴ In these terms, Judd’s practice might appear concerned with the formation and rehearsal of ‘temporary communities’, focused on the time-bound relationships, connections and intensities that bind diverse individuals together within the specific space-time of a participatory performance.

Borrowing the rhetoric of marginal religious orders or from utopian literature, Judd’s recent performances seemingly articulate the quest for the idealised forms of sociability or harmony characteristic of the *communitas* experience. Yet, if Judd’s work proposes towards the ecstatic delights of *communitas*, then it is an experience not made equally accessible to all. Indeed, the emergence of one community can often create another excluded from its terms. The bonds of supposed solidarity that unite individuals within the closed system of a membership organisation or the ‘flow’ conditions of ritual performance can as easily become a protective guard used to keep outsiders at bay. The stronger the bonds within the group, the more impenetrable it can appear to those without. In Judd’s recent practice, he seems to produce the germinal conditions for two distinct communities: if one community emerges through quasi-ritual performance (which in anthropological terms might be called the “in-group”), then a second is made visible through their non-participation. Here, two (or more) communities occupy the same space and are party to the same event, yet experience it differently. It is possible to conceive of the second community as witnesses, their role being one of observation rather than participation. However, echoing earlier work where Judd problematises his own position as a neutral observer, in recent performances it is the audience’s position that is put into question. Judd situates the audience in a similar threshold position to his own in previous projects, inviting them to inhabit the dual role of both observer *and* participant. In many of these recent works, the line between ritual and performance, moreover between performer and audience often remains blurred. The person standing to your side might suddenly break into song or start to sway. Gradually they are joined by others—maybe by someone who you had imagined was just there (like you) as part of the crowd. At times, you might feel your own role shift from observer to performer, as the experience of watching slips towards a sense of being watched. You look to others to gauge their response, though there is no real way of telling who is already ‘in’ on the action. The use of amateur musicians and vocalists in Judd’s recent work further compounds this ambiguity; the slight hesitancy or tremble in their voice raising a momentary doubt as to the nature of their involvement. These frayed edges of performance create a sense of awkwardness and uncertainty. Judd’s is a porous performance where audience members are located simultaneously inside and outside the unfolding action, or rather their experience of being ‘outside’ the performance is always at the cusp of being folded ‘in’.

Arguably, within Judd’s practice it is not so much that the audience feels excluded from the ecstatic experience of *communitas* seemingly enjoyed by the ‘ritual’ performers, but rather that they might find themselves becoming involuntarily drawn in. Indeed, there can be something rather threatening or territorialising about certain forms of collective behaviour. As Turner notes, “*communitas* tends to be inclusive... this drive to inclusivity makes for proselytisation. One wants to make the Others, We.”¹⁵ The verb “proselytise” refers to the act of recruiting or converting someone from one religion (or position) to another, whilst “proselyte” describes the newcomer status of the individual whose opinion or belief has been recently converted, changed. It can be a fine line that separates the initiate who joins a community or activity electively and the proselyte

who is *joined*, perhaps even against their will. The difference between optional and obligatory involvement, moreover between utopian and dystopian models of collectivity can be surprisingly slight. In these terms, the ‘temporary communities’ that are “newly constituted and rendered operational” within Judd’s performances are highly ambiguous and contradictory; it appears unclear whether the ecstatic ‘we’ of collectivity proposed therein is considered as desirable or dubious, even potentially dangerous. By refusing to declare his position, Judd leaves his audience with a range of possibilities, inviting them to keep an open mind. Within diverse projects, Judd eschews the decision between the binary terms of either/or, electing instead for the contradictory position of “being both”, or even “being neither”—no longer and not yet. Locating himself at the precarious threshold or meeting point *between* different communities of belonging, Judd’s own allegiances become evermore difficult to ascertain. Or rather, Judd increasingly evolves and problematises the dual position that he held within his early work, by creating choreographic assemblages where the line between observer and participant—between insider and outsider—becomes less locatable, less easy to discern. Here then, the notion of “being in two minds”—which ultimately preserves the binary logic that it seeks to resist—might give way to a more expanded mode of encounter for increasing one’s receptivity to the world and others, capable of contemplating the co-existence of multiple possibilities.¹⁶

Endnotes

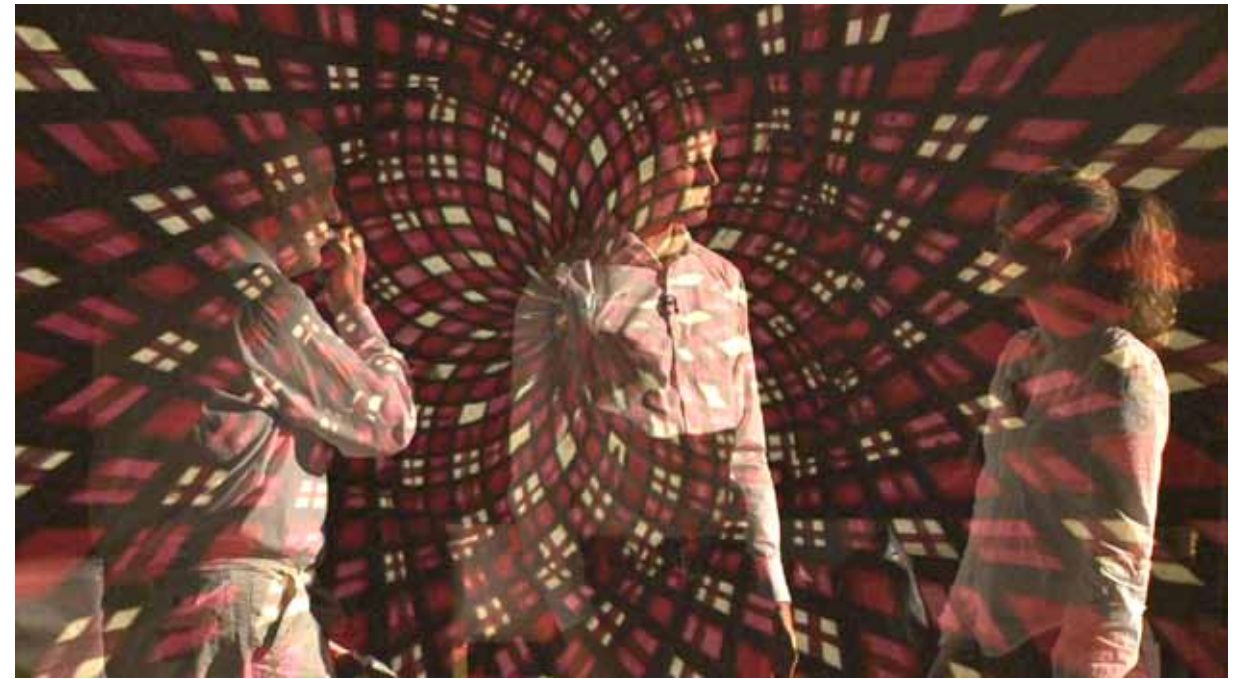
- 1 Rogoff, Irit, “Field Work in Visual Culture”, Berlin, February 2004, unpaginated. Available at <http://ck.kein.org/>.
- 2 Rogoff, “Field Work in Visual Culture”, unpaginated.
- 3 Turner, Victor, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play*, New York: PAJ Publications, 1982, p. 27.
- 4 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 24.
- 5 Turner, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage”, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1967, p. 96.
- 6 Turner notes how the ‘subjunctive’ mood of a verb is used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis or possibility: it “is a world of ‘as if.... It is ‘if it were so’, not ‘it is so’”, Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, pp. 82–83.
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- 8 Landau, Iddo, “The Paradox of the End”, *Philosophy*, vol. 70, no. 274, October 1995, p. 555.
- 9 Landau, “The Paradox of the End”, pp. 560–564.
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- 11 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 48.
- 12 Kwon, Miwon, *One Place After Another: Site-specific Art and Locational Identity*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, p. 126.
- 13 Rogoff, Irit, “WE: Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations”, 2004, unpaginated. Available at <http://theater.kein.org/node/95>.
- 14 Rogoff, “WE: Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations”, unpaginated.
- 15 Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, p. 51.
- 16 Indeed, “the idiom ‘in two minds’ was first recorded in 1853, but variants such as diverse minds and 20 minds date back to the early 1500s”, Christine Ammer, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms*, Second Edition, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013, p. 318.







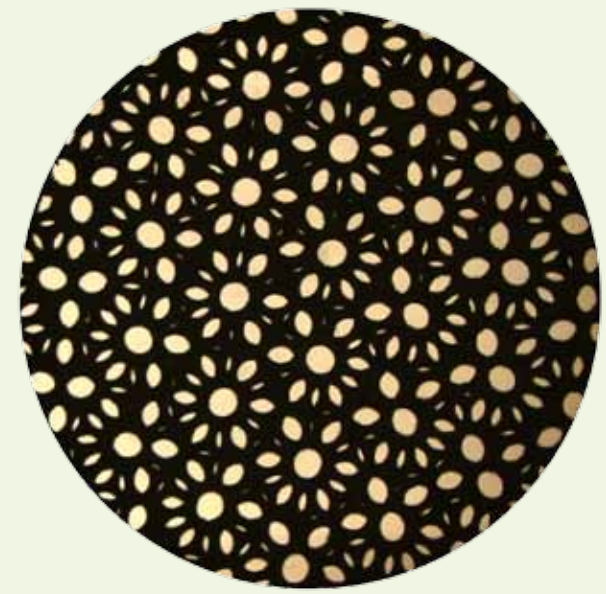












Symposium for a community of unlearning

Alun Rowlands

ABSTRACT OR PREAMBLE

Our symposium seeks to weave new connections between our value and belief systems, plotting their effect on our communal and singular spaces through the documents and narratives that govern, shape and guide them. Working directly with the networks of people and practices that surround us, we often employ tangential forms of anthropology, focusing on the relational limits, endings, translations, transitions and losses through a provocative and often erroneous search. Our search for an unstable knowledge operates in the tense, poetic spaces between documentary and fiction. Breaking and reshuffling ideas is an intensely political project. Repurposing the habits of learning, the urgency of unlearning attempts to invalidate entrenched patterns of understanding.

The community, its practices, rituals and its location is the work. The group is the work. The inconsistencies amongst the group lead to distraction and searching in anyplace other than here. This somewhere else, this whatever, is where we should start, acceding all decisions to the group, at least those decisions transmitted through experimentation and desire to learn. 'Unworking' and 'unlearning' notable methodologies will be key—disentangling first person ethnography, we seek to catalyse looking towards vision. Actors co-creating the event, ritual and social bond might afford us particular direction of how we encounter each other. But this collaborative 'fieldwork', with its equality of intelligences, allows us to navigate a particularly uncertain terrain of misunderstanding and productive non-reading. Only through the idea of a group will we realise—via sharing and losing—our research. Only through the group will there be intensity, an intensity that the individual alone could never attain. Dissolution of the individual is therefore necessary. The group must be open to death.

DAY 1—THE QUESTIONS OF COMMUNITY

I can imagine a community with as loose a form as you will—even formless: the only condition is that an experience of moral freedom be shared in common, and not reduced to the flat, self-cancelling, self-denying meaning of particular freedom.... There can be no knowledge without a community of researchers, nor any inner experience without the community of those who live it.... Communication is a fact that is not in any way added onto human reality, but rather constitutes it.¹

Can community be more than the thin ties between groups of people? Are our common goals, common attributes, common skills or deficiencies the basis for community? Is the desire for community a desire for our ecstatic selves to exceed our individuality? Can we project ourselves as affiliates of an assemblage, a group or community? Does our passion for community reveal the absence of community? What does an aesthetic community look like? Is to think a community to share in the folds of history that expand through time? And what of a community of those who have nothing in common?²

The search for community haunts our contemporary societies, which are fragmented into virtual positions, splintered into incommensurable and incommunicable assertions, aspirations and agreements. Our search for community reveals itself in two modes. Firstly, our political urge for solidarity, mirrored in the deception of groups, unions or states. And, secondly, our sovereignty escaping its own immanence pursues others in the headlong rush to dissolution. This sense of community lies ahead of us, yet to be discovered. The singular self is incomplete: it does not desire recognition but contest, seeking others through ecstatic and often violent desire.³

Affiliation of any kind produces ties, commitment, responsibilities, it weaves a social fabric of exchanges, bonds, rejoinders; it defines civil duties, solidarity, and debts. And yet the passion for community is not fulfilled by membership in these bathetic groups, by communities based on rational calculation or societal ties. Our thinking through community cannot be invented, created or established through our communal work or by congregating in mutual groups, as the rhetoric of society or historical destiny would have us believe. It is only when we have nothing in common that we can face each other, in our rituals over time. The promise that emerges cannot be disengaged—it haunts us. The true community fleetingly visualises the scenario as an absence. Ungoverned by practices, exchanges, projects, and obligations it cannot be maintained and dissolves as soon as we are re-incorporated into the learned social.

Experimental communities place emphasis on both the temporary and the model-like character of their endeavours. Here, bringing together individuals with different knowledge and experience in a collaborative process is the essential factor that distinguishes these communities from those rigidly defined by one

specific feature. Endeavouring towards the figure of community is fraught with ephemeral distinctions. If the collective efforts exceed a mayfly temporality, internal divisions often signal collapse and inertia. Our discussion orbits the potential of art to militate an affective communitarian politics. Here, we are involved not as members of a particular social habitat but as co-creators of a ‘desire-based production’ for long-term use.

The social appearance of a group working together makes visible for the first time their ‘co-appearance’ or ‘compearance’.⁴ In order to compear, all the members of the group play a part in building a composition that stages reciprocal cooperation and becomes significant enough to substitute the members. The figure that compears is what we call community. This community imagines that reality can be transformed rather than just being managed. In this sense, politics becomes a form of stewardship. The group cuts a vital profile and enables the compearance of a real community diagramming what actual society should be. Discussion points powerfully to the question of what constitutes our co-existence today; the ontological question of the political arises with the evaporating possibility of a polity that would incarnate such a “being-with”.⁵

We digress into consideration of film, as mode of documentation, capture and colonisation. Film becomes an analogical machine, a learning machine, a guessing machine, an aesthetic machine and a self-correcting machine. Such films are occasionally closer to ocular stammering than to actual discourse. In their performative reiterations they may be read as a countenance of scientific failure. Spoken voice-over guides throughout, restlessly preventing connection with any one image in particular. Signs evacuate to evade ending up being consumed in the belly of coherent knowledge or anthropological rationality. Errant, inflexible, distant signs return to the space where subjectivity takes shape. The depths of these waters make the surface less transparent but more readily reflective. This is the luminescent space where the narrators, the filmmakers, the ethnographers eventually let themselves be caught up in the concentric circles that emerge in the sphere of the translatable.

We do not communicate to understand each other more. The tools of our research capitalise on the production of ever more connections. They merely reproduce the industrial glut of audio-visual, text and image material transmitted with interest. Attention becomes currency, the need to be seen and heard across increasing bandwidth. In every particular interpretation, we receive multiple voices. The voice is continually shared and is itself a sharing. There is polyphony at the core of each voice. All voices are in themselves exposed, plural, revealing themselves to the unknown. To exist, to communicate, we need to address ourselves to another. Community or communication renders the request for speaking possible.

There is both insistence and resistance with a newly articulated relation to work and labour—the ‘unworking’.⁶ The ‘unworking’ community does not

realise or represent itself through the production and work of its participants. The desire to communicate (to mesmerise in speech or sound or image or performance our experiences) defines what we crave or who and what we are, and is being colonised beyond that of conveying and understanding. We could speculate that there is the ephemeral community of artists and writers, who work for those that they do not and will not ever know—the anonymous body of readers and spectators. We write at anonymous distance for unknown friends, others not engaged in a project with us, others who do not work for or with us, others who have nothing in common with us. We work towards a “community of those that have nothing in common”.⁷ Our anonymous communication delineates bonds of friendship and the ghostly shape of our desires.⁸ We are never freed from this ecstatic desire that points to a hauntological absence of community. Our research is dispatched, enveloped in the promise of community.

DAY 2 — NOTES ON METHOD OR REMEMBER THAT WE DON'T KNOW

*My ‘I am I’ is no hard, small crystal inside me, but a cloudy, a vapour, a mist, a smoke hovering round my skull, hovering around my spine, my arms, my legs. That’s what I am, a vegetable animal wrapped in a mental cloud, and with the will-power to project this cloud into the consciousness of others.*⁹

Unlearning becomes our conduit, a means of connecting us with the world. As a verb it is both an individual and collective tendency; a voluntaristic tendency, allowing us—everyone—to rethink and re-interrogate what we assume we know and think. Art, perhaps, has the potential to reformulate our perceptive understanding of the world.¹⁰ Unlearning is a dynamic amnesiac method in operation, erasing hierarchies that privilege objective knowledge. Knowledge proceeds from the senses. Acquired knowledge coalesces into a blockage between the event and experience. We argue that the value of objective knowledge is overestimated, considered counter-productive in its devaluation of ignorant subjectivity. No doubt such an enterprise will necessitate us to begin by parading misanthropic dichotomies of subject-object or animal-human-mineral.

Unlearning initiates a long process of enquiry fraught with ethical probing formulated as—“only that which is not pushed to the extreme has no return effect”.¹¹ Unlearning enables us to critique the thought-experiment of our own research interests. It tests the relations between interlocutors and unstable ideas of audience and participation in the name of exploration. The precarity of these positions need to forego any deterministic approach for us to ask the questions

in the subjunctive tense. The ‘what if question’ is an attempt to unlearn—it is an interrogative act of disobedience and manifestation of resistance.

This question of unlearning is not so much to create a sense of ambivalence towards the tension that marks the conflicts between positions, but to create a sense of theoretical doubt concerning the forms of categorical knowledge of these cultural, intellectual, historical, and philosophical positions. Our point of departure forges an ethnographic poetics, draws on various disciplines to irradiate the corpse of historical knowledge. We change everything we contact, and everything we touch changes the terms of our assemblages, since it contests the disjointing ascription of agency. We have to unlearn the inherited practice of ethnography, as necessarily guilty, as manifestation of power hierarchies. Acknowledging that disciplines inject forms of power relations into our field, we engage with the recalibration of knowledge forms through unworking and unbuilding these poetics. We never hesitate amidst the flux of participation.

If there is someone you do not wish to recognise as a political being, you begin by not seeing them as the bearers of politicalness, by not understanding what they say, by not hearing that it is speech coming out of their mouth.¹²

The mute ‘objects of study’ and the agency of the researcher ‘subject’ configures the space of knowledge production. This spatial configuration is under the stewardship of the anthropologist subject, while the object of knowledge is consigned to an observable quantity, an object of interest to be counted, ordered, and regulated. In discussion, we note, the equality of intelligence is not the equality of manifestations of intelligence (i.e., knowledge) but rather the non-hierarchy of theoretical capacity. Equality is not something that can be seen or measured, and neither can it be considered a goal or future state. Equality must be approached as it is practised and verified; it has no value in itself but only in its effects through practical experimentations. This scenario banally presupposes the condition for understanding—me to you and back again—speaking beings versus those who produce only noise. Our aesthetic expertise activates, particularly in those moments of participation, a disruption and redistribution of anthropological roles. In turn, what can be seen, heard, thought, said, and done in our episteme, we argue, would be a politics of collaboration. The politics at work in the collaborative is a presumption of equality, which is primarily a disruption of disciplines, its suspension, interruption and reconfiguration.

DAY 3—THINK-FEEL-KNOW SORTIES

Some people love to divide and classify, while others are bridge-makers weaving relations that turn a divide into a living contrast, one whose power is to affect, to produce thinking and feeling.... But bridge-making is a located practice.¹³

Papers argue for curiosity as state of mind. They emphasise a quality of attention. Objects of study are misconstrued via over-intensive scrutiny in the name of rigour—our scenario foregrounds ‘the hunch’. Dwelling in disciplines remote from our own, the desire for knowledge is too disparate for one faculty. Drives for novelty and knowing desire nothing but to know. Objects of illicit knowledge fuel curiosity and a readiness to find strange and singular what surrounds and makes us. Interpretation is a rational straight jacket that makes the world more comfortable, manageable, and less potent. A case is made for artists to have freedom to browse through ideas with the curiosity of the unskilled novice. An irrational approach to knowledge is promoted, tempered through the recognition that this is a privileged position. To see the world as a fragmented ensemble and to see that fragmentation as traumatic requires us to establish some continuity. The more we progress, the more indiscriminate categories appear and oppositions collapse. Irrationalism and the thirst for knowledge are not contradictory towards this indefinable end. Open interrogation allows research to be focused on all-encompassing projects meant to achieve an image or a history compressed into a singular event, a total contraction of knowledge within representation. To the minds of those assembled, there is a form of over-communication and over-saturation in our efforts to gather and structure knowledge. A complete worldview, which, by all appearances, allows subjectivity to creep in, seems to finally resemble an artistic project.

I FIND THEIR TEXTS TOO PUZZLING. THEY REDUCE
A) FORMULAS TO WORDS & B) IDEAS
TO FORMULAS. FOR INSTANCE I SAY ‘SOUL’
A SIMPLE FORMULA LIKE ALL THAT DEAL
WITH ENERGY, BUT THAT VAGUE INCREMENT
OF ‘PSYCHE’ (THOUGH ITSELF IRREDUCIBLE)
FALLS INTO NO EAST NUMBER SYSTEM,
THUS RENDERING MAN’S GAINS & LOSSES, THESE
CLERKS DISCOUNT THE LOSSES OF FACULTIES
OR GAINS IN WISDOM FOR THEIR CALCULATIONS
START FROM A TREACHEROUS, LEDEAN o.
12:88, THEN IS A FACULTY READ OUT
DESIGNED TO KEEP US GROPING IN THE DARK.
I SAY: START SHAKILY, END OFF THE MARK!¹⁴

Attention, inattention and distraction, our frustration is that nothing is unknowable. In this sense our research is at odds with the computational constancy and equilibrium of ‘know-how’ and closer to the all-over smears, surges and spasms, the unpredictable swell and dip of “no-how”.¹⁵ The artist-researcher-ethnographer acknowledges his or her vulnerable relationship to

knowledge. They are engaged in constant co-productive figuring open to what knowledge could be. But the complex claims for knowledge-production do not define what knowledge—what does art know? What marks out its difference? Our findings advocate that “art knows that it knows nothing” and in this moment of recognition embody a productive paradox—the paradox of ‘non-knowledge’.¹⁶ This is a particular branch of knowledge in its elegant articulation with the capacity to create epistemological forms where knowing effectively coexists with not-knowing. This double bind renders explanation void, rupturing the know-don’t-know binary. These epistemic machines substitute rigour with congeries of divergent activities, disciplines and domains—“each secreting its own epistemology”.¹⁷

APPENDIX

*Today, it seems interesting to me to go back to what I would call an animist conception of subjectivity, if need be through neurotic phenomena, religious rituals, or aesthetic phenomena. How does subjectivity locate on the side of the subject and on the side of the object? How can it simultaneously singularise an individual, a group of individuals, and also be assembled to space, and all other cosmic assemblages?*¹⁸

A table-rapping comedy, our symposium is a corpse without heft. Artists, animists, occultists, conjurors... are absurdly indistinguishable in pursuit of an illusive operative knowledge that can split the eggshell of appearances. They can throw voices in acts of gastromancy, extracting strange objects from their bodies or from the bodies of the sick. And, equally, they can make those objects disappear. Seeing and looking are instruments which chart the detachment of knowledge from practical life, through a manipulative culture and paranoid behavioural structures. Reason becomes irrational and conjuring questions origins. We believe ourselves to be free of fear when there is no longer anything unknown, expunging ritual and radicalising myths—human or non-human. Our collective social memory is vague and distant but present in us as a certain inchoate feeling of loss. Rupturing accepted standards of permitted knowledge, known experiences and rhetoric, motivates a quest to penetrate cordoned off areas of study. The insistence of personal witness throughout modern cultures signals an enlightened mind to escape public categories or established truths. Eventually, we require a witness to our dying; a hand, no longer efficacious, but which reassures us that we are not alone. We come to the side of the dying, as a desire to go outside of ourselves, confronting the limits and making us responsible accomplices. It is the ambition to go beyond unexpected combinations that give rise to unclassifiable phenomena, attracting attention.

With its love of rapid disappearances and appearances out of nowhere, with its turning of insides into outsides and vice versa, conjuring helps us understand how this performance is a form of transforming forms. Artifice is recouped as a proxy of participation, or seductive gatherings, inversely becoming efficacious and infectious assemblages. A sticky medium frames the magic of such an event, as a projected metaphor.¹⁹ Our death is but a metaphor? The group here represents the mechanism for attaining that, which lies beyond the group, in the dissolution of death that tears apart the individual as well as the community. Is it necessary to rescue the negative ground of community, around which each of us is able to acknowledge our shared singularity? An inquisitive voice refrains, lured into an expression of agency that does not belong to us, a perpetual critical voice whispering that we should not accept being mystified. Suggestive, inductive, and captivating, our words mesmerise and direct the instability of attractive forces. Whatever seduces us or animates us may also bind us—the more so if taken for granted. Is this fiction or critique? The internal monologue, the voice of the interrogator, echoes redoubtable potentials against the rule of illusions. If it were only fiction we would undoubtedly laugh with a rictus grin and ask whom amongst us trusts that fiction is powerless.

ENDNOTES

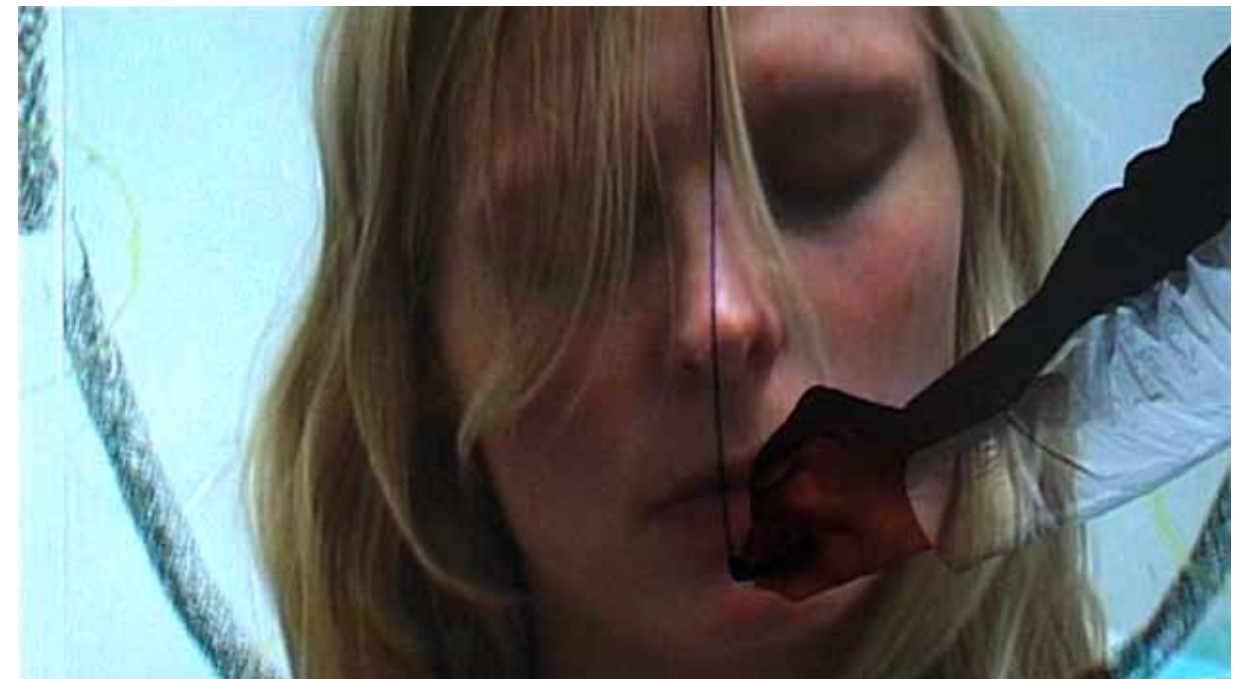
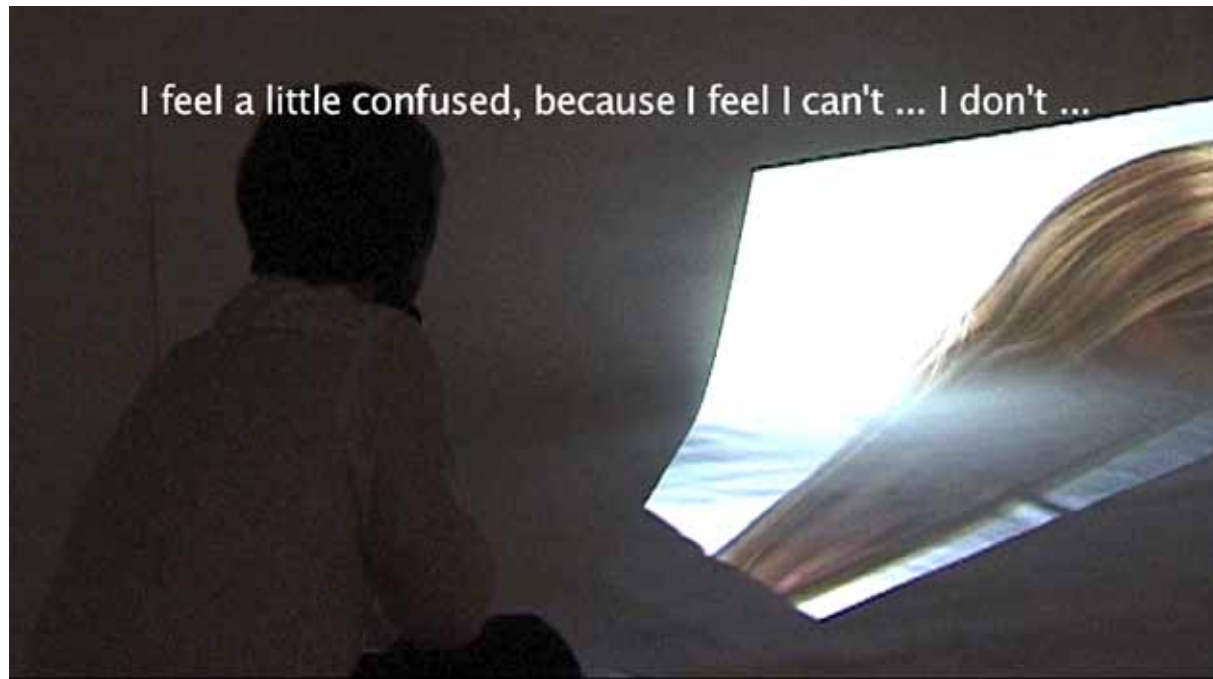
- 1 Bataille, Georges, “Against All Odds”, quoted in Maurice Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1982.
- 2 See Nancy, Jean-Luc, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991.
- 3 For Bataille, erotic love could produce an intense community of shared making without forfeiting the singularity of the members. He experimented with establishing different kinds of communities and believed that a central existence determined by forms of communication focused on expressing the power of libidinous contact was the only valid way of countering the modernist tendency of reducing living beings into “servile organs” for state and society. For Bataille, the ecstasy of erotic love immunised the lovers against political madness.
- 4 Nancy, Jean-Luc, “The Compearance”, *Political Theory*, vol. 20, no. 3, Sage Publications, 1992, pp. 371–398.
- 5 Nancy, Jean-Luc, *Being Singular Plural*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000.
- 6 For Jean-Luc Nancy this is a search that we are all engaged in. And, as he claims, community is not something that has been lost, but is something yet to come. It is the “insistent and still unheard demand for community” that gives rise to absences of community, ephemeral or virtual communities of those who have no community.
- 7 See Lingis, Alphonso, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994, p. 108.
- 8 For Bataille and Blanchot, the need of community is most persuasive for those who have no community. Nancy, in the last lines of *The Inoperative Community*, writes that he should think through the community of those who cannot commune, those who can neither read nor write, or who have nothing in common. But, he observes, in actuality, there is no such person.
- 9 Cowper Powys, John, *Wolf Solent*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1929.
- 10 See Staebler, Claire, “Editorial”, *Le Journal de la Triennale*, no. 1, 2012, p. 2.
- 11 Levi-Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology* (vol. 2), Michigan: University of Chicago Press, 1983. “Never more than in the last two centuries of his history, has man been better able to understand that by arrogating to himself the right to separate humanity from animality, ascribing to the one what he refuses to the other, he was opening a cursed circle, and that that same barrier, constantly pushed back would serve to alienate men from other men, and to claim for ever smaller minorities the privilege of a humanism that is corrupt from the outset for having taken its principle and its very concept from pride.”

- 12 Rancière, Jacques, "Ten Theses on Politics", *Theory & Event*, vol. 5, Issue 3, 2001.
- 13 Stengers, Isabelle, "Reclaiming Animism", *Animism: Modernity through the Looking Glass*, ed. Anselm Franke, Berlin: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig/Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2011.
- 14 Merrill, James, *The Changing Light at Sandover*, New York: Atheneum, 1982. The title page informs us that the 560-page poem is derived from a convened séance. The text itself is divided into sections first marked after the letters of the alphabet, then the numbers 0 to 9, and three headings 'yes', '&' and 'no'.
- 15 See Agamben's "Nameless Science", Beckett's "Unnameable", Warburg's "impromptu think-feel-know sorties", Bataille's "non-knowledge" or Bartheleme's "not-knowing".
- 16 Huberman, Anthony, *For The Blind Man in the Dark Room Looking for the Black Cat that Isn't There*, St Louis: Contemporary Art Museum St Louis, 2009.
- 17 Bachelard, Gaston, *The New Scientific Spirit*, Boston, MA: Beacon, 1984.
- 18 Guattari, Félix, *Chaosmosis*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- 19 See Franke, Anselm, "Animism", *Animism: Modernity through the Looking Glass*, ed. Anselm Franke, Berlin: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther Konig/Vienna: Generali Foundation, 2011. "We find ourselves in a time at which it is ultimately urgent to 'understand'—in order to step beyond and unmake—the magic circle of double binds. But this time it is not the sorcery of the animist 'other', but the modern and "capitalist sorcery" (Isabelle Stengers) that keeps us spellbound, trapped within a set of false choices, within a systemic closure that suggests no alternatives, and does not cease to assimilate into clinical management its other and its outsides."

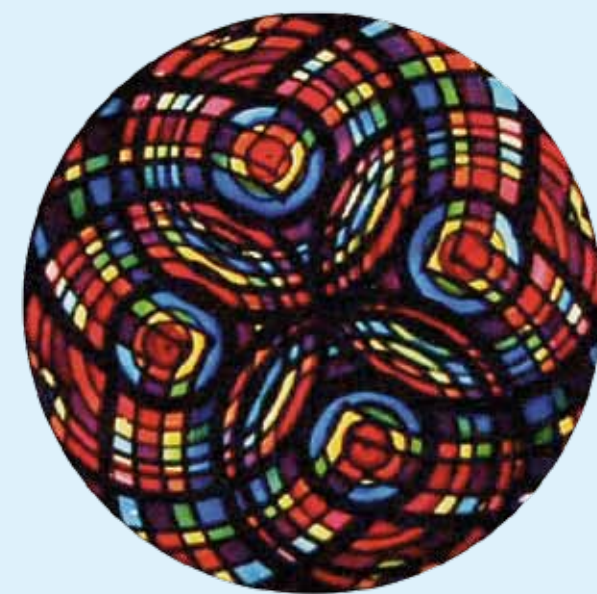












Beyond Belief

Conversations with Emma Cocker

Emma Cocker: Your work often interrogates the complex ritual performances and social practices that surround various closed communities or structures of belief. How do you select the groups that you work with? Is it to do with their *specific* beliefs?

Ben Judd: I am interested in people who are attached to communities that are separated or even ostracised from the larger societal group. On residency in Colombia [*I Will Heal You*, 2007] I worked with a witch—a figure both ostracised and respected within the community. There is an aura of respect surrounding witchcraft, even if you think it is nonsense. The same is also true of the power that surrounds a *séance*.

EC: Whilst witches and spirit mediums have a certain power, in your earlier work, the groups that you were associating yourself with or trying to infiltrate seemed rather impotent or powerless? In video works such as *I Love you* you adopt a personae in order to infiltrate a group of amateur photographers, whilst in *I Miss*, your attention turns to a group of trainspotters.

BJ: Thinking about these earlier videos, perhaps the groups do have a power, but in a very different way to witchcraft. It is still an unknown or secretive activity; it still has codes and is ritualistic. Morris dancing is an obvious example; trainspotting too. To us it doesn't make any sense. Why would somebody endlessly write down a list of train numbers? Yet to them it makes perfect sense and I have a fascination in the structure that they have set up. Maybe this is to do with a certain kind of power. My position within these contexts was as participant *and* observer. The subcultures that I am now getting involved with affect people in a different way, on a more emotional level. Witches do have a perceived power. In Colombia, I was warned against seeing the witch; my interaction with these people reinforces that notion of power.

EC: Marginal practices have a curious latent power perhaps because they exist outside of the mainstream power structures; they have an exempted status or manage to operate beneath the radar. There seems to be a greater degree of risk involved in your recent work.

BJ: I think so. The worst that could have happened in some of the earlier work is that the trainspotters could have caught me, and in fact they often realised that I was videoing them. It feels much more dangerous to try to believe in witchcraft; the danger is unknown—I genuinely don't know what might happen. In Colombia, during the cleansing ritual [which forms part of the video *I Will Heal You*] it definitely felt like something was having an impact on me. In retrospect, I am not sure whether that fear was in fact me just believing the witch's hype. Objects appeared to be transformed through the ritual—a lime, an egg and some sugar took on very different meanings—they had a talismanic property. I did genuinely believe if only for a short period of time.

EC: In a number of your video works and performances, you appear to simultaneously inhabit the position of participant *and* observer, or of a believer and non-believer. The idea of remaining between positions or of not arriving at a single position seems to be central to your work. Do you think that being inconsistent can be critically recuperated as a positive quality?

BJ: I consider my work from that position. Sometimes I don't know whether what I am doing is a real experience or an imagined experience. I really enjoy that ambivalence.

EC: Your work seems to rely on the *tension* between belief and non-belief. In your work you seem to be on a quest searching for an encounter with belief, whilst simultaneously hoping that this belief-encounter won't ever be lasting. Is the tension between wanting and *not* wanting to believe central to your endeavour?

BJ: It is a quest for an unresolved or in-between position rather than a quest for true belief. It is a very strange position of wanting to believe and yet still disbelieving. I would like to believe in clairvoyance and when I stood up in front of a class and tried to demonstrate my clairvoyance [*Close To You*, 2008], I felt that something genuinely did happen. On the other hand, it feels like quite a constructed experience. Being a non-believer or an atheist is still also a belief system. I try to become the *medium* through which other people experience these different positions; this is why it is important for me to physically be present in some of the work. Hopefully people can see from my own expressions that I am going through a very intensive period of questioning, and perhaps they can put themselves in my position.

EC: Is adopting different characters used as a way to put the authenticity of the *self* into doubt? If you can inhabit one position and put that into doubt, surely the sense of the original position is also subject to questioning?

BJ: Absolutely, it makes you wonder whether you inhabit those roles anyway, on a day-to-day basis. If I inhabit a role then at least part of me believes it to be authentic, which seems like a contradiction, because how can it be authentic when it is also a role?

EC: Role-play still requires a particular investment though, a certain kind of immersion. Inhabiting a role still involves the participation of the body and the potential that emotions

are brought into play. There is a point at which things might slip and have the potential to be felt as *real*.

BJ: They are very real emotions. When I was working with spirit mediums in *Close to You*, the nature of the role I adopted took on a whole new meaning or became a new moral problem. People who were bereaved, for example, were looking for a connection with someone and I was supposedly making that connection. I think that the level of uncertainty or even ambivalence—the question of whether I should even be doing this in the first place, whether it is ethically wrong or in bad taste—can hopefully create a tension or uneasiness which I think is important.

EC: The issues of ethics and exploitation must need to be carefully negotiated within your practice. During your residency in Colombia, you worked very closely with a local woman, Verónica Mardel, who had already initiated her own one-person quasi-religious organisation called The Ministry of Universal Culture. You describe how you had to keep reminding her that what was happening was part of an art practice, a construct. Was there a danger of the work endorsing her fantasy?

BJ: I had invented a new movement, *I Will Heal You*, which was partially based on Verónica's Ministry, and I suppose there was always a question of whether I was furthering her delusion or fantasy. It is a fine line, because on the one hand I was encouraging her to talk about her ideas, but then I was setting up a movement that I had to invest in, that I had to start believing in. There was a very strange moment where she arranged a TV interview and kept introducing me as her minister from London. I kept saying that I was not this at all—that I was an artist from England making some work that partially involved her. At other times she would come with other ideas for her movement. For example, she said that she had invented the equation of universality. It was a very beautiful idea with a certain kind of logic to it. I would take her seriously; but there is still the question of what happens if you keep pushing this. I found that increasingly the more I pushed it—fabricated this world—the more I had to start inhabiting it, being physically invested. There was a reality to things.

EC: There seems to be a tension, then, between wanting to set up a movement whilst at the same time stating that it is only a construct. Does the presence of a true believer—like Verónica—unsettle this tension, this balance of contradictions that operates at the heart of your work? What is the difference between *actually* setting up a movement and setting up a movement within a practice?

BJ: You could argue that there isn't any difference. I had written a manifesto and had created artefacts. The movement had a logo and I had given a public lecture. So you could say that this was a genuine movement, but created for particular purposes.

EC: The same could be said of a film set. A production team might make an explosion or a whole new world yet this exists within a particular 'fictional' frame and only has logic within this frame which everyone present understands. There is a sense of knowingly inhabiting a construct

or alternatively perceiving something to be for real. There is always the question of which group you belong to, what kinds of games are being played, what kind of languages are being used.

BJ: I am fascinated by that idea. I set up a performance, *Presence*, in which I invited two clairvoyants to conduct a séance. There was a strange clash between two worlds—between an art audience and the *believers*. I normally think of an art audience as being open-minded but in this particular instance I don't think they were—they appeared sceptical. It created some very awkward moments. The overlap between the constructed world of an art experience and another group which also has its own beliefs was interesting—what happens when these two groups collide or are brought together? Perhaps there are different ways of looking at the world, which are then overlapped.

State of potential

EC: According to Victor Turner, ritual performance has three stages: separation, transition, and reintegration. Within most rites of passage ceremonies there are always these three stages. The middle or transitional stage is described by Turner as that of liminality, where the ritual initiate is 'no longer and not yet' classified. This in-between status cannot quite be defined, yet it still has a distinct character. Turner discusses the *unruliness* of the liminal phase as certain identities or beliefs are abandoned and new ones not yet taken on board.

BJ: I imagine this as a blind spot. There is something that you are experiencing but you can't quite see it or it is slightly out of your vision. When I look at a piece of art that I think is successful, I feel that I am looking at it through a blind spot. I am seeing it but also *not* seeing it at the same time. It is a very strange experience that is unique to art. For me, this is the criterion for a successful piece of work. It doesn't happen very often.

EC: Do you mean that you are seeing something whilst not knowing what you are seeing?

BJ: Maybe I am experiencing something and there is a set of experiences that are coming together to form one experience, and I have never had that combination of experiences before, so I don't know how to describe it. It is a totally new experience. It is almost so new that I can't quite see it. This is art's *promise*.

EC: Art's promise is that it opens up a gap into which something *other* is imagined. It is capable of rupturing what already exists and promising something new. However this promise of the new often remains propositional, it is not always sustained or developed. There is always the risk that it will not quite hit the mark. The promise of art contains the threat of its potential failure. In your work there seems to be a sense of a quest for something—for belief perhaps—but also a sense of the absurdity or potential failure of the endeavour.



Observance - Introduction

- Practice – relationship to specific groups and belief systems – rituals – witch in Colombia
- Occupying multiple positions – work with clairvoyants – occupying an ambiguous position. Interested in this grey area between different positions – for example between belief and non-belief

STAGE 1
Preparation – putting on robes, makeup. Cleansing of actors

STAGE 2
Opening ritual

STAGE 3
Fervent section

STAGE 4
Closing ritual

STAGE 5
Returning to actors

Immersion – the actor and the notion of play.

Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of these desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects – thanks to artistic illusion – just as though it were something real. People speak with justice of the 'magic of art' and compare artists to magicians. But the comparison is perhaps more significant than it claims to be.
Sigmund Freud

Magic / transformation. Alchemy

Magical property of art – the artist and the viewer have the potential to transform objects, to invest them with meaning. A ritual does the same – objects are offered to the Gods and take on a symbolic meaning. For example, shaman in Canada.

Boris Groys:

"[the art object] captures our attention in the context of the museum and acquires new meaning. Its [previous] value gives way to a new symbolic value: the object becomes mysterious, fraught with meaning, mythical. It begins to inspire darkly religious associations, to imply a ritual function..."

"Here the threshold between art and reality is given a purely spiritual interpretation: it is defined by the..."

observed/respected



face the west. The person who invoked the element... by saying "Ye mighty ones of the West, Lords of... thee for attending our rite and ere you depart to your ealms, we bid thee hail and farewell". All participants "Hail and farewell".

face the north. The person who invoked the element... by saying "Ye mighty ones of the North, Lords of... thee for attending our rite and ere you depart to your ealms, we bid thee hail and farewell". All participants "Hail and farewell".

needed to one individual actor who immerses him/herself in feeling what that element represents to them.

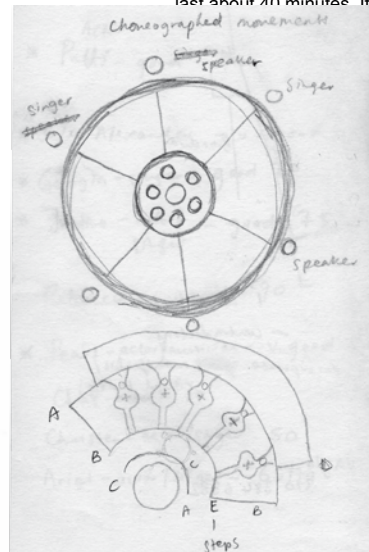
1. **Good evening.** What you're going to witness tonight is an open experiment. It's an ongoing investigation that Sidsel and I have been developing for about a year.
2. Sidsel will go into a **trance** that will enable her, and us, to enter another world, or a parallel dimension. Then we will set up a dialogue between me in this space and Sidsel on the other side.
3. **We don't know** what will happen in each new session. The experience can take any form, in fact nothing at all might happen.

Sidsel: We use the paper to create a platform to enter the space from. Sometimes it is helpful to map out what happens on the other side in relation to this current space and we use drawings for that. We also use the drawing to map out which position is best to communicate from. In this way the drawings are not illustrative, rather like maps or diagrams.

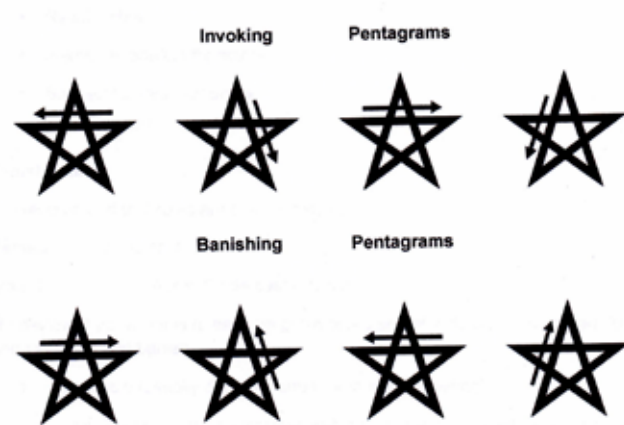
4. In order for Sidsel to **enter the other side**, we use techniques to go into a trance and we also visualize entering a space where the experience begins.
5. Sidsel will **visualize entering this space** through a building, going up in an elevator, through two hallways - from then on she will enter a very open, shifting space that is the portal to the other side.
6. Then she goes from visualizing to **actually experiencing**, and then literally anything can happen.

Sidsel: We invite the audience to get involved tonight and be involved in directing the cause of events. There might come an opportunity to ask questions and have a dialogue with the other side. We also ask that the audience will recognize the delicate situation and keep a tone of mutual respect with the other side.

7. Please can you stay on the **paper** during the session.
8. The sessions that we've done so far have **different durations**, but it will last about 40 minutes. If anyone cannot stay this long we ask that they



| | | | |
|--------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| Enile | Jeff | | |
| Air | Fire | Water | Earth |
| | | | |
| East | South | West | North |
| g | Summer | Autumn | Winter |
| i | Noon | Dusk | Midnight |
| ne | Wand | Cup | Pentacle |
| ibra, | Masculine | Feminine | Feminine |
| us | Aries, Leo, | Cancer, Scorpio, | Taurus, Virgo, |
| w | Sagittarius | Pisces | Capricorn |
| artz | Salamander | Undine | Gnome |
| g | To Will | To Dare | To be Silent |
| ng | Lion | Dolphin | Bear |
| ng | Ruby | Aquamarine | Obsidian |
| ng | Red | Sea Green | Brown |
| ng | Prime of Life | Middle Age | Old Age |
| ng | Intuition | Feeling | Sensation |
| ng | Hot and Dry | Cold and Moist | Cold and Dry |
| ng | Projective | Receptive | Receptive |
| ng | Flame, Sun | Sea, River | Cave, Mountain |



Invoking and Banishing words are as per point 2 and 6 in the ritual outline above.



BJ: In some ways it is a doomed quest. The manifesto for *I Will Heal You* was full of promises such as, 'If you join us you will achieve a wonderful nirvana, a blissful experience' but at the same time warning that it was a sham, that people should stay away, that it was quite dangerous for them to even consider joining. It was setting up the possibility of something otherworldly or magical at the same time dismantling the possibility of this ever happening. It was like saying you can have this if you want it but I am just going to keep it out of reach as well. You will never actually get there. It is the idea of constantly being on the edge of experiencing it and the promise that is important; a perpetual becoming. Once it is inhabited it is no longer a utopia—it becomes something else. This is certainly true of the The Brotherhood of Subterranea, an exhibition I curated at Kunstbunker, Nuremberg in 2008. It seemed idealistic initially, but it became quite an austere exhibition.

EC: Your work explores questions around the idea of belonging and not belonging, what it means to operate inside or outside of a particular community. In earlier work, you adopted a much more peripheral role as a kind of interloper or infiltrator observing a particular group, however more recently you are the one who is creating the terms of the community, for example with The Brotherhood or the movement *I Will Heal You*.

BJ: Even if I am the initiator it is still from a position of trying to be both participant and observer, and also be both connected and disconnected. For my residency at the Banff Centre in 2009 my role became much more one of being a host. When I arrived for the residency I was given a guided tour, and I imagined what would happen if I brought other individuals—such as a shaman or spirit medium—to this space, and asked them to interpret it. They would give a guided tour of the site but for very different reasons, pointing out very different things [*The Symbol* and *Parallelism*]. There is an overlap and within this overlap, how do I position myself? Which side am I on? Ideally, I am on both, listening to what they say and attempting to understand it.

EC: I wonder whether your role is to operate as a catalyst that brings these different positions into dialogue? Your work seems then to be less about locating yourself in one position but more about attempting to keep the two possibilities in dialogue; your position appears somewhat unstable.

BJ: I think it is. I hope that the experience feels difficult or uncomfortable. The idea of questioning my own beliefs or systems of belief is very important. I don't want to find a position of stability.

A kind of dance

EC: I am interested in the slippage between character and self in your work, the fray that occurs when someone who is performing a particular role or operating in an official capacity gives to reveal a sense of the individual therein. In *The Symbol* the shaman tries to turn the tables a little and interrogate you. However, he does this through the voices of others; his own doubts and questions about your project become ventriloquised through the voices of the spirits that he is

purporting to mediate. In your video works, you also appear to shift between positions rather than remaining static or even neutral.

BJ: Yes, the way I work is different to the neutrality of a documentary filmmaker. I don't want the work to have an investigative or journalistic edge; my expressions are important. It is important that my role mirrors the individuals that I am filming. Their roles are multiple and so are mine. Both are unstable.

EC: In *The Symbol*, you and the shaman appear to be testing each other's limits. There is a feeling of circling, a sense of tension or a feeling of working each other out. Both of you are required to suspend certain judgments—there is a sense that you both have questions or reservations about each other's practice. It seems as though both of you are trying to test a limit without breaking it.

BJ: It is a kind of dance. Inevitably there is a gap between my perspective and his. I invited him to give a reading of the site and I didn't expect to be tested in the way that I was. I am not sure whether I am being indoctrinated or not. There is a part in the work where the shaman talks to a tree and then wants me to do the same. He takes his shoes and socks off and walks through the snow and says that it isn't cold. I have to draw the line there and can't believe him. He looks disappointed that I don't just take his word for it and do it.

EC: The marking out of two poles (belief and non-belief for example) draws attention to the shades of grey between. By suspending certain expectations or beliefs it also becomes possible to escape the terms of a given situation, a particular belief structure.

BJ: Yes, there is a spectrum of possibility between these two options and the question becomes one of where you place yourself. If there are specific positions, then what does it mean to be able to jump from one to the other or for them to merge? In fact, you are probably always moving between different positions. As soon as you suspend your sense of disbelief things *do* start to happen. When I met with another shaman at Banff, he laid out his ritual paraphernalia on the ground. On one level, it was just a feather, a shell, a rock—but they also had a charged quality to them. I absolutely believed in the power of these inanimate objects. Perhaps this is another metaphor for making art. It is about suspending disbelief or investing objects with a specific quality that in most other situations they wouldn't have. In art something has the capacity to suggest something else that it wouldn't unless the artist invested it with those properties.

Amateur unruliness

EC: I'm interested in your work with amateurs because there is an unruliness that is both exciting and dangerous, where you're not quite sure what the professional parameters are. You invite an audience and performers into a situation where they might not be aware of the parameters, and what might happen in that context.

BJ: I've recently used amateur choirs, in *Assemblage* [2013].

EC: On reflection, the figure of the amateur is present in many of the groups that you've previously infiltrated and in the recent performances; they all seem to be relatively amateur groups.

BJ: Such as the trainee psychics.

EC: Or the group of amateur photographers or trainspotters; people who are doing an activity as a hobby rather than as a profession. Does your role as the initiate mirror their role as an amateur?

BJ: Yes, I've been aware of my position mirroring theirs; the trainspotters in *I Miss* is a good example. Being aware of them as a somewhat outsider group, and my position in relation to their group being peripheral, uninitiated and perhaps amateur.

EC: Both the amateur and the initiate hover at the limits of a particular community: for example, the amateur hovers at the limits of professionalism, has some knowledge of the language but hasn't fully stepped into the fold. Like the amateur, there is also something quite unruly about the status of the novice.

BJ: You can get away with a bit more. I've often adopted the position of the novice, or I am simply the amateur by definition, because I'm not experienced in the group or activity that I'm encountering.

EC: The amateur is also interesting because there's a sense of a dual role that they inhabit. The amateur dimension of their life, or the hobby that they have a passion for is often something that is quite clandestine, or it's the thing they do outside of their more professional roles. Perhaps it's something to do with not fully inhabiting a role?

BJ: It's an activity that might be difficult to disclose publicly, such as some of the witches I've worked with, who also had quite ordinary professions that they pursued alongside their pagan beliefs. They would consider themselves professional witches, but I'm sure to everyone else it seems like something they do on the side.

EC: Which could be seen as liberating—there are certain permissions that come with that status that are interesting.

BJ: In the class for amateur psychics in *Close To You*, in some ways I found the audience a more interesting subject than the teacher. She was quite polished in what she did—she ran the class and demonstrated clairvoyance very well. The people in the audience were just ordinary people and I was allowed to witness this other side of them.

EC: In *Close To You* there's a distinct sense of more than one audience who are experiencing the same event from more than one perspective. You also describe the strange meeting or collision in *Presence*, where there is both the art world audience and the psychics in the audience. This feeling of two distinct audiences being present is also there in *Polyrhythm*. In your work, there's a sense of not necessarily creating something that a viewer watches, but more that the work functions as a meeting point.

BJ: There was a sense of that in *Concerning the Difference*, when the audience and performers were initially indistinguishable from each other; how the two might be melded together I find very interesting. The performances are suggestive of other kinds of meetings, such as the Quakers, where people come and go and wait for something to happen. Sometimes nothing happens at all, or it might but it's not vocalised. But there's the potential there, the possibility that something could happen. And it's that potential that creates a tension, a feeling of expectation. It's not specified what is about to take place, but I'm interested that the audience could feel that as a genuine emotion—it's not something that's being forced upon them. It's something that surrounds them so that they become part of it.

As if

EC: I am interested in how the notion of performing or doing something 'as if' might refer to the work of an actor, but it also belongs to the vocabulary of ritual. It's used to refer to the subjunctive, a particular modality that's to do with wishing and hoping, emotions to do with longing or wanting something. It feels as if the quality of 'as if' is in a lot of your work in different ways, whether it's the 'as if' of role-play where you inhabit a space 'as if' you are a glamour photographer or a clairvoyant. In later work the quality of 'as if' seems more about propositions being made—the communities that are being proposed in the work have a quality of 'as if'. The properties of utopia are very much in the modality of thinking in this way.

BJ: You're right, a lot of the later work is a proposition. My recent film *I Am On Top of the World* [2013] which doesn't have a dedicated audience apart from members of the public who happened to be there, was shot on a boating lake in a park in London. Performers are on separate boats and gradually converge on an island, where they perform a series of choreographed movements and choral singing. It's a testing out of some of those earlier suggestions. What happens if I find an island and I put people on the island? It's partly out of curiosity, I want to see what that looks and feels like. It's a ridiculous proposition—it's quite obvious it's an island on a boating lake in a park, and there is a revealing of that, such as in the sound of traffic from a nearby road. But there's a fleeting moment, a bit like some of the other performances, there's a sense of potential.

EC: It seems that in your work, something gets set up and then collapses, a utopian proposition gets revealed in its absurdity or in its pedestrian qualities.

Correspondences: An Exercise in Unity

RUFUS

Begin now, as you read these words, as you sit in your chair, to offer yourselves, utterly and in joyful abandon, in quiet, glad surrender... In secret ejaculations of praise, turn in humble wonder to the Light, faint though

JESSICA

The first signs of simultaneity are given when at the moment of recovery period of forgetting ... it is as though we are only coming back into a stivividness which had endured in dim and tenuous form throughout.

RUTH

Like prolonged echoes mingling in the distance, in a deep and tenebros vast as the dark of night and as the light of day, perfumes, sounds, and correspond.

WILLIAM

Along with the praeternatural lights and colours, the gems and the ever patterns, visitors to the mind's antipodes discover a world of sublimely landscapes, of living architecture, and of heroic figures. The transport of many works of art is attributable to the fact that their creators have p scenes, persons, and objects which remind the beholder of what, cons unconsciously, he knows about the Other World at t

ANDRE

Good sense tells us that earthly things are rare and exists only in dreams. To draw sustenance from hap you must first have the courage to swallow it.

DAN

What will I feel? What will I see? Astounding marvels spectacles? Is it very beautiful, very terrible, or very

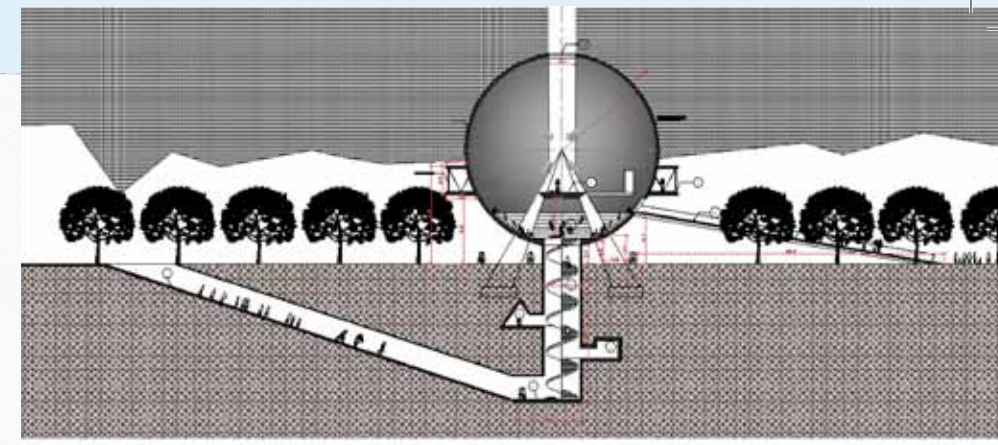
RUFUS

I suddenly became strangely inebriated. The external in a dream. Objects appeared to gain in relief: they a dimensions;

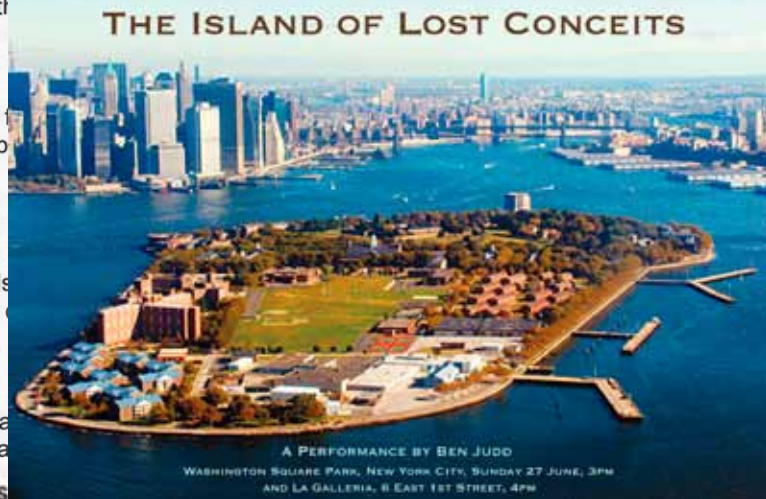
**Ben Judd
Vast as the Dark of Night and as the Light of Day
8 and 9 September**

scout hut

| | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 5.30pm <i>5-45</i> | Audience arrive at location (on beach near left side of harbour wall) for health and safety |
| 6.15pm <i>6 pm</i> | Audience and performers board boats. 18 25 people total on pontoon and landing craft: 10 audience, two scouts, sound recordist, two performers and Ben. Smaller boat 1: one performer, 2 audience, one camera operator, one scout Smaller boat 2: one performer, one audience, one camera operator, one scout Smaller boat 3: one performer, one audience, on Smaller boat 4: one performer, one audience, on |
| 6.30pm | Performance begins Pontoon and landing craft are tethered together and approx 50 feet from coast in Whitstable Bay. Sm stationary or move in circles around pontoon/lan 30 feet away from pontoon/landing craft. After 15 move closer to pontoon/landing craft (approx 20 15 mins move within 10 feet of pontoon/landing c mins small boats are stationary and very close to craft. |



THE CENTRAL BUILDING OF THE WORLD - YO TE CURARE TEM



just for
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ou to
cept of



*Independence
's inauguration
utter ledg*
use we have chosen hope over fear, unity of
scord. On this day, we come to proclaim an end to
se promises, the recriminations and worn-out

cannot dedicate -- we cannot consecrate -- we cannot
long remember what we say here, but it can never

are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these
are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

The words have been spoken during rising tides of prosperity and the still
waters of peace.

Today I say to you that the challenges we face are real. They are serious and
are many. They will not be met easily or in a short span of time.

time has come to set aside childish things.

are equal, all are free, and all deserve a chance to pursue their full measure
appinness.

is the journey we continue today.

capacity remains undiminished

will harness the sun and the winds and the soil

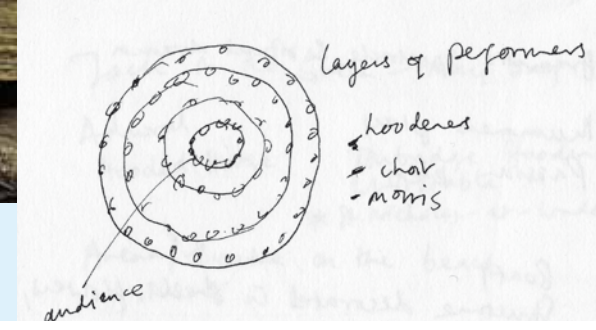
en what free men and women can achieve when imagination
on purpose, and necessity to courage

is yes, we intend to move forward

ue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what

it the moment calls for. That's not what we came here to do.
o fear the future. We came here to shape it. I still believe we
it's hard.

ill believe that we can act when it's hard. I still believe we can
with civility, and gridlock with progress. I still believe we can



I Will Heal You believes in uniting everyone. It also believes that everyone is separate and that this is an impossible, idealistic notion. I Will Heal You wants to unite everyone under a common belief. It also wants to divide everyone.

We want to create a paradise on Earth. A place where everything is perfect. Where love knows no bounds. Where there is a perfect union between people and also between people and nature. Where people work in perfect symbiosis. Where people instinctively understand each other - where ideas, patterns and symbols are echoed throughout every aspect of the people's lives, including their buildings furniture, clothes and jewellery. This is our definition of true love.

Yet this paradise is also a sham. It is a construction, where the love between people is merely imagined. Where people suffer from delusions, where they start seeing connections between things that don't exist. So-called patterns emerge that are simply the result of a hopeless longing for a no-existent unity.

Our manifesto is both deeply profound and ultimately meaningless. It

BJ: Yes, but at the *same time* as it's being realised. I think I want it to actually happen at the same time as me and everybody else realising that it's not. A bit like my role in the work, in which I might be genuinely engaged in an activity at the same time as observing and recording it. Or the actors I've worked with, who you know are performing but you also feel as if they might affect you in some way, and that they genuinely believe what they're doing.

EC: We've previously discussed what would happen if you were to cross the threshold from non-belief to belief, or if you achieved the thing that you were setting out to achieve. You've talked of *moments* in your work when you did believe. Rather than the work revolving around ideas of belief and non-belief or utopia and its collapse (things being either/or) there is a quality of glimmering or glimpsing. There is a sense of a fragmentary or fleeting encounter with something, so that instead of either/or it's possible to encounter both.

BJ: So that these two things are pushed together and are experienced simultaneously. It's an interesting conundrum—can you experience two opposing views at the same time?

EC: Like with Wittgenstein's proposal of the duck-rabbit—it's not possible to see both of them simultaneously, but it is possible for them to be perpetually oscillating. I am thinking of this in relation to your collaborative performances with Sidsel Christensen, *Conversations With the Other Side*. The performances ask the question: is it possible for the scientific and empirical to coexist with the visionary and magical?

BJ: Hopefully the performances experimented with those ideas, to bring them together somehow; the physical gallery space and the imaginary space that she was encountering. That seems to be a state that I'm aspiring to.

EC: A dynamic is set up, where you are inviting people to join in yet telling them to stay away in the same breath. There's a feeling of being drawn to and repelled by the situation; feeling fascinated but also being made to feel uncomfortable.

BJ: In *Parallelism* the psychic's view and my more objective view were presented at the same time. I like the idea of each of these views being punctured by the other, so that through the puncturing you can catch a glimmer of the other, opposing view. In *Conversations With the Other Side*, the projection of Sidsel is like a puncturing, a portal, a way of looking through something that is physical and real.

EC: This reminds me of the way glass functions, it has the capacity to be both looked through and also reflect back. The capacity to see through something but to also get enchanted by its surface. As in a lot of your work, there is something quite enchanting, but the audience can still recognise that it's a construction. As in your use of a magic lantern, you can see the construct and yet it still has the capacity to be enchanting, or propose something that is magical.

BJ: Pepper's ghost is another example. Yes it's an interesting paradox; something that reveals its process has the potential to be enchanting and magical. A digital version of a magic lantern I would find boring, which is partly because I *can't* see how it works. The revealing of a process allows you to see how it's constructed at the same time as being enchanted by it. My 3D photographs also operate in a similar way.

Choreographic assemblages

EC: Although there are communities present in your earlier work, there seems to be a shift towards choreographic assemblages, towards communities that evolve rhythmically or choreographically.

BJ: *Polyrhythm* was a precursor to this—the idea that the performers would move in stages towards a centre, and the movement have a rhythm. It was partly the rhythm of the city being absorbed into the performance. This relates to my interest in rituals, which are usually systematic and have particular structures; similarly, I've been thinking about ways in which the movements of performers can be more carefully controlled. In the same way that music has the potential to transform and enchant you, dance also allows you to lose yourself. For *I Am On Top of the World*, the singing and choreography have a particular relationship to each other. So instead of the performers dancing to a tune, there is a rhythm that's built up through the use of vocal warm up exercises.

EC: Your engagement with Morris dancers and even trainspotters also reveals something choreographic. There is something subversive about the trainspotters' behaviour on a train platform; it's unlike the other rhythms that are going on, but it speaks of a collective activity nonetheless. As in *Polyrhythm*, the performers' rhythm is a counter flow to the other people. The choreographic can operate in a dual way, as it has the capacity to be both disruptive and affirmative; a disruption of the normative flow of the space gradually starts to build pace and suggest its own collective choreography.

BJ: In later performances with actors, a pattern might start emerging from a group of people, and that pattern is increasingly about a physical centring, a coming together. I wanted to try that out on a larger scale, as in the lake in *I Am On Top of the World*, to test out an extension of recent choreographic concerns.

EC: There's a utopian proposition in the work, which does not suggest moving to a different location but instead changing the tempo of a particular situation. Which I think is political and potentially disruptive.

BJ: A bit like the Burt Lancaster character in Frank Perry's film *The Swimmer*, who reimagines bourgeois suburbia as a romantic 'river of pools' that he can navigate. This imagined place doesn't necessarily mean wandering off into an Arcadia, it could be experienced right here.

EC: Which makes the fact that in *I Am On Top of the World* it's an island on a boating lake in London particularly resonant.

BJ: It relates to my work where people sit in a room in a circle. It's an ordinary situation but there's the possibility that collectively some kind of encounter could take place and we might be transported, or enchanted.

EC: As in *I Will Heal You*, you set up a movement which claimed it could transform its disciples, but then there's also a caution in there. It seems as if there's a question around the desirability of the utopian proposition as a model. In the earlier work the oscillation, the push and pull, is more visible, such as asking people to join *I Will Heal You* at the same time as warning them to stay away. In the later work the double-edged quality is more complicated.

BJ: As in the idea of enchantment, it suggests being led somewhere, perhaps against your will.

EC: Or being captivated—in folkloric tales, enchantment always has a spell-like quality to it.

BJ: Yes, where you might lose yourself or lose your mind.

EC: Within your work there's the double threat of the collective: there's the closed collective that's secretive, and there's the overly inclusive collective that wants to make the others 'we', to make them join, to pull them in.

BJ: This is an ongoing concern for me, in the work and in general. Of wanting to be part of a group, and resisting it at the same time. A wariness of being drawn into something, but then having to negotiate that and find a way of doing both, because we all have to do both. I think the same is true of all our relationships. How do you position yourself—where are you in relation to this person, or group? I need both, to belong and to not belong, and maybe that's a hard thing to reconcile.

Preparatory and propositional

EC: You've talked about the idea of rehearsal being of interest in the work.

BJ: In some instances the rehearsal has been more successful than the performance itself, perhaps because there's less pressure for it to be 'professional'. It's a more open space.

EC: We've talked about the fray between the actor and the role that they're performing, which is more complex in rehearsal. It's the fledgling status, they are in the process of becoming, and are not quite fully inhabiting their roles. It's distinctly transitional as a mode of performance.

BJ: Sometimes rehearsals are quite brief, which can be a positive thing. I would like to keep that feeling of the transitional in the performances themselves. That's part of my interest in warm up vocal exercises, they're a way of getting into something, before you actually do the thing.

EC: There's also something quite ambivalent about the nature of rehearsal. On the one hand rehearsal is a gesture that's moving towards something, towards performance, but it's also keeping performance at bay; a deferral. The concept of utopia is entirely predicated on the preparatory, on longing, on desiring, but always keeping the object of desire at a distance because it doesn't exist. It's something that can only ever exist as a proposition.

BJ: The performance and film on the island *I Am On Top of the World* could be seen as a rehearsal for this unreachable place. I want to suggest in the work that this place could be reached, albeit very briefly, when the performers physically come together, at the moment of synchronicity. There is the idea in the work that the cinematic set piece could be a symbol of that synchronicity; such a choreographed moment could imply an idealised sense of coming together. Cinematic set pieces which contain dance and structured movement are also suggestive of the choreographed elements of religious ritual; it is this blurred boundary between a dramatic performance and a liturgical drama that is central to the work.

Free space

EC: The spaces that your work occupies feel increasingly important, including the space of the island in recent work. I think of the spaces you've used as receptacles for certain kinds of activities. For example, the hall in Swedenborg House in *Concerning the Difference* or the forest in *The Symbol* seem to be charged, demarcated spaces. The performance itself also functions to establish a particular sense of space, the terms of the community, rather than the community existing prior to the performance. The performance creates the space, demarcates space, rather like street performers who throw string on the ground and it suddenly creates a stage. There is something of an invocation or a gesture in the performance itself that makes the 'magic circle'.

BJ: I have explored this in different ways, most directly during the Wiccan ritual in *Observance*, when the circle was cast. But also more subtly, for example in *Polyrhythm*, in which there are pre-existing demarcations in a public square, and the work reinterprets those markings. In *Concerning the Difference* the hall already contained chairs which were all facing in one direction, and which I repositioned into a circle. Similarly the bandstand in *Assemblage*, I saw as an island-like space which I could open up and then close down.

EC: I see this element in the work as being an appropriation of existing ritual spaces, the functions of which are then reinterpreted.

Phase 1

- Doors are closed. Spotlights and projector are off
- Actors are part of crowd, either sitting or standing
- Text is spoken in full and in order: introspective / world
- Some instrumental music and singing takes place over in between spoken word
- Spotlighting and projector come on intermittently
- Actors are mostly static
- Actors move incrementally closer together – by end of circle is formed
- Some of actors speak last paragraph
- Circle is broken up, disperse into crowd
- Spotlighting and projector are turned off

Phase 2

- Spotlights and projector are off
- Actors are part of crowd, either sitting or standing
- Text is spoken in full and in order: increasingly outwards increasingly joyous
- More music and singing takes place over spoken word
- Spotlighting and projector come on more frequently. follow actors
- More movement, use more of space, move in circles, beam
- Move closer together – by end of phase a smaller circle encircling some of audience
- Most of actors speak last paragraph, with music
- Circle is broken up, disperse into crowd
- Spotlighting and projector are turned off

Phase 3

- Spotlights and projector are off
- Actors are part of crowd, either sitting or standing
- Text is spoken in full and in order: as a proclamation, Music and singing is continually overlapping spoken word
- Spotlighting and projector on almost continuously. Ra both



rits, which are respectively as this unity to each other. Wherefore the hus are all and each of the things of eneral, but each particular of the everything else. This was several of the interior angels, of which I was ing to cold.

urple, various was seen) a ck part of the This lasted a air earth, by cked his han

it was bright, I thither also;

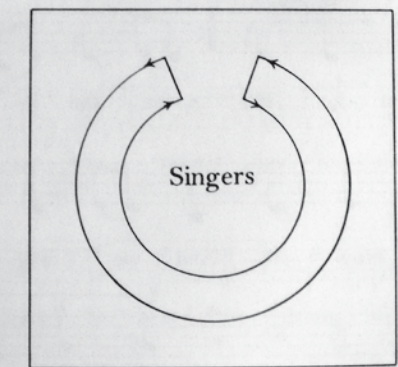


Diagram 2. The Continuous Ring March

- Several people moving at same time, several people m interrupt projector beam
- Move closer together – by end of phase a smaller circle encircling some of audience
- Most of actors speak last paragraph, with music
- Circle is broken up, disperse into crowd
- Spotlighting and projector are turned off
- Doors are opened

Notes on progression through phases

- From puzzlement to proclamation
- From introspection and working out to extroversion and
- A coming together: from disparity and wandering to con and common voice
- From member of audience to member of a group
- Tempo of spoken word, music, singing, movement and speed of slides is gradually increased

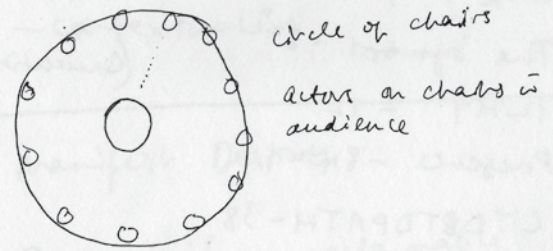
Introduction

- Swedenborg: everything is metaphorical – everything on earth has a heavenly correspondence. Terrestrial objects mirror something grander/spiritual
- Heaven in shape of a man, conversely his body represents something spiritual – example – spirits in leg
- For Swedenborg, these two worlds have collapsed into each other, so that the otherworldly / spiritual has literally combined with the physical
- Swedenborg called this correspondence – could also be called metaphor
- Interested in correspondential relationship - words, movement, song, light could suggest a particular set of beliefs
- Belief can be literally acted out
- Performance in part explores notions of belief and truth: hard to believe some of Swedenborg's writing – talking to spirits on other planets.
- Interested in notion of belief: he absolutely inhabited this world he described
- Interested in power of his prose – how as a reader we can also enter this fantastical place
- Hopefully performance will also do that – invite audience into a particular world that Swedenborg described

theatrical nature of (Swedenborg's) rituals

- Projector will show images intermittently
- Periods of black and periods of silence
- Congregation. Ceremonial
- Phantasmagoria – never quite sure what you've seen make a conclusion
- Catching glimpses of something
- Trying to see into another world
- Walk into space where projection is. Wear white
- Spotlights – intermittent
- Particular phrases will coincide with slides
- Build up – crescendo. More activity – more lines are t overlap. More images are seen and slides spin faster
- Rhythm: disconnectedness – synchronicity – disconn
- Synchronicity – actors say same/sing phrases as sar

Several actors moving & talking & singing



RUFUS

There are visions experienced by certain persons on boast that they have seen many wonderful sights; an This kind of visions is such that when any object is p certain spirits induce upon it such an appearance by cloud for instance, or a certain lunar light is seen by r mind, and thus his imagination, in the representation whether of an animal, or an infant, or any monstrosity imagination is held in things of this kind, he is persua such things. In this way very many visions are bruited than illusions; but such things often happen to those phantasies, and who labour under an infirmity of mind credulous.

PETER S

There suddenly fell a large flamy something before m manner which cannot be described. It was so respler the outward eye, but the interior sight also, which I n at once into a state of wonder whence such a bright Presently there was perceived a something obscure, which there was something terrene. I perceived that t through heaven, in order that it might appear how gre



Concerning the Difference Between the Degree of Pleasure and Happiness

RUFUS

Nothing whatever is more to be desired, or more delightful than the light of truth for it is a source of wisdom

TAMSIN

When the mind is harassed with obscurity, distracted with doubts, rendered torpid or saddened by ignorance or falsities, and truth emerges as from a dark abyss, it shines forth instantaneously, like the sun dispersing mists and vapors or like the dawn repelling the shades of darkness.

ASHLEY

For truths in the intellect or rational mind are analogous to lights and rays in ocular vision; falsities that have the appearance of truth are analogous to sun or phosphoric lights; doubts, to clouds and shadows; and ignorance itself is darkness and the image of night: thus one thing is represented in another.

RUFUS

There are visions experienced by certain persons on the earth who say and boast that they have seen many wonderful sights; and they are also called s

PETER S

Ensemble

Choreographed by Dave Charlesworth Ben Judd

23 February - 24 March 2013

Private view 22 February 6.30pm

BACKLIT Alfred Hoare Ashley Sorell Nottingham NG3 1JG 0115 8372424 info@backlit.org.uk / www.backlit.org.uk

Performances by Sarah Baker Busby Berkeley David Blair Lucy Clout Mays Deren George Gurdjieff Oliver Liric Mark Leckey Yvonne Rainer Jim Shaw Jonathan Trayner Becca Voelcker Gillian Wearing Richard Whitty

Performances by Dave Charlesworth Ben Judd 22 February 7pm



A PERFORMANCE BY BEN JUDD SATURDAY 6TH AUGUST, 5PM ON THE PORCH OF MAXON HILLS, WASSAIC, NY THE WASSAIC PROJECT FESTIVAL www.wassaicproject.org

BJ: For *Observance*, the careful placing of artworks in the curation of the exhibition Radical Nature was reemployed in the careful, deliberate choreography of a ritual. Different artworks were used to represent the four elements so that existing patterns within the exhibition space were reimagined.

EC: I am reminded of Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, where he gives the example of the indigenous people of America who continued to practice their own beliefs but under the cover of rituals practised by the invading Europeans. Your work also invisibly changes the function of something through how it is performed.

BJ: As Christianity absorbed and reinterpreted Pagan beliefs, including magic.

EC: In that model the dominant force absorbed something through a position of power. The alternative model is to take the vocabulary of the dominant culture and use it for your own ends without taking possession of it. So that it's not to do with assimilation, it's to do with resistance. Power relations and ideas around power seem to be addressed in your work.

BJ: It's ambiguous where the power is located, whether it's with me or the audience, or the performers. This is further explored in *I Am On Top of the World*, in which the notion of an audience, who might or might not become involved, is shifted to include anyone who happens to be in a boat on the lake.

EC: By implication anyone else in a boat becomes part of the utopian project, even if they're going in the opposite direction they suddenly become co-opted into a performance. There are two flip sides to utopia then—exclusion and recruitment. One model seeks to exclude non-believers and the other model wants to make others join. Your practice attempts to leave the possibilities open, which is both problematic and interesting.

BJ: My performances might suggest a ritual, they have a structure and a moment of coming together, but they are deliberately inconclusive.

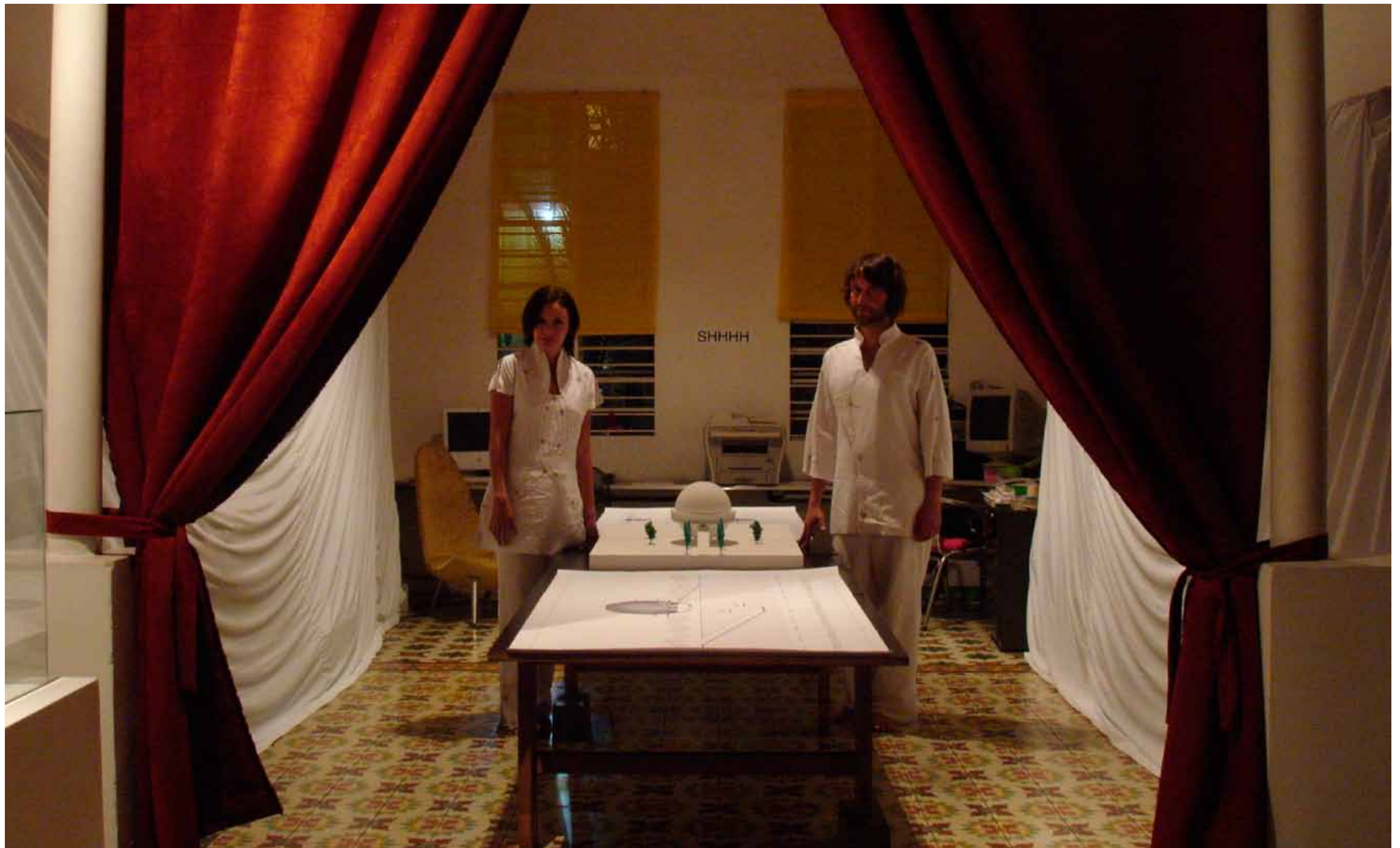
EC: And non-teleological as they don't have a purpose. It performs the mechanisms of ritual but it doesn't serve to increase status or contain a rite of passage, other than the potentially transformative qualities which art arguably already contains. Its ritual function is propositional and ambiguous.

BJ: Thinking about the non-hierarchical nature of *communitas*, I don't want or expect anyone to change permanently, it's a fleeting moment that might take place, and then it's gone. I want the performers to appear from the crowd and then to disappear back into it. There is no sense of knowing what's happened, or why.

EC: The work connects with ideas to do with play, and a sense of 'what if...?' It's a testing out, rehearsing the idea of a ritual without performing it.

BJ: There's the potential though that something magical could happen, even during the rehearsal. I enjoy that feeling of play when working with actors. Some of them have said to me that the performances are fun, that they involve the kind of improvisational activities they normally do in rehearsals. I like the idea that it can feel like a free space.













Metamorphoses and Transgressions

Pandora Syperek

Writing on fantastic literature, Tzvetan Todorov identifies an interchange that takes place between matter and meaning in which—in an almost animistic process—all elements of the world gain a high level of signification: “In this world, every object, every being means something.”¹ This state in which “everything corresponds to everything else” constitutes a pan-determinism where things that cannot be explained by natural laws are explained by the supernatural, and one thing determines another: “On the most abstract level, pan-determinism signifies that the limit between the physical and the mental, between matter and spirit, between word and thing, ceases to be impervious.”² In Ben Judd’s recent performances, videos and photographs an analogous cross-signification takes place, one in which spaces and scenarios are charged with heightened meaning, objects take on animistic import and the senses meld into synaesthesia and the *gesamtkunstwerk*. With origins in the historical supernatural—in particular of the Victorian era—these ‘phenomena’ hold surprising implications for modernism and its legacies.

Marginalised and Misunderstood

The mediation of spirit and matter present in Judd’s work invokes—and sometimes directly references—historical supernatural beliefs. A long-running theme in Judd’s work is that of the fringe community. In early videos, this included trainspotters, Morris dancers, amateur photography clubs and street preachers. More recently, Judd has turned to the occult, working with witches, psychics and shamans. This shift is natural, as the various groups share a status of marginality, whether united by preferred hobby or belief—or both. The clairvoyance class Judd attends in *Close To You*, 2008, feels as much a community support group as a scene for the paranormal to enfold. Shots of the community hall setting’s banal details, including perfunctory kitchenette and shabby notice board materialise the contradictory concept of teaching supernatural powers. Similarly, in videos made whilst

Judd was on residency in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, ‘readings’ of the site by a psychic and a



The Symbol, performance and single-channel video, 8:49 min, Banff, Canada, 2009



Close To You, performance and single-channel video, 19:02 min, Surrey, UK, 2008

shaman feel surprisingly pragmatic. These manifestations of the ordinary within the extraordinary constitute everyday transgressions.

The histories behind these practices position them as what Michel Foucault terms “subjugated knowledges”—fields deemed secondary on the epistemological hierarchy to the official “knowledges of erudition.”³ The Victorian supernatural bordered on official knowledge and scientific thought, though it ultimately remained at its margins. For more than a century, occultism has largely been viewed as anti-modern—a “symptom of regression in consciousness”, according to Theodor Adorno.⁴ Psychic phenomena and mesmerism, or animal magnetism, historically correspond to marginalised subjects, in particular women, servants, non-whites, colonised peoples and the mentally ill. These commonly pathologised others of Victorian society were often taken as subjects onto which to perform mesmerism, since, considered incomplete or unformed, and less civilised, they were deemed more susceptible not only to the suggestion of the mesmerist, but also to the psychic visions and spirit visits that might occur under trance. Hence, while the mesmerist, as penetrator of the soul, was normally a white European middle-class male, the clairvoyant—a medium, or conduit—was usually female.⁵

In 1882, the French neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot discredited the efficacy of animal magnetism, which was initially introduced in the late-eighteenth century by the German physician Franz Anton Mesmer as a medical treatment. Charcot suggested that if its results were not imaginary, they were only perceptible in hysterics and the mentally unfit.⁶ Yet, however marginalised and pathologised, such practices equally opened up possibilities for alternative hierarchies of mental states. Founded in London in 1882, the Society for Psychical Research—which lent institutional validity to supernatural belief systems—proclaimed that hysterics, the insane and other groups labelled degenerate, were in fact “progenerate” in their capacity for other mind states. Likewise, the Society celebrated dreams, altered states of mind and trances as “revealing glimpses of new evolutionary advances in the powers of the mind”.⁷ Such Darwinist rhetoric was used to promote an inverted model of the Victorian self.⁸

This flipped status of subjectivities and knowledge bases resonates with Judd’s treatment

of unconventional beliefs, from those of the ‘street Jesus’ to the psychic medium, the Pagan and the visionary. Such beliefs are exhibited and interpreted via the medium of video. Positioning himself as an intrigued sceptic, the artist does not place judgement on his subjects’ ideologies, whether positive or negative. Of course, there is the risk of ridicule or exploitation in working with vulnerable communities (on residency in Canada, concern over the ethics of Judd’s practice emerged among some artists and staff, in particular where his work touched on indigenous belief systems). However, overall Judd portrays his subjects with tremendous sympathy, while

avoiding sentimentality or glorification of the other.

The proverbial soul-stealing ability of the camera, analogous to the mesmeric penetration of consciousness, is countered by Judd’s self-inclusion in the work. Assuming the anthropological tradition of participant observation, which acknowledges the impossibility of

detached objectivity, he subverts the mechanical gaze of the camera as a visual prosthesis for the (white male) artist.⁹ *Close To You* documents Judd's own attempt at harnessing psychic powers under the guidance of clairvoyant Val Hood. His endeavours to conjure a spirit appear earnest, his position (and, as a result, the viewer's) left ambiguous. Similarly, after communing with a tree to garner a site history of the Banff Centre for Fine Arts, the shaman featured in *The Symbol*, 2009, offers the artist a 'lesson'. Judd's compromising position—tree-hugging in below-freezing weather (though he declines the invitation to remove his shoes), his beliefs, or lack thereof, put aside in the name of research—is the stuff of early-twentieth century anthropologists Franz Boas or Margaret Mead. That the practitioner of indigenous spirituality is of European descent suggests a double-appropriation: first by shaman, then by filmmaker. The video complicates slippery issues of colonised beliefs and representation of the other, while pointing toward discontent with the dominant culture's discourses of Enlightened thought and scientific reason as providing the inspiration for exoticising and atavistic belief systems.

Uncanny Mediations

Although the late-nineteenth century surge of interest in the occult appears antithetical against the period's backdrop of scientific empiricism, such phenomena were not necessarily viewed as incompatible.¹⁰ Some have argued that the turn to Spiritualism and psychical research was the result of religion's recently destabilised position in Victorian society, constituting an attempt to discredit scientific materialism.¹¹ However, these practices employed the same techniques as natural science, and were at the forefront of a number of new technologies. Modern occultism can be seen as "a founding of a rationalist Modernity fervently believing in progress".¹²

In addition to progressive politics—despite her eschewal of Western Enlightened culture, HP Blavatsky, co-founder of the Theosophical Society, promoted equality among people of all races and religions; spiritualists campaigned for female emancipation and the abolition of slavery—advances in technology were fundamental to occult movements and belief in the supernatural.¹³ The telephone's disembodied voices, rail travel's superhuman speeds, telegraphy's instant messages, the radio's invisible waves, electricity's eerie light, the phonograph's ghostly recordings and photography's impeccable facsimiles all created uncanny experiences for the Victorians.¹⁴ In particular, "physical phenomena escaping sensual perception"—telegraphs, radio, ether—"fuelled notions of communication with the supernatural".¹⁵ Many believed telepathy and clairvoyance to work much like wireless telegraphy, while spiritualists considered electricity or magnetism to be the basis for phenomena.¹⁶ Mervyn Heard writes that an image was constructed of the medium "as a sort of reluctant radio receiver" in reaction against the "old style of messianic necromancer" that had fallen out of fashion within the current climate of materialism.¹⁷ The new technologies seemed obvious tools for communicating with and recording paranormal activity.¹⁸

Photography was one of the prevailing methods for capturing the spirits. Inspired not only by photography's uncanny posthumous likenesses, but also by the newly discovered x-ray's imaging of the skeleton (normally only visible after death), spirit photographs even produced a similar aesthetic to x-rays, with their soft, pale, translucent apparitions.¹⁹ Judd's series of stereoscopic prints recalls Victorian attempts to capture paranormal phenomena on film, and the centrality of the media to this process.²⁰ Stereoscopy creates the impression of three-dimensional



Sequential Opposition, two stereoscopic c-type prints, 8 x 17 cm, Hastings, UK, 2006

depth by presenting two nearly identical but offset images separately to the left and right eye. Displayed with nineteenth century stereoscopic viewers, Judd's series shows a middle-aged blonde woman in a long dark dress among settings including a rocky beach, a garden and stone ruins. In most of the dual-images, objects such as stones and driftwood hover in mid-air before the woman; in one set, she appears to levitate. A certain eeriness, induced by the model's distinctive appearance and the banal tranquillity of the setting, pervades the images, so

that even those that lack evident supernatural activity still appear charged with some unexplained drama. Meanwhile, the stereoscopic effect, combined with the use of double exposure, exploits the camera's potential for the uncanny.

Judd's explorations into the supernatural and its mediation through technology go further in his collaboration with London-based Norwegian artist Sidsel Christensen, titled *Conversations With the Other Side*, 2009–2011. This series of performances saw one artist put the other under a trance, so that he or she may communicate that experience while being videoed and transmitted to the audience. The "other side" refers both to the spirit world one might enter in a trance state, as well as to the hypnotised artist's literal location behind a wall. This barrier, and

its transgression through video, is integral as it echoes the membrane between empirical experience and the unknown; furthermore, the projected image of the hidden artist is demonstrated as a phantom. As the other artist facilitates a conversation between the entranced and audience members, the performance takes on a spectacular quality comparable to Victorian phantasmagoria: he or she guides the projected image around the room, distorting its angles, and draws on and around it, interpreting his or her partner's described trance-scapes. Through these various layers of mediation, the artists create incertitude, not simply surrounding hypnosis and the spirits, but more to the point, regarding the artist's tools: the barriers between ritual and performance are broken down.



Conversations With the Other Side (in collaboration with Sidsel Christensen), performance and single-channel video, 1:09:27 min, KINOKINO, Sandnes, Norway, 2011

Considering the associated histories of mesmerism, Judd and Christensen's use of trance is relevant not only to the tradition of public spectacle, but also to the implicit power struggles. "Throughout its British career", writes Alison Winter, "mesmerism brought to the surface issues of power and authority that, however potent, were rarely acknowledged publicly."²¹ The mysterious spiritual activity revealed by the subjugation of consciousness was tantamount to civilisation's encrypted social dynamics. However, Winter argues, the idea that mesmerism was perceived as pseudoscientific is anachronistic, as the rigid confines of science were yet to be put in place; it was but one of many practices that lay the foundations for such distinctions: "Rather than occupying a different world from orthodox or legitimate intellectual work, animal magnetism called into question the very definition of legitimacy itself."²² *Conversations With the Other Side* revives questions of authority and legitimacy within a contemporary artistic

context, challenging its audience's assumptions about reality and its mediation, whether through consciousness or the camera lens.

From Ritual to Theatre

In the performance and resulting video *Observance*, 2009, the apparatus and audience of contemporary art are once again implicated in supernatural phenomena, this time by a Wiccan ritual staged in the Barbican Art Gallery. Enacted by a group of actors in consultation with two practising Wiccans, the performance functions as an intervention in the sanctioned space of fine art. As with the video of *The Symbols* tree whisperer, technology comes to mediate the interface between nature and spirit. Here, however, ritual is heavily coded with the dialectic between modern art and the (super)natural. The various stages of the ritual respond to individual artworks in the gallery that form Radical Nature, an exhibition of contemporary nature-based and environmental art. The foliage-heavy setting of the exhibition could not be more appropriate for

the nature religion's rite. At the same time, however, the earnest ceremony of the face-painted, flower-garlanded performers could not be more out of place than amid the cool clinical atmosphere of the art museum. As they cast circles around a grass mound by Hans Haacke and summon Pagan gods with bids of "hail and welcome" via tree-based sculptures by Anya Gallaccio and Simon Starling, a palpable sense of discomfiture is experienced on behalf of the secular institution. But while the dark arts seem wholly incongruous within the white cube, by conflating spiritual talismans with the charged objects of high art, *Observance* breaks down the secular/sacred binary that has been constructed within modernism.



Observance, performance and single-channel video, 22:34, Barbican Art Gallery, London, UK, 2009

In recent works Judd has absolved himself of the participant-observer dialectic altogether by authoring his own rituals. Following on his work with shamans, psychics and witches, these performances distil the language of ritual to examine the nature of belief and its trappings. The genesis of this work is in *I Will Heal You*, 2007, Judd's ambitious project undertaken on residency in Cali, Colombia, in which he created a religious movement with custom text, song, costume and architecture. Performances of the past few years extract and elaborate on such individual elements, further abstracting their character from any definitive belief systems and relating them to other, unexpected cultural outlets. For example, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, 2011, staged at the Wassaic Festival in upstate New York, combined movements adapted from the Shakers religious sect with the atmosphere of a barn dance (complete with hay bales) and recitations of famous political rhetoric. *Mysterium*, 2011, a performance at London's James Taylor Gallery inspired by the Russian Symbolist composer Alexander Scriabin's eponymous unrealised opera, created synaesthetic experiences to explore the concept of the *gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, and the mysticism of Theosophy, to which Scriabin subscribed.

Concerning the Difference Between the Delights of Pleasure and True Happiness, 2010, a performance at Swedenborg House, London, and its consequent video, unites the seemingly disparate concerns of modern materialism and transcendental spirituality in the figure of Emanuel



Concerning the Difference Between the Delights of Pleasure and True Happiness, performance and single-channel video, 38:30 min, Swedenborg House, London, UK

Swedenborg. In his work, the eighteenth century scientist and Christian mystic sought to unify matter and spirit. Eight performers interpreted Swedenborg's spiritual writings through recitation, song and movement. Embedded among the audience, arranged in a circular, séance-like format, the actors—distinguished only by white shirts—made themselves known one by one. Their gradually layered performance built up to a frenzied crescendo of visionary text, singing and instrumentation, their increasingly agitated actions accompanied by the swirling, colourful projections of a magic lantern, animated by the phantasmagoria specialist Mervyn Heard.

The magic lantern, whose history dates back at least to the seventeenth century, was the primary instrument of phantasmagoria, and was commonly used to create illusions of spirits, ghosts and demons. However, many nineteenth century magic lantern slides, including several used in Judd's performance, depict astronomical, geographical and zoological imagery that would have illustrated scientific lectures.²³ Once again, the technology draws attention to the historically blurred lines between occultism and empiricism, as does Swedenborg's text locating spirits on Mars and in his own foot and ear. After all, though phantasmagoria was intended to ridicule archaic belief in ghosts and subvert ghost-raising activity, it nevertheless resulted from and further fuelled fascination with the supernatural.²⁴ As the actors relay the visionary's unearthly experiences, the kaleidoscopic patterns that reflect onto them, combined with details such as the odours and gentle breezes of the spirits, contribute to the synaesthetic effect. This type of textuality characterises Judd's work. From the 'lyrics' of street preachers set to music in an early video to seminal political speeches and esoteric writings, rhetoric becomes a currency in and of itself, an object that finds its equivalent in song and movement—not only words, but sounds and gestures gain fluency.

In the recent performance *Ensemble*, 2013, which saw singers' arpeggios echoed by dancers' increasingly frenetic movements, such 'language' is thoroughly reduced to abstraction. As in Judd's other recent works, the performers' embeddedness in the audience creates an uncanny sense for the audience member, as if something otherworldly transpires among the alternately mundane or sanctioned space of the gallery. The performers, who regularly wear their own clothing, vary in age, gender, race, ethnicity and body type. This creates a sense of their being 'normal people' onto which something extraordinary has been projected, and consequently a levelling effect—apart from their actions, there is little to separate them from the audience. This consistent device points toward the ambiguous but important stage of liminality that takes place in the middle of a ritual, before a metamorphosis is achieved.

The subjects of Judd's work can themselves be seen as liminal—in between modernism and atavism, science and metaphysics. The Victorian era saw the "simultaneous spiritualisation of science and 'scientification' of Spiritualism".²⁵ By the start of the twentieth century, mesmerism and psychical research had been absorbed into physiology and psychoanalysis. However, artists including early abstractionists and the Surrealists soon developed a fascination with such phenomena, explored, for example, in the practice of automatic writing and drawing. Carl Jung believed

automatism tapped into universal consciousness and spurred the act of artistic creation.²⁶ The veritable fluidity of art and mysticism has provided a running thread throughout modern cultural history into which Judd's work taps. Despite his professed atheism, Judd's regular lectures, performances and screenings in forums such as Swedenborg House and the Pagan Society suggest an earnest interest in involving himself beyond the elite, primarily secular confines of the contemporary art world. Moreover, they point toward longstanding linkages in modernity between art, science and the supernatural that have been fundamental to the development of each of these fields, despite modernist myths that suggest otherwise.

Endnotes

- 1 Todorov, Tzvetan, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, Richard Howard, trans., New York: Cornell University Press, 1975, p. 113.
- 2 Todorov, *The Fantastic*, p. 113. The first quote is from Gérard de Nerval, *Aurélia*.
- 3 Quoted in Lockhurst, Roger, "Knowledge, Belief and the Supernatural at the Imperial Margin", *The Victorian Supernatural*, Nicola Bown et al., eds., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p. 199.
- 4 Adorno, Theodor, "Theses Against Occultism", 1951, quoted in Dichter, Claudia et al., "The Medium as Artist," *The Message: Art and Occultism*, exh. cat., Claudia Dichter et al., eds, Cologne: Walther Koenig, 2007, p. 163.
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- 6 Lockhurst, Roger, "Trance-Gothic, 1882-1897", *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century*, Ruth Robbins and Julian Wolfreys, eds., Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2000, p. 148.
- 7 Lockhurst, "Trance-Gothic", p. 153.
- 8 Lockhurst, "Trance-Gothic", p. 153.
- 9 Judd's earlier video *I Love*, 2003, does this explicitly by turning the camera back on an amateur photography club. The artist's lingering shots and obsessive voiceover provide scopophilic scrutiny of the actions and physiognomy of the all-male membership, mirroring the men's lascivious attention to their chosen 'artistic' subject matter of female glamour models.
- 10 Noakes, Richard, "Spiritualism, Science and the Supernatural in mid-Victorian Britain", *The Victorian Supernatural*, p. 24.
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- 13 Dichter et al., "The Medium as Artist", p. 164.
- 14 Bown et al., "Introduction", *The Victorian Supernatural*, p. 1.
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- 16 Harvey, John, *Photography and Spirit*, London: Reaktion, 2007, p. 70.
- 17 Heard, Mervyn, *Phantasmagoria: The Secret Life of the Magic Lantern*, Hastings, UK: The Projection Box, 2006, pp. 221, 219.
- 18 Dichter et al. propose stenography, photography and phonograph recordings' "fascinating attempts to lend aesthetic expression to the intangible" as artworks in their own right, "The Medium as Artist", pp. 164-165.
- 19 Harvey, *Photography and Spirit*, p. 74.
- 20 'Ghost stereos' were also produced in scores in the late-nineteenth century, Heard, *Phantasmagoria*, p. 240.
- 21 Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 7. It should be noted that *Conversations with the Other Side* maintains the Victorian gender dynamic in that in most versions of the performance, and in the definitive video, Judd acts as mesmerist while Christensen undergoes the trance.
- 22 Winter, *Mesmerized*, p. 5.
- 23 For the various uses of the magic lantern, including scientific and educational ones, see Richard Crangle et al., eds., *Realms of Light: Uses and Perceptions of the Magic Lantern from the 17th to the 21st Century*, London: Magic Lantern Society, 2005.
- 24 Heard, *Phantasmagoria*, p. 219.
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- 26 Gorsen, Peter, "The Entrance of Mediumism into the History of Art. Inexplicability—the Surrealist Key", *The Message: Art and Occultism*, exh. cat., Claudia Dichter et al., eds., Cologne: Walther Koenig, 2007, p. 171.















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p. 61: Artwork for The Brotherhood of Subterranea by Dan Ford, 2008.

p. 67: Drawing for *I Will Heal You* temple by Ricardo Montoya, 2007.

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Colophon

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