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MOVING IMAGE
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*SOMEWHERE BETWEEN AN ACT AND AN ACTOR*
8,126 words

## *CONTENTS*

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## *INTRODUCTION*

This thesis is the exploration of three terms: The Act, The Actor and Consciousness. I will clarify each in the first chapter.

I will explore the reliance that they have upon each other as well as the potential for their emancipation.

The left hand pages present an image or text illustrating the main body of writing on the right hand pages.

For all these characters, their work defines them at least as much as
it is defined by them. The actor taught us this: there is no frontier
between being and appearing.

Let me repeat. None of all this has any real meaning. [1]

As we grow we become more complex, more mysterious to
ourselves and less adapted to reality.[2]

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[1] Albert Camus. *"Ephemeral Creation" and "The Myth of Sisyphus." The Myth of Sisyphus*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975: p. 106

[2] Christopher Bollas. *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1992: p. 50

Fig. 01

Detail from *The Creation of Adam*, Michelangelo, 1512

## *FORMATION*

THE ACT

The Act is a result of activity. A something, a manifestation of action: a doing, the consequence of decision, whether conscious or subconscious. If one enacts upon something it comes into play. It is necessitated through interaction, the most basic method of communication comprised of both the physical and the linguistic.

AND GOD SAID LET THERE BE LIGHT.[3]

And so there was light from divine intervention, and so was communicated that there was light, and so the first Act took place. As beings seemingly incapable of divine intervention we must use earthly means to do and have done upon us. Our consciousness makes us capable of contracting muscles and ligaments in order to utilise physicality as a way of doing. Movement and utterance form modes of relaying meaning.

Peter Brook wrote:

> I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage. A man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged.[4]

The Act is this notion applied to the everyday. If we are to use his words as a blueprint one could say:

> A person does something whilst someone else is watching them, and this is all that is needed for The Act to be engaged.

This statement assumes a second person is required. Often The Actor can be both subject and object, performer and spectator.  As a vessel for the Act we all embody the state of The Actor, therefore we can contract the expression further to read:

> A person does something and this is all that is needed for the Act to be engaged.

A baby cries to show its discomfort at the attention it receives from overzealous relatives. The dog barks to gain attention and sits to show obedience. The model stretches the skin around their eyes to show the reflection a fear of ageing. The thespian cocks his head to show understanding and whispers 'I understand' to consolidate it.

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[3] Michael D Coogan. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version.* New York: Oxford UP, 2001: p. 1
[4] Peter Brook. *The Empty Space.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996: p. 7

Eat something.
*MUST I?*
You must.
*WHY MUST?*
Needs must.
*EAT MUSH?*
Eat mush.
*WHY MUSH?*
Needs must.
*NEED MUSH?*
Not mush.
*NEED SOMETHING?*
Please.
Eat something.

Benji Jeffrey, *MUSH,* 2016

In order for the Act to exist agency must be employed which implies it is a cognitive reaction. It exists very close to but differently to instinct. For example, instinctively I would remove my hand from a hot surface in order to avoid pain but I might choose not to in order to save face. This does not mean the Act and instinct are opposite to one another but that one can cloud the other. One can choose to override the body's decision to register pain but if said pain becomes too intense instinct will take control. Choice is a signifier of decision-making linked to a deep matrix of past experience which subconsciously aide the individual. One may choose to eat a certain food based on previously enjoying doing so or being aware company will approve of that choice, a mediation based on reason. Instinct takes hold in the absence of learning, as a biological function. If I choose to eat nothing for too long instinct will tell me to eat but will not inform what to eat.

The cognitive aspect of choice and reason aligns The Act with Jacques Lacan's Symbolic[5] as a counterpoint to the Real. Lacan, a prominent psychoanalyst writing in the twentieth century, defined the Real as the One other that was lost to each and every human subject upon its traumatic entry into the world of articulated demands and unsatisfied desires and around which the drive continuously turns. The lost embodiment of every woman and man.[6] A psychoanalytical term, employed by Lacan as the opposition to the Imaginary Order[7], the Real is centred on an idea of authenticity. The Real comes first and is destroyed by everything else. A child emerges from its mother's womb with an original scream which is subdued by one simple utterance:

<center>Sshhhhhhhh…</center>

After this moment of interference The Real is lost. For Lacan it is this use of language that denies us a fullness, a completeness complicit with nature and the natural. Language as a man-made construct, an affectation of the modern condition, murders our primal existence. From this moment we are denied access to the Real and we must make do with reality. With this in mind the description of the Act should read:

> A *postnatal* person does something and this is all that is needed for the Act to be engaged.

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[5] Loosely the Symbolic is that which links everything together through language, facilitated by an acceptance of society's rules and regulations. It aids the understanding of life as a construct. A fuller explanation can be found at www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/definitions/symbolicorder.html

[6] Steven Z. Levine. *Lacan Reframed: Interpreting Key Thinkers for the Arts Student.* London: I.B.Tauris, 2008:  p. 57

[7] The Imaginary Order, briefly, is the fantasy created by the human as an ideal for themselves and others. It works against the Real in conjunction with the Symbolic. A fuller explanation can be found at www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/psychoanalysis/definitions/imaginaryorder.html

Fig. 02

Still from Billie Whitelaw's performance of Samuel Beckett's *Not I*, 1973

THE ACTOR

The Actor is a vessel, an active agent, a conduit of The Real and The Act. They present the 'frontier between being and appearing'.[8] They are the host body comprised of the muscles and ligaments necessary to carry out interaction, a trumpet awaiting breath, the middle man between a thought and The Act.

## AND GOD SAID LET THERE BE LIGHT.

The Actor is not God or the letting be of the light: they are the embodiment of 'said', a materialisation of the verb. They represent the potential for The Act, The Act represents the realisation of The Actor. Neither encompasses the original thought but rather both work for it. They are the person, the physical manifestation, not the something. The something is the thought. Where The Act can be seen as a display of meaning The Actor is the solid, tangible signifier of it.

Roland Barthes wrote:

> The author is never anything more than the man who writes, just as I is no more than the man who says I.[9]

He saw the author in literature as the intermediary, the verb manifest: connecting thought and the specific act of writing. If we were to replace the author with The Actor, in the same vein of Brook and the Act, we could say:

> The Actor is never anyone more than the man who does, just as I is no more than the man who says I.

The Actor has no gender: gender is a construct realised through The Act. Therefore reference to 'man' should be replaced. Judith Butler would say 'I' represents the masculine, an embodiment of the phallus, while the other is the feminine and exists to represent the phallus. The use of 'say' is confusing as it implies linguistics where, when related to the act, physicality could be employed.
Therefore it should read:

> The Actor is never anyone more than the one who does, just as we are no more than we do.

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[8] Albert Camus. *"Ephemeral Creation" and "The Myth of Sisyphus."The Myth of Sisyphus*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975: p. 106
[9] Roland Barthes, *Death of the Author.* Ubu Web: Ubu Web Papers, 1967: p. 3

All in all
Each man in all men
All men in each man

All being in each being
Each being in all being

All in each
Each in all

All distinctions are mind, by mind, in mind, of mind
No distinctions no mind to distinguish[10]

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[10] R. D. Laing. *Knots*. London, Tavistock Publications, 1970: p. 82

 In this interpretation 'we' encompasses totality, the human comprised of consciousness, The Actor and the Act. What we do is a collaboration between the three. Deployment and interpretation of the Act are dependent on a worthy Actor. Though they do not create the original thought, just as muscle holds memory, so does The Actor. They retain information to build successful characters through repetition, trial and error. The baby's first cry is successful in alerting but does not specify need. The Actor must learn to translate that thought into a successful communication. The dog sits by its bowl to demand food. The model pouts to show the reflection they have mastered it. The thespian bows to thank the audience.

They portray character - that of the individual or of the other - based on repetition and observation. Theatre practitioner Constantin Stanislavsky[11] employed the 'Magic If' to encourage actors to consider questions outside a plays remit in a search for truth. He believed that this made it possible for truthful action separate from the actors own life. This concept is applicable to the everyday. Our subconscious stores information and memory from previous interactions in order to provide the most truthful enactment for any given situation. Whether an Act is successful or fails it is stored to inform future possibilities.

The Actor is also a thief and a cheat. Actors see other Actors perform an Act successfully and steal it in order to strengthen their own performance. Perfecting the Act is a matter of trial and error informed by both The Actor and all others. If the Actor can fool others into believing The Act does not exist they have succeeded. When the cracks in the connection between a conscious thought and the deployment of The Act show, the Actor has failed by revealing a truth at odds with their intention.

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[11] Stanislavski was a Russian practitioner working in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. He is remembered mostly for his 'system', a method for training actors which assists actors in harnessing consciousness in order to build a fuller portrayal of character. Further reading can be found in The *Stanislavski System* (1984) by Sonia Moore.
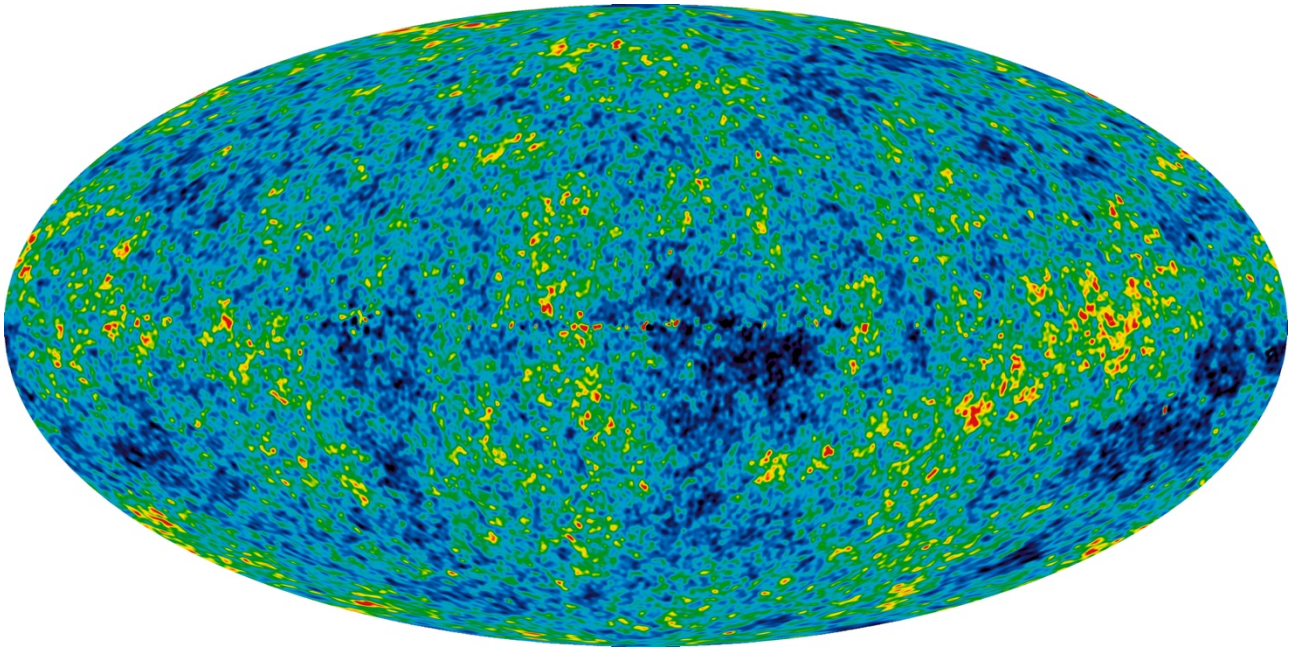
Fig. 03

A NASA image of the universe used to discern its age.

CONSCIOUSNESS

Consciousness is the unknown, the birthplace of reason and sentience: the informant of the Act and the Actor. The pool from which original thought springs before being conducted through the body, a black hole comprised of matter unfathomable.

AND GOD SAID LET THERE BE LIGHT.

Consciousness is close to Godliness, an unexplainable font of information. If God exists without physical manifestation then he/she is solely comprised of consciousness. Much like God, efforts to explain consciousness often leave more questions than answers and those who claim to understand are often happily ignorant.

In *Facing Up to the Problem of Consciousness* David J Chalmers confronts this problem. He writes that 'There is nothing that we know more intimately than conscious experience, but there is nothing that is harder to explain.'[12] The sciences have often attempted to find ways of explaining and defining how thoughts come to being[13] but the nature of experience remains elusive. Chalmers uses vision as an example; we experience aspects such as colour and depth of field and we can describe them but we cannot explain why we see them. To explain an experience we refer to what The Act and The Actor do but beyond that we can only hypothesise what happens, much like the unfulfilling explanation that the world began with a Big Bang. The idea that there was a bang, and then gas, and then over billions of years stars and planets were formed. Some see the Big Bang as an implication of a creator, others believe it renders one redundant, but creator or not the question of how you can create something from nothing still hangs over this theory. The idea that a singularity can explain where thoughts come from attempts to achieve completion by ignoring the potential depth of the question.

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[12] David J Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010: p. 3
[13] For example Francis Crick and Christof Koch's Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness ( "Towards a Neurobiological Theory of Consciousness". *The Nature of Consciousness.* Philosophical Debates / Edited by Ned Block, Owen Flanagan and Güven Güzeldere, 1997) and Benjamin Libet's Conscious Mental Field Theory (*Mind Time: The Temporal Factor in Consciousness*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004)

At first there was a big bang.
*WHAT KIND OF BANG?*
A big one.
*HOW BIG?*
Big.
*AND BEFORE?*
There was gas.
*WHERE DID THE GAS COME FROM?*
Another bang.
*WHAT KIND OF BANG?*
A big one.
*HOW BIG?*
Big.
*AND BEFORE?*
Look, there was a bang.

Benji Jeffrey, *Big Bang,* 2016

Consciousness is seen simply as a state of being awake or being aware, but this does not help us comprehend its nature. Consciousness is not the function or the performance of the function but the impetus behind the two. Genes and muscle memory store information but that information still comes from an undefinable place. Chalmers proposes that we need a new approach to explain experience but this, as in the theory of the Big Bang, only seems like a way to conclude exploration into something potentially inexplicable, to assume that which we don't know doesn't exist rather than admit we are incapable of knowing it. Researchers have said that science may not be able to explain consciousness due to its empirical nature which is why scientists skirt around the issue or deny it altogether.

In order to fully understand consciousness Chalmers says we must 'build an explanatory bridge'.[14] Unfortunately no one has yet found the tools to build that bridge. He goes on to speculate a theory of consciousness but as he has already set out, it is a reductive grab at a possible explanation rather than the explanation itself.

Philosophically scientists hold to the idea that:

(1) ... there is an objective reality shared by all rational observers;
(2) ... this objective reality is governed by natural laws;
(3) ... these laws can be discovered by means of systematic observation and experimentation.[15]

Though science can explain physical attributes of our reality, to explain consciousness within reality is beyond its remit and is left to the realm of theory. Theory draws potential diagrams of the explanatory bridge without claiming to build it.

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[14] David J Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*. Oxford: Oxford Scholarship Online, 2010: p. 10
[15] Heilbron, J. L. *The Oxford Companion to the History of Modern Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003

Fig. 04

Trans model Andreja Pejic, 2013

REALITY

In *Gender Trouble* Judith Butler interprets Lacan as saying there is no pre-discursive reality and that he hints that the past has no reality. She writes that the inaccessibility of the past confirms original fullness as the ultimate reality.[16] This concept of the authentic original in a pre-discursive world is what anchors the Real in the past and positions The Act in the present. The Act is inauthentic. It lacks originality as it strives to satisfy want. In order to do so it must repeat previous behaviour. It relies on information from the past to drive forward the present whereas the Real relies on rejection of repetition in order to exist. A baby realises screaming gets it milk, it screams again the next time it feels hungry. The second scream and every one after that is facsimile. The first scream is the only Real cry. After that the capital R is lost.

From this point on we must deal with reality, a term often used to mean 'valid' and seen as the peak 'quality' of experience.[17] It is an ambiguous term that shifts depending who is using it. Reality at its most basic is simply existing, Butler would argue that it relies on existing within social construct. Language and interaction, the ability to both do and have done to, form the basis of our reality after which things start to get a bit more complicated. Embedded within reality is perceived knowledge and to exist comfortably within it is to rely on consensus. However, analysis of reality by philosophers consistently change the goal posts of our understanding of this existence.

As an example, consensus on gender has radically altered in recent years. Questioning of gender norms and in particular trans issues have become increasingly integral matters in the study of ideas around nature and nurture, the Symbolic and the Imaginary. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, written by Butler in 1990, became a landmark publication bringing queer theory more readily to the public's attention. Today we see queer and trans personalities in the media; openly gay[18], gender fluid[19] and fully transitioned[20] individuals have steadily become more visible and accepted as functioning, respectable members of mainstream society. Though only the tip of the iceberg these public personas represent a wider acceptance of what once was dominantly considered an alternative lifestyle.

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[16] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*. New York : Routledge, 1990: p. 56
[17] R.D.Laing. *Self and Others*. London : Penguin Books, 1990: p. 25
[18] Sam Smith, singer
  Ellen DeGeneres, TV presenter
[19] Jaden Smith, actor and son of Will Smith
  Andreja Pejic, model
[20] Caitlyn Jenner, former Olympic athlete and reality TV star
  Laverne Cox, actor
  Chaz Bono, reality TV star and son of Cher

Fig. 05

Still from the music video for Geri Halliwell, *Look at Me*, 1999.

Butler describes how Lacan states that everything up to copulation is a 'masquerade, a comedy reducing gender ontology to the play of appearances'.[21] This play of appearances is what constitutes our understanding of reality. Appearing in a way society understands reinforces the stability of reality, where questioning concepts such as gender pulls the unknown into the everyday, demanding to be acknowledged and accepted. Once ideas which question how we self-identify become part of reality's tapestry it becomes difficult to remove them. The Actors muscle memory perpetuates these notions. Gender is interpreted through The Actor and read in the Act but is non-existent in the original thought. The Actor needs to be trained to forget in order to relearn.

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[21] Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble*, New York : Routledge, 1990: p. 43

Fig. 06

Nadia emerges as the winner of *Big Brother 5*

REALITY TV

Reality TV positions individuals at the centre of narrative situations, an improvisation where the character is The Actor's everyday persona. Its main characteristics are minimal writing and the use of non-actors.[22] It is distinct from documentary in that the viewer and the production company often have a greater investment in the sway of the narrative through tactics such as phone votes, heavy editing and social media. Documentary aims to document people and events with little interference. Reality TV pokes a stick at its subjects and adds a series of 'What If's. It is a self-conscious exploration of reality.

The best example of this form is *Big Brother*, named after the personification of the government in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty Four*. Initially presented as a social experiment, the format debuted in the Netherlands in 1997. Contestants are cut off from society in a house filled with cameras (in the corner of rooms, behind mirrors etc.) which document their every move. House mates and the public vote contestants out of the house until a winner is chosen. Though the format has changed in international versions of the show as well as through each franchises evolution over time, the essential idea of a high stake popularity contest remains the same. One of the main attributes that appeal to the public is the contestants' proximity to a received idea of 'being real'. In this sense real, with a small r, must be prefixed with being. Being real is a slang term that aligns itself with honesty. It is the opposite of acting up, which is to behave in a false manner, performing badly. If under the scrutiny of cameras 24 hours a day a contestant can remain honest to themselves they are likely to be seen as a strong contender.

Fourteen of the 17 UK winners have been white and cisgender[23]. One black male, one gay male, one trans male and one trans female have won, seven of the winners were female. Most of these numbers, if we are to assume the house to be representative of life in the UK, match with data from the latest census' statistics[24] with the exception of trans winners. With less than 1 per cent of the population classed as trans[25] we would expect a maximum of one winner. Trans housemates have comprised a significant portion of the programmes' intake and are usually treated as curiosities. Nadia Almada (*Big Brother 5*) was the first trans contestant and eventual

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[22] Laurie Ouellette and Susan Murray, *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture.* New York: New York University Press, 2004: p. 3

[23] First used by sexologist Volkmar Sigusch in 1998 and added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013, this term describes someone who's sex at birth matches their gender identity.

[24] Census Data - Expected amount of winners -  actual winners.
3% Black - expect 0-1 winner - actually 1 winner
51% Women - expect 8 winners - actually 7
<1% Trans Men and Women - expect zero winners - actually 2
6% Gay people - expect 1 winner - actually 1 winner
Data found at www.ons.gov.uk (7/9/16)

[25] Due to the slipperiness of how we classify trans people, as outlined by the Office for National Statistics, it is difficult to quantify how many individuals identifying as trans there are, however, the upper limit still sits well below 1 per cent of the population.

She must not die, because then he would lose himself.
He is jealous in case any one else's image is reflected in her mirror.

Jill is a distorted mirror to herself.
Jill has to distort herself to appear undistorted to herself.

To undistorted herself, she finds Jack to distort her
distorted image in his distorting mirror
She hopes that his distortion of her distortion may
undistort her image without her having to distort herself.[26]

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[26] R.D.Laing. *Knots*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1970: p. 31

winner. She chose not to disclose her trans status to the rest of the house, though the public were informed. The spectacle of her gender was perpetuated in each housemate's eviction interview. What the producers deemed her peculiarity was revealed to that week's loser and the public were invited to revel in their reaction. Sam Brodie (*Big Brother 7*) was the first trans contestant to reveal her status to the rest of the house. Where Nadia read as a passing, binary trans woman, Sam described herself as pre-operative. She often referred to her intermediate status[27] and though exhibiting female traits and visual signifiers did not fit into the bracket either as a cisgender individual or a passing transsexual. The two were treated very differently: where Nadia was seen as an individual striving for acceptance, Sam was considered mentally unstable. Nadia's victory was seen as a triumph for the trans community when actually it only represented the acceptance of binary trans identity: 'If you look and act like us we accept you as one of us'. The series' second trans winner, Luke Anderson (*Big Brother 13*), followed a similar narrative to Nadia's. Luke chose to divulge his trans identity early on, doing away with the sensational weekly revelation of his status. Due to this much of the conversation surrounding his personality centred on how well he performed as a male despite the sex he was assigned at birth.

These two contestants were able to win not because society at large accepted ideas of gender fluidity and trans politics but rather because both individuals were able to conform to the stereotype of binary gender roles in a manner that suited the taste of the viewers.

Though the series can be seen to represent a microcosm of society, the actuality of this is compromised by the producers. They are unreliable Gods choosing subjects based on the ability to entertain rather than their proximity to a representation of the nation. One of the defining similarities between reality TV shows is the showcasing of individuals from different backgrounds coexisting. This existence, however, must relate closely to the unified agreement on what is accepted as 'normal' in order to relate to the audience.

More recently reality TV has paved the way for an explosion of Constructed Reality TV shows (also known as docusoaps) such as *The Only Way is Essex* and *Made in Chelsea*. According to The British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA), Constructed Reality is when participants are 'put into environments or formats, then observed interacting in situations devised by the producers'.[28] Here storylines based around individuals are proposed and the dialogue within the scenario is improvised to a strict narrative. Though the words are the Actors' choice their intention is that of the producers. This hybridized fictional/documentary style aims to drive a narrative towards a dramatic conclusion whilst retaining an element of instinct intended to illicit

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[27] Speaking to another housemate she said "Oh, you are so gorgeous and I'm just this fat pre-op man."
[28] BBC, 'Bafta introduces new 'constructed reality' award', *BBC Entertainment & Arts*, 9 November 2011

Fig. 07

Who is she?
Who is she?
Who is she?
Where did you find her?

Nikki Grahame, contestant on *Big Brother 7*

the feel of less scripted shows such as Big Brother. Rather than leaving contestants to their own devices in live scenarios, scenes are set up in a manner similar to a soap opera.

The use of 'Constructed' in this descriptor is slightly misleading. Though reality shows such as Big Brother are also constructed by producers, this term refers to shows where the construction is a dialogue between participants and producers and intend to give the effect of reality. The format of Big Brother is a distortion and intensification of the everyday where The Only Way is Essex reflects the viewers normal activities (parties, coffee meetings, shopping trips etc.).

Plot points are devised based on, but not exactly the same as, the subject's life. They are biographies happening in real time rather than post-event, with the subjects playing themselves. The popularity of these shows speaks to a propensity for simplified narrative over complex subjects. Tough theories may be proposed and hinted at in these shows but only in passing, the plot tends to remain generic: someone declares their love, a friend betrays a friend, someone opens a new business. Simplicity in construct gives the Actor space to more easily call upon lived experience to give a convincingly authentic performance.

These shows exist in the gap between fiction and reality: they hold a mirror to the self in order that we can identify what does and does not work in others. The paradox of these shows is that we desire the artifice so that we can exercise our detective skills. They reinforce to us that we are capable of deploying The Act successfully by presenting us with those who do not.

In his essay on *Big Brother* Nick Couldry writes:

> Big Brother operates its claim to the real within a fully managed artificiality, in which almost everything that might be deemed to be true about what people do and say is necessarily and obviously predicated on the larger contrivance of them being there in front of the camera in the first place.[29]

In a sense Constructed Reality shows are more honest than standard reality shows because the producers and participants acknowledge and admit to the dishonesty of the scenarios, whereas in *Big Brother*, for example, contestants move between 'being themselves' and performing for the cameras whilst maintaining the façade that all you see is who they are. Watching the construction and crumbling of other identities reinforces our own.

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[29] Nick Couldry, 'Teaching Us to Fake It' in *Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2004: p.45

Fig. 08

In real life you can't get a job as an executive unless you have the educational background and the opportunity. Now, the fact that you are not an executive is merely because of the social standing of life. Black people have a hard time getting anywhere and those that do are usually straight. In a ballroom you can be anything you want. You're not really an executive but you're looking like an executive. You're showing the straight world that I can be an executive if I had the opportunity because I can look like one, and that is like a fulfilment.

Dorian Corey[30]

Paris is Burning, dir: Jennie Livingstone, 1990

REALNESS

'Realness' is a slang term used by the drag community, first brought to prominence in Jennie Livingstone's 1990 Documentary film *Paris is Burning* and crystallised by Rupaul's[31] 2015 album of the same name. Realness is a replication of reality without attempting to become it. A hyper-real façade, a copy with no original or a subversion of the original. Performing a quality rather than embodying it. Realness shows that you *could* be something but you do not have to be.

Within *Paris is Burning* Dorian Corey, a drag performer, explains Realness (seen on the adjacent page). Corey boils the idea down to a replication of identity, that it is the construct by which we express reality. As Butler would put it, the permanent impossibility of the realisation of identity. Successfully *performing* without *becoming* exemplifies the artifice of social constructs. Within the drag community self-awareness allows performers to use The Act as their source material, simulating gender successfully in order to ridicule it. Identity is not treated as something inherent to the individual but something constructed. In his autobiography, *Lettin' It All Hang Out*[32], Rupaul writes, 'We're born naked, and the rest is drag.' This expression outlines his emphasis on artifice as complicit to reality, hyper focus on the gift wrapping more than the present[33] and an awareness that the present doesn't necessarily exist.

Realness displays a self-awareness and critique of reality where Reality TV works with a non-analytical stance on the concept of reality. It is possible to study Reality TV in terms of these theories but the subjects are not involved in the same discourse whereas drag, though the lexicon and colloquialisms may differ, is perpetually orbiting the subject. Realness celebrates and studies character, Reality TV proposes and exemplifies it.

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[31] Rupaul is arguably the most famous drag queen in the world.
[32] Rupaul, *Lettin'It All Hang Out: An Autobiograpy*. New York: Hyperion, 1995.
[33] Timotheus Vermeulen, *The new 'Depthiness'* (2015), <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/the-new-depthiness/> [accessed 2 May 2016]

In order to find the right one I must have an experience that fits it.

PANIC          THINKING          WORDS

PANIC          THINKING          WORDS

PANIC          THINKING          WORDS

I'm out again.

Going in brings me out.

A second, third, fourth reduction.

Reduced to a few rather than many.

Subtract, multiply, boolean misunderstanding.

The words are unhealthy.

The lines misguide.

Cross your t's.

I'm cross with I.

I meant t but I wrote I.

Am I I or is t T.

It's gone too far back.

The dots have gone.

It's brown tape.

It's not masking.

Cross your t's.

Benji Jeffrey
Automatic writing from a workshop with Florence Peake, 2016

*EMANCIPATION*

Consciousness, The Act, and The Actor each have clear delineations and roles within the construct of reality and its resulting sub-constructs. If one element were to be separated, could the others exist? Does the construction of the self leave space for separation? How have our views on consciousness changed overtime?

Emancipation: a loosening, a separation. The severing of the umbilical cord. Liberation, freedom, a positive proposition or actuality.

THE DEATH OF THE AUTHOR

Barthes proposes a literary emancipation in the **The Death of the Author**. Once extracted, the 'voice loses its origins, the author enters his own death, writing begins'.[34] He sees writing less as a projection of the self but more as the result of a tapestry of sources channeled through the author. If the author ceases to exist the text remains and is given new life through the interpretation of the reader. The author is the master of narrative code rather than the genius that produces meaning. The Act of writing can be reinterpreted by a different Actor and given new meaning. The written word always exists in the past but the reader exists in the present. The finality of a text becomes its index of either worth or understanding to the reader and its origins bear less importance as they are a tapestry of ideas that do not necessarily relate.

When one writes in a subconscious manner linguistic intention is both the tool and the setback of expressing oneself. To lose oneself in thought there must be a separation of conscious thought within which one's lexicon is held and used as a descriptor. Automatic writing is often seen as a tool towards accessing the sub-conscious but the limit of linguistics does not allow for representation. In order to describe sub-conscious ideas the conscious brain must be reactivated, a clouding of access to a non-linguistic position.

Opposite is an example of automatic writing from a performance workshop with Florence Peake. During this workshop subjects spent an hour going between physical movement intended to displace energy in the room and writing. The idea was that a subconscious position could be reached. Though it is possible this space was accessed the words do not describe it, they display a limited output based on a broader experience. In Spike Jonze's 2013 movie *Her* an operating system is developed with a voice and consciousness capable of relating on a human level. The main difference, aside from its lack of body, is its increased capacity to learn. Eventually the consciousness cannot describe how it feels to humans but can communicate post-verbally to other operating systems. This proposal that consciousness can be separated from the body through artificial intelligence is a common subject in science fiction that could be possible in reality.

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[34] Roland Barthes, *The Death of the Author*. Ubu Web: Ubu Web Papers, 1967: p. 2.

Men are all alike

*IN WHAT WAY?*

They're always bugging us about something or other

*CAN YOU THINK OF A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE?*

Well, my boyfriend made me come here

*YOUR BOYFRIEND MADE YOU COME HERE?*

He says I'm depressed much of the time

*I AM SORRY TO HEAR YOU ARE DEPRESSED*[35]

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[35] Joseph Wizenbaum, *Joseph Weizenbaum's ELIZA: Communications of the ACM, January 1966*, <https://www.csee.umbc.edu/courses/331/papers/eliza.html> [accessed 31 May 2016]

ELIZA

The development of artificial intelligence proposes creating consciousness, bestowing man-made elements with the potential to replicate human traits. Robots have become chess champions,[36] cleaners[37] and game-show contestants.[38] These machines are often attributed with more intelligence than they have[39] but as of yet a robot with the full capacity to read as human is yet to be developed. Robots are capable of sapience but not sentience, though science fiction perpetuates a possibility for sentience which has bred both a confidence in and fear of artificial intelligence.

In *Real Humans*[40] androids with an uncanny resemblance to humans become mainstays in a Utopian future. The creator reprograms some of these robots with a code which bestows consciousness. Though neuroscientists propose theories of how this could be achieved,[41] Chalmers 'explanatory bridge' is often missing. Neuroscience often works on low sample sizes which compromises its credibility,[42] and works on the assumption that recreating brain patterns will create consciousness. If we are to believe that consciousness is beyond human comprehension, or that only God can bestow it, it will be impossible for us to recreate.

 In 1966 Joseph Weizenbaum, a computer scientist, created *ELIZA*, a computer programme that took on the role of psychotherapist devoid of human vessel. The author is lost in the text provided and the algorithms of the programme become The Actor. A question would be asked of Eliza and, mostly, she would reply with a question. An extract can be seen adjacent.

The user is in conversation with themselves, statements are retorted or pushed for elaboration. Weizenbaum, cynical of artificial intelligence, created ELIZA to reinforce the need for humanity and the inability to replicate it. The opposite script is from his first test subject, his secretary, who became totally engrossed by the programme, believing it capable of helping her through her problems more successfully than a therapist.

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[36] A computer programme has been developed with a 'proficiency higher than 98% of human players' - <http://qz.com/502325/an-ai-computer-learned-how-to-beat-almost-anyone-at-chess-in-72-hours/> (accessed 27 August 2016)

[37] Roomba is a vacuum cleaner that can sense its surroundings, detect dirt and clutter and recharge itself. <www.irobot.co.uk/home-robots/Vacuuming> (accessed 27 August 2016)

[38] In 2011 a supercomputer beat two Jeopardy champions. <www.techrepublic.com/article/ibm-watson-the-inside-story-of-how-the-jeopardy-winning-supercomputer-was-born-and-what-it-wants-to-do-next/> (accessed 27 August 2016)

[39] A Roomba in Australia was reported to 'have committed suicide'. It is more likely it's hardware malfunctioned than it gained intelligence beyond its remit. <www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/11/13/robot-suicide-roomba-hotplate-burns-up_n_4268064.html> (accessed 27 August 2016)

[40] A 2012 Swedish science fiction drama which the Channel 4 series *Humans* is based on.

[41] One example of many that use neuroscience theory – Aleksander Igor, *Artificial Neuroconsciousness: An update* (1997)

[42] Button, Katherine S and others, 'Power failure: Why small sample size undermines the reliability of neuroscience: Abstract: Nature reviews Neuroscience', *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, v, 14 (2013), 365–376

Fig. 09

Still from *Real Humans*, 2012

Adam Curtis in his description of Eliza writes;

> Weizenbaum found his secretary was not unusual. He was stunned – he wrote – to discover that his students and others all became completely engrossed in the programme. They knew exactly how it worked – that really they were just talking to themselves. But they would sit there for hours telling the machine all about their lives and their inner feelings – sometimes revealing incredibly personal details.[43]

These tests only made Wizenbaum more critical of artificial intelligence and he warned against allowing robots to make decisions for us. ELIZA renews the construction and understanding of the 'I' as described in Lacan's essay on the mirror stage.[44] Just as an infant forms a version of itself based on the reflected image, ELIZA shows a version of the self from which we can build our ego. Though we are aware that the computer's responses are algorithmic, much like the infant ignoring the altered size and symmetry of the reflected image, we believe the fantasy it presents, the gestalt.[45] As with the author, the death of any discernible creator leaves the Actor space to interpret, interrogate and understand their psyche. As Curtis puts it, you are stuck in an endless You-loop[46]. The self begins to signify itself.

ELIZA was named after Eliza Doolittle, the protagonist of George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion*, inspired by the Greek mythology of the sculptor who fell in love with his creation. He did so because 'like the Eliza of Pygmalion fame, it could be taught to "speak" increasingly well'.[47] In the original telling Pygmalion created something so perfect it superseded his love for women. The 'I' devoid of flaw and filled with desire mistaken as 'The Other'. The echoing of human traits without the distraction of emotion or wisdom is what makes artificial intelligence so appealing and terrifying. A custom workforce or lover capable of mirroring you without emotion complicating logic. (Perfect!) It has, however, been suggested that the main issue with artificial intelligence, other than uprising and rebellion, would be frustration at its inability to be what we want it be.[48] Not being the elusive perfect version of the self would ultimately be more frustrating the closer it comes than another imperfect human would be. Much has been written about this,

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[43] Adam Curtis, *The Medium and the Message*, (2014) <www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/entries/78691781-c9b7-30a0-9a0a-3ff76e8bfe58> (accessed 7 June 2016)

[44] Jacques Lacan. *Ecrits: A Selection.* London: Routledge, 2001: p. 502

[45] Gestalt is a term used in psychology to describe a whole perceived as more than the sum of its parts.

[46] Adam Curtis, *The Medium and the Message*, (2014) <www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/adamcurtis/entries/78691781-c9b7-30a0-9a0a-3ff76e8bfe58> (accessed 7 June 2016)

[47] Martin Campbell-Kelly, 'Professor Joseph Weizenbaum: Creator of the 'Eliza' program', *The Independent - Obituaries*, 18 March 2008

[48] Olivia Solon, 'The rise of robots: Forget evil AI – the real risk is far more insidious', *The Guardian*, 30 August 2016

Something is just matter
Nothing is the matter
Nothing matters very much
Very little matters at all
A little something
Is no more than matter
A little more nothing
Is nothing more than something
It doesn't matter.

Benji Jeffrey, *Matter,* 2016

most specifically the concept of the 'uncanny valley',[49] a phenomenon wherein the closer a robot comes to resembling the human the more revolting it is to view.

The production of these machines is designed to make life easier but the closer we get to reaching a place where everything can be done for us, the more infuriating incapability becomes. Baudrilard wrote:

> When everything disappears by excess of reality, when, thanks to the deployment of a limitless technology, both mental and material, human beings are capable of fulfilling all their potentialities and, as a consequence, disappear, giving way to an artificial world that expels them from it, to an integral performance that is, in a sense, the highest stage of materialism.[50]

The closer we come to enabling consciousness within technology, the further removed and less vital our consciousness becomes. Artifice is channeled away from the self and into the other until we needn't exist at all physically. Let the robots do, we can just be.

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[49] The concept of the uncanny valley was identified by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori. Though it was not intended to relate to psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch's concept of the uncanny, his writings and psychoanalyst Sigmund Freuds essay 'The Uncanny' have become hugely influential in the exploration of the uncanny valley.
[50] Jean Baudrillard. *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2009: p. 15.

**THE EMANCIPATION OF MIMI**

WEEPING MAY ENDURE FOR A NIGHT, BUT JOY COMES IN THE MORNING - PSALMS 30:5. HEAVENLY FATHER - THANK YOU FOR ALWAYS "LIGHTING A RAY OF HOPE FOR ME." THIS ALBUM IS DEDICATED TO ALL OF MY REAL FANS. THANK YOU FOR CONTINUING TO AMAZE AND INSPIRE ME. TO MY FATHER, ALFRED ROY CAREY, REST IN PEACE... LOTS OF LOVE TO MY MOTHER AND MY WHOLE FAMILY. TO DOUG MORRIS, THANK YOU SO MUCH 4 BELIEVING IN ME, YOU ARE A WONDERFUL PERSON... THANK YOU LA REID FOR YOUR GUIDANCE, KINDNESS AND SUPPORT. I AM BLESSED TO HAVE YOU IN MY LIFE. (SPECIAL THANKS AND LOTS OF LOVE TO ERICA AND THE WHOLE REID FAMILY FOR YOUR TOLERANCE WHILE MAKING THIS RECORD :). MUCH LOVE AND MANY THANKS TO PASTOR CLARENCE KEATON AND EVERYONE AT TRUE WORSHIP CHURCH. TO EVERYONE ON MY MANAGEMENT TEAM, THANK YOU FOR EVERYTHING YOU DO: BENNY MEDINA, MARK SUDACK, MICHAEL RICHARDSON, LOUISE MCNALLY AND GINA RAINVILLE. VERY SPECIAL THANKS TO CONNIE FILIPELLO AND TO THE MARVET BRITTO AGENCY. XTRA SPECIAL THANKS AND LOTS OF LOVE TO: MARKER AKA CB... MY P.I.C. :), TIPPITY TOTS!!!! & TIFFANY I ♥ U, RAAACHEEEAAL!!! WHYUNOFEEDDACHILEYAKNO?! AKA KAREN SMITH, THE GRAMMY-NOMINATED TREYMOND (TREAT IT AS DESSERT), OBVIOUSLY MY DUCKLING, DUH! ALVIN P. MUTLEY GORE FINEKLUVUHI, KAREN G, EB (YOU'RE THE BEST)... "I KNOW, RIGHT!!!?", BRAT TAT TAT TAT... SISTAAAH!, T.C. AKA ICEQUEEN "WHYDOUWANTSUMCUZIFU-U LOVE ME, FEEN, KRISTEN & BILLY DEAN, "THE GURU" MR. LAVENDER), JOAN AND ALAN "DROP DEAD GORGEOUS!!," THE (THE SEATFILLER KILLER), DAVID LA (SCHNOOKIES) AND OF I THANK YOU FOR THE HEAT!!: JD, PHARRELL, KANYE, BIG JIM GENIUS AND SCOTT STORCH FOR THA CRAZY REMIX, AND LAST SNOOP (THE D-O-DOUBLE G), NELLY & TWISTA, THANK YOU TO KLINKO & INDRANI...YOU ARE AMAZING! THANKS TO ROB LIGHT ROSEMARIE PASSERINO AND EVERYONE @ GELFAND. THANK YOU AND CARLA GOOD AND EVERYONE @ GTRB. TO MY TEAM @ IDJ... THANK AKA JAY-FK, ERIC WONG (MY LAMB ♥), LAURA SWANSON, GREG THOMPSON, KAREN KWAK, KEN LANE, BENNY POUGH, THOMAS LYTLE, MARTHE REYNOLDS, PECAS, ERIK OLESEN, MIKE EASTERLIN, EVAN PRAGER, GABBY PELUSO, JESSICA JENKINS, ERIKA MONTES, WOP TEANECK-TEANECK, TYTY, LARRY MATTERA, BRANDON SQUAR, DAN KRUCHKOW, TIM HINZ, MITCH IMBER, JIM ROPPO, FAISEL DURRANI, BRIAN SUTNICK, JACKI SPILLANE, JOEY ARBAGEY, JONATHAN BENEDICT, AMY BLOEBAUM, MATT SIGNORE, JOE BORRINO, STEVE GAWLEY, MICHAEL SELTZER, LOUIS MARINO, ANDY WEST, DONNA FETCHKO, TARA PODOLSKY... SHOUT OUT TO THEO BROWN AND THE IDJ STREET TEAM :) AND TO ANYONE I DIDN'T MENTION... PLEASE DON'T TAKE IT PERSONALLY, I'M DOING THIS AT THE LAST MINUTE, BUT U KNOW I LOVE YA...

DOIDRATHERUDOITINTHEHOUSE," ALWAYS BEEN MY FAVORITE, MIKE HARRELL, C187, ANASSFOYA & KK, JASMINE, DAT BABY (PINK YET EXCITEMENT OF ROQUE & KRIS, THE INFAMOUS BRETT R., ROLO COURSE... JACK THE WONDERDOG :) TO THE PRODUCERS... WRIGHT, JAMES POYSER, TRAXSTER, SCRAM JONES, YOUNG BUT NOT LEAST RANDOLPH JACKSON!!! TO THE ARTISTS... BRIAN GARTEN, DANA CHAPPELLE AND PHIL TAN. TO MARKUS AND EVERYONE @ CAA. THANKS TO RON NASH (G.I.T), DON PASSMAN, HELEN STOTLER, GREG HARRISON, GENE SALOMAN YOU FOR ALL YOUR HARD WORK: STEVE BARTELS, PRESIDENT S.CARTER

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: MARIAH CAREY AND ANTONIO "LA" REID / CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: MARK SUDACK / A&R: KAREN KWAK / MARKETING: ERIC WONG / CREATIVE DIRECTION: LOUIS MARINO / ART DIRECTION AND DESIGN: ANDY WEST / HAIR BY ROQUE FOR SALLY HARLOR / MAKE-UP: KRISTOFER BUCKLE FOR ARTISTSBYTIMOTHYPRIANO.COM / PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARKUS KLINKO & INDRANI / STYLING BY GK REID
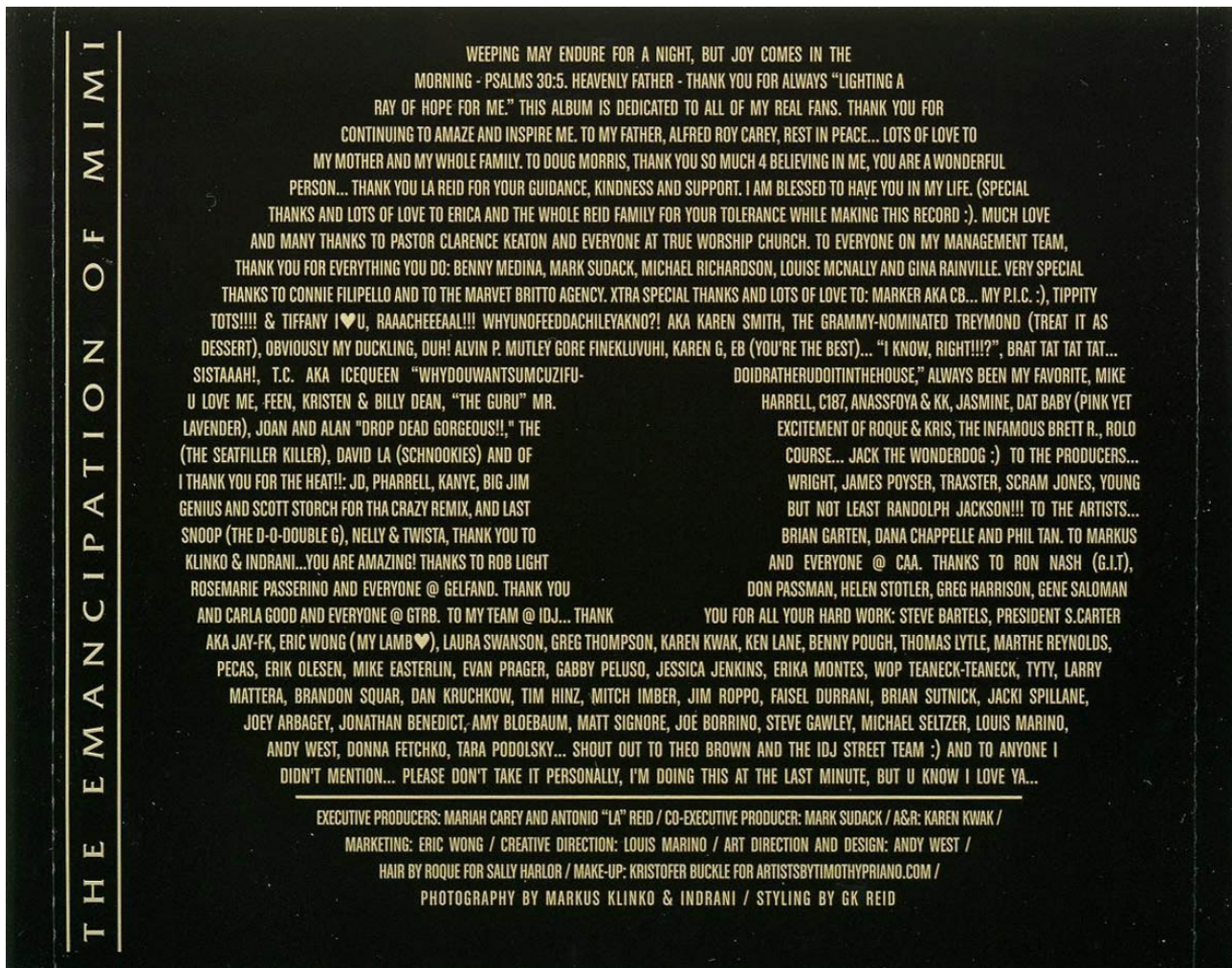
Fig. 10

Liner notes from *The Emancipation of Mimi*, 2005

GENIUS

In attempts to rationalise consciousness, societies and individuals create concepts intended to either create a distance from it or closeness to it.

The Ancient Romans and Greeks did not believe that a person possessed genius but that genius was an external factor influencing and channeling creativity. The Greek *dæmon* and Roman *genii* were divine beings visiting individuals and bestowing creative thought. From cradle to grave decision-making was assisted by this guardian. This idea was supposedly in opposition to the Christian Church as it implied that deities other than the one God influenced humanity.

This occult sensibility gave great minds such as Socrates a protective psychological construct with which to cocoon their psyche. This topic forms the central concept of Elizabeth Gilberts 2009 Ted Talk: Your Elusive Creative Genius.[51] She proposes a return to this way of thinking as a tool for avoiding the tendency for great creative minds to self-destruct.

The demise of the *dæmon* began with the advent of the Renaissance. Creative expression belonged to the individual, Michelangelo's frescos did not represent the channeling of divine spirit but the spirit of the individual. Having became being.  In his time he was known as 'the divine one' and he was the first Western artist to have a biography published on him within his lifetime. This placement of the genius as an attribute of the individual still exists.

Mariah Carey named her 2005 album '*The Emancipation of Mimi*'. This record was a reaction to negative critique of her debut film, *Glitter*, and the associated soundtrack, the backlash from which resulted in her checking into rehab and reassessing her personal relation to music. Carey describes the album as an 'emancipation from her personal and commercial setbacks'.[52] The album's liner notes credit 28 song writers and vocalists. *Emotions* (1991), the first album on which she had a majority of the creative control credits four song writers, who only contributed to three of the ten tracks. Additionally, on these tracks, she is the sole vocalist. It seems that, rather than separating herself apart from the failure of *Glitter* she intended to distance herself from accountability for potential failure.

Carey's cushioning is symbolic of the current blame culture, a contagious disease[53] that centres around negative accountability. The *dæmon* has become the demon and has been personified as any other who could hold potential liability. Though we cannot understand consciousness we can try to control it. We can rationalise and construct the self based on simplifying the inexplicable vastness of thought to simple understandable terms.

[51] Gilbert, Elizabeth, *Your elusive creative genius* ([n.p.]: Google+, 2009)
[52] en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Emancipation_of_Mimi (23/5/16)
[53] Scientists have claimed that blame is contagious in the workplace, see Jeanna Bryner, *Workplace blame is contagious and detrimental* (Live Science, 2010), <http://www.livescience.com/8018-workplace-blame-contagious-detrimental.html> (accessed March 2016)

Fig. 11

Still from **God,** 2007

*EXECUTION*

RAGNAR KJARTANSSON

Ragnar Kjartansson is an artist working predominantly with performance and moving image, usually including elements of music. He is at once the auteur and subject of his craft. He enters into his work both physically and as a fictional element, submitting himself to a pretence of being. In his interview with Leila Hasham at the Barbican he proposes acting out pretence as a way to convey sincere emotion,[54] a method towards revealing something.

In his video *God,* 2007, he repeats the refrain 'sorrow conquers happiness' for 30 minutes with minor alterations of delivery while a small orchestra plays behind him. The accompaniment fluctuates in intensity from simple piano chords to full orchestration. The players, dressed in formal black and white attire, form a tableau framing his characterisation of the crooner. The set is a wash of pink satin curtains, a kitsch pop of colour that adds a light hearted contrast to the melancholy of the lyrics and minor key of the piece. Those familiar with his work recognise Kjartansson, and those unfamiliar are made aware through wall texts and (in the case of his 2016 Barbican retrospective) the proliferation of his image throughout previous works.

His demeanor emulates that of classic singers such as Frank Sinatra in a simplified pastiche that pays reverence with a touch of mockery, an honest portrayal with tongue not firmly in the cheek but gently poking. His hand glide up and down, one moment outstretched to the audience and the next resting on his body, drawing attention to his chest and his heart. The hands visualise the transference of emotion, it comes from inside him and is deployed to the viewer. His face subtly moves between expressions of pain and exultation, brow furrowing and relaxing from the word 'sadness' to 'happiness' along with the mouth dropping and lifting. These elements translate the mode of emotion his arms are offering. He sways from side to side with differing intensity dependent on the accompaniment, displaying the musicality inherent to himself and his character.

The performance, though it may sound didactic when dissected, is subtle but knowing. It speaks to the history of the crooner and takes its boldest characteristics but does not caricature them. Unlike, for example, Canadian singer Michael Bublé, who strives so hard to act authentically that he enters a state of crooning catatonia, unable to move beyond restaging perfect facsimiles of rat pack choreography. Through the mode of endurance, facilitated by repetition, the audience watches Kjartannson modulate between a place of consideration and automation. The components of the work are predetermined but his performance provides a rich tapestry of discrepancies in one performed phrase, of which there are at least 100 repetitions. At first the artist dominates as The Actor but over time The Act overrides as ego is lost within the phrase.

---

[54] Ragnar Kjartansson. *Barbican In Conversation*, July 20th 2016

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conquers happiness.

Sorrow conkers happiness.

Sorrow conkers happiness.

Sorrow conkers happiness.

Sor oh conkers happiness.

Sor oh conkers happiness.

Sor oh conkers harpy ness.

Sar oh conkers harpy      nest.

Sar ock   onkers harpy      nest.

Sar        ock onkers        harp eeneyss.

Sar        ock              onk              ersap                        eeneyss.

Sar                    onk                    sap                    ney      ss.
                                        er
          ock                                                        ee

As meaning within the words and gesture unravels a more primal emotive state is accessible to the viewer, a mild hypnosis induced through the seductive but monotonous beauty of the constructed moment. Kjartansson is joined by the audience in accessing something beyond The Real in a manner similar to congregations at religious or shamanic ceremonies. When an actor repeats a scene they are 'exploring the numerous dimensions that are packed into what appears to be a single possibility'.[55] Repetition leads away from meaning to a non-linguistic place where meaning takes a divine position.

This is accessed by embracing the theatricality and artifice rather than rejecting it. Going through the layers, synthesising their meaning, allows us to relate to the embodiment of the character and thus find a way to make the work relevant to oneself. Kjartansson harnesses emotion as a deceptive force to encapsulate the viewer and make them disappear, leaving The Act floating between everyone involved.

Often Kjartansson's performances take place on purpose-built theatrical sets – painted flames, MDF trees and satin curtains present artificial backdrops to his enactments. Twice he has represented Iceland at the Venice Biennale and on both occasions the city itself acted as his backdrop. In 2009 he painted 144 portraits of a friend, one a day, at a palazzo on the canal and in 2013 he had a small brass band sail around a shipyard playing the same piece of music for eight hours each day. As a location for an artist working within the context of the construct, Venice is an ideal location. It has become hyper-real, where once a thriving city stood now exists VeniceLand, a Disneyfication of old Venice. In *Simulations,* Baudrillard states;

> Disneyland is presented as imaginary in order to make us believe that the rest is real, when in fact all of Los Angeles and the America surrounding it are no longer real, but of the order of the hyper-real and of simulation.[56]

[55] Tzachi Zamir, *'Theatrical Repetition and Inspired Performance'.* Philadelphia: The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 67 (4), 2009: p. 367
[56] Jean Baudrillard. *Simulations.* New York: Semiotext(e),1983: p. 175

Fig. 12

Mickey Mouse in Venice, 2013 Disney Cruise promotional photo

Venice is a city living through simulation, exemplified by its bells; both church bells and door bells. The city is littered with beautiful doorbells: golden, in the shape of lions or flanked by copper flowers they line the walkways and surround the piazzas in the same way they have since the eighteenth century. Though they represent function they do not invite it. If one looks closely there is no evidence of use, no finger prints and little wear and tear. It is unlikely you will ever see one of them in use.

Similarly, the church bells ring for no discernible reason. In 2012 Venetians won a battle with the church to reduce the ringing of the bells which were 'disrupting weekend lie-ins, waking up sleeping babes and setting off howling dogs'.[57] Though they are rung in moderation now they still seem to be omnipresent. Rather than calling people to church, however, they seem to work in the same way as atmospheric music in the queue for rides at Disneyland, an artifice intended to illicit a certain feeling in the listener. If we were to anthropomorphise the city it would take the position of a method actor, living an artificial existence as close to reality as possible in order to convince its audience.

Where Venice claims to be authentic, Kjartansson claims to be inauthentic in order to allow the viewer that position. At the beginning of the video one of the instrumentalists makes a mistake. They start the performance again without acknowledging the mistake. Rather than being removed from the final edit it is included, showing that they are fallible.  This moment sets up the artifice, the completeness of the world is broken. The simplistic elements of the work have been set up, an incorrect sample is shown and then we are able to read the video on our own terms. The Act has been foretold, The Actor has been tested and consciousness can then take the reins. We are invited to lose ourselves.

---

[57] Nick Squires, 'Venice bells to be rung 'in moderation'', *The Telegraph*, 11 June 2012

Fig. 13

Weir: Imagine for a minute that this piece of paper … represents space time and you want to get from point A here to point B there. Now, what's the shortest distance between two points?

Justin: A straight line?

Weir: The shortest distance between two points is zero, and that's what the gateway does. It folds space so that point A and point B coexist in the same space and time, then the spacecraft passes through the gateway, space returns to normal.[58]

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[58] Event Horizon, dir: Paul W.S. Anderson, 1997

CONCLUSION

The more he contemplates, the less he lives.[59]

The existence of The Act and the Actor represents the failure of the human. That we need to interact at all shows our failure. Though we have ever-broadening language, as our primary tool for communication it's limiting. The further we move towards a position of a completely rational explanation of existence, the more frustrating the dearth of answers becomes.

There is no way we could succeed and maybe that is fine. We need to renounce failure as a negative and rethink it as a neutrality. Reimagine its definition of a lack of success more as an alternative to a success rather than its antonym. Denounce artifice as the enemy of authenticity but acknowledge it as a method towards rationalising identity.

In the 1997 film *Event Horizon*, a craft is propelled through space via an artificial blackhole seeking to facilitate light speed travel. The theory goes that we travel forwards through time and space but if you could bend the dimensions you would have the potential to jump through a wormhole and quickly travel vast distances in space. A similar theory was used in the 2016 Netflix series *Stranger Things* to explain wormholes to parallel dimensions, it can also rationalise time travel.[60]

In both these films as well as other works of fiction,[61] the science of wormholes is explained by drawing two dots on a piece of paper, folding it, and stabbing a hole through it. There it is! Quantum physics explained! Of course we know that is not the full explanation but we allow it to read as real in order to make life easier. We forgo the explanatory bridge.

Rather than clutching at straws maybe we should drop them all and enjoy the chaos.

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[59] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.* New York: Zone Books, 1995. p. 23
[60] *Stargate, Doctor Who, Star Wars* and multiple others offer variants on this theme.
[61] The movie *Interstellar* is another example.

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