

lany white

DAN BAKER

THE
ART
OF
LIFE

Talker

#1

Ian White

When I moved to London in 2008, an exhilarating feature of many of the screenings and talks I attended were fierce critical interjections from a tall, handsome and extremely articulate man seated in the audience. With none of the hesitant, self-conscious courtesy that defined so many of the art events in the city, he seemed ready to pose direct and incisive challenges to whoever was on the stage as soon as questions were opened to the floor. It was excellent.

He seemed genuinely outraged by any insubstantial points being made or artworks that he judged ill-considered or problematic. Witnessing this was intimidating and sometimes terrifying, but I was always inspired to see someone so engaged with interpreting the work at hand and ready to address any question or issue with such urgency and no trace of status-anxious wariness.

Later, having discovered this formidable person was Ian White, I was excited to learn that, in addition to working with and programming, among others, artist film and video distributor LUX, he made performances. Seeing his work *Democracy* at DAAD in Berlin in July 2010 was a confounding and thrilling experience. At the time I described it, clumsily, like this,

Picking his way through the crowd, White sits on the floor. He is dressed in a plain white T-shirt, blue jeans and white Hi-Tec trainers. Slowly, the radio begins to emit sound and we hear the BBC World Service. From Our Own Correspondent is being broadcast. Until now, White has been motionless, staring out with a customary performance art vacancy. He then stands with his right arm looped around his back and lifts one foot from the ground. He maintains this position for some time until he wobbles with the exertion of the extended pose, sits again and repeats the action while we hear accounts of Nicolas Sarkozy's media image and planned developments for the Appalachian trail. Behind him on the white wall a powerpoint slideshow begins: images of Queen Elizabeth I, an immaculately tended stately garden (a site, I later discover,

designed for said monarch's castle at Kenilworth by her suitor Robert Dudley) and close-ups of the bearded features of the classical statuary that ornament the garden. But before the series of images is even half complete, the artist is on his feet again, has unbuckled his belt and unencumbered himself of jeans. Standing in his briefs, one foot still through a denim leg, he lifts his arms to assume a quasi balletic / Karate Kid crane kick stance with leg lifted before toppling forward. Through a repetition of this action it becomes clear that he is making his way towards the exit. The crowd part to let him pass and he makes his egress, Levi leg trailing. The audience applauds this 'ending', animates in typical fashion and begins to dissipate rapidly. Yet the powerpoint presentation continues. Gradually images of a shopping centre, odd oblique shots of the Fernsehturm at Alexanderplatz, a detail of a hypodermic syringe painted by Francis Bacon, and then another inserted into an arm, strewn garments in a bedroom and finally self-addressed postcards are introduced into the montage.

I thought about this piece a great deal and continue to do so. Its pace, its provocations, its layered intellectual enquiries all resonated profoundly. In response, germinal plans to begin making a zine that collected interviews with people who worked in different ways with performance were galvanised and I wrote to Ian asking if we could meet to talk about his work. He graciously said we could and in 2012 I spoke with him for a couple of hours about the origins of his practice and what he was working on currently. This conversation is the first issue of Talker.

Giles Bailey.
2016





About 3:30pm on 19 January 2012.

Giles: I was curious to hear about the origins of your practice in performance and more about how it relates to the other things that you do curatorial or educationally or... I'm not necessarily trying to bridge those two things but...

Ian: Yeah. I mean...

G: Well, when did you first start making performances? Did you go to art school?

I: No, I have a degree in English. I went to Cambridge. So I have a degree in English Literature. No art school. I mean, I was always going to go to art school until I was seduced by not doing that and thought it would be quite interesting not to please my art teacher, and my art teacher thought it might be quite interesting for him to show that I hadn't pleased him. But really I'd always been making. Not when I was at school, but I was making performances during university and afterwards, but never really being so aggressive about situating them in the visual arts or anticipating that that would become quite a major part of what I wanted to do, but they were always being made.

G: So what was informing that at the beginning?

I: Well, it depends how far back you want to go. Wearing the net curtains at the age of five was informing it for sure. And the *idea* of performance for sure, it had always been part of what I understood that I was about, literally from wearing the net curtains at the age of five, with photographic documentation to prove it unfortunately. Then at University I suppose circling around an experimental poetry scene and being quite involved – not really writing so much poetry myself, a little bit but not a lot – but

seeing a lot of people read live. I mean, this isn't something I'd been especially conscious of until now you've asked me the question. So there was a lot of stuff circulating around that. People like Rod Mengham, Denise Reily and Jeremy Cronin, so not exactly British Language Poetry but associated with the America Language Poetry school. So, quite a sort of difficult edge of British Poetry if you like – and seeing a lot of those people read or perform live and being with other contemporaries who were also interested in that kind of work and just starting to see work in museums. So, you know, seeing oh... Stuart Brisley in the mid 90s in Oxford or a little bit of the very last work by Leigh Bowery. I suppose just being exposed and interested [was important] and there being an excitement or a pleasure in that activity. Maybe more so than looking at static objects in a room and not really having a relationship to materials in that way. As someone who might consider himself an artist, I was never really pursuing any kind of engagement with materials in the way a painter or sculptor would, but I probably [was] with the materials of performance if you like. That's where the engagement continued.

G: So was there a clear point when you began to situate yourself in the visual art world with the stuff you were making?

I: No. I think when I left university I was always intending to somehow work in the visual arts while not exactly knowing how. I got various sorts of gallery jobs and then friends were curating stuff. A good friend was curating a small performance festival in Stoke while she was doing her MA there. It was more of a gradual thing. Then the first, more visible work I made was during the period when I was running the Horse Hospital in London, which is at Russell Square. It still has a programme around underground invisible cultures. So we had a gallery space that then turned into

a screening club and worked with quite a lot of outsider artists and untrained artists and people working in a... without wanting to mythologise the idea that a London underground actually did exist after 1988... we worked in kind of counter cultural way in London if you like. I became quite good friends with artists during that period, which was from '95 to 2000, and then we started collaborating and making work together. Well really, the major collaboration was with James Hollands who makes music now and also still makes videos. Sometimes on his own, sometimes with other people. He has a band. He and I became quite involved and my boyfriend at the time was also, he's a theatre designer called Andrew Walsh. I worked on an opera production with him as a dramaturge, but the collaborations with James involved Andrew and also a guy called Jim Beresford. The four of us became a sort of unit. We went through period of... well strangely, we got asked to make nightclub visuals for an absolutely horrendous gay nightclub on Leicester Square called Home. We started making and manipulating images to go there and this was just extended into a series of collaborations. A major thing for us – well it was pretty low key at the time – but a major thing for us was a project that we worked with Dennis Cooper for a festival called Night Bird that was run by this club called Duckie. The premise was [that we should make] proposals for alternatives to the gay nightclub and we set up this situation in a pub off Oxford Street called... oh no, I've forgotten what the pub was called. It will come back to me. The Quebec public house! And it was a real serious, old school '80s gay pub, frequented mainly by middle aged or older men, some rent boys, but really a sort of average pub. It had this disco basement and we set up this kind of black, monolithic telephone box in the middle of the dance floor. You'd go into the telephone box and pick up

a receiver and it automatically dialled Dennis Cooper's house in Los Angeles and you could speak to Dennis.

G: What would he say to you?

I: Well, whatever. People knew that that was the deal when they were coming so it was advertised as the thing that you would come there to do. People knew who they were speaking to so a lot of them had stuff that they already wanted to talk to him about, or they were fans or they wanted to talk to him about his work. Outside the black telephone box the rest of the people in this club space could hear his answers to the questions but not the questions being asked. That was the simple thing, there were lots of other factors. We manipulated his voice and put it through a distortion machine so it would echo into infinity. Around the pub and the club there were these little light-sensitive bleepers like you get when you walk into a shop so every time anyone came in and walked down the stairs about five bleepers went off – or if you went into the toilet. We covered all pictures in the pub with either images of the pub itself or we just blacked them out as if they were censored. Hmm, those were my anarchic days. But that was quite a significant thing in terms of, you know, it wasn't really a performance, but it was very much in this border territory between something that was like a curatorial project or like putting on a night club. We didn't really think of it in any category but we were working together...

G: And its liveness was absolutely crucial?

I: Yeah, and it was a one off event and that was it. That was the commitment and the engagement and the excitement of doing it. Then a few months after that, we staged a version – or an inversion – of *Oedipus Rex* the Stravinsky Opera Oratorio at the ICA, which was again just a

one night, one off thing. I'd started playing records in this really kind of naive DJ way where you would play expressionist opera and Kylie Minogue at the same time. There was no manipulation, it was literally, put the needle on the records and let them play to the end at the same time. I'd done that a little bit in a club a few times. James Hollands was also making music, but very much in the tradition of experimental noise and industrial noise music, and we brought together more people. We'd made this video work that was projected on a screen. A writer called Ken Hollings wrote a text that appeared as surtitles over the image like you get in an opera and the whole thing was structured around the Stravinsky Opera.

G: And all these works were negotiated and conceived collaboratively?

I: Yeah, pretty much.

G: So there wasn't a singular vision? Was there someone else's idea executed by the group?

I: No. Well, it wasn't like we were a utopian community. It was actually a really difficult situation.

G: No, but maybe more along the lines of a theatre company or something?

I: No, there were absolutely no fixed roles whatsoever. Different people did different things but there wasn't one person directing. In fact, the work depended on people not knowing what others had done. We didn't know the text that Ken had written so we made the video without knowing what the text was. We only saw it come together on the day – we actually never even really saw what it was. I prepared a DJ set to play and I don't think I told James what I was going to be playing. He did the same, he prepared a music set to play. So we knew what the ingredients were – or what the

layers were – but not what the content was going to be. It was about, I suppose, the liveness of this interaction [between] these things. We also worked with a proper opera singer so the only bit we kept from the original opera was Jocasta's aria. She only sings once on her own and we employed the black monolith telephone box from the Quebec, so at the beginning of the piece she appeared and walked through this corridor of green light and sits in the telephone box and shuts the door. At a certain point she comes out of the telephone box and she's wearing a walkman with the soundtrack, with the musical accompaniment and sings Jocasta's aria but without any music at all. She then just sits on the stairs.

G: Again, were there quite specific influences that were informing that? Other things that you were going to see that were particularly inspiring, suggesting formal structures that you would imitate or appropriate?

I: It's quite hard to name. I mean a very sort of generic interest in '60s and '70s avant garde practice without being hugely influenced by one person.

G: There weren't peers that you were seeing perform?

I: No.

G: So you wouldn't have situated yourself within a community of others making work in that way?

I: No, not really a community. The people that we were working with were making work in other situations and with other people, so to that extent yes, but not really anyone outside of that group so much. There were things in London, like the nightclub Duckie, which were kind of significant but also a situation that I find... I suppose I found some of the stuff they did to be totally brilliant and

made by friends and people I still know and love, but then also a bit too slight or a bit too mediated by the nightclub.

G: It sounds like it was extremely different to what you guys were doing.

I: Yeah.

G: Was there a name for the group?

I: No. For a while we used this name “MANGINA” which came from... I think it was a mail order catalogue or male underwear that James had found where... It was sort of like for these peculiar design of men’s thongs where you could squash the penis so the thong was shaped so that it kind of looked a bit like a vagina and they were in bright puce and green lycra. So when we did the *Oedipus Rex* project I think we called ourselves MANGINA. Maybe also for Dennis Cooper, I can’t remember, but we didn’t really work together after the Dennis Cooper event, it stretched everything to a point... and I think there was a lot of aggression. I mean, the work was articulating quite a lot of aggression and it was coming out of quite a lot of aggression and quite a lot of engagement in... So it was incredibly productive, but also a very difficult working relationship. There was no new age ethos around the idea of collaboration at the time at all. It was much more challenging — challenging and supportive, but there was a lot of antagonism and there were a lot of clashes between people and, in a way, it was totally invested in the energy of that and intended as... You know, it was a teenage work, it was angst and rebellion.

G: It makes me think about experimental music and noise, or at least an attitude which applies to its ethos.

I: Yeah, that was something that was really going on for us at the time which is maybe more significant than the Duckie

club. There was a club called Disobey which happened upstairs at the Garage run by Paul Smith who runs the record label Blast First. When I was working at the Horse Hospital I became very good friends with them and we collaborated in starting the screening club for the Horse Hospital. They would run this nightclub where people like Russell Haswell and Bruce Gilbert would DJ. The band who at that time were called Panasonic and are now called Pan Sonic [would play], you know, all of that kind of music scene – Paul’s partner and subsequent wife, Susan Stenger who came out of the 80s New York punk scene with [her group] Band of Susans, experimental musicians like Kaffe Matthews. They were people that we were very much circulating around. We weren’t really part of that situation as performers or artists but it was stuff that we were really seeing. We had a couple of noise gigs at the Horse Hospital. You know, if anything I suppose, there was that, but influence was coming a lot more out of a more kind of 1980s classic underground, Cinema of Transgression, queer British experimental films of the 80s, Steve Farrer. People who were really making a dirty mess of material – subcultural, or just a manifestation of something subcultural. Or just a very romantic idea of undergroundness, if you like, that was circulating.

G: So what are the steps you take towards this performance situation where it’s very much about you as an individual performing for an audience?

I: Well, I suppose it’s only half the performance work I make when I would work on my own. Maybe even the majority of stuff has been in collaboration with other people.

G: So how about this situation where it’s you on the stage then? You as the subject, not just the creator of the work?

I: Yeah, there were a couple of things that I'd done before and during the Horse Hospital where I would be that. What happened was I stopped working at the Horse Hospital in 2000 and became the cinema curator at the LUX. During the period I was working there it did not feel at all possible to be in that position professionally and to make my own work. I just couldn't. I didn't have time, but just didn't feel like... It just would have been inappropriate. So I just stopped. I didn't really make anything and fortunately that period only lasted for a year, when the LUX was shut down and we all got the sack. So I was very much thrown back out of this institutional culture into realising a significance of a network of people outside of the institution who I wanted to keep working with and collaborating with in various forms. Aspects of performance were circulating amongst the group of us about that time. I suppose I'd also started to reassess how I'd been working with these other people in this group and to reassess how aggressive a lot of those relationships were and how much the work was about aggression. One of the major, major influences was meeting and becoming very, very close — both as a friend and intellectually — with Emma Hedditch who was working at the LUX. [I was] talking with her and thinking through the making of political work with her through the stuff that she was doing and friends of hers, most significantly Jimmy Roberts. In that period of not making stuff I really started to reappraise and rethink how I wanted to make things.

G: Were you seeing much performance at that time or was it more a period of intellectualising of your relationship to it as a maker?

I: Probably a bit of both. It's really hard to say about [the influence of] what I've seen, when and how much. It's such a miasmic cloud of stuff and

a lot of it was historical work. A lot of it by that stage had started to come out of experimental film and video and seeing performance either recorded or made into experimental film.

G: So at this point presumably documentation was being circulated much more broadly?

I: Yeah, and also, because of doing the job at the LUX, I was seeing a lot more work in collections that wouldn't have been available at that stage on the internet in the way that it is now. From being exposed to stuff I hadn't really been exposed to before, but might have read about or might have existed in a more kind of theoretical way. And seeing stuff at the ICA and I suppose that was the odd thing during the Horse Hospital period was that there was a lot of performance around the body and body modification – Franko B and Ron Athey and that kind of scene.

G: Is that something you were interested in, or remain interested in? It's something I don't know a great deal about.

I: I would see quite a lot of work by those people during that period, yeah. I was never very interested in making that work myself, but I was interested in aspects of the extremity of those situations and their kind of inherent cultural challenge. We worked once with Franko B on a show at the Horse Hospital. I think also the scale of the emotional charge of those situations was something I only ever really experienced in a live situation, rather [than] through the document. I think that interest kind of continued, but there's somehow an affiliation between these counter cultural or subcultural activities straddled between artists' moving image or experimental film — the kind of collaborative or collective processes involved in that — a set of politics around the establishment

of the co-op and thinking about what it meant to be engaged and committed to working in that area now. [Also] what kind of contemporary practice was occurring and who was making it and what the politics were around that and what my investment in the politics was. So in a way, on a professional level, I had these quite markedly different things going on, but actually, on an intellectual level, or on a private, personal level they were always quite intimately connected for me. The modus operandi or the political theses or positions were quite closely related. Also, even though I was attempting to be professional in that situation when I was running the programme for the LUX cinema, I would often have quite a strong desire to challenge what that role would be and to problematise a curatorial position in relation to this work. [I would often] feel an affiliation to the problematising rather than an affiliation to an institution and certainly not aspiring to have an institutional career, an institutional curatorial career. So, in terms of me performing, we started to do small things together. There was a group of us who ran a project called The Mary Kelly Project that was around the collection of films in Cinenova, which have had just had a lot more exposure and a lot more attention after the Showroom exhibition last year¹. And for that whole period, Emma Hedditch was really the only person going to the Cinenova office and keeping it ticking over. She was doing it on a voluntary basis. We became involved in that and a group formed. We got a bit of arts council money and we did various screenings that would push at the boarder of what a screening would be, you know, the screening as maybe a live work, a screening as a kind of institutional critique and aspects of performance started to creep into that. Then actually

we did a night at Duckie where Emma showed a video, a Scandinavian video – I can't remember if it was Danish or Swedish – of a woman giving birth and Mike [Sperlinger] and I did our washing and took our wet clothes and hung them on washing lines in the club. I had vitamin pills that I was offering to various members of the audience. They obviously didn't know if they really were vitamin pills but, you know, they were for sure. So bits of performance just started to creep in as a way of being in the world, just as a way of negotiating stuff. As a means, I suppose, of thinking through things and doing that through a kind of public presentation and being present which was often how the film screenings were happening anyway. It was very much the idea around the film work, or the curatorial work. The cinema auditorium had the potential to be a social space and [we were] continuously attempting to address that or to bump up against that as a problem. I became more implicated on a physical level through these different projects and the first major thing was this collaboration with Jimmy Roberts.

G: So you met him though
Emma Hedditch?

I: Yeah, kind of through Emma and various other people who were working at the LUX cinema. We showed the super 8 films that he'd been making in the cinema which were just amazing. They are just stunning, they are brilliant, they are absolutely brilliant; incredibly fragile, intensely personal, also really quite formal. They almost operate on level of being a colour study, but a colour study which is charged with study of race or ethnicity or portraits of groups of people and his friends and members of his family. So intensely emotionally charged but they also have these strict formal aspects to them, you know, they are fragile super 8 prints and they've never been reproduced as anything so they really have a charge.

¹ Reproductive Labour: An exhibition exploring the work of Cinenova, 9 February – 26 March 2011 at The Showroom <http://www.theshowroom.org/exhibitions/reproductive-labour-an-exhibition-exploring-the-work-of-cinenova>

That was a massive thing for me, to see those. During that period I'd seen him make performances. There was a series of three at the Macbeth pub on Hoxton Street that Michael Gillespie had curated and I thought they were totally, totally brilliant. In each performance he came down the stairs of the pub and did a different action. In the one which was the most striking he came down the stairs and was being followed by a camera that you could see as a live link up to a small TV in the pub. He had flat pack cardboard under his arm and he left the pub and went to the opposite side of the road – it was summer so it was still light – and he just constructed the flat pack boxes, they were of different shapes, different dimensions and different scales and arranged in front of a brown, wooden garage door or a shed door on the opposite side of the street. Then he went back into the pub and back up the stairs. It was just a work of great brilliance and that made me fall in love with what he was doing. It was properly inspiring so it became a friendship with this kind of conviction about the work that he was making. I started curating the film programme at Whitechapel and working freelance. And Jimmy, in 2002 – it's a bit like This is Your Life isn't it? – In 2002, Polly Staple, who I'd also known through a sort of London poet set — avant-garde poetry circuit — was curating the Cubitt space. She'd come to screenings at LUX and while she was curating the Cubitt space did a series called Saturday that wasn't an exhibition but was a series of events every Saturday for the duration of an exhibition. She invited me to do something and I invited Jimmy and Emma. So the three of us made an evening event together where Jimmy showed super 8 films, Emma showed a video with a soundtrack that she made live, a kind of spoken soundtrack with a teenage girl playing the guitar, that was sort of semi-improvised — planned but improvised. And I made a slide piece with slides of Gains-

borough paintings that I was operating with a slide projector. And the slides were projected wonky onto a wall overlapping a TV monitor. On the TV monitor there was a video of me holding up various cards with sort of subtitles on them related to the paintings that you were seeing the slide projection of. So it was like this kind of anarchic... not totally anarchic but this kind of wild rereading of Gainsborough as a visionary painter a bit like William Blake. So, pointing out all of these things that are actually quite fucked about Gainsborough that you don't really realise when you look at these portraits of upper middle class people in the National Portrait Gallery that he used to paint with brushes on six foot long sticks by candlelight and these sort of intimations of relationships with his sisters who ran haberdashery shops. So I was proposing that that was where his love of ribbons and ornate dresses was coming from and there was some odd, potentially incestuous thing with his sisters and his father, you know, all sorts of stuff. And [it] had this soundtrack of the Knight's Tale by Chaucer being read in Middle English from this BBC record that I had left over from the DJing days. So [there was] this joy of very lyrical, pastoral, romantic love. It was in two halves. So I was clicking through slides at the end of the first half then I walked from behind the slide projector and above the projected slides there were two scrolls and I pulled one down and it's a massive, A1 blow up photocopy of the front page of the TSTV news – The Transvestite Transexual News. They had some of the most incredible syntax and grammar in their editorial writing, I mean it's inimitable, it's totally, totally mind-blowing. I think the first one was about foot and mouth disease. Then Jimmy showed some more films, Emma did some more stuff so in the second half more slides and more of this story and then, at the end, un-scrolled the second which was another TSTV news cover about May balls, and it was

about going to balls in the Summertime. Kind of. So that was a very significant for me, working in that way and making a work and saying, "I have authored this." At that time this was something quite new for the people I had been around, a lot of whom just knew me from working at the LUX cinema and not from the Horse Hospital days, so that was quite a marked thing. After that Jimmy and I talked about making a performance together that would involve this durational... spending a summer together, somehow developing something for somewhere. We didn't know where it was going to be. [It] actually never happened because we didn't get it together and it wasn't working towards anything. Then the Tate, I think probably via Gregor Muir who I'd worked with at the Lux [Centre] who went to work at the Tate, was interested in talking to Jimmy about maybe showing his films. Somehow that conversation was going through me to Jimmy and the conversation sort of developed into an invitation to make a performance instead of being an invitation to show films which then became an invitation to the both of us. And so we made this first work together in 2004, *Six things we couldn't do but can do now.*

G: And this was for the Art Now programme?

I: Yeah. And that was the most physical thing that either of had done at that time, with that kind of support at that kind of level for that kind of an institution. It was a major development process. So we had six months of seriously working together — physically working together on it. We performed it twice and I sort of wish we'd only performed it once. The first time it was performed in the downstairs Manton Street entrance foyer where we laid a dance floor and mapped the Art Now space. It was when the Art Now space was that horrible sort of cupboard at the back behind the

Duveen Galleries which was really too small to perform in so we mapped the space of that gallery onto the floor of the foyer space and people sat on two sides. We performed it the first time there and maybe a week later a second time in one of the Pre-Raphaelite galleries upstairs which was part of the early days of Late at Tate. We realised it didn't conceptually make any sense to repeat it a second time.

G: And am I right remembering that there is a choreography and also a John Cage drawing being installed?

I: Yeah. So the piece is about 50 minutes long and it consists of a set of actions that me and Jimmy developed over time that were coming out of things we'd observed or things in life, but kind of stylised and interpreted not to the point of total abstraction, but to a certain degree of stylisation. We also learned Trio A, the Yvonne Rainer dance as part of that process for it to be performed as the end section of the work. So Jimmy and I were there the whole time making this series of actions, most times in silence, we didn't really speak, there was no dialogue. There were occasional bits of sound track and I played a piano at one point, but otherwise it was silent and at a pace... it was slightly slower than the normal pace at which you would work so it was quite meditative, quite a zen sort of feel I suppose. As we were doing this, at the beginning of the performance, two art handlers come out of a door on the back wall of the performance area and put up these Tensa Barriers and then bring out a John Cage drawing and hang it on the wall. They take everything away and go back into the room and by the end of the performance they come out again, put all the barriers up again and take it down. And the audience would never... it was a glazed drawing in pencil on cream paper, you would never see what the drawing was and it was semi-coincidental that it was a John Cage drawing.

We wanted to hang a work from the Tate collection ourselves and the line of enquiry of what it would incorporate to do that was actually a really fascinating route into the institution, but there was no way we were ever going to be allowed to touch an artwork. There was no way an artwork could be moved from one side of the Tate into the performance area when there were members of the public there. So, via this really elaborate, really, really intensive discussion process with Tate, the only possible way we could incorporate this idea into the work was for two art handlers to be in the room next door which had this — coincidentally again — this exhibition called The Stage of Drawing that Avis Newman had curated. She was teaching Jimmy at the Rijksacademie, so she was like, “I curated this show, of course you can use a drawing.” So I think she really helped in brokering stuff and the only way it could happen was for the art handlers to be in that room alone with no members of the public, for the barriers to separate them, for them to bring it out on the trolley and then... yeah. In a way there were these different kind of aspects, or puns, not as blatant as being a joke but these oblique ideas about work that were very much coming out of the idea of spending time together and a certain idea about the everyday, even though I don't think that's such a useful description to use about anything you ever do. I mean, what's not everyday? But very much coming out of engaging with Yvonne Rainer's work and this idea of task-like activity. For the performance we made these t-shirts with the Labour Party logo on the front, so they had a rose with the word “labour” on them.

G: And you wore Levi's too
I seem to remember?

I: No, they were from APC. I think they were ladies' jeans from APC. We looked everywhere to find jeans that would be really, really stretchy, but

would be very, very tight. We couldn't find them and ended up spending quite a lot of money at APC in New York for these jeans that they brought out of the storeroom. I think without really telling us they were ladies' jeans.

G: That's funny because I have really constructed something in my memory, that may not have significance for the work, about this connection between... the idea of this generic jean and something to do with the red tabs and the red logo.

I: No, they weren't. The jeans I wear in the *Democracy* piece are Levi's and I owned those jeans anyway but they were the right jeans for the performance. And, you know, that's something that's always continued. I mean, like most of the thing I wear, I would own, but in wearing them in the performance it's not “I am wearing my own clothes” I am for sure wearing a costume if you like. It's very, very deliberate, even if I own them. So you know, the APC jeans from the performance with Jimmy were my best gay cruising jeans so I would always wear them after for going to a gay sex club in Kings Cross, because they were so skin-tight. It was a bit of a risk but that was the thrill at the time. Not any more, I hasten to add.

G: And is there something that ties all those works together? Is it too simplistic to talk about it in terms of a collage practice?

I: Yeah, I suppose, yeah. I suppose I don't really think about it as collage so much as a kind of layering. I think of collage as being something that is a bit linear still, something that would be a picture plane, that you would read in the way you would read a picture plane. Whereas what was going on in the work, and more so when I started to make work on my own, was like a process of selection that was straddling something like a curatorial process and something like an artist process.

G: It absolutely seems to be about the collisions between these different things that are put together. Maybe that's why I'm making that connection. Each element only means the very specific thing that it means by being collided with something else.

I: Yeah, absolutely. And it was always very much about found systems or found things or the idea of developing an action that became like a found system. In a way it's very connected to when I was playing these records, where I would just play the records. I wouldn't change the treble – I mean, I didn't know how to do that, but that was a kind of wilful not knowing how. James Hollands and I would always argue about that because I would be totally resistant and he would be thinking I was just stupid for not trying to fuck around with, you know, the balance and using it as a material whereas I was interested in the action only being about pressing play. That totally carried over into these other works if you like.

G: One of the works in the trilogy of pieces documented in the DAAD book² gives an account of an experience of meeting a strange man. Do you think about that in the same terms? With the same kind of “found” character that you do all of the other stuff?

I: For sure. It's absolutely verbatim an email that I'd written at the time. It's not faked, I haven't changed it at all. It's a reading of an email that I'd written to a friend. I'd written it at the time, not with the intention of it being ever used in anything. Really not as a work, but as a description of what had happened to me for a really good friend. And it's really, really important that it is that. It's not intended to be in the work as something that is confessional, but it is intended to be about the idea of the personal and the

collision, in your words, or the layering of that with what happens when Tony Conrad's *Flicker Film* starts playing and the implications about subjectivity and how that film invades the body, has this physiological effect, has this hallucinogenic effect. It's layered up against this thing that is intimate and personal but it's not about a need to tell the audience that this happened to me. But it is about...

G: So, do you just read it?

I: Yes, I read it, but in a way that is maybe audibly stylised or maybe not audibly stylised. So there are very regular breath counts. Every full stop has a breath count, every comma, irrespective of conveying meaning or inflecting a sentence with local character or my speaking voice.

G: I think I heard you tell the story informally at De Appel.

I: Yes, that was actually really hard because suddenly it became a really personal thing that I was confessing and I felt kind of embarrassed because all the frames that are in place in the performance to prevent that were totally gone. It became this personal thing I was talking to Emily [Wardill] and the audience about.

G: But I was curious about it because it had this... it seemed like the register at which it operated as a story told in that scenario was really engaging and compelling. I became caught up in it as a listener in a very familiar relationship, that of having stories told to you. And that seems very different to the distance that you set up in the performance scenario of *Democracy*.

I: Yeah. Well, what happens in the performance is the Tony Conrad film starts playing about seven minutes after I begin reading, when the projectionist wants to, and the soundtrack of the film, like the

² Ian White: *Ibiza Black Flags: Democracy* (2010) German Academic Exchange Service; Edition: 1

flicker effect that it creates, is really invasive. So dependent where you're sat in the room, my voice comes from the front, the film sound comes from the back, so the film sound eclipses what I'm saying and obscures it so you become very involved in this quite salacious personal story that is deliberately partially erased by this other soundtrack. Then this invasive optical thing starts happening so you can't keep track of the story. I mean, a few people can if they are sat in the right part of the room or they can concentrate but there's tension between those two things.

G: So the effect is that your subjectivity as an audience member is really highlighted so you have to make the decision about which things you read and which things you engage with?

I: Yes, and it becomes a problem and what you hear won't be the same... and the problem of you not hearing what I hear become material in the work if you like.

G: Do you think of that having an antagonistic character which is similar to what you describe about these earlier pieces made in collaboration?

I: I think it does have a bit of that, but it's not really intended. It doesn't come from exactly the same antagonistic place. In a way, it's a lot more formal, but it was made, and the first time it was performed was at the Horse Hospital. It was an anniversary of the gallery and they invited back different people who'd worked there to do something. So it was devised and made as piece of work for this one off performance at the Horse Hospital. One of the other layers that happened was kicking over this bottle, which starts at the beginning of the piece to appear as if it's an accident and I've accidentally just kicked over a bottle of beer that's at my feet, but by the end becomes a stylised repetitive action that is very clearly cho-

reographed. You know, how it's kicked over and how it's picked up has obviously become a very choreographed part of the work. That was specifically because of the situation at the Horse Hospital where there is a moulded concrete floor and throughout the whole time I worked there people would kick over their bottles during film screenings. So I knew that in the audience during that night people would have already kicked over their bottles. In a way for me it works as a channel of communication. It's like a call and response thing which is a self-distancing device as well, ideally producing my body as a kind of agent rather than the essential self confessing or taking about real experience. The final thing that happens in the work is this litany of sentences taken from gay cruising websites where men talk about what they don't want in an ideal partner. So these layers... so it for sure has an affiliation to this earlier work and it is a very difficult experience for an audience. And the Tony Conrad film is in and of itself difficult let alone...

G: And, "difficult"? You'd definitely use that word as opposed to "demanding" or something else?

I: Yeah. Even at their most esoteric, I aspire for none of the works I make to need anything other than a person to look and too listen. You know, they don't require any extraneous knowledge or anything from outside of that immediate situation that they're in in order to understand or respond or work with it.

G: But my impression is that your work has a kind of scholarly dimension to it and I was reminded of that kind of feeling when you described the Gainsborough performance as well.

I: The three pieces as part of the trilogy at the DAAD gallery all begin from seeming... from the position of the lecture, if you like. The room in all three

of them are set up as if you're about to hear some kind of a lecture. It's something, as a mode of address, that I started out working with that I think has shifted a bit now in work I've started to make since that trilogy. Those three works weren't ever intended as a trilogy. It became one by the time I was making the final work, but it wasn't a scheme at the beginning. But, yeah, there is a scholarly aspect to all of them I think. There is something that is a kind of intellectual enquiry if you like behind them but it's not a test of an audience's intellect and it's not really, you know for me, I don't intend the work to be about an interest in the presentation of that intellect, it's just more a manifestation of how I speak or how I'm able to speak in that situation. I suppose attempting to push certain thought processes or conceptual understandings of what I'm doing. That probably, if I was being self-critical, can be a bit... it works best when it's less uptight. I think the risk of working like that is that the work becomes something which is overly self-interested and it works better when there's a certain kind of disregard rather than an absolute thought through conceptual strategy.

G: My impression is that "the scholarly" is just one element and each time you're presented with scholarship there's always something that disrupts that which doesn't allow you to be educated in a conventional way. Is that something that is very fundamental?

I: Yeah, there's often something which is blatantly non-academic or anti-intellectual, something like the kicking over of the bottle or these sentences for gay websites or the aspects of the personal or taking my trousers down in *Democracy* or in the middle piece in *Black Flags*, with the ridiculousness of the wind machine or the sex tape at the end of it. So I suppose — I don't know if people in the audience experience this — what

I'm trying to do in putting these things together is always about the layering of different vectors, or vectors that work in opposite directions to each other so that the instability of them or multiplicity of ways of reading refuse how you would normally receive information in that situation, refuse a hierarchy of the spoken word over something which is seen, over other noise, refuse the idea of a particular content. I think for me content isn't anything more than looking and seeing and being present.

G: And only contingent as well I guess?

I: Yeah, absolutely, contingent. "Contingent" is a great word I think. And provisional also, you know, on that situation, in absolutely that particular place.

G: And in terms of the way you think very carefully about the decisions that you take, for instance in terms of what you were saying earlier about a costume acknowledging a character, how do you think about this slightly absent character you assume or this person operating in a different reality?

I: It's definitely not about the construction of a character at all, I mean, assuming this can be avoided.

G: But one can't help but read it in the work.

I: There is for sure maybe something like a persona perhaps, but for me it's very, very much rooted in ideas around agency rather than character. So it's always a kind of self distancing and it's not about manifesting the presence of a character with any kind of interior psychology that I'm presenting or persuasion, you know, a psychological effect of identification or persuasion or description even.

G: So you would discourage a reading of it that would make a connection

to – I can't think of a way of putting it that will sound sophisticated – but a more theatrical mode where there's some kind of fourth wall that draws a line between a reality that you are sharing with the audience?

I: I think there's something stylistic that occurs in the work which is a marker or separation between me, the performer, and the audience, but what I'm trying to do is to also use this as a marker between this physical body there making the work and presenting the work and me as the essential self. In a way this stylisation, what I'm trying to do with it is position me as the essential self in the same place as the audience, but in the room with the audience also receiving this thing which is an object and the object which is being received is that situation, not just me, in front of the people, performing.

G: So there's really no distinction between... or you're existing in the same mode as an observer and a subject?

I: Yeah, but as the product of there being a very clear distinction. You know, the audience is not the performer, there are invariably very regulated or quite classically regulated situations now in the work. There is an audience and there is a performer, but the work is being in that place and I'm there too, if you see what I mean. I suppose I would describe it as something that is possibly stylistic in how I try to perform rather than that establishment of character. It's for sure something to do with an idea of agency.

G: I wanted to ask about the piece with Emily Roysdon at the Chisenhale Gallery³. Did that operate with a similar sort of strategy to the scenario you describe?

I: Yeah. It was kind of an experiment

³ Emily Roysdon & Ian White: Interim Thursday 22nd April 2010 http://www.chisenhale.org.uk/events/interim_event.php?id=19

really. I actually knew Emily's work also through Emma Hedditch in the first instance and it first struck me as some of the strangest video stuff I'd seen. Then I started to include it in different curatorial projects, a bit at Whitechapel in a thing we did with Emma there, something for the Office for Contemporary Art in Oslo and she came to speak in Oberhausen [at the short film festival]. So I knew her as a curator. We became friends because we had a lot of other mutual friends in New York and then she invited me as an artist into this show she was curating called Ecstatic Resistance. I made *Democracy*, the final piece in the trilogy, for that exhibition, knowing that it would complete the idea of this trilogy. So she was occupying the role of the curator and invited me as an artist and as a continuation of whatever this dialogue had been, or had been about. Polly had invited me to make a performance at Chisenhale as part of this Interim series. Nothing had seemed quite to click and we couldn't quite... then Polly suggested maybe working with someone else and I think maybe even Polly suggested Emily. So that's kind of how it happened and it was working with this... well I don't know, it was trying something out. It was using that as a situation to think through aspects of her practice and for her to think through aspects of mine via making a work together.

G: So that would relate very specifically to what you were describing earlier about the events that you do — screenings where there are kind of performance-like element taking place as well and more like an expanded way of thinking through a set of ideas?

I: Yeah. So it's about making work as a means of thinking and being in the world or continuing to be able to do and be those things as a way of just negotiating what it is to carry on being in the world. You know, the work I make is not outside

of an institutional context, it's often very much within it, but it is kind of outside of an idea of the career of an artist negotiated through a commercial gallery system. That's never happened with the work, and it's not something I object to, but it's never been what's driving the work. The work has only ever... All of the work I've done, in a way I think, has only ever come out of a sort of need. Without wanting to sound too... The only thing I could do to carry on being in the world, which is kind of dramatic and I don't mean it in such a melodramatic way but, you know, it's kind of coming from that direction more than articulating it for some other kind of system. So yeah, working with Emily was very much that.

G: Is that a position that she would subscribe to? I don't know very much about her work. Is she more situated in the art world? Or the commerce of the art world?

I: Hmm, I definitely would not speak for her in terms of what she would say about that or where the act of making comes from for her. I think probably somewhere entirely different and the same also with Emma, the same also with Jimmy. You know, Jimmy and I have in the past given interviews separately from each other about the same work where we would describe it or explain it or talk about what it means in entirely different terms. And it's totally acceptable to us that we would do.

G: And so when you're making it there's not a lot of conversation about intentionality? It's more just... maybe "intuitive" is not really the right word.

I: There's quite a lot of talking and thinking. I mean the process with Jimmy tends to be... I'm probably a lot more prone to wanting another cup of coffee and sitting and talking a bit longer and he's much more likely to want to get up and physically doing stuff. So, you

know, we had to negotiate that. And with Emily there was... you know, we knew each other and we'd talked about roughly what a framework could be but before the Chisenhale piece she came to London for two weeks and we sat at a table in the Chisenhale almost for two weeks talking and she really didn't... she has a much more ambivalent desire with regard to performing herself than I do. And that was something she wanted to explore in that [work] — to perform herself — and I wanted to explore the way that often in her work a kind of evacuation occurs. You know, she evacuates a certain idea of content or... So we just sat down and started talking about these things and we'd get to a certain point in the conversation and be very conscious of it, that we'd reached a limit. One of us had tried to push too far in a particular direction and we'd have to stop. Then we'd come back the next day and start the process again.

G: So extremely systematic in that way?

I: Yeah, or at least very much aware of there being a close relationship between process, form and content. The process with Jimmy for both the works we made together was very, very different for each one. How we structured the process related to the kind of structure we were exploring in the work itself. They were very, very closely matched. The works I've made by myself are much less conscious in a way because I don't have that conversation with myself that I have with other people.

G: So there's no anxiety for you in those works?

I: Anxiety in terms of...?

G: My experience is that it's in those negotiations, either with another individual you are working with or with some imagined person, which is the genesis of anxiety or doubt or uncertainty as an artist working alone.

I: The *Ibiza* piece with the Flicker Film, I wasn't worried I just didn't... you know, because of the nature of the invitation it was something that didn't worry me and the *Black Flags* piece... I suppose there always is a kind of dialogue, I just might not be aware of it. There's always a set of things that I think you kind of check ideas against and it's like, "does this work?" *Democracy* maybe was harder to make and performing that for the first time in Kansas City was difficult actually. There's been one performance of that that was really, really great in Dusseldorf. Also Jimmy had invited me there as part of a thing he did which was the right one and the others were always...

G: So are there moments in each of these performances where you don't know what's going on but it's important that it happens?

I: Yes, and it's almost like putting myself, you know, when I'm working privately, putting myself in a situation where I'm thinking a lot about one thing in order to get the thought about the other thing from over there on the other side of the room, not sitting there and really thinking through the actual... you know, having to have a lot of mental noise going on in order to have something else come out. This is where the wind machine, sex tape, black flags thing came from and I'm just working on this new work now which will be at the Hebbel Theatre in March.

G: Where's that sorry?

I: Here in Berlin. The Hebbel am Ufer Theatre.⁴ It's a proper, big, proscenium arch stage. I mean, I'm pretty scared. I am actually genuinely scared and excited. It will involve a selection of films that I've curated, if you like, or selected, and performance. And as long as... I shouldn't jinx this maybe... It will be me mainly

⁴ Ian White, *Trauerspiel 1*, Hebbel Am Ufer, Berlin (March 2012).

on my own but for the duration of the performance/screening there will be a man on stage, I don't know if he will be visible or not the whole time or where he'll be or how it will work but he will be naked and knitting. And this is another example of something that absolutely has to be a part of it and it's a deeply respectful thing that I mean towards this person, it's absolutely serious but it's absolutely structurally... it's absolutely the thing.

G: Its integrity will presumably be illustrated over the course of the evening and something that initially may be read as absurd becomes... and because it's inflected by the films it becomes something that you begin to recognise as totally central.

I: Yeah, and, you know, there could be things in a work for which you're not able to take absolute responsibility at the point of conceiving it but then becomes something that you think about after, that you learn about what the work was or is that you've made and the works kind of modify themselves through that process. There was a piece of work that I made after that Summer show called *Hinterhof* that was at the Kunsthaus Bregenz and I still find it very, very difficult to look at it or really work out... and I'm slowly thinking it might be OK, but there's a lot of anxiety in it more so that the other things we've been discussing, so it's not that it's absent.

G: Something else I was thinking about was improvisation. Is that something that comes into the work? I was curious.

I: No. There's no improvisation. It's not that everything is absolutely scripted or absolutely choreographed but a set of actions will be decided upon. So timing or repetition or variation within a set of things can happen but it's absolutely not improvisation and the only kind of chance that's involved is

the kind of chance that comes out of what we talked about before, the experience of these things simultaneously which you can never exactly predict. So in the *Democracy* piece we have no idea what's going to be on the radio at the time of the performance. So it's entirely chance, but it's always that radio station and there's no prerecording, but nothing else is improvised. The length of time I can stand on one leg for changes because I just do it until it hurts or I really wobble and don't want to fall over, so that's not absolutely fixed, but the elements in and of themselves are fixed.

G: So, it's like instructions for yourself?

I: Yeah. In this piece called *Hinterhof*, the Bregenz piece, there was the illusion of improvisation at the beginning where I sit on the floor of the gallery space and talk to the audience as if I'm introducing the work I'm about to make. I performed it three times, it was almost exactly the same each time. But I was trying to play with the mode of something that is seemingly intimate but actually choreographed or theatrical.

G: And this new work for the theatre was commissioned as a performance rather than a curatorial project? Or would you not draw a distinction between the two?

I: It's a good example of something being that you couldn't identify as being one or the other. I was invited by the Kino Arsenal to be part of a research project they're doing called The Living Archive. They've asked tons of different artists, curators, scholars to make different research projects into the collection of film. They had quite a lot of funding for it. I had been talking about these ideas about the relationships between theatre and experimental film and liveness and cinema and wanted to do something that would extend this as a research project. Via whatever means it came down to

this situation where I would use this research process as the means to... well, initially the idea was that it would be the means by which I would produce a text for a performance. One that might be derived from looking at films but that might not include films and would leave this original material behind actually it's turned out into a situation where there will be films included — probably five films — and live performance. It was commissioned by the Kino Arsenal and I decided it would be a performance project and invited a German artist who lives in Berlin called Johannes Paul Raether who will make his own kind of research project and also present a performance at the theatre on the same night. So not a collaborative performance work but the outcome of two different research engagements with the archive – two performances with an interval in between. So that totally straddles this area. There's been quite a lot of work I've done here with the Arsenal here dating from the first residency I had which ended up with a series screening during which I was trying to almost make a set of wrong decisions and to try and turn an idea about context into material. So showing two entirely different films at the same time as each other. The series was called *It's Not the Homosexual Who is Perverse But the Situation in Which He Lives* after this Rosa Von Praunheim film. I performed the *Ibiza* piece as part of this series and then did this double screen with Emily Roysdon and her David Wojnarowicz referencing series of photographs sort of emulating his *Rimbaud in New York* series, but replacing the male body with a mask of Rimbaud with a female body with a mask of David Wojnarowicz, was showing as a PowerPoint presentation that she was controlling. The Rosa Von Praunheim film was screening and then these things where the audience would wear headphones and hear me read a text while they were watching a film with its own soundtrack. It ended with this

event in a sex club called Lab.Oratory which is in the basement of Berghain where we screened all of Richard Serra's films that feature his own hands projected onto screens that were stretched over various bits of equipment in the sex club. And the audience moved around from one bit of equipment to the next.

G: So in that sort of scenario do you end up with an audience that is both an experimental film audience and a sex club-going audience?

I: No, it was closed as a sex club. We were using it on a Monday night which is when it is not open. I think there was maybe one person there who came because he knows it as a sex club and, you know, that's why I knew about it. Usually it's a men only space. I think New Years Eve they open it as more of a dancing space so women would go in there, but usually there are no women. So the audience were a kind of youngish, queer, artist, experimental film audience. There were quite a lot of other people involved in this series. There was a sort of art/film/queer crossover but not really a sex club crowd.

G: But it's an interesting notion isn't it? That those sorts of decisions of like, whatever it is, expanded curatorial practice, what that might do to audiences in terms of creating unusual cocktails of people.

I: Yeah.

G: Because I often find that the people that I know who are part of a particular performance scene seem very unfamiliar with... I mean visual artists seem to generally be best equipped to straddle different disciplines.

I: For sure. I think a lot of people – artists making experimental film – found that series a lot more problematic and would

often contest what I was doing as being an inappropriate thing and disrespectful to the films. And, you know, I don't disrespect their opinions and certainly for this project now the idea is that the performance will be separate from the films.

G: You described it yourself as seeking to make wrong decisions which, as an approach, seems to me absolutely fundamental in terms of examining the protocols for viewing artworks.

I: Yeah.

G: The only way you could possibly begin to imagine alternatives, I would have thought, would be by doing things that ostensibly appear to be wrong or misguided. It's good.

I: Yeah, or trying risk what that would be without being destructive. By not following a protocol. I mean, that said, for all my interest in disruption or something which is perhaps a subcultural or countercultural or an inversion, I think there's also quite a lot of classicism in the work. For me there's a real sense of balance that often, when I thinking, "What are these elements? What are these layers?" What they move towards that is a sort of balance. These things work in relation to each other. Even if it's asymmetrical but there is an idea of balance which I think is my kind of dark classicist side.

G: It's interesting having a conversation like this and seeing you map it through time and see some pretty fundamental impulse which is maybe exactly what you just described, coming from something which is closer to a petulance or something and it become highly developed.

I: Or more frustration possibly.
A petulance or a frustration.

G: I only say that because begins at quite a teenage stage and then becomes

intellectualised. Not in a reductive way. Then there's a vehement position taken and just being wilfully discursive and that's maybe what's absolutely essential.

I: I think the more I've come to focus on making performance as a practice, I've come more and more to think about the performance situation as kind of channel of communication which is a bit new age maybe or aspirational but, you know, that is what interests me about it. Especially when you make a performance more than once and you have, like in Bregenz, this thing of going back to this place once a month for three months so some people in the audience – quite a few people in the audience – coming more than once to see it, some people coming every time. And it not being about "you've seen the work" because the work is this channel which you've never seen, you've only experienced new every time. That really interests me. You know, maybe that's this [process of] borrowing aspects from a theatrical practice and the idea of repertory and of course repetition.

G: But to let that contingency be played out, that's very different from a traditional theatre model.

I: Yeah. It's straddling these. It's also thinking about how can this work occupy a space within the visual arts that asks for something other than being part of a gallery's events programme or being the entertainment at a commercial gallery opening. That will always be a tension with making performance I think and probably one I don't even want to resolve. I'm interested in all of these situations, in experimental film, in curating artist film for the cinema, in performance, because they all occupy an elliptical position to the institution. There's always a kind of inherent tension that, for me, is sustaining or productive. Somehow by repeating a work you can almost claim a space for it equivalent to the duration

of an exhibition, if not equivalent to being an object. I can't quite imagine how the performances themselves would ever be sold like an object. I mean, they can't be. There might be other things that come out from them, but occupying space and time in the way that an exhibition does is something that I also want to really try and push at. And that started at the DAAD thing, doing it every Saturday for three Saturdays.

G: Oh really, is that how it was structured?

I: Yeah.

G: And it was the same piece each week? Or each work from the trilogy?

I: No, no, it sort of overlapped so the first week was *Ibiza* and *Black Flags*. The second weekend was *Black Flags* and *Democracy* and the third Saturday was *Democracy* and a free barbecue. Most people came for the free barbecue. And it was this idea of this overlapping, repetition thing.

G: That's nice. We just happened to be in town for that.

I: Yeah exactly. No! you came for the free barbecue.

G: It was nothing to do with the free barbecue.

I: Phew.

G: Thanks a lot for taking the time to talk with me. It so great to hear about the work.

I: You're very welcome. These things are always... you know... productive to have to try and give voice to... I haven't sat down and consciously tried to think that far back. In terms of what I was seeing, it's really interesting.

G: It hadn't occurred to me to force you to do that. One of the motivations for doing this is to have conversations with people whose work I'm interested in and inevitably there... the type of artists who make you think about the decisions that you've taken with the work *you* make, whatever, so I always feel intrigued to ask where these originary moments are. I hope as well that once it's a collected set of interviews it will be quite an interesting and extremely various set of accounts of what the initial things are that... not to put an emphasis on that at all though. Hopefully they will all be quite different, quite concerned with different things just depending on how the conversations are structured.

I: It's a really nice idea because I think there is that other problem that there is a genuine lack of discourse around performance. It doesn't quite fit into art magazine territory. I think one of the things I didn't say is that what I really love about performance – either going to see one or giving one – is that it's something to do. You know, there's not enough to do with art. You go and see a show and it's done in two minutes. Almost literally. It's not enough. I like the idea that it's something to, going out and doing something. Whether that's watching or performing or whatever. We should have things to do, it's better.

G: I suppose film is exactly the same in that way, things that are dependent on time are just more engaging. It is great when you see a good exhibition though. I went to see a Dieter Roth show in Switzerland recently who is an artist I'd never really thought about for a second, but it was such a great exhibition, I was completely knocked out by it...

I: More than anything I go to see opera – at the risk of sounding like an opera queen. My ex-boyfriend Andrew used to design for opera so we

would see things together quite often.

G: There's always a bit of an idiomatic obstacle for me with opera.

I: Yeah, I think it is for a lot of people. For me I had no engagement with it. Our paths hadn't crossed until I went out with Andrew, not listening, not aspiring to listen to it, not seeing it, nothing. But now... I especially love it when you get cheap tickets. There's something really fantastic about being able to get pretty cheap tickets to go and see something on a particular scale. And I don't go and see everything and I would wilfully chose not to see the things that are the most popular productions.

G: I guess you get its idiomatic character really rammed down your throat because, culturally, you're just used to seeing a snatch of *La Bohème* or whatever.

I: Yeah, but as a situation where there are multiple layers working within a conceptual framework it's pretty definitive, even if you hate it, and it's often disappointing and it's often rubbish, but as structure with multiple layers of things that have to click together, I suppose I really like it.

G: There's definitely an appeal for me in terms of not being able to understand it. There's no possibility of deluding yourself that you're getting an overall comprehension of what's going on. Particularly if it's in a foreign language. You're never going to be able to assemble something that would be conclusive and that's quite an empowering position because you're suddenly liberated from receive some sort of prescribed message...

I: Part of the thrill of living in a city where you don't speak the language is that you're not addressed. It is precisely the thing that happen when *Trio A* the Yvonne Rainer piece is performed in a proscenium arch theatre and the

performer never ever looks at the audience. You're not being addressed. The emotional charge of that and the sense of liberation is quite a genuine sense of freedom and getting on with what you're doing which is looking, and that person is getting on with what they're doing, which is dancing and it's a really fantastic situation but it's very much like how living here. I mean, I speak a bit of German now but I'm not addressed by a lot of stuff. I am if I'm in an English speaking place. I also quite like that.



Talker is an interview zine
about performance.

This is issue #1 and features a conversation with artist, writer and curator of film, Ian White. The interview took place in January 2012 and focuses on Ian's live work — from early experimental collaborations to his landmark solo trilogy *Ibiza Black Flags Democracy* and hybrid curatorial projects.

Out soon! Issue #2 with Kate Valk of the Wooster Group.

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