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The ethical deceptions artists make: What is at stake when artists working with audiences, communities and other participants blur fact and fiction?

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The Ethical Deceptions Artists Make

What is at stake when artists working with audiences, communities and other participants blur fact and fiction?

Joshua Sofaer, January 2023

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The illusion is truth. The truth is illusion.[1]

INTRODUCTION

This research report[2] seeks to understand how artists use 'deception' in their work, the ethical considerations they engage with, and (to a lesser degree) the impact of their decisions. The report can be divided into two. The first three chapters examine the demand for artists to act ethically and investigate some key concepts that relate to artistic deception. The intention here is to develop a subject-specific vocabulary that can inflect the reading of the second three chapters, which introduce and present five interviews with individual or collaborating artists, thinking through the implications of artistic deception, especially in the context of artist leadership. Research is presented without a protracted analysis. Preliminary interpretations are offered but the emphasis is on laying out the research findings. The report is a first step in what is conceived as a more developed inquiry over the coming years, both in and alongside arts practice.[3]

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2. This research was funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council UKRI through Clore Leadership and the research was conducted over 6 months from August 2022 to January 2023.

3. As such, it is imagined that the dissemination of the research beyond this report will take form in both academic contexts (teaching and publication) and in professional arts practice.

The methodology for working with interviewees.

Although there is a connecting thread across the chapters, readers can be selective. Each chapter can be read in isolation and the interviews singly, depending on interest.[4]

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4. A brief note on terms. Throughout the report a range of terms are deployed (fact – reality – truth | fiction – lies – deception | doubt – belief). There has not been the capacity to define these (often contested) terms in any detail and on occasion they are used interchangeably. This is sometimes the result of referencing a range of different sources and sometimes simply because the common usage of one term over another seems more appropriate in a given circumstance. While acknowledging this inconsistency, the issues under investigation are themselves inconsistent, multi-valent, and often contradictory. The language use might be considered to reflect this indeterminacy.

1. THE ETHICAL DEMAND

Contemporary art and performance practices are now offering a plethora of modes of audience engagement. Scholars (as audiences) are consequently making the case that the inviting of participation necessitates a consideration of the ethics of that engagement. As Helen Iball observes:

> …one-to-one theatre involves interpersonal relations that, in analogous professional situations, have a code of ethics and specific requirements regarding training and supervision, including procedures for dealing with potential harm. This becomes even more evident where there is a blurring of habitual distinctions between social and aesthetic practices […] where there are similarities between intimate audience and confessional, spiritual and/or counselling experiences. (Iball, p.44)

It is not just one-to-one theatre that might demand a reconsideration of performance training to encompass an ethics of engagement. The 'social turn' across all artforms in the past decades has created a space for the appraisal of values, standards and conduct (Bishop, 2012). As new forms of unwritten performer-audience contracts are made manifest, we are reminded of the need to be aware of what they might set in motion.

This is reiterated by Kelly Jordan, who writes, "…theatre makers have an ethical responsibility to take care of their spectators during and after their participatory experience" (Jordan p.207).

As an artist working with audiences[5] I am curious about my own "ethical responsibility" and that of my peers working in related ways.

Needless to say, there is much written about how art is, or is not, demonstrating ethics[6]. There are legion examples of ethical protocols in the social sciences[7]; there are some resources for using performance to engage with 'ethical issues'[8]; and there are also examples of guidelines for artists to consider their ethical approach in working directly with participants[9]. *But what role do ethics play in what artists (think they) actually do?*

Part of the problem is the lack of critical engagement with what Jordan calls "participation gone wrong". As Claire Bishop has noted:

> The complexity of each context and the characters involved is one reason why the dominant narratives around participatory art have frequently come to lie in the hands of those curators responsible for each project and who are often the only ones to witness its full unfolding. (Bishop p.162)

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5. The works I have been making are not necessarily co-authored in the way in which social practice can sometimes promise. They are *about* the audience members, and as such, completed by the personal histories of individual audience members and their engagement in the work. However, those individuals are not autonomous, they are not directing the action. Rather they fit into a prescribed and determined structure that has been set up for them, in the hope that they might find benefit in the process. In this sense, the works are not so different from performance works or installations that seek to address the audience indirectly, finding points of relevance through common identifications. Many of the works are participative because they follow a tradition that Claire Bishop has articulated as, "…taking reality and its inhabitants as material" (Bishop, l.2152).

6. For example: *Risk, Participation, and Performance Practice*, ed. by Alice O'Grady. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

7. For example: *Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK (ASA) Ethical Guidelines 2021 for good research practice*, which outlines the basic principles of "do no harm", "be open and honest about your work", "obtain informed consent".

8. For example: Durham University, Centre of Social Justice and Community Action, *Performing Ethics* which uses the work of August Boal (Forum Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed) to explore ethical challenges in collaborative research settings.

9. For example: Palatine, *The Ethics of Participatory Theatre in Higher Education: A Framework for Learning and Teaching* by Francis Rifkin, which offers a framework for ethical considerations in Participatory Theatre which is here defined as "process-based work aimed at personal group and/or social development" (Rifkin p.4). Also of interest is the Drama Spiral developed by Clark Baim, "…a practical decision-making tool intended to help theatre and arts practitioners to negotiate the complex, contested, and inherently risky terrain of personal stories" (Baim p.80).

Left to artists and curators, the rhetoric is often uncritically celebratory. As Ailbhe Murphy has said, in her extended plea for critical voices in the discussion of socially engaged arts practices:

> I am reminded of an interview I heard with the late writer John McGahern when he was talking with Miles Duncan [about] the research for his novel *The Pornographer* that involved him reading a lot of pornographic literature. He had come to the conclusion that pornographic literature is a lie because in that literature the sex always goes well. We find, I think, a certain resonance here with accounts of socially engaged art practice, because, it would seem, quite remarkably, everything goes well. (Murphy 00:09:40)

We might benefit from talking much more openly about the risk to participants of artwork and what happens when everything does not go well, but if artists are bound to a prescribed ethical process (for example Francis Rifkin's 'Ethical Framework for Participatory Theatre'[10]) then what is the risk for the artwork? The moment a series of ethical rules are laid down (*first you do it like this, then you do it like that*) something vital and important is potentially lost. One major block to the application of a model of ethics in artistic practice is the imperative to allow for a rethinking of ethical frames.

In his extended essay *Theatre and Ethics*, Nicholas Ridout traces the history of the argument that theatre is essentially *unethical* from Plato (who reasons that theatre represents "a systematic failure to properly distinguish between true and false" (Ridout p.20)) to Emmanuel Levinas (who writes that art is "the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow" (Levinas p.132)). The key grounds for the case against theatre is that it is, by its very nature, untrue and therefore deceptive. (The presumptive reasoning that fact is 'true' and fiction 'untrue' is arguable and I explore some of this in section 3.(ii) Ontological Overlap: Fiction and Fact are not Separate.)

Then again, another problem is that an ethical theatre (a didactic or moral theatre) risks the very real trap of increasing self-satisfaction in an audience and reinscribing their pre-existing belief systems. If an 'ethical theatre' is "assimilated by [the audience's] existing understanding of the ethical" (Ridout p.67) then there is no transformation and no ethical progress. As Rustom Bharucha has said, "…not succumbing to bourgeois morality and feel-good liberal, even 'radical' sentiments […] can serve as a robust corrective to political correctness and the illusions of good citizenship" (Bharucha p.107). Ridout puts it thus: "Theatre's greatest ethical potential may be found precisely at the moment when theatre abandons ethics" (Ridout p.70). The same claim could easily be made for visual arts.

'Active' participation on the part of the audience in an artwork places ethical questions centre stage but such questions are not new (as Plato attests) nor are they only relevant in the context of participation. There is not an evacuation of ethics when the audience is seated in the dark. Participation may (or may not) require different forms of ethical consideration, or simply different pragmatics of thinking but when I ask artists engaged with modes of participation about the ethics of their practice, the discussion quickly turns to 'intention' and 'effect'. They don't mean to do harm. This is about their personal morals rather than the ethics of the work. As Theo Reeves-Evison argues in his study of the differences between lies and fiction, "[B]y devoting attention to a moral calculation based on intention the thoroughly ethical stakes involved in artworks that experiment with deception are overlooked" (Reeves-Evison p.137). The moral argument makes excuses for the ethical problems that the work might set in motion. So how do you test the ethics

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10. Rifkin proposes a series of 7 stages as a process for artists who engage with ethics (specifically in participatory theatre). Stage 1 is the Radical Ethical Frame (REF) developed from the work of Augusto Boal and Dorothy Heathcote; Stage 2 is the values of virtue, responsibility and benefit as proposed by IFACCA (International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies); Stage 3 are the core principles of choice, equality, respect, safety, competence; Stage 4 are the questions Stanislavski used in his character-building exercises: Who? What? Why? Where? When?; Stage 5 asks How?; Stage 6 is evaluation and reporting; Stage 7 is reflection and reflexion.

of engagement in relation to what artists themselves think they are doing? (As opposed to, for example, focusing on the interpretation of art through analysis and audience interview.)

In what follows, I choose to focus on deception as a kind of 'obvious' ethical problem. *When and how do artists tell untruths? To what service is the untruth put?*

Art practices of all genres have the opportunity to lead ethical debate. This research focuses on understanding how artists themselves approach ethical issues. It is not focussed on genre. It is not interested in the specificity of categories of artwork, so much as the way in which deception is strategically deployed (and received). Given that the presentation of the (un)truth most often takes place in a form of 'storytelling' this research focuses on works which pursue narrative, be that in visual or performing art traditions.

2. PARAFICTION

In her essay 'Make-Believe: Parafiction and Plausibility' (2009) Carrie Lambert-Beatty identifies and names a phenomenon in contemporary art practice: parafiction.

> Fiction or fictiveness has emerged as an important category in recent art. But, like a paramedic as opposed to a medical doctor, a parafiction is related to but not quite a member of the category of fiction as established in literary and dramatic art. It remains a bit outside. It does not perform its procedures in the hygienic clinics of literature, but has one foot in the field of the real. Unlike historical fiction's fact-based but imagined worlds, in parafiction real and/or imaginary personages and stories intersect with the world as it is being lived. Post-simulacral, parafictional strategies are oriented less toward the disappearance of the real than toward the pragmatics of trust. Simply put, with various degrees of success, for various durations, and for various purposes, these fictions are experienced as fact. (Lambert-Beatty p.54)

The parafiction may or may not be participative in the way in which we have come to understand social practices. Participants may or may not be asked by artists to create a fiction *with* them but their trust in, or with, whatever is presented to them is where the meaning of the work is generated[11].

In a more recent interview Lambert-Beatty (in conversation with Courtney McClellan) has nuanced her definition of parafiction as a spectrum:

CL-B: I find it helpful to think of parafiction as a spectrum rather than a simple category, in order not to conflate very different practices, while also pointing to that connection between them. At one end are practices very close to hoaxes, and at the other are situations that might give rise to just a bit of wondering. I call them "strongly parafictional" and "weakly parafictional," although this is a little unfortunate, because it isn't meant to imply that one is better than the other.

CM: Degrees of potency, maybe.

CL-B: Yes. Although many would say that the most potent are those in the middle of that spectrum— when fictionality or facticity can't be fully resolved. But epistemic shift is the common denominator. I think it's actually a very physical experience. It is potent in that way: it is cognitive, but you feel it in the body. (McClellan)

Lambert-Beatty admits that parafiction is "ethically risky" (Lambert-Beatty p.66) but also that she is "not interested in passing ethical judgement on parafictioners" (ibid. p.67). She continues, "The fact that parafictions are queasy-making is key to what they are and what they do." Perhaps from the perspective of the interpretation of art and Lambert-Beatty's aim to try and identify a form of practice through naming it, a discussion of the ethics does not add so much. But for artists working with parafictions and for audiences encountering them, the ethics may well be at the forefront of their consideration.

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11. Lambert-Beatty lists some parafictions which include: "…advertising campaigns for imaginary products, a not-really-censored exhibition, hacked museum audio tours, several never-made movies, a sham supermarket, nonexistent video installations, dubious abortions, a staged marriage proposal, an impersonated Pope, ersatz archives, questionable military units, a faked vacation, an invented critic, a fictional historian, a made-up monkey, an arguably authentic rabbit, a projected penguin, and legions of fake artists, both historical and contemporary." p.56

3. AUDIENCE RESPONSE & ONTOLOGICAL OVERLAP

As a classification, parafiction ("fiction experienced as fact") is an extremely useful way of thinking about the trend of utilising deception as a strategy in contemporary art practices and I want to consider two ways in which the concept might be extended[12]. The first observation is that while defining a category of art, it does little to understand *audience response*. The second observation is that while embracing it as a category definition we need to insist that fiction and fact are not ontologically separate.

3.(i) Audience Response and the Neural Parliament

Parafiction as a spectrum (a scale between two extreme points) puts the "hoax" at one end and "situations that might give rise to just a bit of wondering" at the other. Audience response need not correlate to the "situation"; it is possible to believe a hoax entirely and to doubt established facts.

Why this is important for a discussion of ethics is that any work of fiction which is completely trusted and believed by an audience, is ethically problematic. There has to be doubt in order for the work to survive ethical interrogation. (That 'doubt' can do a lot of critical work. As Lambert-Beatty writes, "Parafictions train us in skepticism and doubt, but also, oddly, in belief" (ibid. p.78).)

The model of a single scale between two points might be adequate to describe the strength or weakness of parafictional potency but not what is happening in our cognition of parafictions. Our cognition does not often operate at just one point on a single spectrum and I want to suggest that there are several mechanisms at play simultaneously. We might think of them as independent faders that increase or decrease in intensity. There might be many factors to consider. Some of the main ones include: the reality check mechanism, imagination, and confirmation bias.

The response is choral, reminiscent of the "neural parliament", a term coined by the neuroscientist (and Science Fiction writer) Daniel Eagleman to describe what is happening in the brain in relation to Self.

> …you have all these different parties fighting it out to steer the ship of state, to control decisions. When we look at the conflict that happens in decision making, who you are emerges from the brain-wide battles for dominance that rage inside of your skull every moment of your life. (Malcolm & Willis)

There is no single point on a cognitive spectrum. The parliament is always (to a greater or lesser degree) in session. Everything appears in the same space of consciousness; the same space of experience. Experience is simultaneously multiple. It is the interaction of these different mechanisms that produces meaning.

As we look for a way of understanding this cognitive multiplicity, let us consider some other ways in which the aesthetics of trust and doubt have been conceptualized from the perspective of the audience rather than as a category definition: 'aesthetic production of doubt', 'act of fiction', and 'metaxis'.

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12. It feels important to note that the works of art referenced by the interviewees in this study may or may not sit happily inside Lambert-Beatty's category definition of parafication. (Nick Millett's *Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial* feels very close to a parafiction; Robin Deacon's *White Balance* hardly so.) I see the term as one of the most useful I have encountered. Although cumbersome, perhaps a more accurate terminology for some of the works would be 'para-parafictional'. In any case, I only present this term and those that follow as ways to try and frame a reading of the interviews that follow, rather than to offer evidence for, or examples of, a category of art making.

3.(i.i) Aesthetic Production of Doubt

In her essay 'Doubt Fear', Caroline Jones examines artists' strategies in the wake of the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the rhetoric of political fear mongering emanating from politics in the USA and Europe. "In these artists' hands, doubt has a profoundly social effect," she writes (Jones p.24).

> Journalism's emotional manipulations left us desperately in need of the hermeneutics of doubt. Perhaps fatal to a soldier or a prisoner of war, doubt is crucial for citizens in a putative democracy. It opens public discourse against the closure of fear. (ibid. p.29)

While some of the works that Jones examines might also fit into what Lambert-Beatty describes as parafiction, Jones emphasises the *production* of doubt *in the audience,* shifts away from a category distinction and focusses attention on response. In this way, the production of doubt is contextually ethical or unethical ("fatal to a soldier" in one context but "opens public discourse" in another).

However, as Jones necessarily configures it for the urgency of her political argument, the aesthetic production of doubt is localized to a specific set of concerns at a particular moment in time: "…the aesthetic production of doubt can counter the politics of fear" (ibid. p.32). In the context of this research study, the question then becomes, what else, if anything, does the aesthetic production of doubt engage in audience response?

3.(i.ii) Act of Fiction

Since 2015 I have had an ongoing dialogue with Professor (now Emeritus) of neuroscience Mikko Sams, and latterly Einat Amir, both from Aalto University, Finland in which we have been exploring what is happening in the brain when we encounter fiction (in a novel, play, or film). In the spring 2022 we completed a preliminary write-up of our research under the title: 'Act of Fiction: Simultaneously experienced multiple perspectives of (un)reality when engaging with narrative-based art'.

The starting point for this research has been the concept of "suspension of disbelief", initially propounded by English Romantic Poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In summary, our contention is that there is no "*suspension* of disbelief" but rather something more similar to our decision-making systems, that enables us to be present in the real and the unreal (fictional) simultaneously. We term this phenomenon 'act of fiction'.

We need only think of how we might sit in the theatre watching the opera *Madam Butterfly* (for example), be narratively transported into the world of suffering it depicts, while also simultaneously critiquing the production (in its inception and/or its iteration), while also thinking about our lived reality.

> I am distraught at the pain inflicted on a fictional woman, while I am also pursuing a critique, concerned for my lover, and managing my chores – occupying several realities at once and all in the knowledge of the others. (Amir, Sofaer, Sams p.3)

What is useful about 'act of fiction' in the context of this research study is that it allows for a cognitive simultaneity of several separate experiences and that each of these experiences can be understood as their own types of reality. However, 'act of fiction' is describing the simultaneity of being in realities and fictions and it does so by considering them as separate categories. We don't believe the woman on stage to really have plunged a knife into her heart, rather we empathise with her despite knowing that she hasn't. What marks out audience response to parafiction from this 'act of fiction' is that it is caught in an epistemic problem of doubt.

3.(i.iii) Metaxis

In his work at the confluence of performance and therapy, Augusto Boal has used the word 'metaxis'[13] as a way to describe the state in which a participant "spec-actor"[14] inhabits both the reality of their situation and the image of that reality in the unfolding process that Boal sets in motion.

In the process of Theatre of the Oppressed, participants describe the details of a real-world personal struggle. They then direct actors in modulations and shifts, watching the results unfold 'on stage', as a way of engaging solution focused real-world change, in what Warren Linds has called "a constantly shifting as-if world" (Linds p.115).

Boal argues that the space of theatre allows for a radical reconfiguration of the conditions of our existence through working with the imagination.

> In the aesthetic space one can be without being. Dead people are alive, the past becomes present, the future is today, duration is disassociated from time, everything is possible in the here-and-now, fiction is pure reality, and reality is fiction. (Boal p.20)

By creating a space for the imagination to play out realities, Boal demonstrates an exchange between reality and fiction and the way in which they riff off each other.

> When the oppressed herself, in the role of the artist, creates images of her own oppressive reality, she belongs to both these worlds utterly and completely, not merely 'vicariously'. Here we see the phenomenon of *metaxis*: the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image. (ibid. p.43)

In this configuration it is possible to 'be' in the real-world of fiction, just as much as it is to 'be' in the real-world of fact.

Boal's 'metaxis' offers a conceptual way of thinking about the simultaneous inhabitation of different worlds. In this model 'trust' and 'doubt' might affect the participant's ability to engage but less so their 'belonging' to the worlds engaged. Imagination is reality. Art reenters life.

While the frames of 'aesthetic production of doubt', 'act of fiction', and 'metaxis' all provide useful nuances in the consideration of the way in which audiences experience parafictions, none of these concepts fully articulate or theorise the vertiginous space of an audience who enters the world of artistic deception. We might run the gamut of all these mental states. The point at this juncture, however, is to emphasise that such artistic strategies are having an effect that is simultaneously multi-valent and often contradictory.

3.(ii) Ontological Overlap: Fiction and Fact are not Separate

Underlying the concept (and even the designation) of *para*fiction (para = beside) is the implication that there is an ontologically stable position of 'fiction' for parafiction to offset. To argue differently is not to call everything fiction, or to deny that there are such things as facts, but rather to see that no facts are beyond doubt.

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13. Metaxis (or metaxy) is a word used by Plato to describe the condition of "in-betweenness" especially in relation to spirituality and the occupation of both earthly and divine worlds simultaneously.

14. "In a Theatre of the Oppressed session, there are no *spectators*, only *active observers* (or spect-actors). The centre of gravity is in the auditorium, not the stage." (Boal p.40)

Writing in the wake of the publication of the Pentagon Papers, which revealed that the Johnson Administration in the US had lied to the public and to Congress about the war in Vietnam, Hannah Arendt states:

> Facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy witnesses to be established in order to find a secure dwelling place in the domain of human affairs. From this, it follows that no factual statement can ever be beyond doubt […]. (Arendt p.2)

It is perhaps to test the mirror of this, which is to say that no fictions are beyond belief, that artists deploy deceptions. Let us consider ways in which facts and fictions overlap in three configurations: 'fabulation', 'parafictional personas', and the 'factish'.

3.(ii.i) Fabulation

In *Deleuzian Fabulation and the Scars of History*, Ronald Bogue sets himself the task of drawing together strands from across the opus of Gilles Deleuze in order to develop the literary theoretical concept of fabulation. Bogue's work (as a preeminent scholar on Deleuze) is part archival, searching through any mention or reference to fabulation in the work of Deleuze, but also part bricoleur, piecing fragments together to form a new script of his own, a terminology for critical analysis of works of literature.

Bogue divides his approach to fabulation into five components: (i) becoming-other, "…a passage between categories, modes of existence and discrete entities such that stable elements are set in metamorphic disequilibrium" (Bogue p.9); (ii) experimenting on the real "…interventions in their ambient social, political, institutional, environmental and material worlds" (ibid p.10); (iii) 'legending', "…the treatment of characters and their actions as immediately sociopolitical in nature" "[a] mythography of images that take on a life of their own" (ibid); (iv) inventing a people to come, "…imitations of potential collectivity" "a transformed mode of social interaction" (ibid); (v) deterritorialising language, "novelists create a foreign language within their own language" (ibid p.11).

Bogue uses the concept of fabulation to press the idea that storytelling (fiction, or 'untruth') can lead us towards truth (the truthfulness of the lie).

> The term 'fabulation' […] allows one to conceive of storytelling simultaneously as a way of engaging and articulating real and material problems – and hence as a way of getting at truths of a certain sort, of countering lies and insisting on historical facts that have been denied, buried or distorted – and as a means of inventing new possibilities for construing the world and its future development. (Bogue p.13)

Fabulation then, does some work here, for it complicates the idea that fact and fiction are ontologically separate. But in the way that Bogue configures it, fabulation is a conceptual tool for understanding *fiction*, which is to say, what has already been understood as 'not fact'.

3.(ii.ii) Parafictional Personas

Extrapolating from Lambert-Beatty's concept of parafiction, Kate Warren focuses on the cultural phenomenon in which performers of all kinds, play 'versions' of themselves. The examples Warren cites range from popular culture (eg. John Malkovich in *Being John Malkovich*, Stephen Colbert in *The Colbert Report*) to fine art (her focus is on the personas of Israeli-American artist Omer Fast and Lebanese artist Walid

Raad). Warren demonstrates that parafictional personas are a category of parafiction where fact and fiction overlap and interlace, and even blend inseparably. Distinctions between fact and fiction therefore become impossible to delineate.

> …constructing a fictionalised version of oneself allows for multiple levels of fiction and reality to co-exist, maintaining a sense of open-endedness and irresolvability. (Warren p.56)

> Parafictional personas allow for multiple levels of fictionality and reality to co-exist. (ibid. p.65)

Warren goes further, to state that parafictional personas "represent an extreme idea of the persona in general" (ibid. p.66) which is to say that there is a sense in which *all* identity presentations are degrees of fiction. It becomes a wasted effort to try and separate out the 'truth' or 'fiction' of a parafictional persona, or perhaps of any persona. After all, as the neural parliament argues and deliberates within the cluster of atoms we call 'self', we can often struggle to know what we think or feel about something ourselves, let alone on behalf of others.

The parafictional persona distils the potential and problem of the parafictional: "As supplements to reality, parafictional personas are seductively dangerous, being engaging and seditious, entertaining and critical, ethical and unethical at the same time" (ibid. p.66).

3.(ii.iii) Factish

In his joyous and productive comparison between the practice of science and the worship of divine images, Bruno Latour articulates what he calls "symmetrical anthropology" and finds remarkable similarities in the way in which scientific facts and sacred beings come into existence. They are both mediated by human endeavour, both require technological intervention (a microscope, a chisel) to become visible.

> It hardly matters whether they are called divinities, genes, neurons, economies, societies, or affects. […] …they count more than we do. […] What we fabricate never possesses, and never loses, its autonomy. (Latour p.21)

Latour invents the adjective "factish" (a combination of 'fact' and 'fetish') to designate a position that does not accept the "difference between construction and reality, immanence and transcendence" (ibid. p.22). In English, the suffix '-ish', of 'factish', that turns the nouns (fact and fetish) into the adjective, carries the meaning *to some extent*, or, *with the qualities of*, so the factish is also something like, but not quite, a fact.

The "facts" of parafications are, as Lambert-Beatty writes, referencing Latour, "matters of investment, debate, and desire" (Lambert-Beatty p.82). "This is precisely the territory of parafiction, which at once reveals the way things are and makes sensible the way we want them to be; and which offers experiences of both skepticism and belief" (ibid.).

The concepts of 'fabulation', 'parafications personas' and 'factish' extend our understanding of parafications by helping us insist on the ontological overlaps between facts and fictions.

4. ARTIST INTENTION

What is the point of studying artists' intentions? Why wouldn't we just concentrate on looking at the effects produced by the work they put in the world? As Theo Reeves-Evison argues:

> Any understanding of intentions is reliant on how they are communicated, and for this reason they are at the mercy of a dichotomy between genuine and disingenuous speech. Effects, on the other hand, are signs of themselves and cannot be falsified. Faced with the inscrutable nature of intentions, this essay wagers that a focus on the effects of artistic practices of deception will be more fruitful. (Reeves-Evison p.138)

But if there is an ethical demand on artists, then it makes sense to investigate what artists (think they) are doing. If we are to engage in a discussion of 'accountability' how else can we do so?

The social and political imperative of better understanding artistic intent in relation to ethics becomes even more urgent if we accept that the future of cultural production is served by technological innovation and the increasing development of AI. If the algorithm is set to take over, then surely *now* is when we need to be examining the ethics of the creator, ready to challenge those that will ultimately 'code' what we will consume. Parafictions engage in what Michael Young has termed "speculative realism" (Young, p.44) but that speculation, as Yuval Noah Harari's work suggests, may very soon become reality:

> Technology makes our stories and fantasies more important than ever before because it makes them more powerful than ever before. If people in ancient Egypt wanted to live forever, they just couldn't. They didn't have the technology. So, they fantasised. And their fantasies had a lot of impact on the economy because they used all the resources to build these huge pyramids. And it had an impact on culture and on politics but the impact was limited. Now when people fantasise about immortality, they are starting to have the technology to actually do it. I don't think it will be feasible in say, 20 years, but given 50 years, 100 years, I don't think that overcoming old age and death is impossible. And then whatever we fantasise on, whatever our dreams, whatever stories we believe, it becomes the most powerful force in the world. The very future of evolution – of life –will be shaped by human fiction. By human fiction I mean the stories in which we believe. Science and technology will give us the power to realise whatever fiction we believe in, and then the question, 'What is your favourite fiction?' will become, maybe, the most important question in the evolution of life. What we are seeing, or what we will see in the not so distant future, is exactly the collapse of the separation between fiction and reality because things that begin as fiction in the human mind, we will have the technology to make them a reality, and then they are no longer fiction. (Harari, 00:23:50)

In the world Harari imagines, fiction can become fact through technological advancement. That has always been the case. In our ancient literatures, we dreamt of flying, of traveling to the moon, long before it was possible. The shift is perhaps that imagination now becomes the preeminent drive for new realities. Scrutinising the ethics of imaginative intent affords us the opportunity to consider how those realities might be conceived. This is partly what is driving Nick Millett in his work *Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial*, itself a kind of "speculative realism".

As the interviews which follow attest, artist thinking is, in itself, a form of knowledge creation; thinking through, rather than thinking about. Unbounded by the conventions of what Stacy Makishi calls in her

interview "fixed" disciplines, art practices afford permissive approaches to the subjects they engage with and that has the potential to reconfigure the way in which we understand what it might mean to take an ethical stance. In its questioning nature, art practice induces a 'healthy' doubt in the artist. As Robin Deacon says, "I have doubts around the idea of sincerity, even doubting my own sincerity." He also acknowledges that playing with his audience's understanding of the truth of what he unfolds in front of them is "a form of manipulation".

For Makishi, who also acknowledges that "manipulation […] is part of how you make a good show", art practice allows for a reconfiguration of 'self': "You put on the persona in order to say the things that you couldn't say as yourself." And she perceives that persona as *prima facie* a way to gain automatic consent for what, in other contexts, would be deemed unethical: "Remaining an artist first and everything else later, is giving me consent to be a shape shifter, a bullshitter." In this frame 'truth' does not take precedence. "Will I faithfully stick to the truth? No, because I'm not interested in the truth. I'm interested in meaning."

In the context of the work *Lucky Charms* discussed between Ke-Wei Wu, Yu-Jou Tsai and myself, truth can even provoke the unethical; "factual accuracy […] adds to the ethical danger" by lending credence to other elements of a narrative that would otherwise be understood purely as fiction; forcing them to signify as truthful through association. The ethics of truth are also understood as culturally specific, for in the context of Taiwanese folk religion, as Wu says: "The power of religion is *in* the stories", which is to highlight the productive energy of fiction in real world encounters.

The in group/out group dynamic and the risk of humiliation at discovering one has been subject to a story (or parafiction) is played out in the discussion between Lucas Melkane, Philip Pilekjær and Piet Gitz-Johansen. But the ethical troubling of such a deception falls away when the fiction is neither widely distributed, nor rigorously enforced. Melkane is clear that even when the fiction is revealed as fiction, it is still ongoing. In recalling the moment when the fiction that he and his collaborator had constructed, was in danger of being revealed, Melkane says, "I didn't think it would break the fiction as such if he told Kwon, because the fiction was still ongoing; Piet was still acting as Philip. He would just 'disguise' the fiction." Melkane's use of the word "disguise" seems counter-intuitive because the fiction is actually 'revealed'. But (whether this word usage was intended or a slip of the tongue) the artistic intention that the fiction should be *received as fact*, is, paradoxically, 'disguised' when it is revealed as fiction. Such a paradox would be an absurdity in normal social relations (for example in the case of husband who is found to have cheated on his wife, we would not describe the consequential relationship breakdown as a 'disguised happy marriage') but art practices can highlight the way in which normative values are constructed and offer alternatives.

For Nick Millett, as an actor, the way in which fiction and fact fold back into each other causes existential doubt. He becomes subject to his own parafictional persona: "…there are moments where I'm actually really buying into what we're doing." He oscillates between believing and doubting alongside his audience. "Playing with ambiguity is always a risk. But […] the artist's intention shouldn't be on trial here. Truth is. And that means that the spectator's belief is itself the subject of the piece." Perhaps this gets to the core of what artists engaging in strategies of deception offer to ethical consideration, they bring critical distance to the way in which we perceive the truth of the world around us.

Focussing our attention on artist intention, rather than on the effect of artistic practice, allows us to call artists to account, explore new forms of knowledge creation, consider alternative ethical frames, and allow us to conceive of ways of interrogating our own intentionality more generally, without immediately defaulting to prescribed 'best practice' models of ethical engagement.

5. THE INTERVIEWS

The research has been conducted amongst peers. I have chosen to interview colleagues who I have observed over the years are engaging with similar concerns to myself, or artists who have been introduced to me more recently who share this set of concerns. Most often we focus our discussions on a particular piece of work. None of the works fit very happily into easy designations of genre, although all are engaging with the performative in some sense.

The way in which deception is configured across arts practice is multivalent and there are overlaps between what might be distinguishable genres of art making. There is greater variation in fictionality and facticity *within* 'literature', or 'visual arts', or 'performance' than there is *between* works which play with the parafictional across those categories. As Lambert-Beatty acknowledges, works which employ deception through a narrative articulation are necessarily performative in the linguistic sense of the 'performative utterance' defined by J L Austin.

> Parafictions in general are performative, where that is understood to mean that they effect
> or produce something rather than describe or denote it. They are unhappy performatives
> insofar as they, like the movie wedding, are only "make-believe." But insofar as they make
> *someone* believe, however temporarily or ambiguously, they trouble the distinction between
> happy and unhappy[15] performativity. (Lambert-Beatty p.61)

Beyond linguistics Lambert-Beatty is writing in the context of the performative turn in the visual arts and not about theatre. Theatre (as Plato highlighted more than two-and-a-half millennia ago) is by its very presence, understood as a lie. While there is no formal difference between the words of a book of fact and the words of a book of fiction (we must look for clues to make an assessment) and while we may take a contemporary art 'documentation' strategy at face value even in the context of the gallery, the theatre as a location is synonymous with disbelief.

But performance also establishes trust: in the doctor's surgery, the politician's promise, the academician's lecture, for example. The performance of the authority (for better or worse and to a greater or lesser degree) is what builds trust.

There has been no intention to identify a 'trend' or to survey across contemporary art making in the last decade, which would be well beyond the scope of this study. Rather, I am hoping to unravel and test a grammar of artistic ethics in relation to deception and start by parsing a syntax which I have been working with myself for some time.

Interviews were conducted either in-person or with video conferencing. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. In 5.(iii) the interlocution is described as a "discussion" as in this instance all parties prepared questions and it was a conversation between collaborators rather than an interview. As the report author, I made a first draft edit which radically reduced the length by an average of 70% but up to as much as 90%.

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15. The 'happy' peformative would be the *for real* "I do" in a marriage ceremony; the 'unhappy' performative would be the one in the movies.

The edited transcript was then sent to interviewees for their approval or emendation. In all cases some further editing was required. The resulting texts sit somewhere between an immediate verbatim response and considered reflection. It is hoped that they therefore carry the spirit of both spontaneity and deliberation.[16]

Interviewees were paid an honorarium for their involvement and signed release forms for their inclusion in the report.

[16]. The experience of reading the edited transcripts varied wildly. On the one hand there was relief and pleasure: "Wow, I'm so happy – that was a real pleasure to read!" (Robin Deacon, email to the report author, 7th December 2022). On the other there was considerable discomfort: "Extreme edits are often sold as simplifying, concentrating. But in the end, they render simplistic, diluting. My comments and suggestions don't bear on the great work of fat trimming. I've done my best to hold back and only express myself when I feel the meaning is distorted or the loss of nuance is so great that it dramatically contradicts the very indeterminacy I make such a fuss of. In fact, I think much of what I suggest seeks to restore the links between the different parts of the conversation, restoring the clarity of meaning that emerges through the associations and loopings, and that can get lost if too much nuance is cropped" (Nick Millett, email to the report author, 20th December 2022). Whatever the initial reactions of interview subjects, we kept working back and forth on iterations of the interview until an agreed compromise was achieved.

5.(i) WHITE BALANCE: Robin Deacon[17] interviewed by Joshua Sofaer

2nd November 2022

The format of presentation is the lecture, a performance lecture but a lecture nonetheless. The *mise-en-scène* is sparse (a projection screen, some technology, the speaker himself). The trappings of theatre are hard to find. We do not appear to be in the land of make-believe. The lecture is part of a series, 'Conversations at the Edge' and is introduced by an academic programmer. As the title appears on the screen <<White Balance: A History of Video>> we sit safe in our seats. The title fades and is replaced by the next <<A performance for a cinema by Robin Deacon>>. Something is already off. Like the vertiginous destabilising effect of the title of Julie Myers' *Nonfiction: A Novel*, though less emphatically protested, we are, at some level of consciousness, adding up the signifiers to make sense of the situation in which we find ourselves. What level of trust should we bring to the narrative which is about to unfold? Will this be *history*? Will it be *performance*?

JS: We are here to talk about a moment in *White Balance: A History of Video*[18] a performance and writing project that you have been making since 2014. Could you start by describing the genesis of the project?

RD: If you are drawing a line through my work as an artist it would probably be traceable to a documentary film that I made about the late American artist Stuart Sherman who I met as a student and who very much influenced my early work as an artist. He died in 2001. Around 2008 I was starting to think about his work again, about what happened to him and the sense that his work was lost to history. I started making little re-enactments of his performances and using video documents as tools for transcribing what he had done. I was replacing my body with his but the starting point of this was looking at these videos and figuring out what he was doing and re-enacting it. That eventually became a full-length documentary film[19] where I delved into his archive. Seeing this, I became really conscious of the arc of the formats that he was using, going from open reel video tape to u-matic, high 8 video, 16mm film, all of these different formats became this way of 'telling the time' so to speak. It wasn't just about how he looked physically in the film or in the video at a given point in time, but also the particularity of the format and the feel and look of it.

That started to bleed into my thinking in a more general sense; could the same thing be applied to, say, how a family works? I began to consider those who make videos or photographs, away from specifically art and documentation contexts, and considered broader questions around self-image, how families generate images and how one generates one's own image. That is what fed into *White Balance* where I was working with video cameras.

JS: Could you talk about how *White Balance* has spun out through various writing practices and how it's currently occupying a space in your work? How do you describe what it is?

RD: This question comes up in the context of the classroom. Students ask: 'So, Robin what is your work like as an artist?' and I say, 'Well, I have some projections going and I will be speaking, kind of almost lecture-like and I will be sharing little fragments of mine and other people's writings or fragments of cinema that interest me,' and then they say, 'Well that is just like your lectures then, that is what you do in the classroom.' I remember that was quite revelatory for me because I was like, 'Oh yes!'

17. Robin Deacon (born 1973, Eastbourne, England) is a British artist, writer and filmmaker.
He is Artistic Director of SPILL Festival + Think Tank. www.robindeacon.com

18. *White Balance: A History of Video*, February 19th 2015, Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago

19. *Spectacle: A Portrait of Stuart Sherman* (2015) directed by Robin Deacon

It would seem like a very obvious observation. The form of the lecture is interesting to me and the interaction of voice, image, text. I think the thing with *White Balance*, certainly in the iteration that you saw, was that I gave the lecture whilst seated in the audience, where it gets a little bit, '…well hang on what is this?', and I think there are a multitude of reasons why I did that. I used to use the term 'problematizing presence' but that seems a little too academic for where I'm at now, but there was something about taking those recognisable structures around the lecture, the experience in the classroom and playing with those things a little bit so you can't quite place it.

JS: Subsequent to the performance you've also been working with the text in different ways, right?

RD: It was the same with my work on Stuart Sherman, in that that was a documentary film, a series of solo performances, a group performance that I directed, several papers, several print publications, and all of the discussions that bubbled up around that and within that. When it came to *White Balance* there's something quite fragmented about it in a similar kind of way. It was also published as a text piece in a journal, it was given in fragments as papers in academic conferences, and one thing that I kept on coming back to was particular sections involving the use of a camera filming a dog, which I know we are going to talk about, and that is a fragment that I kept returning to in talks about my work.

JS: The opening titles of *White Balance* reference "history", "performance", and "cinema".
       Can you talk a little bit about what these words might signify?

RD: I remember being conscious of not using the definite article with the word 'history': *a* history of video, rather than *the* history of video. In relation to 'performance', perhaps the word has just become meaningless in a certain kind of way. I've been doing things called performances since the mid-1990s and I was teaching in a Performance Department for many years, and it's just a convenient word to say what it is. It feels like *White Balance* was not a lecture, a lecture feels too specific, and so maybe 'performance' does work as a more open kind of term but it's very unspecific.

       With 'cinema' it's the location, it's cinema as a building, it's like a theatre but the stage is shallow and there's this flat screen on it and in a way that makes more sense to me as a space to work with and also where I position myself. I was able to look at the screen as much as the audience and I really enjoyed that as an experience. Incidentally, I have recently been reading an essay by Camille Paglia which was basically arguing that cinema as a form was finished, cinema is no more, and I thought that was really fascinating.

JS: So, cinema, like the video tape, dates the content?

RD: Yes. I consume films through my television at home and people watch through their laptop or on their phone and so on, so that relationship with the screen is shifting. In general screens have got smaller and more personalised.

       Another thing, if I look at those three words: history, performance, cinema, and think about age, the understanding of those words shifts depending on how old you are. My experience of cinema is not the same as somebody who's in their 20s now and their understanding of that word and knowing that a lot of the people who would have seen that work would generationally have a very, very different experience of the things that I'm talking about.

JS: There's a moment in *White Balance: A History of Video* where you show some footage that purports to be of your (now deceased) family dog. The text proceeds as follows: "The following story exists in two versions with distinct outcomes and implications. The first version suggests that I am about to show you some of the only video footage that exists of my first and last family pet. I am told this footage was shot by either my father or mother. According to the label this was in the summer of 1986." You then screen the video before revealing to us that the footage was not what it purported to be. It was a hoax. You show us new footage of you yourself shooting the video of the dog. You reveal 'the truth' but that truth is also positioned as fiction. "My family rarely took photographs and we certainly never had a video camera, even now looking through the few albums that do exist, I've always had a sense that I'm subject to some sort of manufactured familial conspiracy of faked staged photographs inhabited by actors, paid by the hour to smile. Obscure aunts and distant uncles become fictional constructs."

Before you show the footage of the dog you employ reporting verbs: "suggests" or "I'm told" or the adverb "according to the label" (which operates as a reporting verb). It's a distancing device which sets up a clue and creates doubt as to whether or not what is being described is factual. You then undercut your own statements by reporting that what you have told us was not true, and the reality, the 'truth', is presented in terms of fiction. The point that you are making here, as I understand it, is about the way in which the sensibility of the materiality of the video places us in a particular 'timeframe' and also perhaps a particular 'truth frame'. Can you talk a bit about what is happening in this moment that slips between fiction and fact?

RD: To clarify, I liked the idea that family photographs could portray actors paid by the hour to smile. It wasn't really a feeling I actually remember having. Did you understand that as a moment of fact?

JS: It rings very true. I feel exactly the same thing looking at family photographs. My point is that you position reality as a kind of fiction, directly after presenting fiction as reality. You stage an autobiographical moment and then describe an autobiographical moment as staged. You hoax the audience, set them up to believe one thing and then undercut that belief. What does working with truth in this way produce?

RD: In subsequent lectures I've given about this work I tried to confront this as a question. "To what end?" was a phrase I used when I last talked about this piece. There's part of me that feels like probably the most direct answer that I could give is that this section of the performance explores narrative structure. I could say, it is almost as simple as that, that there is a pleasure I feel in telling and retelling and undercutting stories. It's not about tricking people necessarily. The word hoax is interesting. I never viewed it in that way. I had an interest in narration, in storytelling, and how in a classroom an idea is turned over for discussion with a group of people and we look at things from different perspectives. I relate it to a film like *Rashomon* or something like that, the idea of telling a story from different perspectives. I have doubts around the idea of sincerity, even doubting my own sincerity.

The context in which *White Balance* was written and in which it was discussed was the US, where I lived at the time, when conversations around fake news were doing the rounds. Interpretations, at least conversationally, would lead back to some of those things that were going on, that were very present in my everyday life under a particular political administration. There was a shift that people started to notice in the way information was disseminated and how much harder it was to find a singular point of truth. I wasn't writing in response to that but I was conscious of the conversations and people would often reference the post truth age. I'm not a writer by training and sometimes I think when I write. I'm trying to figure out how writing works.

A still from a video shot by Polly Yates in 2015, which reveals Robin Deacon 'faking' footage of his pet dog on a JVC-GRC1. Minutes earlier in the performance, the faked footage had been screened and described as being a home video shot by his father in 1986.

White Balance: A History of Video by Robin Deacon | February 19th 2015, Gene Siskel Film Center, Chicago

The interest in narrative structure is definitely there. The word pleasure keeps coming back to me, that there is a pleasure in storytelling that opens up possibility, or reading and misreading, that is really interesting to me.

JS: Are there any ethical questions in your mind about that?

RD: Yes, that was where I started coming back to the phrase I used earlier, "To what end?" In the US there did seem to be implications in terms of how facts work, or can be misused. When I talked about this work to students, and particularly American students, I wondered if someone coming out of it would think, 'Well that is interesting, this could be a tool for helping me read the cultural landscape, of building scepticism as a sort of skill'. It could be read that way, and that's fine, but at the same time there was no moral to the tale, if you see what I mean. It wasn't like at the end I was going, 'So be careful because there's a lot of fake news out there, kids.' It wasn't that.

JS: Then your beloved dog Frankie did die in the real world. Could you talk a bit about how the work that you had made in *White Balance: A History of Video* became meaningful again on the event of the death of your dog?

RD: In *White Balance* there were two 'dog' videos. One was shot on a JVC-GRC1 which is an iconic video camera that was used in the *Back to the Future* films. I was thinking about the idea of video tape, rewinding as a form of time travel. Obviously, it's a very old video camera from the 1980s and what you film on it looks like a tape from the 1980s. In the performance I state: "One may remember the day this footage was taken, perhaps not too long before the death of this loved animal." The second 'dog' video was filmed at the same time on an HD camera (which had been the general video camera I used). My wife was filming me, with the HD camera, filming Frankie on the JVC. That's how we generated the footage.

Fast forward to February 2022. I was giving a talk at the Royal College of Art and this footage had become a thing I threw into my generic artist lecture to talk about my work that explores unreliable narration: the relationship between storytelling, voice, medium and so on. I said, "I'm becoming conscious about how old my dog is now." I showed them two little images of him l had recently taken on my phone. He was just sat there on the sofa looking a little crumpled and grey, no longer the young, silky black dog of the past. It was only a couple of months later that we took him to the vet who told us he had cancer.

During this time, I was thinking a lot about those parts of *White Balance* that pursue a kind of narrative play, trickery, hoaxing, structural exploration of how narrative works, and I was thinking about the credulity of an audience and all of that. What does all that mean now? What does it mean that I had said years ago, "One may remember the day this footage was taken, perhaps not too long before the death of this loved animal" now that he was dead? It's like narrative has caught up with me in some way.

JS: I'm reminded of Hannah Arendt's essay 'Lying in Politics' from 1971, which she writes in the wake of the publication of the Pentagon Papers, which revealed that the Johnson Administration in the US had lied to the public and to Congress about the war in Vietnam, where she states:

> The truth of the matter is that this [getting rid of facts] can never be done by either theory or opinion manipulation—as though a fact can be safely removed from the world

I'm not suggesting that you killed your beloved dog but rather that somehow you are the victim of your own deception, or perhaps that your rehearsal of the death of your dog was precisely that. Any thoughts?

RD: Ha! Frankie, has bitten me on the behind! It's interesting because I've never been in a situation of losing a family member, I didn't know my grandparents particularly, I was either too young or they died before I was born. I don't think I was particularly well set up for dealing with loss because I've never really experienced it in a fundamental visceral way. Some people would shrug their shoulders and say, 'It's your dog get another one, what difference does it make?' Well, it makes a huge difference to me but that sense of, if I'm in a position where I feel like I can be distant around ideas or I can talk about my interest in narrative structure and possibilities for play in quite a detached way, without thinking about the implications, well, maybe this is where I'm learning my lesson. Now I'm feeling like, oh no, there are implications, they just come to you later. It's not, you know, an awful thing where I feel like I need to atone or what I did in 2015, that it was bad and now this is me paying for that in some way, but it's like, oh, he's dead now, and that changes everything and then it does return to sincerity. What does sincerity mean in this context?

I'm suspicious of the word privilege for a lot of reasons, but I feel like in some ways I have a sort of 'narrative privilege'. I've always had a distance from grief and so maybe that has enabled me to play with this kind of storytelling.

JS: 'Narrative privilege' is an interesting way of putting it. It is true that some people are in the know and others are not. There is an in-group/out-group dynamic, a hierarchy that is created through access to different information.

RD: Yes. I don't know if it is all a bit clever! It's kind of smart in some way but it's a form of manipulation. I would like to try and think this one out because it is an important question and I've asked it directly, "To what end?" and maybe it is a worry I have about where the world is going. We are all at sea in terms of finding some kind of certainty. Seeing how things play out on social media, I worry about where things are going in terms of just having some kind of certainty.

I have just remembered a section in another performance where I was talking about my parents and I would say that my mum had been a nurse and my dad had been a music teacher. I was using the past tense because they had retired but I was conscious that it could have been interpreted as them no longer being here and I would always feel the need to clarify: "You could be forgiven for being under the impression my parents are dead. They are not." Now there is a little part of me which knows *that* is next. It took seven years after *White Balance* for Frankie to die. The performance I'm talking about now was made in 2019, so by that logic my parents should be dead in about four years' time!

JS: As children of the 1970s whose parents are still alive, it's something that sadly feels "next" for us all.

Something I have been meaning to ask: is there any reverberation in the title *White Balance*, specifically the word 'white', that is not referring to video technology and the need to colour correct video for on-screen presentation?

RD:	That is an interesting question. It had flitted across my mind when we were talking earlier. There was a review of *White Balance* that did, for the first paragraph or so, riff on what that word 'white' in the title would mean relative to my appearance as a 'person of colour'. It was quite amusing to me. There are a multitude of things I could have called the piece, I suppose, but that idea of the title as a 'provocation', I look at that with a wry amusement. It's one of those things: no matter your self-perception, there are people who don't care if you say your work isn't about race, the very fact of you being on the stage means it is, and so you can't get away from that even if you want to.

JS:	But wait a minute, is that the biggest hoax of all in *White Balance*? Even if it's accidental, but then I can't quite believe it is, even if it was only intentional at a subliminal level. Is this the *parafiction* in the socio-political milieu of Chicago 2015? The provocation to make a performance, as a person of colour, called *White Balance* that is nothing to do with race?

RD:	I'm not unconscious of that. It's not, 'Of course it doesn't mean that.' So, perhaps I do like the idea of people thinking that maybe it does.

5.(ii) THE FALSETTOS: Stacy Makishi[20] interviewed by Joshua Sofaer

4th October & 17th November 2022

The Falsettos is a kind of autobiographical fiction. It is a performance which draws on the performer's life narrative, the real events of her life as she understands them to have happened and makes a connection with her feelings of inadequacy and depression to those of Tony Soprano on the eponymous television series *The Sopranos*. It premiered at Chelsea Theatre, London on 25th May 2013. Also referenced is *The Making of Bull: The True Story* which was inspired by the Coen Brothers' film *Fargo* and premiered at Chelsea Theatre, London on 11th November 2010. In both of these solo performance works, Stacy Makishi engages real world interactions with popular fictions, in order to try and find meaning for a life well lived.

In this extract from a much longer and more wide-ranging discussion over two sittings, Makishi talks about her understanding of the role of the artist in truth narratives and her depiction of 'real life' people as characters in her work.

JS: How did you start out?

SM: In Hawaii, if you got bored watching the sunset, there was the Comedy Store. I stumbled into comedy and then I went to Los Angeles and I did improv. I wasn't good at any of these things. They put me on a stool and said, "Tell us what happened this week." Usually I would cry and people thought it was funny and they said, "Can you do that again next week?"

When I came to the UK my immigration status classified me as a writer, so I started doing performance poetry, not because I was poetic, but because it was legal. I sucked. It was me fucking a cabbage giving birth to a Brussel sprout and that was a poem. So, then I went into live art. Recently, one of my students said to me, "Can you help direct my new solo show Stacy because you do live art." Which to him meant you could perform on stage without having to be talented. And I thought, actually, that makes a lot of sense.

Right now, the world is changing, so my creative response is changing. People are going through big feelings: loss, regret, grief, separation from God, separation from meaning, whatever. People want to experience art that means something to them. I want to find symbols of how it feels to be human. No one has to have answers but we all need to have a witness. My job is to gather us together and to bear witness to the mystery.

JS: Has the role of the audience changed in your work?

SM: Yes. I would say that if there isn't some kind of transformation, I don't feel like I could cum. It has to happen together, that we both experience something and we climax at some point. There should be a recognition that this is how life is for me too. I think all I'm trying to do is to recreate church, or some kind of churchy feeling, where we are gathered. I am you, doing the thing that's hardest for you to do. And then you clap.

I'm not here to save you. I'm more mess than messiah. I'm no shaman but I like the costume. I think art gives us permission to put on the form without really becoming the thing.

JS: Why be an artist? Why not be a counsellor or an analyst?

SM: I'm not interested in playing a role because with the role comes expectation, responsibility, credentials, all of the paperwork. It's death. I'm interested in aliveness. If writing makes me come alive, I write. If I want to do a dance, then I dance. I like making, I like performing, but I don't want to be cast in a permanent fixed role: actor, writer, performer, doctor, guru, they are all fixed.

JS: Why don't you want to be fixed?

SM: Because it's dead. It's like Elvis, right? Elvis loved dancing and singing and he did all these gyrations, he was alive. He could really get a crowd going but once he became an image, he wasn't allowed to grow anymore. Grow old, grow fat. In the end he couldn't live up to his image. He couldn't be Elivs anymore. Someone else did it better. As a joke, he entered an Elvis contest and out of 12 performers he came in 8th. Elvis couldn't even live up to being Elvis.

JS: Is that true? Elvis entered an Elvis contest and came 8th?

SM: Yes.

JS: Wait, is that really, really true?

SM: Well, who the fuck knows? I'm saying it Joshua, so is it true?[21] I don't know. I heard he came 8th.

JS: Let me ask about truth. Are the ethics of truth nuanced differently in art and in life? Is your ethical boundary different in theatre?

SM: In some strange way when you are on stage you have to become whoever you need to become to give the audience the thing that they need to have. That's what drag queens do. You put on the persona in order to say the things that you couldn't say as yourself.

JS: Is that an ethical difference? What do you risk for yourself in the work that you are making?

SM: It's really important for me to have an authentic connection. I need to be vulnerable and allow you to see parts of myself that I don't necessarily want you to see. The secrets, the scars, the things that scare me. The risk is shame, but if I really want true connection, I have to risk the shame and it's a fucking death.

Trying to say something is risky. The art that is 'above' the, oh so intellectual art, risks nothing. If you're not going to risk anything what's the fucking point? The audience feels safe, they know that nothing will happen to them, no big revelations, no transformation.

JS: What about your participants, what do they risk?

SM: They're going to risk feeling their own fucking heart, they're going to risk feeling the feeling that they don't want to feel the most. They might risk more than me in some ways because I already know what the material is and they don't. That's why there's always consent. I ask 1,000 times, "Are you willing, are you willing?"

21. It is not true. It is a myth which could be based on the story that Charlie Chaplin entered a Charlie Chaplin lookalike contest, although that too is disputed.

JS: Do people refuse consent though? Is that consent real?

SM: Well recently I've been doing performances on Zoom and you can press 'leave' and get the fuck out and nobody even knows.

JS: You can. But do people really leave if they feel uncomfortable? In a coaching context you seek permission to offer your own experience, and you say, "Can I share something with you?" and very rarely will people say no. It's like forcing a card in a magic trick. Although, apparently, even just asking the question has a similar effect to eliciting consent. Are you relying on the fact that the ritual of theatre will give you the consent? Is it really informed consent?

SM: I think if I say I'm an artist, I'm already saying I'm a bullshitter, right? It's artifice. Remaining an artist first and everything else later, is giving me consent to be a shape shifter, a bullshitter. I'm not the real deal. Okay, this is church but it's not really church. But it is a grey area.

You might be fucking somebody and you said let's do sex and they agreed and you both did it, but inside the sex, while it's happening, there might be moments where the person doesn't even know they don't want it anymore. Is that ethical? I don't know if it's ethical.

JS: When you say "I don't know if it's ethical", what is 'it'?

SM: Any art, unless it's the kind of art that I was talking about where people are above it all.

JS: You've said you don't know if what you are doing is ethical. If you were making this work in the context of being a counsellor there would be an established series of protocols you could reference but there is no ethical guidance in live art and maybe ethical guidance would precipitate the evacuation of art. What do you consider your duty of care to be?

SM: Well, I have a producer and the producer says 'This is a Stacy Makishi show so we might need a trained therapist on board and all the safeguarding protocols for consent,' and they say, 'It's going to be emotional, maybe about loss, and we have these trigger alerts'. But to be honest, I feel the UK is almost like America. It's litigious. 'I am going to sue your ass if I'm triggered. I have post-traumatic stress, I have trauma, and your thing re-traumatised me.' I almost want a heading that says, 'If I don't trigger you, if I don't wake something up, then I probably did it wrong. Don't come if you don't want to be triggered because I am trying to trigger you and with great love.' My job is to provoke, not to protect. This is ain't a safe space, it's a brave space. I've got to know where my heart is, what my heart intends, to know where I'm coming from, then I want us to wake up, wake dead feelings, I want to arouse repressed emotions. I love you so much that I'm not going to protect you from me and don't think that I have all the credentials to put you back together again, so take care of yourself. Is that a bit defensive? Probably.

JS: You've talked about the artifice of art. What does that mean for fact and fiction?

SM: I don't know what to say about fact and fiction but the audience needs to believe that I believe. And I do. In what? I don't know. Is it deception? Is it bullshit? Is it coincidence? Who knows? It's a mystery. In fact, it is Mystery. I'm under my own spell. I've unspelled myself from disbelief and I might encounter magic.

JS: I'd like to ask you about two shows that you've made, *The Making of Bull: The True Story* and *The Falsettos*, as ways of thinking about truth and fiction in your work. And I'd like to do so by looking at characters whose stories you tell, all of whom are real people in the world. Perhaps we should do so chronologically. Would you introduce *The Making of Bull: The True Story*? What was that show about?

SM: To be honest I never know what anything is about, but the beginning is whatever I'm obsessed with. At that time, I was obsessed with the actor Steve Buscemi and sometimes when I'm scared, I get obsessive and I like to watch things over and over because it gives me some kind of peace of mind. I watched the film *Fargo* over and over and over and then I was traveling to Minnesota to work on another show and when I got on the plane and opened *The Guardian* there was an article about a Japanese woman called Takako Konishi who died in the snow on the border of Fargo North Dakota with a map clenched in her hand. The part of the story that really intrigued me turned out to be an urban myth, but the story went something like this: There was a Japanese woman walking around in the freezing cold in Fargo, or somewhere close, in Minnesota and these people picked her up and asked her what she was doing. It was very cold and she was wearing a miniskirt. She was going to freeze. So, they took her to the police station and they thought she kept saying "Fargo, Fargo, Fargo" and she was showing them this crude map and they suddenly thought, oh my god this Japanese woman is obsessed with the film *Fargo*. In the film there's a scene with Steve Buscemi burying a suitcase of cash in the snow and they think this Japanese woman is looking for the suitcase that's buried in the snow because the film *Fargo* opens with the title: <<This is a true story>>. They're trying to tell this lady that she got it wrong and *Fargo* is not true but they couldn't speak Japanese and she couldn't speak English. So, they called this Chinese restaurant down the street because they thought that if she spoke to a Chinese person, she might understand that this was not true! I was obsessed with *Fargo* and I knew I was going to write something to do with the film and now there was this story about a Japanese woman. It was another ingredient, a story inside my story. I just know that if I keep following these stories it will take me to the truth.

JS: In the show, you don't tell the audience what you've just told me. You tell the audience that her name was 'Yukiko' Konishi and that not only are you both Japanese women but you also share this name, Yukiko, because, you say, that's your middle name. She's obsessed with *Fargo* and you're obsessed with *Fargo*, and in the show, you say that she freezes to death in her search for a buried suitcase that contains one-million dollars. You don't say that it is an urban myth. So, my question is about the retelling of the urban myth, the retelling of the lie.

SM: I'm just going to stop you because it's not just that we share the same name. I mean my middle name really *is* Yukiko[22] and Yuki means snow and I'm stuck in the middle. There's a kind of truthfulness even in the lies of it. During that period of time I couldn't own my own story, I thought of my life like a doughnut because a doughnut is defined by what's missing, the hole in the middle of it. And I guess when you think about the truth, you can say the truth is wholeness, it's integrity. So, basically, I'm saying I have no truth and I lack integrity. I'm like a doughnut; I'm defined by what's missing, I'm defined by a lacking truth.

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22. This is not true. Stacy Makishi's middle name is Fujiko.

JS: In the title of the piece, *The Making of Bull: The True Story*, you signal that bull, or bullshit, lies, are in a constant struggle with the true story. Truth is always under interrogation; it's held up as something that's fragile or negotiable. It works artistically but I want to ask about the ethics of it. Yes, your middle name is Yukiko and Yuki means snow but Takako Konishi's name was not Yukiko Konishi. As you alluded to, Takako Konishi's story is actually nothing to do with *Fargo*. She went into that snowy landscape to commit suicide, and she was looking for the best place to see a starry sky and then she froze to death because she wanted to die. She had sent a suicide note home. She had been to North Dakota several times before and had some kind of romantic connection to the place. She was looking for a meaningful place to die. The urban myth about a 'crazy Japanese lady that believed a fiction and was after the money' is a lie, but it's also a racist lie, or at least plays into unconscious bias. I'm not coming down on one ethical side or another, I'm just trying to understand your considerations when working with that material, and how you hold the truth of Takako Konishi's life.

SM: I don't remember if I discounted the story as an urban myth when I initially read it. All I was thinking was, oh my god somebody else is like me! She's obsessed with *Fargo*. I saw it as a sign and I grabbed it. This is my material; her story becomes our story. This is material for the truth I am trying to tell and it's a good, juicy story. It kind of makes me look like some sort of a scavenger but the reality is I'm just putting it out there. I'm saying okay story find me and make this interesting. When I read her story, I didn't think about whether or not it was real or that I needed to get to the bottom of it, or expose the racism. I felt bad later on when I found out that it was an urban myth. I felt sorry for her. And it was horrible to think there was a lot of racism. I mean, they called up a Chinese restaurant because they wanted someone to talk to her in her language! It's all pitiful but also funny. I mean, I laugh a complicated laugh when I think about the situation.

JS: It makes artistic sense; I'm just trying to understand the process. Why would you not just make up an entirely fictional character? Is there something important to you in using a real person? It's a real lie in the world.

SM: Exactly. I suppose that's why the making becomes really important to me because there's something real about me hunting down a story. It has to come into my path. Another example of that was Janet Wakimura who appeared in *The Falsettos*. My friend Lisa and I saw her on TV and we were just so freaked out because we were working on this story that had something to do with my sick mother but we didn't really know exactly what. It was the same kind of 'ping' moment. There was Janet Wakimura on TV and she was sent to prison because she murdered her mother; they had a suicide pact. I was living with my sick mum and I couldn't stand all the suffering and I joked with Lisa that I was going to get a gun and shoot both of us and end all the suffering. And then there was Janet Wakimura on TV who had done that, or half of it! It was similar to Takako Konishi. It was the serendipity, the magic of seeing the answer. It's like, oh my god, there's the answer to the mystery. It's a sign, a signal, or a message. I feel like my own story, my own life, is so chaotic and random that when I'm making art, I'm looking for that connection. There's a spiritual component of feeling I'm inside a mystery. I don't know what this is about but I faithfully will follow. Will I faithfully stick to the truth? No, because I'm not interested in the truth. I'm interested in meaning. I'm interested in knowing that there is a story to all this and that there is meaning to all this and I'm more interested in the meaning than I am in the truth. So, if it makes sense, that is where my truth is.

Video documentation still from *The Falsettos* by Stacy Makishi, 2013. Makishi introduces archival news report footage from the arraignment of Janet Wakimura who was accused of stabbing her mother.

JS: That makes perfect sense as a way to approach your work. I still want to drill down on the ethics of the decisions that you make because they really open up all kinds of interesting questions. So, let's take Janet Wakimura, who you very beautifully and hilariously describe as Janet Whack-your-mama. But Janet's mama didn't die. I mean, she might be dead now but the stabbing in the neck from her daughter didn't kill her.

SM: I didn't know that. I wasn't interested anymore. All I know is that I saw her on the TV and she had the same plan as I did. She's this daughter, she's the same age as me, and she wants to whack her mama, who was the same age as my mom. In my mind this is all the same. They are clues. The numbers add up. And yes, I use her name and the story. You can ask about the ethics but for me what is ethical is that I'm telling our story. I want people to know that they too could be Janet Wakimura, and that it is possible to love somebody so much that you will want to fucking whack them. I want to understand that my suffering is not random.

JS: So, what you're saying is that whether or not Janet Wakimura's mother died is irrelevant. That's a biographical fact that can be researched if you're interested. The story that you're interested in is that Janet made a suicide pact with her mother because they were both suffering and in your search for connections in the world, that is a story you identified. Is that right?

SM: I make art because I feel as though I need to make connections with something beyond truth, you know, with God or whatever you want to call it. I'm trying to make meaning out of the shit of my life.

JS: So, in the search to find meaning, is anything fair game?

SM: Well, this is meaning in *my* life, so, yeah, I'm looking for meaning for Stacy.

JS: Takako Konishi and Janet Wakimura were both people you learnt about from news media but in *The Falsettos* two characters appear who are people that you know personally. One of them was 'Joshua', which is me, and the other one was 'Barbara' your therapist. And on the night that I was in the audience, so was Barbara. I want to say immediately that I am not damaged, or anything like that, by the experience of being named in the work, but I want to understand better your rationale for naming these people from your real life.

      In the performance, Joshua is a kind of devil and Barbara is an angel. Joshua causes the problem and Barbara is the saviour. The problem that Joshua causes is based on fact; I can attest to that. The story is based on an argument we had, in the real world, in a Mexican restaurant. (For the record, we are extraordinarily close friends.) In the show, Joshua is a negative influence. He is the aggressor. Barbara is the therapist who Stacy claims to have fallen in love with. Both of us were sitting in the audience. Why was it important to name us?

SM: I have no idea, Joshua. I mean you guys were there, and I guess it just fortifies the realness. Because people want reality and then they want more than reality. They want to be woven into the tapestry of the story that is part real and part bullshit. As an audience we want to be grounded in the material of a factual world. But you could have stood up and said *you know what, actually Stacy, fuck you, it wasn't like that why are you always portraying me as the dick in all of your shows.* I think that people like to feel that it is real; that's part of the reality TV thing; we like what's real.

JS: But what about Joshua, what about Barbara's feelings? Did you want to take revenge on Joshua because he'd upset you?

SM: No. I'm looking for symbols, archetypes, to make a symbol of the feelings. So, maybe you're an archetype. You represent the father, or the critic, actually what you represent to *me* is the truth.

JS: What about Joshua and Barbara in the audience then? I mean, I was very uncomfortable watching it but I don't know how relevant that is because I was also fine. I remember somebody came up to me and said, "Oh you're the Joshua from Stacy's show!" And I was like, "Oh goodness", and then they said something like, "But she loves you".

SM: I feel really bad now because actually I had no idea that the way you were portrayed might have hurt your feelings. I'm very proud of my relationship with you; you are somebody who is very important to me. But when it really comes down to it, 'Joshua' is a symbol of the truth. I don't really know how else to talk about the ethics of it.

I think there is a kind of manipulation that is part of how you make a good show. When I'm doing a show, I just want to get to the end to find out what it is about. I work very hard at staying as faithful as I can to the material that comes, in order to get to the end of the mystery. I don't care about the ethics, I don't care about anything, I just need to get this thing out there and solve the mystery. And do I feel bad about it? Actually, no.

The trickster walks in and, bang, things go from a very f lat factual place, to magic. You wait for the mistakes; you wait for moments where you're out of control and you are in the moment. The architype that I embody when I'm doing these things is the trickster and it's not very ethical but it's usually trying to disrupt the status quo. It's willing to disrupt and take things out of control.

JS: So, is the trickster trying to engage in a provocation?

SM: I think the trickster is trying to take control away from me, in order for something more real to happen.

JS: Did Joshua and Barbara fail you by not heckling you? Would that have been better?

SM: You know, it's an invitation for shit to happen. I'm an artist; I put together a show carefully, even the mistakes. Everything is planned.

JS: And what about Barbara? Did Barbara ever comment on the fact that you basically told the audience that you were in love with her?

SM: No. I don't think she gave a shit. I don't know. I think, maybe, I told her (don't know if I told her) I probably didn't tell her she was in the show. But I think Barbara would probably just see herself as a symbol. I have no idea. You can see that it doesn't even matter to me. I'm an unethical storyteller. I will grab at things and turn them into something meaningful, not for the audience, but for myself. You know, that's the honest truth. Possibly.

5.(iii) LUCKY CHARMS: A discussion between Ke-Wei Wu, Yu-Jou Tsai[23] and Joshua Sofaer

4th November 2022

Lucky Charms is a book that will be published in 2023. Five stories are told across the Guantian region in northern Tainan. Blending fantasy and real life, the project explores how creating a contemporary mythology can encourage a sense of belonging and placemaking. The book will be a mixture of documentary and fiction in such a way as to simultaneously cast doubt on established 'truth narratives' and at the same time promote a sense of magical connection to the locale. Each story is pushed through a range of media: words (history and geography next to magical realist fiction) and images (documentary photography, sculpture, illustration, and performance). *Lucky Charms* is in itself the artwork. It is not the presentation of documentation of artworks that have happened outside its pages, so much as the site of the artwork itself. By creating a new mythology with and about the people and places of Guantian, *Lucky Charms* tests the possibilities to deepen sense of place. The hypothesis here is that by creating contemporary folklore, based in fact but quickly (and obviously) becoming fiction, residents will have a sense of belonging, connecting them to their locale and to each other. *Lucky Charms* has been created together with students from five departments in two universities, with professional artists and writers, and community participants.

In this extract from a much longer and more wide-ranging discussion, Ke-Wei Wu, Yu-Jou Tsai and Joshua Sofaer consider the ethics of community fieldwork and the interrelation of fact and fiction in place-based storytelling.

JS: How did you come to be living in Guantian?

YJT: We first came to Guantian as students, as part of National Cheng Kung University's USR (University Society Responsibility) project. Professors open courses for students to do fieldwork in the countryside of Taiwan, to understand and promote localities, getting to know the history and people. The project completed within a year, when the money ran out but we had built up strong relationships with the villagers, so we decided to stay and run our own studio here.

KWW: In the beginning we didn't identify as artists and we didn't really have a specific purpose of what we were trying to do. We began by recording and writing down the memories of people we met. We didn't define it as art.

YJT: Maybe we thought of ourselves more as reporters.

KWW: Yes, and we also wrote short stories.

JS: When we first met, you mentioned the ethical imperative of that decision to move. You felt that the University had abandoned Guantian. They flew in, made a project, and then just left. You felt that was not right and your decision to base yourselves in Guantian was partly in response to that.

KWW: Yes, that is true. Before we went to Guantian we learnt about the ethics of fieldwork but in our experience the University had not really thought through what was needed locally in Guantian. They were coming from the perspective of anthropology with an idea that there were certain problems that needed to be solved but actually those problems didn't really exist. We wanted to try and work out what really mattered to the people of Guantian. And then in order to respond to people you need to gain new abilities, learn new things.

YJT: In both anthropology and in artwork the way it was presented to us was that there was a goal to reach. You set up your plan, conduct field research, and write up your paper. Art was similar. You go there, you take something out of it, and you make it into your art. So, at the end you have your paper or you have your art. But in our methodology the most important thing is the place; we are trying to figure out what the place is.

JS: We met on the 11th of February 2022, nearly nine months ago. Our first project meeting was just two weeks later on the 25th of February and we have been collaborating on the project *Lucky Charms* more or less continually, a day or so a week since then. It seems important to register for the record that while we have done most of the work, it is still in progress and that it hasn't yet met the audience in its major form, which will be a book. I am the designated artistic lead on this project, but our collaboration has really been at its heart. And I would say the project followed on from the geography and connections and interests that you are attached to, because I am a stranger here. I wondered if you could talk a bit about how you see our working relationship?

YJT: It's funny you use the word 'stranger' because that is how we saw ourselves for a long time. I think our collaborative work began by experiencing what it was like to be a stranger all over again. We tried hard to take you to the places and people we like, or want you to know, and to see it through your eyes.

KWW: Do you still feel like a stranger in Guantian?

JS: Yes, but I think there are advantages in that. I don't think it's a problem. Maybe not a stranger, but an outsider, definitely. But I feel like an outsider pretty much everywhere, so there's not much difference in Guantian.

KWW: One thing that we are always thinking about is, 'what is local?' Maybe you think that we are local but for those people who have lived in Guantian for a long time, we are not. I think you have become part of Guantian because people there, care about you. Visa[24] is always asking us where you are and how you are doing. I also think that Ying Gong Bo[25] cares about you.

There is one thing that I think is both dangerous and interesting because out of all the curatorial team in the Mattauw 2022 Triennial we are the ones who are most familiar with Guantian, so in a lot of different circumstances we have to represent the farmers and inhabitants of Guantian. But we cannot represent them. There are so many problems representing people other than yourself.

24. An important community participant in the project *Lucky Charms*.

25. 應公伯 [pinyin: *yīng gōng bó*], sometimes translated as 'good brother' or 'lonely ghost', an immortal being somewhere between a ghost and a god in Taiwan folk religion. One of the stories in *Lucky Charms* worked closely with this god.

JS: They are ethical problems. Do you see any ethical problem in the way that we have been working together?

KWW: Well, there's something in translation that can become a problem. There is always something missing, and there are also misunderstandings. We joked that we have 80% misunderstandings during our processes. Things are changed. All of the *Lucky Charms* stories we have created are quite different from our previous works because you are bolder than us to imagine the possibilities to work with the inhabitants.

JS: Do you see the fact that you have experienced translation as transformation as an ethical problem?

YJT: I don't think the issue of misunderstandings through translation is an ethical problem in itself but if the stories people tell us change through the process, then perhaps there is an ethical question to answer. Our working practice has usually been about trying our best to report the truth but working with you on *Lucky Charms*, we have reached for the imaginary. We have written these stories and we present them as a kind of fact and I am wondering about the relationship between local history, these stories, and the truth. I don't know if what we have done will harm local history or let people get to know more about it in a strange way.

KWW: Is the intention of *Lucky Charms* to make people believe these things really happened?

JS: To me it is not a question of belief, it's a question of experience. For example, I was conducting research about the goddess Niang Ma in Chiayi[26] and as part of my ethical protocol I went to the temple and I asked her permission to continue. The question I asked was, "Is my research legitimate?"[27] I really felt the goddess's presence throughout my entire encounter with her, not just at this moment of asking her permission but in the performance celebrations for her birthday which I had been researching. But that experience was not based on belief. It would be hard to walk into that situation without feeling something; it was a very physical encounter. I was very nervous when I asked her the question about my research. I got three very unambiguous '*Yes*' responses and I felt an incredible intensity, but I can't really say it was about belief. Throwing the moon blocks didn't require my belief. They were there, I could see them, and there were rules for how to use them.

The stories we are telling are, at least to my mind, very obviously just that: stories. If you believe them blindly, step into a world of belief, then I think there is an ethical problem. But if you engage with them as an experience of the imagination, or if you research them and come to your own conclusions about what is fact and fictional, whatever your position is, as long as there is doubt, then, for me at least, the work has the potential for productive affect. We are not asking people to believe that mountains reappear and birds lay golden eggs.

When I worked on *The Gold Nose and Green Ginger*[28], there was a little room which you could visit to hear the sound of a magic nose breathing. A young girl, she was like 10 or something, she said to me, "The sound of that breathing, is it real or is it just a recording?" And I said to her, "What do you think?" And she said, "I think it's a recording." And I said, "Well if you don't

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26. In 六腳鄉 (pinyin: *liùjiǎo xiāng*) in Chiayi, is 娘媽堂 (pinyin: *niáng mā tang*) where the goddess referred to as '*Niáng Mǎ*' or 'Mother' is seated.

27. In Taiwan it is possible to communicate directly with the gods using moon block divination 跋杯 (pinyin: *bá bē*).

28. Part of Hull 2017 UK City of Culture www.joshuasofaer.com/2017/08/goldnosegreenginger/

believe…" and she interrupted, "No, no, I believe, I believe!" And for me that was the perfect answer, because she knew it was a recording, but she chose to engage in an imaginative belief. It is a choice. We created these stories together but I can choose to believe as much as the next person that the mountain reappeared from the plane and that is a real experience for me in some sense. I think the ethics of the work can be productive in the space of doubt. But this is the question that goes to the heart of what we are investigating.

KWW: So, for you people know that the words and pictures we put in the book are not true but they can choose to believe that they are true?

JS: I think it's more nuanced. We can believe in fiction, and we can doubt facts. Arts practice is, or can be, about imagination.

        Is this the first time that you have worked by integrating fact and fiction in your writing?

KWW: In our working process we are still trying to find out what is fact and what is not fact. And maybe a fact is that the building of the reservoir was begun in 1920 and it was finished in 1930. We want to get those kinds of historical facts right. And we would like details to be based on history, so for example Yu-Jou researched what local people would wear at the time.

        On the other hand, there is very little documentation about what happened in anonymous people's lives in Guantian in the first half of the 20th Century and that is where we can work with fiction. We might find a name in an archive and then invent a life for them.

JS: Well, the genre of historical fiction tries to imagine historical events, but nobody thinks of a world where mountains just suddenly rise up out of the ground or where birds lay gold eggs as historical. That is fiction, magic, folk tales. It's not born in any reality as we know it.

KWW: But a mountain was dug out and we researched what year that happened. Yu-Jou and I really care about things that happened, we like to find out specific information.

JS: Sure. We have all been working towards as much factual accuracy as possible, but in a way that adds to the ethical danger. The fact that we can prove that the mountain was dugout in a certain year only lends credence to the 'impossible' elements of the story that follow on from that fact. This is where the idea of 'parafiction' comes in. Actually, I don't think that what we are doing is really parafiction as Carrie Lambert-Beatty describes it. We are operating in two simultaneous frames: that of fact and that of fiction. My hope is that it will create a pleasurable reader response, activating the imagination, but also engaging doubt, and that they might go onto consider and even research what is based in historical fact and what is not. I can imagine the readership will include a spectrum of responses from those that are strongly inclined to believe that a lot of it is real, to those who will read it entirely as fiction.

        Maybe this is a good moment to talk about some specific instances. One occasion that caused a lot of discussion between us was the use of a photograph by John Thompson who documented a lot of Asia in the 1860s and 1870s, and whose photographs are revered and considered important historical documents in Taiwan. I suggested we use one of his photographs in the book and that we miscaption it, to give it a caption that was not related to its origin but that fitted our story. My feeling was that the image is so famous, that there is no risk to truth because if people do any kind of investigation, they will be able to find the scholarship. But you

particularly Ke-Wei, objected to that. Incidentally, I think we have ended up at the right place, which is to lace the caption with doubt. Maybe I will just read that caption.

> The editors of this publication have failed to find any extant photographs that they are confident depict Founding Mother Mountain. This photograph was taken by John Thompson in 1871. Some scholars have identified it as being Tianliao Moon World in the neighbouring county of Kaohsiung but this is disputed by some others, who argue that it could be anywhere in the mountainous regions of Kaohsiung and Tainan. Perhaps Founding Mother Mountain looked something like this.

And all that is entirely factually true; there is nothing there that is inaccurate at all. We did fail to find a photograph of Founding Mother Mountain, and some scholars have identified it as being Tianliao, and this is disputed. And all the words like 'failed,' 'confident,' 'some scholars', 'this is disputed,' 'it could be,' 'perhaps,' all of these words operate like conditionals, they function to lay doubt, even though the statement is factual. So interestingly, here it is an example of how a factual statement might encourage a fictional reading, as opposed to the other way around of giving you fiction and encouraging you to think about it is as fact. Could you talk about this instance of the use of the John Thompson photograph?

YJT: When you first suggested we miscaption the photograph I agreed with you. I agreed that the photograph was famous and its history well documented. I was excited by the idea that we would raise doubts as to the truth narratives of our work because that is how it is in everyday life. We hear a sound. I think it is a bird, and you think it is a whistle. It happens all the time. And I liked the idea that we could activate doubt and point to the cracks.

JS: Paradoxically, by being honest in the caption for the photo by John Thompson, we make ourselves more trustworthy across the rest of the book. So, if your ethical quandary was about not wanting people to trust us too easily, Ke-Wei, then in this instance, we might have failed! If we had captioned the John Thompson photograph, 'This is a picture of a custard tart', people would have gone, 'What are they talking about? It's a photograph of a mountain somewhere, and it looks reminiscent of work by John Thompson, why are they calling it a custard tart?' So, then doubt is immediately promoted.

KWW: John Thompson famously produced a lot of photographs in China as well as in Taiwan. If we said, for example, 'This is not China, it is Taiwan,' what are the consequences of such a statement? What is the effect of the misunderstanding in Taiwan and in China? I'm also not so confident that people *will* do the research. If we say 'This is Founding Mother Mountain photographed by John Thompson in 1871' I think there will be two types of readers. The first are scholars and they will read our caption and think, 'Holy fuck! That is not Founding Mother Mountain'. The other type are not John Thompson experts and will just believe the caption. So, in this case, I don't think there is a choice to believe or not believe.

JS: That's interesting. In your view if we miscaption the John Thompson photograph it does no work. People will just think, 'well that's wrong…' or they will not think anything, they will just think, '…okay, I accept that'. There's no inbetweenness. Maybe it comes back to ethics, because it is the inbetweenness where there is most possibility for narrative interrogation.

KWW: I'd also like to make a point about Taiwan's identity. John Thompson is a very important photographer for us Taiwanese. He is our first photographer. There are many scholars and people involved in the effort to study his photographs, determine the location and historical context. Miscaptioning the photograph becomes a serious misleading of scholarship. It really alters our historical facts. We in Taiwan are trying to build our own history and it is a very critical thing that people want to understand. These photographs are very treasured.

Only when, and if, everyone knows that the photograph was taken in Tianliao can we say it was not.

JS: So, the ethics here hang on the pre-existing knowledge that the audience has?

KWW: Yes. That's what I think.

JS: That's very interesting.

The second instance that I wanted to mention was the small neglected and almost forgotten shrine that we discovered on one of the site visits. This is a real shrine that is part of a very real belief system in Taiwan. Could you talk about how the shrine fits into Taiwanese Folk Religion?

YJT: Those small shrines in Taiwan are usually either for worshipping the God of the Land or Lonely Ghosts. If they are for worshipping the God of the Land then, officially, they should be registered with Yuhuang Dadi, the Jade Emperor Temple, in Tainan City but because that's a bit complicated it often does not happen. Therefore, it's not always clear to whom the shrine is dedicated. If it is a Lonely Ghost then that means that someone died or was killed in that location and they are worshipped in order to appease their spirit.

JS: So, we don't really know who the shrine is for.

YJT: Correct.

JS: We conceived of, and you wrote, a story about the god of that shrine. And while it's based in some historical fact it's biographically more or less completely invented. And now it becomes incorporated as part of the living mythology of that god. Is that how you understand it? We've written religion; a religion that we are then also worshipping at.

YJT: Yes, that's right.

JS: For the record we should add that we have very seriously sought the god's permission through the process of moon block divination, at more than one occasion, and only acted in accordance with their wishes and their directions. We also worked with a mage, somebody like a priest, that intercedes between gods and humans. But, nevertheless, we wrote about that god and have created his backstory.

For me, that has been totally bonkers. Far more ethically serious a consideration than miscaptioning a John Thompson photograph. But throughout that process you both seem to have been very relaxed, even slightly laughing at my nervousness, and my wanting to do everything according to the strict protocols.

A photography from the book *Lucky Charms* depicting the rededication of the shrine. Photograph by Yu-Jou Tsai & Ke-Wei Wu, Rong-Hua Chuang & Chang-Hsu Su, 2022.

Lucky Charms by Joshua Sofaer with Yu-Jou Tsai and Ke-Wei Wu was created for Mattauw 2022 Triennial, Tainan, curated by Jow-Jiun Gong and Clio Yu-Cheng Hung. The project was produced by Emma Liao and Yoyo Kung. *Lucky Charms* was commissioned by Cultural Affairs Bureau, Tainan City Government and supported by Ministry of Culture, Taiwan. First published in Taiwan in 2023 by 藝術公社 Art Commune & 日青創藝有限公司 Kelio Arts Ltd.

The caption reads: *Until recently, the story of the lonely ghost had long been forgotten. Only a few farmers would visit the shrine, very occasionally, to pray for safe passage across the water. The shrine itself was in some disrepair, giant poles of bamboo tangled over the roof, earth had covered the surrounds, the paint had faded away, and the name tablet of the god was missing. When we stumbled across the small red metal stairway up the hill and followed the overgrown path to the shrine, we immediately felt a supernatural presence and wanted to discover more. We learnt about the old folk from Bentan who were given the miraculous opportunity to revisit their former village at the bottom of the Wushanto Reservoir and the role the lonely ghost had played to make such a journey possible. Taking instruction from the affiliated mother temple and a local mage, as well as from the lonely ghost himself, we refurbished the shrine and offered a giant orange to the god. In a rededication ceremony the lonely ghost told us how he longed for company and implored us to visit him more often.*

One important thing to add, if I may, is that you both do this as regular worshippers in Taiwanese Taoist and Buddhist temples. You're not doing this from the outside, you're doing it absolutely as a member of the congregation here.

KWW: I am thinking that the reason you think it is bonkers, is because in the Christian world all the stories about Jesus are in the Bible. You cannot create any new stories in the life of Jesus. They are already there.

JS: The Judeo-Christian Islamic traditions are certainly founded in key books. You can interpret the book, but you can't start writing the book.

[laughter]

KWW: I think the key point here is that there will not be any new gods in those traditions but we often have new gods. Besides those very famous gods like Guanyin or Buddha that everyone shares, there are a lot of gods that many people don't know. You were talking earlier about Niang Ma; she is only worshipped in that specific place in Chayi, she is the god for them, but not for us. If someone has magical powers or is a very good person, after they die, they can become a god. And when someone becomes a god, there are always stories about their life and why they became a god or goddess. That's why we feel totally comfortable to make up a story about the life of a god.

JS: But wait a minute, isn't there a leap there? I totally understand that new gods emerge, but isn't there is a difference between somebody leading an exceptional life and are therefore subsequently worshipped, and inventing the life of a pre-existing god? In English we might think of this as *hubris*, an offence against the gods. Maybe the way that I'm thinking about it isn't culturally appropriate.

KWW: I think in Taiwan as long as you don't say that a god is not good, as long as he or she is doing some good things, I think people will think, *Yes, our god is a very good one, so they could do those things*.

JS: So, ethically then, any effort to extol the god can only be good?

YJT: Yes.

JS: And, therefore, fact and fiction are irrelevant, it's about praise. The ethics of 'truth' from a western perspective don't apply.

YJT: With or without our story, Taiwanese religion is constantly evolving and innovating. New stories and ceremonies are written all the time.

KWW: The same god may have several contradictory stories written about them. The power of religion is *in* the stories.

5.(iv) LOVE STORY: Lucas Melkane, Philip Pilekjær and Piet Gitz-Johansen[29] interviewed by Joshua Sofaer

16th November 2022

Love Story was a group show at the Amado Arts Space in Seoul, South Korea that took place from 20th March-16th April 2017. Artists were invited to respond to the medium and system of exhibition, experimenting with different frameworks. The online archive records: "Lucas Melkane collaborates with Philip Pilekjær to make a work that exists only as rumour. The artists install a stuffed swan somewhere on the roof of the exhibition hall where the audience cannot see it. In the exhibition space, references to rumours are displayed as if they are works of art. The actual work can only be seen from the surrounding roads, through the windows of nearby cafés, or in high-rise buildings, not in the exhibition itself. For the artists, an exhibition is not a place to create the inevitable unity of thought and matter, but rather a conversation or rumour that is heard while recognising the gap between the two."[30] But the work archived is not the work that Melkane and Pilekjær created. Their work was rather to send someone else in their stead, an imposter, literally an actor. In this discussion Melkane, Pilekjær and the actor they hired, Gitz-Johansen, recall their collaboration and think through the reverberations of their deception.

JS: Could you start by introducing yourselves?

LM: My name is Lucas Melkane. I'm a visual artist and also have a catalogue of different practices to make a living.

PP: My name is Philip Pilekjær. I'm an artist. I edit a magazine and do all kinds of other things to make a living.

PGJ: I'm Piet Gitz-Johansen. I'm an actor and performer. I teach and do a lot of other stuff as well.

JS: Thank you. We are here to talk about a piece that you made together as part of the group show, *Love Story* that took place in Amado Art Space in Seoul in 2017. Can you talk a bit about how that invitation was extended and the decision that you took to involve Piet?

LM: I had several meetings with Kwon[31] who was the curator of the show. He had come from Korea to Denmark a few times. At some point he sent an invitation asking if I wanted to take part in the show. I was in Portugal at the time and had thought I wanted to work with Philip, so I talked to him about it.

        Philip, maybe you can help me remember how we got to the idea of sending a persona that could act like you to do the exhibition.

PP: As far as I remember, it was a kind of a practical solution to the fact that the exhibition space offered a small budget and there was only enough for one of us to go. We figured that since only one person has to go, it could be more fun to send a third person instead of us. Part of it was also that we had been studying 'scammers' and 'hustlers', so there was a context that we were interested in.

29. Lucas Melkane born 1988, Svendborg, Denmark; Philip Pilekjær born 1988, Odense, Denmark; Piet Gitz-Johansen born 1986, Copenhagen, Denmark www.pietgitz.com.

30. Translated from Korean. Original at: amadoart.org/?avada_portfolio=제4회-아마도전시기획상&portfolioCats=40&ckattempt=1 Accessed 7th December 2022.

31. Hyukgue Kwon (권혁규), curator.

LM: And 'cunning'. I remember.

PP: Exactly. So, it was partly an interest that was already there and it was partly a pragmatic solution in response to the limited travel budget. We came to Piet because we had a mutual friend who is an actor who had a few years earlier been called "The sexiest man in Norway" and we thought, *That's great. He should be the one acting as one of us!* But he couldn't do it and he said, "You have to ask my friend Piet instead because he will be perfect for this role."

JS: So, you didn't know each other before hand?

PGJ: No. Lucas gave me a call and told me it was in three weeks. I remember the limited amount of time that I had. He said, "We have initiated a project in which you have to perform as Philip and create an art piece for a group show in Amado Art Space in Korea." Then we met on Skype. It was very confusing to start with but we agreed that I should go and meet Philip in Berlin, where he was living at the time.

      We had 24 hours together in Berlin, me and Philip. We had a long walk and we went to different art galleries. I had to get into Philip's mind in order to create an art piece as if it were him creating it. Then we went to the hairdresser to get the same haircut. We also went to see a theatre piece, just for me to give something back. Then I went home and I was on my own in the search to create something that I could bring to Amado Art Space.

PP: It's also important to say that the whole reason for Piet to come to Berlin and us spending time together was because Lucas and I agreed that we had to take it seriously as a theatre play. Piet would have to do the preparations that one would do to form a character. It was not just a joke. We wanted to take it seriously and to do all the things you would do if you were trying to act as someone.

PGJ: I would try to get more into Philip's mind. If someone asked me something, I wanted to be able to answer what Philip would answer, which was a very big task in three weeks. But we really went for it. We talked a lot in order for me to get to know Philip and his view on things.

JS: Was any of this documented?

PGJ: No. I have a screenshot from the first Skype meeting.

LM: We spent some time talking about when the theatre play should start. We decided it should be the moment the driver picked Piet up in the airport in Seoul with his name, or with his character's name, 'Philip', on a board. That was the signal to go into character.

PP: The discussion of when the fiction should start or stop came out of the fact that Piet had to show his own passport to the customs officer. We had thought he should be in character the whole time, even for the people that are not aware that it's a theatre play, and that of course includes the customs officer in the airport, but then it would break the fiction that he doesn't have a passport that says 'Philip Pilekjær'. So, again, I think it was a practical solution. We figured the play has to begin after he has arrived in Korea.

PGJ: Another important thing you decided was that you didn't want to know what art piece I had created.

LM: That's true.

JS: So, Piet, you've had this time with Philip in Berlin. You've come back to Copenhagen. By this stage you've got two weeks or something like that, before you leave for Korea. You've got one rule which is that you're 'on' the second that you see your name, or rather 'Philip', your character's name, on the airport pick-up driver's sign. There's also a rule that you don't tell Philip or Lucas what you're going to produce. Were there any other rules that were given to you?

PGJ: No, just some information that their friend Bjarke was already there and I had to interact with him as well. He was also participating in the exhibition. He would be there and I had to be his friend because I would be Philip from the moment the taxi driver showed me the sign.

I think I need to step back a bit because there were a lot of sleepless nights thinking about how to create the art piece 'as Philip'.

LM: More than that, the artwork had to be something that Philip and I could have done together. Kwon had never met Philip; I had just told him on the phone that I couldn't go but I was collaborating with another artist that would then come.

PGJ: Yes, I had to create a piece that would be a collaboration between Philip and Lucas. My mind was very puzzled. I was also very puzzled by the fact that it would be a scam. I thought it was interesting but somewhat problematic as well. There's two white men sending another white man down to scam in South Korea. It felt like the biggest task I had ever been given. At the same time, I had a lot of respect for you because you gave me your trust.

The art piece I ended up bringing was a taxidermy swan which I had in a bag at the airport. I wanted to mount it on the roof of the art space. The public shouldn't see the swan but I would exhibit the bag that I had brought it in. I don't know how I ended up there but it felt like it would be the kind of thing you two guys might have done.

I had been emailing with Kwon as Philip. I made an email address specifically for that purpose. I had also written a little text about the art piece because something was needed for the exhibition guide. I had sent that to him. Then, I was in South Korea! The taxi driver had a big sign, "Welcome to South Korea Philip Pilekjær." I got a shock and I said, "Hello, my name is Philip Pilekjær."

There, in the taxi, the performance started. He asked me what I was doing and I told him I was an artist from Denmark and what I was working on. It felt like a rehearsal but it was already the beginning. I was very nervous because he drove me straight to the gallery. I had it in my mind that Bjarke would be there and that he had sent some emails to say that he was very concerned with the project. He didn't like the fact that he was dragged into the fiction and that he was forced to be part of it. He had developed a friendship with Kwon and felt he was lying to him.

LM: Bjarke knew that you would come. We had told him that there would be a theatre play and we would send an actor as Philip. In the beginning he was quite excited about it but then quite quickly that turned, especially towards the date when you would arrive.

PP: Part of it was that in the days before you arrived, he and Kwon started forming a friendship. Both of their partners were pregnant and they shared this very important personal moment. The fiction created some tension for Bjarke.

JS: Did this create a new jeopardy for the success of the play?

LM: I remember Philip and I talked and agreed that no matter what the outcome, even if Kwon found out as soon as Piet steps into the gallery that he is not Philip, that we had sent another person, then that is fine. Piet should still stay in character. Those were the terms of the play. If you go to a play in a theatre, you know that it's a play and you accept the play as a play.

PGJ: But after I met Bjarke and Kwon, you and I agreed that Bjarke was allowed to tell Kwon.

LM: Yes. We encouraged Bjarke not to tell. We told him that he would change the play if he told. But in the end, what could we do? We had several calls on the phone after you arrived and he was very upset; really upset about the whole situation.

PGJ: Yes. He was very upset after the first meeting.

JS: So, what happened then? You're in the taxi on the way to the gallery…

PGJ: Yes. The taxi drops me off at the art space and there I meet Kwon and Bjarke and I got a big shock because Bjarke was acting in a forced way. He was saying, "Hello, Philip, my old friend, it's so good to see you." He was somehow trying to help the project but I didn't believe it.

        I had some information about him that I had learned from Philip and he was very overwhelmed when I started talking to him about the time we had been climbing, different movies we both liked, things like that. He felt like he had to act himself but was also very confused.

        I just felt all the time how difficult it was for him to stay in the fiction, or to cope with the fact that I was not his friend, Philip. Or was I? He was really trying in a very sweet way at first to hold onto the fiction but it was very difficult and overwhelming for him. And he helped me put the swan on the roof. The thing was all this took maybe nine minutes and then it was like, "Okay, see you".

JS: Nine minutes? Nine minutes after you arrive at the gallery?

PGJ: Yes. They had to go for lunch. I don't know, maybe it was 15 but it felt very, very short. We mounted the swan on the roof and I placed the bag down in the art space and they were like, "Everything looks very good. You can come when you want but the opening is in two days." And Kwon said, "If you need anything just write me." Philip had booked a hotel for me that was not so far away. It all went so fast. Then suddenly I was alone, walking to the hotel very confused. *Am I Philip now, or only in the art space?* I remember my own feelings and also trying to have Philip's feelings. It was one big mess inside.

JS: Who did you check into the hotel as because presumably you had to show your passport in the hotel?

PGJ: Yes, that was Piet.

JS: Okay. Then you're in Seoul. You have two days in Seoul before the opening. Do you have any interaction with the gallery in those two days?

PGJ: That same day Bjarke sent a very long email to Philip and Lucas saying that it had to stop, "This is too overwhelming. I can't be part of this." We agreed that he could just tell Kwon.

LM: Yes, we wanted Bjarke to tell, if he wanted to tell. There was nothing else we could do. But Piet wouldn't drop the character. Piet would continue as Philip.

PP: Once we had put things in motion we didn't really want to interfere. We wanted to just let things play out. And so, if Bjarke wanted to let other people know that Piet was acting, then that would be that.

JS: Lucas and Philip, was there any ethical quandary in your mind at this stage? Piet talked about his feeling that he was being sent as a scammer but he embraced the task and was moving forward with it. Your friend was clearly very unhappy. What were you feeling?

PP: I think we were a bit both worried and also confused about Bjarke's reaction but also felt that he had the power and the right to break the fiction if he wanted to. He didn't have to play along.

LM: I remember feeling that it was a very quick turn, that he didn't give it a chance but that, of course, it's okay to tell. Also, I would put it in other words: I didn't think it would break the fiction as such if he told Kwon, because the fiction was still ongoing; Piet was still acting as Philip. He would just 'disguise' the fiction.

PP: We also thought it was interesting that it seemed Bjarke's reason for not telling, up until that point, was that he felt that he would somehow compromise our artwork. It felt that he was somehow more loyal to it than we were.

PGJ: It was my initial plan to drop the fiction at the opening, to make a speech, and to give the power to the people there by asking: "Now that the truth is out, what should we say to Philip and Lucas?" But that never happened because Bjarke told Kwon about the project. I realised, *Okay, I just have to continue to be Philip.* I was very nervous about how Kwon would react but he met me with open arms, saying, "Hello Philip, great artist from Denmark!" He clearly really liked Lucas and Philip's idea and thought the piece was interesting. And throughout the opening he wanted me to "Talk!" about art to the people there.

      There was a dinner after the exhibition and at that point Bjarke was very happy and I guess relieved with how things were resolved. I remember him laughing, and personally, as Piet, I felt that he was, somehow, laughing at me. I felt a bit insecure at that dinner. Then, at some point, Bjarke left to sleep but I stayed a little bit longer and went for some fancy drinks with the other artists. At the end of the evening, I turned to Kwon and whispered, "Thank you for everything. I'm going to leave now. Take care of the swan." And Kwon whispered back to me, "I knew all the time that you were not Philip. I googled." He had also been tricking Bjarke. He was also part of the play. And he said, "But to me you will always be Philip."

JS: Do you believe that he knew you weren't Philip?

PGJ: Yes, I do.

JS: I want to try and unpack some of what is going on in all of this. The work that Piet made, as Philip, supposedly in collaboration with Lucas, is an oddly visible thing, this stuffed swan, that nevertheless can't be seen because it is hidden out of sight on the roof. It exists in the mind of most people in rumour, and that rumour has to circulate in the exhibition in some way. But there is, presumably, a second level of rumour that is leaking out to whatever degree and that

Piet Gitz-Johansen, actor, in the 'character' of Philip Pilekjær, artist, chooses to display the bag and trolley used to transport a taxidermy swan from Copenhagen to Seoul in the gallery space.

Love Story by Lucas Melkane and Philip Pilekjær, Amado Art Space, Seoul, South Korea, 2017. Photo by Junyong Choi.

is that Philip isn't Philip. This second rumour (that Philip isn't Philip) seems to me to be the main locus of the piece but if you go on to the Amado Art Space web archive there's absolutely no mention of anything other than the swan. There's no mention of this dissimulation of the artist. I'm wondering if you've got any comments on that because it seems to me that the most important aspect of the work, up until this report, or however else it has leaked out over these last five years, is lost?

PP: It depends what you mean by 'lost'. The swan that is documented on the website, that Piet brought to the gallery, it's not an artwork in itself: it's a prop that is used as a placeholder for the artwork. But yes, it's true that this piece, which is a fiction, is a very ephemeral thing that more or less only exists as a rumour or story.

LM: I think we're quite happy about that, no? I don't see a necessity to have tons of pictures. I find it much more poetic to have this ephemeral moment that can exist in such a light way.

JS: I would agree with you, except it's only poetic if you know about it.[32] There's only a poetry if you're subject to the poetry. Is the conclusion here that the work really only exists for you both?

LM: I honestly have to say I only do stuff for myself. I'm very self-centred in that way as far as my artwork is concerned. I'm not having a big need to share everything that I do. This project included different things that we had to research and most of the time it's things that we only share within our little bubble.

PP: I feel similar to you, Lucas, but I think it's also very much for the people that were involved in it, Kwon and Bjarke for example. I think it's generous to make an artwork for a really small handful of people and hopefully it will be something that they will think about once in a while.

PGJ: Another interesting thing was meeting Bjarke at the airport on the way home, where I was me, Piet, and saying, "Hey, are you okay? Thanks for everything." He then understood that I had conceived the art piece that had been presented at Amado Art Space, and I had written the accompanying text.[33] Yes, maybe the swan was a prop as Philip says but Bjarke's head was exploding in the airport and he was like, "But you can't make art; you're an actor. Are you sure that Lucas and Philip have not done this?" I told him, "Yes, they don't even know what I've done here."

When I tell the whole story people always ask, "How much of this is true?" People suggest that it's a lie.

JS: Let's pause for a moment and reflect on this. I had a lot of ethical questions about the work but they fall away when the audience for the work just becomes the people that are involved in the work. The in-group/out-group dynamic, the problem of the parafiction, or the dissimulation, or the deception, is that it's potentially humiliating when you discover that you've been tricked.

32. This author found out about the work as a former tutor of Piet Gitz-Johansen from his time at Norwegian Theatre Academy, Fredrikstad, Norway. Piet had contacted me in the days leading up to his trip to Korea to talk through some of his concerns about the piece.

33. Melkane and Pilekjær titled their piece (the "play") the same as the exhibition: *Love Story*. Gitz-Johansen titled his piece (the "prop") *Swan*. The text Gitz-Johansen wrote as part of his dissimulation is as follows: 'For the exhibition *Love Story*, Philip Pilekjær and Lucas Wichmann Melkane propose the sculpture, *Swan*. The work *Swan* consists of a taxidermy swan mounted on the roof of Amado Art Space for the duration of the exhibition. The work conflates questions of life and death (the swan reenters the sky, while decomposing when exposed to wind and weather) with questions of visibility and invisibility (the work will not be visible to the public but will be made present through its announcement and possible rumours), through a Duchampian move with opposite consequences. In *Swan*, the object, by entering the category 'artworks' obtains decay and disappearance rather than display and preservation.'

That's why I question if Kwon knew, because if he says, "I always knew," he avoids the potential of feeling humiliated. (I've been googling Philip and I don't think I've found any pictures of you.) Anyway, whether he did or not is held in the balance. It's another truth, it's another fiction, it's another thing that can't necessarily be entirely resolved, maybe not even by Kwon himself.

PGJ: He had met Lucas before and there was always something weird. So, it's more like he didn't know everything but he knew that there would be something happening.

JS: He was expecting something.

PGJ: He was expecting something.

LM: He'd probably been expecting that I would not come up with the usual thing of sending an object. The first time I met him I invited him to my temporary studio which was in MacDonald's. I tried to sit and work at MacDonald's because I had this idea that if I could work in MacDonald's, then I would be able to work all over the world because all MacDonald's look like each other and they have the same menu and they have Wi-Fi, there's a toilet, all the necessities of the workspace somehow. I had a long conversation with him at MacDonald's. I think he knew that working with me would not be the usual way of working.

JS: One of the things that's interesting is how power shifts. Power is initially in the hands of Kwon who gives it to Lucas through the commission, who shares it with Philip, who both give it to Piet who then goes to Korea. Bjarke takes the power, with a lot of equivocation, but he takes it, and gives it back to Kwon, where it started. There's a circle of power. Another observation is that there's a lack of trust by Bjarke. It's arguably understandable that he feels that way. There's a lack of trust in art, or maybe it's a lack of trust in performance, or of Piet. What happens then, is that Piet's *dénouement*, in which he wants to give the audience a kind of community power, is taken away by Bjarke's need to not be complicit in a deception. The possibility for a folding back of the scam against Philip and Lucas (and I can imagine you would have embraced the idea of the audience deciding the fate of the rumour that comes back to you) is then broken.

PGJ: That's how it felt being there.

JS: One of the questions in my mind was, 'What does the deception offer?' but I think that it's very clear that the deception, in this case, offers a critique of visual art itself. In this work, the actor, the pretender in the role of artist, can create an artwork. Philip, you described it as a prop, maybe that's what it is ontologically, it really is a prop, but it can be perceived by the interpreters of art as art, and that's the way that it is catalogued in perpetuity. This critique pulls the artwork metaphorically off the plinth and I find a productive possibility in this act of deception and the possibility of fiction being understood as fact.

PP: Yes, I think that's true. I think another thing that it produces is an enhanced perception of the world around you. When it's revealed that part of your experience has been a fiction that's been played out by an actor, then, from that point on, you'll be aware that maybe the guy sitting at the hotel bar is potentially an actor producing a play. There's a shift in how you perceive the world. This is what Lucas described as poetic.

PGJ: I still use it as a tool for creating performance. I create fictitious people and ask how they would create the work. It's been one of the tools I've used the most. So, in my private artistic world the work lives on and some days I ask: *What would Philip do here?*

5.(v) CATHEXIS 1: TRUTH ON TRIAL: Nick Millett[34] interviewed by Joshua Sofaer 18th November 2022

Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial[35] is the first in a series of ongoing performances by Elapse, that engage the question of truth and technology. Under the auspices of a semi-fictional social innovation start-up, TheTruthTech®, which focusses on the justice system, *Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial*, takes the format of a prototype technology demonstration, in which an AI system called Trubē is presented for public information and evaluation.

Trubē extracts and analyses biometric and neurological data from a person (a witness, expert, or the accused) and displays this information for the audience. The audience are ostensibly there to deliberate and participate in the verdict but the conversation quickly turns into one about the ethics of the technology, and doubt as to whether the technology is in fact real.

In this edited discussion Nick Millett shares the origins and imperatives of the work, his relationship to hoaxing and belief, and the audience response.

JS: Could you start by introducing yourself and saying a bit about how you choose to describe what it is that you do?

NM: I don't like to define what I do because I don't like definition, and that's part of the orientation in my work. Actually, even saying "my work", that kind of codification, hearing that in my ears, is kind of strange. Well, I occasionally create experiences, I guess. I don't think it's fair that I have an identity as an artist, I don't really identify with that, but I do create experiences for humans.

JS: That seems relevant to your work. May I ask, then, what that reluctance is?

NM: I think there's a formal element to any identification. It's really about remaining as undetermined as possible, and then in the work for as long as possible. And then trying to develop mechanisms in which that indeterminate zone becomes accessible to other people. *What is it that makes it hard to identify with closed systems and codified existences, and pre-given categories, and therefore given forms?* But in general, I would say that I'm participating in an epochal questioning of identity, and not taking a definitive position.

JS: Is there a political efficacy to indeterminacy?

NM: There's a political ramification. I will always be trying to scramble the codes, the easy identifications, the positions people take, the group think, digging beyond the status quo to see what's emerging.

JS: We are here to talk about *Cathexis*, which has many modalities and is still ongoing. What is the genesis of the project?

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34. Nick Millett (born 1968, Nairobi, Kenya) is Artistic Director of expanded theatre company Elapse, which creates interdisciplinary "artistic experiments" for live audiences.

35. After a series of workshops and work-in-progress performances from December 2017, *Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial* premiered at MESS Festival, Sarajevo in October 2018. *Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial* was an interdisciplinary, international collaboration with the Interaction Technology Research Group at Utrecht University, the Atelier-Théâtre Jean Vilar in Louvain-la-Neuve, Heartefakt Foundation in Belgrade, NMA strategy consultancy in Paris and CPI NGO in Sarajevo; it was co-financed by the European Union. https://www.elapse.eu/projects/cathexis-1

NM: I can point to a handful of origins. One was doing a play by W David Hancock called *The Race of the Ark Tattoo*, which I did in French for a few years. I call it a play but the idea was to get it away from being a play as much as possible. It's simply a garage sale and the guy who's holding the sale starts telling a story that becomes an interactive experience. He is an unreliable narrator and that creates these amazing zones of uncertainty where the audience, who don't really know they are an audience, are having to scrap together their own collages of events, trying to understand the genesis of this guy's identity, trying to understand how his memories coalesce, what is actually fiction, what isn't fiction. And it was a fascinating experience, and as I say I think it's a brilliant piece of work. A fascinating experience that married me totally to creating ambiguity.

Another origin is a longstanding obsession with English literary satire, people like Wyndham Lewis and before him Jonathan Swift, and the mechanisms that make a reader question. I call it 'real satire', when you actually do it in a performance, undercutting the audience's position so they go into reflexive mode.

Actually, initially I wanted to do Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* and to shift it away from a classic modern tragedy where you identify strongly with a hero and you're very comfortable in your identification with him. I wanted to take what I had learned in *Ark Tattoo* – over-stimulating the audience to scramble clear narrative identifications – and apply it to *The Crucible*, forcing identification with 'the idiot crowd' and the general circumstances rather than the hero. But the rights were taken.

Then I thought to do a very simple performance: a lie detector, the audience, and me. It was to be about how truth functions. But then things took on a completely different evolution. The first iteration of the project is called *Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial* and arises out of that research into the lie detector.

The idea with *Cathexis* was to explore where we are now with the question of truth and justice and where we're going. And so, the desire became to create an experience of a possible future of justice, and to propose it as a technological future. So far, the incursion of AI into the field of justice hasn't gone that far and so it gave us free rein to start imagining what that could be. We worked with the computer science department at the University of Utrecht. It was very interesting to team up with a positivist scientist who's really developing deception detection tech.

I had Hancock come on board and we asked ourselves: *Well, okay how do we actually, you know, immerse an audience in this future and suspend their disbelief? How do we do that when our budget is limited?* So, we decided to make the event itself the product of a half fake company. So, instead of simply having a play which was a tribunal in the future, we created a contemporary company that would present its new justice technology to the audience, who were no longer a theatrical audience but who were more like a focus group.

JS: Is that how it was advertised? You were looking for focus groups not audiences?

NM: It was pretty hard to present it that way in every instance but in Belgium and in France it was presented as a company working on new technology, and not launching it but testing it with the public, yes.

JS: Was it shown in theatre spaces?

NM: Mostly. In some instances, the theatre was pretty much the only auditorium around, and was used by the community for various functions. The theatre was the default space because of the funding but I've been asked to do it in different spaces.

I want to take the intelligence that comes from acting and from the play around ambiguity and the use of the imagination into different spaces, whether it's in corporations, in law societies and law schools, in public halls. The efficacy of the piece is maximised when it is not clearly determined beforehand as theatre. More important than the space is the audience. I like reaching extremely diverse audiences.

Just before COVID, I was invited to do it in a seminar on AI for the top execs at *Le Ministère de l'Économie et des Finance*. As you can imagine that made my heart sing. I went as a start-upper and I showed them the results of our tests around Europe. One of the big issues in this project has been the 'reveal' and when it should happen. In this case the organisers revealed the fiction at the end of my presentation and the discussion focused on that. Which is fine because, you know, one of the purposes of *Cathexis* is to provoke a discussion about ethics. The process of building *Cathexis* itself involved many ethical discussions with our partners, not all of who were from theatre. We had human rights organisations, NGOs, and there was a psychologist for whom the idea of not telling people what we were doing proved ethically very difficult, which in a way is paradoxical given that social psychology is one of the fields of science where the research depends on concealing the truth from test subjects.

JS: What was it that the psychologist wanted revealed?

NM: They wanted us to reveal upfront that this was a fictional company and that we weren't really building this technology. But actually, we were building some of the technology. We were getting as far as we could on the budget we had. It's not all fake. Some of it works.

In *Cathexis*, I play the Chief Vision Officer of a social innovation start-up, TheTruthTech®. It's a very schizophrenic experience and there are moments where I'm actually really buying into what we're doing. There was a real ambiguity. At the beginning of the experience, I present the consortium, and the consortium is real.

As an actor, I have had first-hand experience of the possible confusion you can feel when you are acting, when you take it to certain lengths of realism and the process becomes existential. You start looking at how we produce our own subjectivity. What is it to be a subject of our experience, because one of the most profound experiences as an actor is when you find yourself behaving but not being the subject of that behaviour. It's a very profound experience. It's one of the things I'm continuously exploring.

JS: One of the things that strikes me about *Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial* is that it's engaging with a truth problem on at least two levels. It's simultaneously the issue that forms the content of the work – *Is the person under investigation telling the truth?* – as well as being the operant mode through which the audience engage. So, the audience is asking: *To what extent is this investigation of truth, truthful?*

NM: That's a very good point. There was an extreme range of experience. We had people who would realise that there was something afoot. One woman said to me at the end, "At every moment I

couldn't decide whether it was…" – and she used this great French phrase, 'du lard ou du cochon' – "…whether it was the fat of the pig or the flesh of the pig," which is to say, truth or fiction. Other people thought it was just a brilliant piece of technology that the world needs. And then there were those who realised the whole thing was a projection.

JS: It strikes me that if the audience believes 100% in the fiction, then they consider that this is a piece of technology that's coming, for good or ill. Such a belief raises a lot of questions about future technologies but it is ethically dubious and risks reducing the artwork to a scam. It seems there has to be some doubt that is cultivated in order for the questions to remain active.

NM: It's undecidable. The artist cannot determine whether the spectator will believe a simulated possible future. Since, here, that simulation (of a possible future) is encased in a simulation of a present-day start-up in order to raise the question, amongst others, of corporate scamming, then yes, there is a risk of some people being taken in. Playing with ambiguity is always a risk. But in no way can this be said to be "reducing the artwork to a scam". The audience isn't univocal and the gaps between their experiences are rich. So, the artist's intention shouldn't be on trial here. Truth is. And that means that the spectator's belief is itself the subject of the piece. The doubt is created by the focus group; it's created by the other members of the audience. That is absolutely clear. There is no intent to have people going away believing that this is totally true. When I talked about real satire, this is absolutely the heart of it, and for me the history of hoaxing is very close to what I call real satire. These are questions of interventions in the real and how you get people thinking about practice, about politics, about their lives.

But I want to get away from the knowing 'wink wink' of the post-Brechtian, *we all know this is fiction*. The *let's all sit here and be very comfortable in our knowledge*. There's a lot of that in theatre and visual art in France at the moment, where the intelligentsia is having an easy cultural outing, and I like disrupting that. Which takes us right back to the very beginning of our conversation where I was talking about categories and identity, pre-given frames. If the moment you walk into a theatre, museum, or gallery you don't know where the work is, where there's not such a clear frame, there's room to be challenged in a different way. I feel more and more: let's get the art out into space, into what Rosalind Krauss called "the expanded field". Let's expand the field as much as possible to the point where it becomes difficult to distinguish.

I think the point is how the 'truth' of the performance is revealed. That can happen in different ways but what's important to me is that it happens after an experience has been had, after an experience of believing, so that the experience can then be reflected on. And that is where you start transforming; the plasticity of the brain is actually worked. And that's why disturbing and questioning enables change to happen, and enables new subjectification to happen, new subjectivity to be produced.

But the hoax itself is absolutely crucial to me. Because, you know, what I'm researching is hoaxing, 'real' hoaxing, 'artistic' hoaxing. The diverse ways of hoaxing. Real satire, which uses the hoax as a method, reveals structures of perception, it reveals structures of thinking, structures of subjectification. The questions for *Cathexis* are: *What is the regime of truth we're moving into? How is tech involved in that, how will our lives change?*

Magic Leap, Theranos, Musk are examples of the whole question of where post-truth is produced. *Cathexis* is a sort of connivance between the absolute necessity of having visions of the future and the ambiguity as to whether the vision we are presented of the future is fraudulent, possible, unrealistic. *How are our brains being worked by all of this, and how is the media reporting what's happening? When is it a hoax?* More generally, *When is any tech company's product vision a hoax, and when isn't it a hoax?*

JS: Is the intention then, to create a more discerning and more curious and more questioning citizen?

NM: Yes, for me *Cathexis* is simply a questioning machine. I create experiences that make people question. It's almost as simple as that.

Right now, the three pillars (bad act, bad intention, bad character) of the justice system are being totally undermined by technological and scientific advance. This is what we present to the audience. The guide, the Chief Vision Officer is presenting the *raison d'être* of TheTruthTech®, explaining why this product is needed, how uncertainty in the justice system is being produced, and then presents a product that exacerbates that uncertainty! Yet, it's a double bluff, because what appears like fiction is still based in real research.

JS: I've been wondering if it matters whether it's presented as truth or not. It seems very clear to you that people have to have an experience of believing that it might be true, but if you just said, *Okay, this machine doesn't really work like this but we're now going to imagine that it does*, what would be different?

NM: I want to bring the 'what if' closer.

JS: So, the deception, or the element of deception, brings the experience closer to the audience.

NM: Yes, and when I say 'bring it closer' I mean, ramp up the stakes, increase the intensity. If the intensity of the experience increases, then the more intellectual engagement there is, the more questioning happens, the more vibrant and vital the questioning is.

Our camera person, our *vidéaste*, Oriane, went home on the tram after one of the performances and she said there were a bunch of young people there and the whole way back, for half an hour on the tram, they were in this incredible argument, not just about whether it was true or not. That was some of it, but most of it was about the idea of the tech. To get beyond the passive spectator and beyond the untouchable conceptually engaged spectator, you have to ramp up the embodied experience. You have to put the spectator into play, in French you say *mettre en jeu*. And *mettre en jeu* means also taking a risk, there's some danger, and that's why the overarching project for which we got Creative Europe funding was called 'Innovate Theatre as Event': the notion of 'event' as something that happens, that occurs, that has high stakes, that intensifies, and that creates thought as a result.

JS: I want to revisit our discussion of the interplay of form and content. What I called the 'operant mode', the mode in which the audience are witnessing what unfolds in front of them, is to question the truth of it. *Is it real?* Specifically, *Is this technology real?* And the subject under investigation, the content, is to ascertain whether or not a prisoner that is up for parole, and who is being interrogated by the technology, which you name 'Trubē', is telling the truth.

An actor portrays a prisoner on remand who agrees to subject themselves to an interrogation by Trubē, TheTruthTech® technology, and subsequently an audience vote as to whether they should be set free or returned to prison.

Cathexis 1: Truth on Trial, Le Cube, Issy-les-Moulineaux, France, 2019. Performance still by Oriane Polack.

You are questioning the truth of something with an unreliable tool, and so truth is doubly fragile. I wondered whether the aim to know whether the prisoner is telling the truth, is lending anything back to understanding whether or not the frame that we're looking at is true.

NM: I think it can be the way you're describing it. For some people it can be that sort of vertiginous experience, a *mise en abyme*, and it's meant to be complex. It's meant to be hard to categorise and require you to think hard and question hard about everything. But the goal is not just to have people sitting there thinking: *Is this true?* I mean, I told you the example of the woman who said, "I don't know whether it's true or not," but I think that wasn't simply a sort of epistemological question. The reason why she's asking that is actually also, *Shit, is this true? Is this what the future's going to be like?* The experience is not of an aesthetic object but of a real question.

When I get up on stage, I'm not 'acting'. I welcome people to the event and introduce the context. The lights don't go out, we have them do a questionnaire to begin with. There are helpers wearing TheTruthTech® branding. All of that stuff is 'real'. When the actor playing the prisoner – we've given it away now, Joshua – but when the actor is in the cube, is in Trubē, the truth-telling environment, we frame it in the terms that they are a real prisoner. We have all of the necessary plausibility markers and we push verisimilitude as far as possible. Because that is how justice works today, via truth-telling, truth determination, or via simply the creation of verisimilitude, you know, especially in the theatrical style of justice in the States. There's lots to say about law and justice which we haven't touched on, and the question of the theatricality of justice and how truth functions in that. Those are other layers in the piece.

But it doesn't actually matter to me to be able to say with absolute clarity what I'm doing or why. It's research. It is experimentation, and it continues to evolve with the audiences. And for me the major question that will continue evolving is the ethical question of what we're doing and of the timing of the reveal. We've had very heated arguments and experimented with different ways of revealing or not revealing.

I was invited to present the project at the University of Tübingen. They have a graduate research centre in ethics, and I was discussing with them afterwards and I was imagining we might team up so that we could research the ethical questions together. And then I realised that they were more interested in helping us 'be ethical'. I want to go back to them now with the piece and show them what's happened, and see how they react.

JS: So, what are the ethical questions that people are raising? Is it simply the idea that people might not understand that this technology doesn't really exist?

NM: Primarily that. As I said earlier, I think this piece crosses over with a lot of social psychology experiments including some of the classics, Milgram and all of that, and the question of captive audiences. Most of the time the ethical question is: *What if people go away believing it's true?*

JS: And what is the ethical problem with that?

NM: It's lying.

JS: …and lying is bad.

NM: Lying is bad. And in this particular case that lying is about our future, so it is scaremongering. Some people see it as extremely dystopian. Some people say, "It's 1984! It's totalitarian." It's important to emphasise that everything in the piece is based on real fundamental research that is ongoing. Whether it functions perfectly or not in the demo is another question.

JS: If somebody asks you, "Is this technology true?", what do you say?

NM: At the beginning I would sort of wink.

JS: Literally wink?

NM: No. There'd be a sort of hint, "Well, of course it's true but it's a demo, a maquette." At any trade show, everybody is presenting their future products that don't yet exist and don't yet function. If you go to the big automobile events half of what's on show is fake; it's theatre.

But as the project continued, then I decided we should have a disclaimer that said something like, 'This project is part of an ongoing artistic research project by the company Elapse.' We indicated that it was art, so it was contextualised as fiction. Someone said we should remove the disclaimer and I agreed with him because I want the thinking process to go on as long as possible. Why cut it short for the audience? But then in Louvain-la-Neuve we had someone come back to a discussion the day after the show and he was pretty indignant because his parents had gone away believing. We had a fascinating discussion with him and it made me doubt a little bit. I mean, it puts us all in an uncomfortable position. I kept saying, "Look, I'm sorry you feel uncomfortable but I'm really glad you feel uncomfortable, because it means that we're in exactly the right spot."

And so, the ethical question is to accept that we do not know what we're doing or where we're going, and that we have to make our path. That's the ethical way. We have to make our path, and I hope, and I think from what we've seen, that by provoking thought and by people asking themselves, *Well, what do I really think?* instead of just consuming the next vision of Google or whatever, their next amazing product, *What do I actually think about it? How can I think more about the implications and the consequences of it? Is it desirable? Do we actually want it?*

Or are these just irrelevant questions today because we know that we're on a technology train and we can't get off, so we have very little say. That brings us back to the political question that you raised earlier.

JS: And what would *you* say, if it was true? If you were accused of a crime, would you take Trubē as your form of justice?

NM: You can't ask me that! I have to ask you that. That's the question that we ask everyone across Europe.

I'm totally undecided, and I'm allowed to be, because justice systems are collapsing all around the world, they really are. The fact that the systems don't work anymore, they're outdated, the roles of jury, lawyer etc., makes Trubē relevant, even if not for right now. I harbour a suspicion that I would say "yes". And I suspect that, at some point in the future, greater justice will be able to be delivered by a sort of human-machine collaboration. But there's one thing you've got to remember. In our presentation Trubē doesn't make the decision. It's not, you know, that 1984 thing. We don't go so far that Trubē makes the 'Guilty!' 'Not guilty!' decisions. It's a contextualisation machine.

6. *AETHICS:* ARTISTIC DECEPTION AND LEADERSHIP

For the first time in the 2010/11 intake, Clore Leadership named a dedicated 'Artist Fellow'. When I accepted that fellowship[36], questions were provoked: *What does it mean for an artist to be a leader? How does leadership manifest in the things artists do? How can we rethink the role of an artist in the context of the need for leadership?*

As part of my 'Artist as Leader' research[37], I conducted 7 interviews with artists working in the UK, Japan, USA and Australia to explore these questions together[38]. Almost without exception, those interviewed rejected the title 'leader'. It was simply not a term with which they could identify, seeing it bound up with the very structures of power that they saw their work as attempting to dismantle. When asked to think beyond the definition of a leader as someone who issues commands, and rather to consider it as someone who is conscious and intentional about change, they could see themselves within a spectrum of leadership but generally did not see much use value in an appellation that was forced to resignify before its meaning became relevant.

The artist Cornelia Parker playfully offered the notion of 'redael' (spelling 'leader' in reverse) of doing leadership backwards, inverting both the structures and terminology of leadership. 'Redael' became a metaphor for a form of artist leadership which was both visionary, inspiring, influential and innovative, and at the same time, questioning, interrogative, plural, and doubting. It is precisely because artists find value in doubting the terms of 'conventional leadership', that they make inspiring leaders.

Something similar can be witnessed in the interviews conducted as part of this study on the ethics of deception in art practices. There is a hesitancy to identify with 'conventional ethics' and that hesitancy is, in itself, a form of ethical engagement. One thread across all the artist interviews is a moral confidence in their intention to 'do no harm' coupled with a doubt about the ethical effects of their work:

> …there was no moral to the tale, if you see what I mean. It wasn't like at the end I was going, 'So be careful because there's a lot of fake news out there, kids.' It wasn't that. […] It's kind of smart in some way but it's a form of manipulation. (Robin Deacon)

> I almost want a heading that says, 'If I don't trigger you, if I don't wake something up, then I probably did it wrong. Don't come if you don't want to be triggered because I am trying to trigger you and with great love.' My job is to provoke, not to protect. This is ain't a safe space, it's a brave space. […] I don't care about the ethics […]. (Stacy Makishi)

> I don't know if what we have done will harm local history or let people get to know more about it […]. (Yu-Jou Tsai)

> I was also very puzzled by the fact that it would be a scam. I thought it was interesting but somewhat problematic as well. There's two white men sending another white man down to scam in South Korea. (Piet Gitz-Johansen)

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36. The Clore Fellowship is a programme of tailored leadership development for a cohort of "exceptional leaders" in the cultural sector. The experience was of enormous benefit to my work as an educator, researcher and artist, helping me to understand a range of policy issues for arts professionals, and giving me training in financial management, media response, a secondment to 'Action for Happiness' wellbeing charity, a powerful cultural network, and crucially, training in Relational Dynamics coaching methods.

37. The research element of the Clore Fellowship, funded by Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), was optional. Fellows applied competitively with a research proposal.

38. An overview article was published in *Arts Professional* (no.260 December 2012-January 2013 pp.28-29) and the full interviews were published by a-n (at http://www.a-n.co.uk/artist_as_leader from December 2012) where they are still available and accessed by artists and researchers.

> …the ethical question is to accept that we do not know what we're doing or where we're going, and that we have to make our path. That's the ethical way. (Nick Millett)

It is not that the work is *un*ethical but rather that the ethical frames operate differently in the context of arts practice. They are constantly challenged, continually negotiated. Perhaps this could be considered '*a*ethics', as in *a*typical. Ethics in aesthetics has the set of 'best practice models' prescribed in the social sciences removed: aesthetics becomes *aethics*[39]. *Aethics* manifests as an ethics that folds back on itself, as a question within the aesthetics of the work.

> Parafictional art is political. But unlike traditional examples of political art, it does not operate initially through either ethics or epistemology. It acts first through aesthetics. (Young, p.38)

The aesthetics interrogate the ethics by revealing power structures at play. This is what Deacon calls his "narrative privilege", which is to say his control over how the story unfolds and particularly how truth is revealed over time. But he also recognises that he cannot really control the way in which that narrative meets, and is comprehended by, those receiving the work. As a person of colour, he titles his work *White Balance*, in the knowledge that no matter what his intention, his very presence will likely mark the introduction of a discourse on race in the mind of his audience.

> It's one of those things: no matter your self-perception, there are people who don't care if you say your work isn't about race, the very fact of you being on the stage means it is, and so you can't get away from that even if you want to. (Robin Deacon)

The title *White Balance* refers to the way in which a video camera is adjusted to account for different types of light, to give a 'truer' representation of colours seen. In searching for a reading in the context of race (in relation to Deacon's presentation as a person of colour) the audience fall into a trap, a (self-)deception, which ultimately opens out the way in which people of colour are subject to their (minority) identity in a way that the presentation of a white body is not. This kind of ethical deception – *aethics* – is the particular purview of arts practice.

If deception in wider society is more commonly motivated by an unethical (or amoral) desire for the preservation or betterment of self, the *aethical* approach to deception is to occupy the spaces of fact and fiction simultaneously, in order to reveal dominant power structures.

Of course, this is not to claim that deception in the context of art is always right, good, or justified. The artists themselves are equivocal about that. ("To what end?" Deacon asks himself.) Indeed, part of the imperative for this research was my doubt about strategies of deception that I have been experimenting with in my own art practice. Some of the work that artistic deception is making will fail ethical judgement, even when reframed as *aethical*. To restate Lambert-Beatty's point, even when works pass that judgement, "parafictions are queasy-making" (Lambert-Beatty p.67).

This queasiness, or rather a sort of hovering in a space of not-knowing what one is feeling, haunts much of my response to the way in which Stacy Makishi uses the real lives of others as material. On one hand the falsification, or selective retelling of the life of others for the purpose of her own narrative unfolding, does not pass ethical scrutiny, certainly in terms of the precepts set by the social sciences, but on the other hand, beyond parroting those precepts as an inviolable social contract, it's difficult to see where the harm of her fictionalisation lies.

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39. I offer this neologism very tentatively and it will need extrapolation later. Aethics™ is (already) a brand name for a US company selling CBD oils for sports wellness. The name is a combination of 'athletics' and 'ethics'. https://aethics.com/code-of-aethics/

Theo Reeves-Evison sees deception as a step in (narrative) time towards the ultimate meaning of a work of art. "Deception can serve as a prefatory stage in the deployment of a fabulatory image" (Reeves-Evison p.142). Which is to say that trust (solicited through deception) can be engaged in order to reveal itself as deceptive and therefore to provoke critical meaning. Deception here is a tool in the artistic palette which is no longer just 'bad'.

This sense of a 'higher' usage of deception (higher, that is, than the unethical desire for the preservation or betterment of self) is manifest by Makishi's search for an authentic lie: "I've unspelled myself from disbelief and I might encounter magic." In this world the category definitions (truth, lie, real, unreal) don't seem to apply as they might otherwise.

Indeed, as my work with Ke-Wei Wu and Yu-Jou Tsai has taught me, it is when there is a possibility, or more ideally the necessity, for an interrogation of the narrative of an unfolding work that positions itself as both fact and fiction, that there is a possibility to hold the category of 'reality' to account.

> If an artwork can intensify, elongate, and alter one's attention to the world, it can initiate a doubt regarding the reality of what one sees. (Young, p.38)

In Nick Millett's framing, truth must be revealed only "after an experience of believing" because it is then that the audience can have an experience of both believing and disbelieving, and in the encounter of the two together, criticality is produced.

The effect of altering one's attention to the world, is not just manifest by the artwork itself but also by its actors. Both Piet Gitz-Johansen and Nick Millett reference the vertiginous internal space which is (always already) part of acting:

> I remember my own feelings and also trying to have Philip's feelings. It was one big mess inside. (Piet Gitz-Johansen)

> …one of the most profound experiences as an actor is when you find yourself behaving but not being the subject of that behaviour. (Nick Millett)

This complicates the in-group/out-group hierarchy of the parafiction, the separation of those in the know and those not in the know, and shows that the creators of parafictions are, at least in some sense, subject to their own ruse. My own experience, as the creator of 'stories to be believed' is that I am subject to them just as much, if not more than, the audience for whom they are created.[40] Such a folding back of the deception onto its creator may be part of the *aethical* frame being defined here.

An example of the way arts practice subjects itself to its own critique through a strategy of deception, is the way in which Lucas Melkane and Philip Pilekjær's hiring of an actor to play one of them and make their work, passes into the world of visual arts unnoticed. That an actor can produce artists' work, begs questions about the way we create and interpret visual art. The *aethical* deception of their art practice reveals the flimsy structures on which art practice itself is built.

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40. I have 'prayed to the god I created' in both *The Gold Nose of Green Ginger* and *Lucky Charms*, works cited above.

While creating a believable fiction can, in Nick Millett's words "increase the intensity" of experience for an audience, it is by "remaining as undetermined as possible […] for as long as possible" in the simultaneous spaces of fact and fiction, of truth and lies, that a demand is made of us, what Betina Kümmerling-Meibauer has described as "epistemic vigilance" (Kümmerling-Meibauer p.564).

Art practices of all genres have the opportunity to lead the way in our ethical debate, paradoxically because of their non-compliance with societal norms. Arts practice is a space of potential radical creativity and experimentation in which ethics can be negotiated, tested, and responsive. This atypical engagement with ethics, in what is the relatively ringfenced space of arts practices, allows for frames that do not pass the threshold for 'good' ethical engagement in the social sciences but this does not make them unethical. As tested in strategies of deception, ethics in aesthetics – termed here as *aethics* – can provide approaches that test and reconfigure ethical codes and provoke us to think again.

(NOT) FINAL WORDS

I embarked on this research project with the aim of trying to understand what was at stake ethically when artists working with audiences blurred fact and fiction or presented fiction as fact. The imperative was both extremely personal (to develop some conceptual frameworks and practical considerations for my own art practice) and also societal (to consider if and how arts practices might contribute to, and even lead, discussions on ethics). We are living in a world where truth is 'mediated'. Perhaps it always has been. We need only look to the quote from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* which opened this report – *The illusion is truth. The truth is illusion.* – to remind ourselves that truth and falsehood have always been intertwined, contested and context specific. What might be a particularly contemporary phenomenon of this mediation of truth is that the consequences can reach much further and more immediately, through social and other media. The rapid development of AI technologies and particularly creative machines, brings a whole new set of ethical concerns, around authorship, artistic innovation, and machine cognition devoid of emotional empathy.

It is my hope that this report can play a small part in the ongoing conversation. For myself, the work has just begun.

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