

**Being For Others:  
Critical Reflections on the Stranger,  
the Estranged and the Self in Participatory Art**

**By**

**Samantha Fawn Munro**

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**Rat Western  
Professor Tom Martin**

## **Abstract**

By referring to established concepts and theories which contemplate our experiences in relation to others and space, this thesis examines the interactions and responses of an audience during various participatory artworks. I draw upon Jean-Paul Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and Elizabeth Grosz' *Architecture From The Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* in order to understand our interactions with other people, our interactions inside an environment, and the objects and ceremonies we use during these interactions. I align these experiences with the methods which are employed to anticipate and create the interactions between an audience and a participatory artwork. Our daily interactions can be considered a frame that an artist shapes for their represented situation to allow, provide and guide an audience towards their possibilities for movements and actions within a participatory artwork. The interactions that occur in participatory art are done in relation to others and include groups of people interacting with each other rather than an individual disembodied experience. I refer to Claire Bishop in her book, *Artificial Hells*, and Nicolas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics* in order to define participatory art. In defining participatory art I focus on the idea that participation is a social activity without which the artwork does not function or exist. I unravel Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A*, Anthea Moys *Anthea Moys vs The City of Grahamstown* and Christian Boltanski's *Personnes* in terms of the frame they use to construct participation and interaction. I refer to my own exhibition *Ineffaceable* as an exploration of these frames which encourage participation. The inside and the outside are a constant theme throughout this thesis and my exhibition. This thematic re-emerges in relation to a number of opposing and fluctuating dynamics: the self and the other; the object and the subject; familiarity and strangeness; the participator and the spectator; the immersive and the disembodied; and the artwork and the audience. Participatory art has not been sufficiently explored particularly in South Africa with South African case studies and particularly from a practical standpoint that includes methodologies for creating participation. This thesis hopes to enrich and contribute to the contemplations on participatory art by focusing on our interactions with others.

### **Declaration of Originality**

I declare that this thesis is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by complete references. This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirement for Master of Fine Art at Rhodes University. I declare that it has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at another university.

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## **Introduction**

This thesis examines the interactions and responses of an audience of various participatory artworks by looking at some of the already established concepts and theories which contemplate our experiences in relation to others and space. Our interactions with other people, our interactions inside an environment, and the objects and ceremonies we use during these interactions even for mundane daily rituals are the focus of this body of work. The task of this thesis is to align these experiences with the methods which are employed to anticipate and create the interactions between an audience and a participatory artwork. The frame that an artist creates for their represented situation makes use of the ways in which we interact in our daily experiences to allow, provide and guide an audience towards their possibilities for movements and actions.

To outline these interactions and enrich participatory art theory, I draw on Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of Being-for-Others, Part 3 of *Being and Nothingness* and Elizabeth Grosz' conception of being in relation to space in her book *Architecture From The Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. The focus and use of these is in order to examine our experiences as a subject with a perspective or as an object in relation to an Other. To further explore how these interactions affect the self, our understanding of the world and our being within it, I touch on the influences of the past and Freud's "Uncanny Strangeness" as it is explored by Julia Kristeva in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*. The interactions that occur in participatory art are done in relation to others and include groups of people interacting with each other rather than an individual disembodied experience. Since my exhibition will also be exploring these group dynamics, I outline Sartre's conception of our being as a group. I provide a definition of art which is open enough to encompass and allow for the purposes of participatory art and I define participatory art by referring to Claire Bishop's book, *Artificial Hells*, and Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*. In this definition, Bishop and Bourriaud emphasize that participatory art is a social experience rather than an individual one. As such, I focus on the mechanics and dynamics that come about through interactions as a group. I draw on these theories in a description of three participatory artworks<sup>1</sup> Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A*, Anthea Moys *Anthea Moys vs The City of Grahamstown* and Christian Boltanski's *Personnes*. Bailey's *Exhibit A* requires

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<sup>1</sup> These works qualify as such by the definition I have outlined in reference to Bishop and Bourriaud's theories of participatory art.

the presence of both the paid performers and the audience members, their interaction comes about through eye contact with one another and it is this eye contact which is responsible for generating the intended meaning behind the work. Moy's work in the Grahamstown community engaged with different games and groups, recreating the frames in which they play and reforming their roles to be a part of the National Arts Festival. Competitors participated in the events against Moys in front of an audience, which were both viewers of an artwork and spectators of a game. The kind of participation that comes about in Boltanski's work is symbolic rather than physical. The viewers complete the work through their experience of the second hand clothes that he presents by imagining the past lives these items had. This kind of participation as well as some of the themes presented in *Personnes*, informs my own work. The inside and the outside are a constant reincarnation in this thesis, re-manifesting as the object and the subject; the participator and the spectator; the immersive and the disembodied; and the artwork and the audience. This thesis will begin with a chapter outlining Jean-Paul Sartre's and Elizabeth Grosz's concepts of the Other and space, which will serve as the philosophical concerns with which I approach the theory and examples of Participatory Art in Chapter Two, Boltanski's *Personnes* in Chapter Three and my own practice in Chapter Four.

Chapter One is divided into a number of smaller sections namely; *Sartre: Being-for-Others*; *Sartre: Being in Space*; *Grosz: Perception, Outside, and Space*; *Sartre: The Incompleteness of Being*; *Grosz: The Space of the Past*; *Kristeva and Freud: The Uncanny Strangeness*; and finally *Sartre: The Us-Object, The We-Subject*.

*Sartre: Being-for-Others*, unpacks how an encounter with an Other, brings me into awareness of how I must look from the outside. The next section, *Sartre: Being in Space*, looks at how our being for others changes our perspective on space. When I view myself from the outside, I am no longer a subject with a perspective, rather I am an object situated in space for the Other, an object that I can never know in the same way the Other knows. I then look at Elizabeth Grosz' theories on space by unpacking her descriptions on the boundaries of the inside and the outside. Being on the outside, allows for an opportunity to have a perspective upon an inside, but to know the inside one also needs to have experienced immersion within that inside. These boundaries are in constant flux, infecting one another. In *Sartre: The Incompleteness of Being*, the Other



brings me into awareness of an outside perspective of myself, a part of myself that is estranged from myself. I am constantly re-establishing who I am in relation to this outside perspective as I fluctuate across the borders of inside and outside. I have a similar experience of myself when I reflect upon my own past identity. To get a clearer understanding of the past, I next explore it in relation to Grosz in *Grosz: The Space of the Past*. An experience of the present is to presuppose the past. To remember, is to place oneself outside of the present moment and reflect upon the past. My experience of the past is an experience of something that is no longer present to myself, and is thus estranged. *Kristeva and Freud: The Uncanny Strangeness*, explores how estrangement of the self comes about when repressed qualities are brought to the surface in a moment of being with an Other or being in the past. Finally, in *Sartre: The Us-Object, The We-Subject*, I outline how these theories come about in encounters with the other whilst being with or as a group. We can experience being whole and equal as an object with a group of people in relation to a third, this experience is that of the us-object. We can also experience ourselves as a subject aware that other people around us are also subjects with the same possibilities of movement, this experience is that of the we-subject.

Chapter Two is similarly divided into sections: *Art as an Outside*; *Bishop and Bourriaud's Participatory Art*; *Transcendence and Facticity within Participatory Art*; *Participating in Brett Bailey's Exhibit A*; and *Participating in Anthea Moys' Anthea Moys vs. The City of Grahamstown*.

In *Art as an Outside*, I briefly explore how art may be seen as an outside perspective on the content of which it is representing. This explanation allows an opening for participatory art to be understood in terms of what it tries to accomplish as art. The next section looks at Claire Bishop's and Nicolas Bourriaud's unpacking of participatory art and attempts to provide a frame for what participatory art is and what they claim it tries to accomplish. Here, I am attempting to unfurl the definitions of participatory art. I am not comparing Bishop or Bourriaud's definitions, I am simply using their similarities to draw on the main concerns of participatory art. I am not trying to specify or detail this definition by giving an account of what participatory art is not. I aim to leave the definition open towards possibilities, including numerous artworks as it is not the task of this thesis to limit or make value judgements on what is and isn't participation. It's

task is only to enrich the theory behind the mechanics of participation. The section entitled, *Transcendence and Facticity within Participatory Art*; is the section in which I relate my exploration of interactions in *Chapter One*, with how they manifest in participatory art, particularly how they manifest in the group dynamics which are present in participatory art. Participatory art will be seen to have two sides which fluctuate within the experience. These are namely the inside and the outside as they relate to the object and the subject and the immersive and the disembodied. I explore how these two sides frame our experience in terms of our possibilities for movement and interaction. The next two sections on Bailey's and Moy's artworks are case studies in which I outline the manifestations of these two sides. I do not unpack these artworks conceptually in the context that they are representing, rather I explore how these artists have used and anticipated participation within their works.

*Chapter Three* describes and unpacks Christian Boltanski's *Personnes* in terms of Participatory Art. Participation emerges differently in Boltanski's *Personnes*. In *Personnes* the participation comes about through the experience of the work and in the moment of the work but not through physical interaction. Rather one completes and finds meaning through one's own reliving, reimagining and retelling of the stories and relations found, as one walks through and performs the underlying moods of the piece. There is awareness of others within the space but the work itself is a representation of bodies and of others. Similarly in my own work, I use the potential presence of a body and an Other rather than only relying on performative bodies. I also draw upon objects which represent Others and the stories they may have.

*Chapter Four* describes my own work, which is an exploration of how we interact with others. Since the work has not yet been exhibited, this chapter outlines the experience as I imagine it, it outlines the interactions and movements that I anticipate and the potential other movements that may develop in the frame that I have created. I suspect, as well as hope, that there are a number of interactions that I won't be able to anticipate or prepare for. The frame allows for movements of play and interaction that I cannot control or describe beforehand. The frame is open enough for these unanticipated moments while secure enough that the immersion within the experience does not break. That people come together through introduction, play and understanding, opens up the possibility of a collective creation of meaning to which I may not be completely privy.

The themes of Strangeness, Familiarity, Dislocation and Voyeurism have been my guidelines for the mood and content that this exhibition explores. These themes bring about the concepts that I have outlined in Chapter One without reiterating these concepts. These concepts in Chapter One have thus not only been a tool to enrich participatory art but have also been informing the content of my practice. As such, these themes have also informed this thesis, as underlying guidelines that have sparked my interest and developed the theory.

## Chapter One

### Inside, Outside, Self and Other: The Theories of Sartre and Grosz

By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgement on myself as an object, for it is as an object that I appear to the Other. Yet this object which has appeared to the Other is not an empty image in the mind of another. Such an image would be imputable wholly to the Other and so could not 'touch' me... I recognise that I *am* as the Other sees me (Sartre 1956: 222).

Sartre: Being-for-Others

Sartre: Being in Space

Grosz: Perception, Outside, and Space

Sartre: The Incompleteness of Being

Grosz: The Space of the Past

Kristeva and Freud: The Uncanny Strangeness

Sartre: The Us-Object, The We-Subject

## *The Queue*

*The woman had been lost in her own thoughts until she smelt the man's warm breath come floating over her shoulder. A sudden awareness of his body's proximity to hers seems to jolt her into the moment. The stranger's shoulder is almost brushing up against hers and his shopping basket is touching the back of her legs. She can see him out of the corner of her eye, but only as a shape, a blurred silhouette, devoid of physiognomy. She shifts forwards in the queue, but inadvertently creates a 'miniature Mexican wave' as the man shifts forward too. Her awareness of the stranger and of herself does not fade; the awkwardness of his swaying and shifting is a constant reminder of his proximity to her. Her mind begins to focus on every movement he makes, she hears him sniff and scratch and click his fingers restlessly. She clears her throat and attempts to create a barrier. She moves her basket from her right hand to her left hand in the pretence of naturally shifting arms. Unfortunately, her eyes falter over the man and catch his gaze for just a second. The pretence is broken and apologetic murmurs and hand movements come into play.*

## *The*

*man had been lost in his own thoughts, but the sudden shifting followed by the eye contact with the woman in front of him had brought him into sharp realisation of the moment and the space he was in, he hastily shifts backwards. By becoming aware of the woman's perception and discomfort, so he too becomes aware of his external body located in space.*

## **Sartre: Being-for-Others**

In Sartre's discussion of being-for-others (Part 3 of *Being and Nothingness*), he writes of a man who, in perhaps a moment of jealousy, is peering through a keyhole at a scene beyond. The man is immersed within the pure act of looking at the scene through the keyhole, and is only focused upon this end, and the instruments he uses to accomplish this (the keyhole, the door frame he holds to steady himself, and so on) are thought of only in so far as they are a means to this end. He is not aware of himself as an object and is acting in a mode of pure being.

...there is no self to inhabit my consciousness, nothing therefore to which I can refer my acts in order to qualify them. They are in no way *known*; I am my acts and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification (Sartre 1956: 259).

Suddenly the man hears footsteps. Another person has come upon him and is able to see him peering through the keyhole. He is no longer in the pure act of looking through the keyhole but has become reflective upon himself as an object within the perspective of the Other. He is experiencing his self at a distance, from a point outside of himself, rather than in the pure intimacy of the previous act.

This means that all of a sudden I am conscious of myself as escaping myself, not in that I am the foundation of my own nothingness but in that I have my foundation outside myself. I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other (Sartre 1956: 260).

Similarly, in the example with which I opened this chapter, after the woman makes eye contact with the man in the queue, the man views himself from her perspective as she may see him. Through this perspective, he sees how she may have felt intruded upon, and perhaps feels embarrassment. The woman becomes the subject and he becomes an object in relation to her, from her perspective and within her space.

## **Sartre: Being in Space**

The woman and the man in the queue become aware of one another through the subtle interactions between them within the space. The woman finds her space intruded upon, and she is brought into an awareness of the man's body in relation to hers. She becomes conscious of the space between them. The man is an object for her, but not in the same way as a shopping trolley or a cashier's table. She is aware that he is a point in space from which his own perspective emanates; a perspective alternate to and outside her own, though spatially similar as they stand in relation to each other. The woman's awareness of this alternate perspective changes how she relates to the space in which she is situated. She begins to view her space in relation to his space and the imaginary boundaries between them. Her relation to the space now includes his body and what she imagines his perspective to be. She awkwardly tries to negotiate around him, his body, his perspective and his space.

Sartre explains that when I look at the world before me, I experience it through my own perspective. Everything I see is seen from the point at which I occupy in space. I exist for myself as a point inside space and this point is indicated to me because it is from this point to which all space is referenced and at which I can affect and change the objects and space before me. The objects around me are ordered and arranged in relation to myself and I can ascribe meanings to them. I have knowledge of these objects, and through further inspection, I know I can have more knowledge of these objects. However, as according to Sartre, when I see another person enter the space they are not an object for me in the same way. Instead the Other is a special object, in that I know he is also perceiving these objects and his surroundings. He perceives them in relation to himself and ascribes his own meanings to these objects. The meanings he ascribes to these objects are different to the meanings I ascribe to them and although I may know he can see these objects and we may share and agree upon the qualities these objects possess, I cannot fully conceive or be certain of how he experiences these objects. I will always be outside of and distanced from that experience. The Other has brought me into an awareness of a spatiality that exists outside of mine, the objects are no longer arranged in relation to me but are now organized in relation to the Other. Sartre states:

...suddenly an object has appeared that has stolen the world from me. Everything is in place, everything still exists for me, but everything is traversed by an invisible flight and fixed in the direction of the new object. The appearance of the Other in the world corresponds therefore to a fixed sliding of the whole universe, to a decentralization of the world which undermines the centralisation which I am simultaneously effecting (Sartre 1956: 255).

The world as it appears to the Other, and the meanings the Other attaches to the objects in that world, will always be hidden to me, since I am not directly experiencing the Other's perspective, I am unable to *know* it. And if the Other was to look upon me, I become an object situated and organised in space in relation to the Other. My body is my being within the world as a subject (with a perspective) and it is my being-in-the-midst-of-the-world as an object for the Other. Just as the Other attaches meanings to the objects which I cannot be certain of, so does the Other attach meanings to the me that is represented on the outside, the body. This is the object that I am for the Other which I am never able to truly know or see. In the same way, Sartre's man who looks through the keyhole is experiencing being in the world until another comes upon him; then he is being in the midst of the world. He cannot experience himself as being in the midst of the world while simultaneously experience being in the world. I cannot be an object and an observer of that object at the same time.

...this object exists for us only in the capacity of an abstract indication; it is what everything indicates to me and what on principal I can not apprehend since it is what I *am*. In fact what I am can not on principle be an object for me inasmuch as I am it...But the upsurge of my being, by unfolding distances in *in terms of a center*, by the very act of this unfolding determines an object which is itself in so far as it causes itself to be indicated by the world; and I could have no intuition of it as object because I am it, I who am presence to myself as the being which is its own nothingness (Sartre 1956: 318).

The Other who see me, sees an aspect of me that I can never know. This results in an estrangement with the self. This perception of me from the outside, creates a kind of insecurity,



easily associated with embarrassment or shame. "I do not reject it as a strange image, but it is present to me as a self which I am without knowing it, for I discover it in shame and, in other instances, in pride" (Sartre 1956: 261). In this way the Other has a hold upon the self. This representation of the self from the perspective of another is an aspect of me which is out of my control. It is in the control of the other who has seen me and interpreted what my qualities are from this perception.

## Grosz: Perception, Outside, and Space

The subject can take up a position only by being able to situate its body in a position in space, a position which relates to other objects. This anchoring of subjectivity in its body is the condition of a coherent identity and, moreover, the condition under which the subject has a perspective on the world, becomes a source of perception, a point from which vision emanates (Grosz 2001: 38).

To contrast this experience of our being a subject in space where our perception of the world is in relation to our bodies; Elizabeth Grosz refers to a psychosis called Psychasthenia<sup>2</sup> in her book *Architecture From The Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space*. Within Psychasthenia, a person can only view themselves as others may see them; from an outside perspective. They are removed from their own perspective and no longer feel present within their bodies, to the point where they have become a part of their surroundings. What the psychasthenic experiences is an aspect of self-perception that is in fact common to most of us. What sets them apart is that this is the only form of self-perception available to them. The person knows where they are but cannot experience their perception from that point rather they perceive themselves within the space as a part of that very space. The person's body is not the point of reference to their own surroundings.

The primacy of the subject's own perspective is replaced by the gaze of another for whom the subject is merely *a* point in space, not *the* focal point organizing the space. The representation of space is thus a correlate of one's ability to locate oneself as the point of origin or reference of space. Space as it is represented is a complement of the kind of subject who occupies it. The barrier between the

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<sup>2</sup> Grosz makes a reference to Roger Caillois' paper "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia", within which Caillois compares the mimicry of insects to psychasthenia. Within mimicry the line between an insect and its environment breaks down, the edges of the inside and the outside become indistinguishable, and the environment is no longer external to the creature but becomes a part of its "identity". Instead of mimicry being a reaction to its environment, it is a reflection of it, "a *representation* of space, as seen by the insect and its predators."(Grosz. 2001:37 -38) The organism is no longer a focal point distinct from the space it is within, but sees itself as a part of that space, losing its subjectivity.

inside and the outside...is ever permeable, suffused not only by objects and apparatuses but by spatiality itself (Grosz 2001: 38).

Grosz writes that the outside is a space identified as being *not* the inside, it is known by what it is not. The inside has boundaries, it has limits and can be fully occupied, the outside as a space beyond, it is the border transgressed into what is strange to the inside, it is set apart from and othered from the inside. But, as Grosz continues, the outside is not a complete opposite of what is inside, but is a reflection of the inside, changed from one form into another, conditioned by the inside but simultaneously becoming and transgressing as the inside does. To understand the inside one has to have experienced the outside. The distance the outside has from the inside allows for a perspective upon the inside. However, this perspective can never completely know the inside either, to know the inside one also needs to have experienced immersion within that inside.

To be outside (something) is to afford oneself the possibility of a perspective, to look upon this inside, which is made difficult, if not impossible, from the inside... However, this always occurs at a cost: to see what cannot be seen is to be unable to experience the inside in its own terms. Something is lost—the immediate intimacy of an inside position, and something is gained—the ability to critically evaluate that position and to possibly compare it with others (Grosz 2001: xv).

But, these experiences cannot happen simultaneously, one cannot be on the outside whilst still being immersed inside. Instead the outside and the inside interact through encounters between one another, and through these encounters they are changed and recreated, and for this reason the boundaries are in constant flux.

## **Sartre: The Incompleteness of Being**

Sartre explains the Other's perspective as providing (or perhaps imposing upon) the self an imagined point in space which is at a distance from the subjectively embodied body, such that the body is an object within that perspective and all space is in relation to that perspective. The Other is physically looking at me, from a point in space that is at a distance to me within my perspective. My presence to the Other is without distance, in that I feel it intimately and immediately, yet he is at a distance from where I am in space. When I apprehend his look, the look is present to me, as if I was the one looking from the point of view of the other, while simultaneously the look is upon me as an object within his perspective, and I am at a distance in relation to his perspective.

...the look is upon me without distance while at the same time it holds me at a distance - that is, its immediate presence to me unfolds a distance which removes me from it. I can not therefore direct my attention on the look without at the same stroke causing my perception to decompose and pass into the background (Sartre 1956: 258).

I cannot apprehend a look of an Other, while looking at the Other. I cannot be immersed within my actions and my own perspective whilst also being on the outside of them, aware of how I am perceived as an object from an Other's perspective. I cannot be on the outside whilst still being immersed inside. I cannot be both subject as relates to the inside, and object as relates to the outside, at the precisely same time. Instead the outside and the inside interact through encounters between one another, and through these encounters they are changed and redefined, and it is this fluctuation that brings the self into estrangement. Since I am constantly re-establishing and re-interpreting who I am through this back and forth with the outside perspective, I am never completely who I think I am.

This outside perspective that I experience when I encounter another does not actually require the other to be there. Once I am aware of myself from the perspective of the other I can have that experience and reflect upon the self even when there is no Other. I can imagine what I must look

like from another's perspective. Even the potential presence of an Other can make me feel perceived and vulnerable, taking me outside of myself in the pure moment of being, fluctuating insecurely between trying to be who I am and being aware of what I must look like. "I am for myself only as I am a pure reference to the Other" (Sartre 1956: 260). My perception of myself both when I am being-in-the-world and perceiving myself in-the-midst-of-the-world, becomes a constant fluctuation of my being. I am constantly redefining who I think I am in relation to these perspectives. Sartre writes of this experience as being both desired and rejected by the self. I want my own perception of myself, my own identity to be at one with the Other's perception of me. I want to be seen as what I am and conversely, I want what is seen to be what I am because I want to be stable, comfortable and familiar to my own self. One way of doing this, is to accept the self as an object for the Other and accept their perception over me. But this will repress the qualities I am to myself; it would deny my own perceptions and the self as subject with other possibilities. The second is to attempt to deny the subjectivity of the Other and look upon them as an object. But this is to deceive the self, as we already know the Other as a subject and will never truly be able to escape his gaze. As such, neither of these strategies can be effective.

I also define myself and have knowledge of myself in relation to my past. When I reflect upon the past, I experience the self as being the person within that past. However that person belongs to the past and is no longer completely who I think I am now. I have become otherwise since that person. I know myself as that person while also not being that person. I cannot change this past self, they are no longer who I am, but who I was. They are not how I know myself to be in this moment and so, bring the self into estrangement.

## **Grosz: The Space of the Past**

To remember any moment is to throw oneself into the past, to seek events where they took place—in time, in the past; to experience any other space is to throw oneself into spatiality, to become spatialized with all of space (Grosz 2001: 119).

## *The Vacant Room*

*The woman enters a room and immediately experiences a heavy sense of loss. The room had once been a place of comfort and familiarity, but now an empty smell brings her into sharp realisation of difference. It is the smell of dampness and dust, stuffy within the confined and closed up space, a presence of the absolute stillness that the room has endured the week before. She remembers that a year ago, this was the smell of the house. It had filled every room as if while the carpets had been wet, the house had been closed up and forgotten, and with no sunlight to absorb the dampness, the carpets had soaked in the dust and the dead. The smell had vanished quite quickly and quite deliberately in a few days of living. But since the room has been put to rest, and become a space removed, erased and snuffed out, the smell has established itself once again. And this smell makes her blatantly aware of her act, of leaving. Strange how she has never considered what the smell had been in her time of occupying the room. Now she cannot remember it, but she knows that it had been intimate and comfortable, a smell of her very own presence. And this empty smell has replaced it as if in retaliation to her leaving, it has taken something from her that she is unable to rekindle.*

*In this sudden loss, she is no longer prepared for the rest of the room. She tries to place herself in the space, tries to remember it full. She can see the grooves of the old creaking cupboard in the carpet and she attempts to imagine it back into the corner, but its boundaries don't seem to fit with her imagined bed and desk. And the square of sunlight that hits the carpet is uninterrupted by the usual shadows of moving curtains and obstructive furniture, everything is so still that the sun's slow measurement of time seems to be slipping, its yawning stretch spreads dizzily across the room. It feels so unnaturally grey. Without her dark curtains, she struggles to imagine the light and shadows, everything around her is a new colour, the walls are a strange shade of yellow and there is a stain in the carpet she cannot understand. Was it always there? Was it this furniture that had made the room feel full before? There were things of course, in the draws and cupboards filling the shelves, cluttering her desk, sometimes layering the floor or hanging on the wall. All these objects seem to be lost into generic shapes and categories now. The items themselves although representative of her presence are lost in that they are unremarkable within the eclipse of the room. Lost too, is the room as it once was, her*

*memory never able to refill it, it feathers away just as the smell has and leaves behind this empty space where nothing fits. Grasping at moments spent there is like trying to remember each frame of a film seen ages ago, the sequence is never complete, never smooth, with black gaping holes which leave the woman standing in darkness.*



Space, rather than being a divided area within which we move, emerges to us through our movement. Perception within the present is our potential toward possibilities of movement in space, upon the build-up of objects and matter of which lived space consists. Perception is on the brink of what will be. An experience of the present does not come before the past. To experience the present is to presuppose the past. The present and past exist concurrently, instead of one after the other. "The present can be understood as an infinitely contracted moment of the past, the point where the past intersects most directly with the body." (Grosz 2001:123) Remembering allows for a different kind of perception, one which has 'faded', wherein there is no possibility for movement, the space within it floats out of reach. Perception and the past are in reference to what is outside of ourselves; to remember is to enter a space which is the past within our own duration. To remember is to be outside, because it is to break away from the present moment and space of possibilities, and place oneself into a moment that has been. Nevertheless, it is inside, because it is that which is only experienced through our own re-manifestation of it.

To remember (to place oneself in the past), to relocate (to cast oneself elsewhere), is to occupy the whole of time and the whole of space, even admitting that duration and location are always specific, always defined by movement and action. It is to refuse to conceptualize space as a medium, as a container, a passive receptacle whose form is given by its content, and instead to see it as a moment of becoming, of opening up and proliferation, a passage from one space to another, a space of change, which changes with time (Grosz 2001: 119).

Through remembrance, we experience a removal of the self from the present and a dislocation of spatiality. We find ourselves experiencing a moment of uncanny strangeness.

## Kristeva and Freud: The Uncanny Strangeness

The perspective of myself I have through the encounter with the Other and with the experience of my past self, are experiences which bring me into awareness of my own estrangement with myself. It is these experiences which cause me to redefine who I think I am and bring me into realization that I do not know myself as I apparently did. To further understand this experience of estrangement I will refer Julia Kristeva and her exploration of Freud's theories on the experience of "uncanny strangeness" in relation to the Other in her book *Strangers to Ourselves*:

To discover our disturbing Otherness, for that indeed is what bursts in to confront that "demon," that threat, that apprehension generated by the projective apparition of the Other at the heart of what we persist in maintaining as a proper, solid "us." By recognising *our* uncanny strangeness we shall neither suffer from it nor enjoy it from the outside (Kristeva 1991:192).

Freud uses the German words *heimlich* and *unheimlich* to define the experience associated with the uncanny. *Heimlich* is defined as being of intimacy, of home and of comfort, as well as being concealed, secret and of the private. Freud's understanding of *heimlich* is that within this word, there resides a paradox: it is familiar and intimate yet deceitful and hidden, concealed from the self. If *heimlich* is associated with the familiar then *unheimlich* is associated with the stranger, it is defined as eerie and weird, however it is also the unsecret, the privacy made known; what is concealed (of ourselves) is unintentionally revealed (to others and to the self). It is the "frightening" which returns to us our own past and makes us aware of something previously repressed, something which had been familiar and intimate, but through the process of repression, has become estranged to the self.

....that which is strangely uncanny would be that which was (the past tense is important) familiar and, under certain conditions (which ones?), emerges. A first step was taken that removed the uncanny strangeness from the outside, where fright had anchored it, to locate it inside, not inside the familiar considered as one's own and proper, but the familiar potentially tainted with strangeness and

referred (beyond its imaginative origin) to an improper past. The other is my (“own and proper”) unconscious (Kristeva 1991: 183).

My body as my being-in-the-midst-of-the-world is experienced as a representation of me; a point in space which I internalised as a symbol for all the qualities that I imagine I am. Symbols, according to Freud, become for us what they are representing and are not bound in their literal form. Similarly my body is for me who I am from my perspective where I impose my own qualities onto this point that I occupy in space. However, my being-for-others breaks this imagined symbol of the self. My body, as an object-in-the-midst-of-the-world, is no longer just a representation of what I imagine myself to be, but is interrupted by what I imagine the other sees as me through this symbol and I am forced to understand this symbol as a literal body on which the Other imposes what they imagine my qualities to be.

Strange indeed is the encounter with the other - whom we perceive by means of sight, hearing, smell, but do not “frame” within our consciousness. The other leaves us separate, incoherent; even more so, he can make us feel that we are not in touch with our own feelings, that we reject them or, on the contrary, that we refuse to judge them- we feel “stupid,” we have “been had” (Kristeva 1991: 187).

I experience the uncanny strangeness through the loss of my imagined self. Through the Other, my body is reflected to me as a familiar object but with qualities, that I had previously repressed, now exposed. The uncanny strangeness within being-for-others is an internal conflict where the self is constantly reconstructing its identity through a process of repression and that which is repressed being revealed.

Also strange is the experience of the abyss separating me from the other who shocks me-I do not even perceive him, perhaps he crushes me because I negate him. Confronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom at the same time I identify, I lose my boundaries, I no longer have a container, the memory of experiences when I had been abandoned overwhelm me, I lose my composure. I feel “lost,” “indistinct,” “hazy.” The uncanny strangeness allows for many

variations: they all repeat the difficulty I have in situating myself with respect to the other and keep going over the course of identification-projection that lies at the foundation of my reaching autonomy (Kristeva 1991: 187).

## Sartre: The Us-Object, The We-Subject

If the sentence, "They are looking at us," is to indicate a real experience, it is necessary that in this experience I make proof of the fact that I am engaged with others in a community of transcendences-transcended, of alienated "Me's." The "Us" here refers to an experience of *being-objects in common* (Sartre 1956: 415).

Sartre's theory of being-for-others is furthered by his concepts of the Us-Object and the We-Subject. Within these concepts, the individual experiences being a part of a group that is either object or subject for an Other or Others. The individual is not having a lone encounter with the Other, but is experiencing herself included with other people who are sharing in the same encounter. In the case of the us-object, the self is no longer experienced as an individual but is experienced as a part of an objectified group.

The Us-object comes about when two or more people become aware of themselves as an object through the presence of an additional outsider. Their view of themselves as the object includes each other, as they make up the whole of that object together, and are not distinct as individuals with unique agency. Their transcendence has been equally snuffed out. They are one in the same object united in what has cast them as similar.

Now at the appearance of the Third I suddenly experience the alienation of my possibilities, and I discover by the same token that the possibilities of the Other [the second person] are dead-possibilities... This means that I suddenly experience the existence of an objective-situation-form in the world of the Third in which the Other and I shall figure as *equivalent* structures in solidarity with each other (Sartre 1956: 418-419).

The person who relates their identity, or a facet of their identity, to others within a group is able to experience Us-Object. This experience creates a kind of equality through its membership, and the motivations of the group are seen as a joint effort. The group's identity which has been adopted by a person, offers an already moulded way of being to which the member can easily

conform and excuse himself. The mode of being is to be included within this group, which he has already established, and so to be it means to be what he is.

Sartre argues that the members of the We-Subject have a different experience than those of the Us-Object, in that they do not experience themselves as a whole that is indistinguishable from the group.

In the “we” nobody is the object. The “we” includes a plurality of subjectives which recognize one another as subjectivities. Nevertheless this recognition is not the object of an explicit thesis; what is explicitly posited is a common action or the object of common perception (Sartre 1956: 413).

The members of the We-Subject, are able to recognise that they are observers and others around them are also observing the same object, and Sartre grants that there may be commonalities between members but that this feeling of being united is not as robust and does not offer the same level of solidarity as in the case of the Us-Object. What is common to this group is not a directly shared experience but is the object itself which is under scrutiny. The members who are viewing this object are not united in what they are, only in what they see. The member of the We-Subject is unable to simultaneously participate in looking upon an object and having an outside awareness upon those who are looking. To have this outside awareness of them is to no longer be immersed within looking at the object. So it is to no longer be a part of the We-Subject. Within the We-Subject, the members have a secondary awareness of each other. And each individual still has their own perspective and their own possibilities on which to act. The We-Subject is unable to experience the same degree of wholeness that is experienced within the Us-Object.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined what happens to the self when we encounter an Other. The Other brings us into reflection of ourselves and changes our perspective from being one of a subject to being that of an object. In this awkward reflection of the self we realise our own estrangement, our own position in space and our own position in relation to others. This awkwardness, as I will go on to show, is a useful tool in participatory artworks to bring about reflections and interactions with others. Our position as audience members, as participants in an artwork, fluctuate between our being in the world immersed as subjects and our being in the midst of the world reflecting upon ourselves as objects within the artwork. It will turn out that this is particularly apparent in performative participatory works where the experience of being object and subject is a constant fluctuation between performer and audience. Here the Other fluctuates between being the audience, put in a position of power over the performer, or being the performer, who singles out an audience member or audience members with whom they interact with. Our perspective within space is not just how we look at our environment but how we decide and become aware of our possibilities of movement and interaction. Our space and the objects and people within that space dictate and direct our behavior, our mood, what is taboo and what is allowed to be done. This is further explored in relation to the us-object and we-subject in the next chapter, *Being Inside and Outside Art: Theories of Participation*. This chapter builds upon these theories in relation to participatory art and how these dynamics might be used as mechanisms to bring about certain interactions and responses. The focus will be on how we encounter participatory artworks in moments of the us-object and we-subject as I consider the audience members as having a group experience rather than only an individual experience. Participatory art relies on and emphasizes group interactions and collective understandings. This reflection on group interactions also informs my own exhibition *Ineffaceable* explored in Chapter Four. During *Ineffaceable*, the relationship and the interactions which occur between audience members with each other as well as with the artwork will be responsible for creating the meaning of the work, even creating the work itself.

## Chapter Two

### Being Inside and Outside Art: Theories of Participation

Art as an Outside

Bishop and Bourriaud's Participatory Art

Transcendence and Facticity within Participatory Art

Participating in Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A*

Participating in Anthea Moys' *Anthea Moys vs. The City of Grahamstown*



## *The Security Guard*

*She tries to be confident, standing as if she was meant to be there, blending in, acting normal, breathing. She knows she is allowed to be here, of course she is. Anyone is allowed to be here. She clears her throat. But she feels like a fraud and her attempt to be inconspicuous only draws attention to her. She loses her direction and turns about, fumbling.*

*The eyes are on her. They can see her, their movement slows down as they begin to suspect, they stand staring at her with authority. She makes no eye contact, pretends not to notice. She tries to focus on the objects around her and on what she is doing. But they stand in the corner of her eye. Staring. Her eyes flutter about the room, darting nervously. Her hand comes up to her face to move away the hair that was already behind her ear. She sighs and taps her fingers as she sneaks a glance at the person in the corner, turning again just before reaching his gaze. She decides to look at her phone, maybe act like she was busy typing out a message, anything just to feel busy and normal and uninterested. Then someone behind her speaks, would she like some help? Is she looking for anything in particular? She stutters that she is fine, thanks him, and moves a couple of meters further before pretending to look at her phone again. The eyes are still on her. They are still waiting for her, still suspect her, but of what she does not even consider. She keeps looking around, hoping for a distraction.*

## Art as an Outside

An artwork is an outside perspective on an aspect of the world, a reflection of life, a fiction and representation of our experiences in the real. Even when it absorbs what is real, it is presented in the space and context of artifice and we, as viewers, experience it as such. To situate a form as art, either through reconstruction or recontextualisation, is to put it on the outside, into a space of fiction. Its reconstruction or recontextualisation causes the viewer to question the aspect of the world that is being reflected. We are provided with distance from the inside that it is representing and we are afforded the opportunity for a perspective upon this inside.<sup>3</sup> An artwork is a means to break us out of our inside experience. The outside we experience is not the opposite of the inside, as previously referred to in relation to Grosz, rather it is the inside transgressed, transformed and estranged. It is an aspect of the world made different, a moment in life unexpectedly brought to attention, a familiar but unreal experience. Art is a distance from the inside, a chance to experience the inside within a perspective and a chance to change our expectations and understanding of that inside.

So it is not as if the outside or the exterior must remain eternally counterposed to an interiority that it contains: rather, the outside is the transmutability of the inside... it is to see that the outside is a virtual condition of the inside, as equally real, as time is the virtual of space. The virtual is immanent in the real (Grosz 2001: 65).

To position art as the outside, is not to argue that immersion within an artwork is impossible. The boundaries of the inside and the outside are in constant flux, and so is our position within art. Art infects the world and the world infects art, "to be outside something is always to be inside something else" (Grosz 2001: xv). An artwork may provide the opportunity to become immersed inside an experience, our ability to believe at one moment, blind to the forms construction, allows us to fall into the work. However it is always an inside of an art form, not the *inside* of the "actual" experience being reflected, but the reflection itself experienced through

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<sup>3</sup> The inside is twofold - the inner working or literal construction of this object which in the context of art may have been deconstructed/displayed open in some way for closer inspection but also the inside of a context from which it is now removed - the object within a daily or expected circumstance.

belief. It may be its own aesthetic which allows for this almost hypnotic trance of immersion. If this experience is too close to the “actual” experience being reflected and we are unable to break out of our being within it, then we are unable to reflect upon it and have a perspective. Art is deprived of the ability to have a perspective when it becomes an experience too close to life. It risks presenting only an inside rather than offering a shift or subversion of the real. When art becomes indistinguishable from its environment, it ceases to have its subjectivity within an experience, it melts, dissolves, disintegrates and assimilates into life, it stops being art, stops having power. Our fluctuation from the inside to the outside allows us to experience a multi-tiered reflection. This fluctuation will be further discussed later in this chapter in relation to the us-object and the we-subject.

## **Bishop and Bourriaud's Participatory Art**

...The artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of *situations*; the work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or 'beholder', is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant* (Bishop 2012: 2).

What is collapsing before our very eyes is nothing other than this falsely aristocratic conception of the arrangement of works of art, associated with the feeling of territorial acquisition. In other words, it is no longer possible to regard the contemporary work as a space to be walked through. It is henceforth presented as a period of time to be lived through, like an opening of unlimited discussion (Bourriaud 2002; 15).

Participatory art, according to Claire Bishop, is a move away from the notion of the artist as an individual creator and presenter of art objects with which a viewer has a disembodied, non-interactive and unassertive experience. This is not to say that there is no participatory element in the nature of engagement with static objects or scripted performance, but rather this is a means to categorize a particular mode of production whose methodology requires an emphasis on interactivity and direct participation in order to function or in some contexts to even exist. Participatory art attempts to align itself with a more social experience, in which the audience themselves form an essential part of the art. Without them the art often ceases to function or exist as more than debris or documentation. The meaning or understanding of the art is present in the engagement between the participating members and the situation created. Participatory art places greater importance and emphasis on the process of creation. The final end product which is valued would be the art's potential to prompt a change in the way people think or feel. Often these participatory art situations last over a period of time, within which narrative, characters and relationships are developed, and participants become immersed within a situation. Bourriaud (2002:14) prefers to refer to this mode of production as *relational* art, but similarly to Bishop, he

places a strong emphasis on its social context, its intersubjectivity, its use of the encounter or situation, and the meaning of the work developed through collective collaboration, as opposed to the "independent and private symbolic" experience of art. One reason for this turn to a social experience, as mentioned by both Bishop and Bourriaud, is that visual commercial media, a paradigm of "independent and private symbolic" experience, has become a constant presence in our daily routines. The invading repetition of this imagery, which is forever trying to capture our attention and evoke sensation, has saturated and deadened our reactions and our willingness or capacity to empathise. Participation is an attempt to *animate* our experience within art:

...it rehumanises a society rendered numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentality of capitalist production. Given the market's near total saturation of our image repertoire... artistic practice can no longer revolve around the construction of objects to be consumed by a passive bystander. Instead, there must be an art of action, interfacing with reality, taking steps - however small - to repair the social bond (Bishop 2012: 11).

The structure and market that is created around object orientated art involves the spectator and the artwork. In theatre there is the spectator or spectators and the actor. These roles include power dynamics and potential claims of superiority and inferiority. The object or performed text assumes a dictatorial role in the creation of meaning and the audience members are given the role of the outside disembodied eye who may observe and conclude but are always aware of their outsider status and lack of capacity to influence the live reading of the work.

But the binary of active/passive always ends up in a deadlock: either a disparagement of the spectator because he does nothing, while the performers on stage do something - or the converse claim that those who act are inferior to those who are able to look, contemplate ideas, and have critical distance on the world...The binary of active/passive is reductive and unproductive, because it serves only as an allegory of inequality (Bishop 2012: 37-38).

For most participation there are the participators, the performer (or artwork) and the secondary

audience (viewers who watch but are uninvolved within the event or viewers of the documentation of the event). Participatory art as a medium attempts to break the elitist barrier of this classic art hierarchy by appealing to the general public, who is not particularly familiar with the art world, and in trying to bring art closer to an experience of the present and the ephemeral, brings into question the roles of superiority played by those who have the agency of participation, those who have the luxury of spectatorship, and those who have the authority of authorship. Participators are given possibilities towards actions, while an observer is often restricted. However, a participator may be viewed as a labourer, as if they are only able to experience art through the 'handicap' of participation. All the while the observer, like the art critics and curators, are placed outside, with the elite position of perspective, able to understand and conceptualise about a work.

To argue, in the manner of funding bodies and the advocates of collaborative art alike, that social participation is particularly suited to the task of social inclusion risks not only assuming that participants are already in a position of impotence, it even reinforces this arrangement (Bishop 2012: 38).

Bishop goes on to explain that the aesthetics of an artwork break these performances as mere reinforcements of our social roles and inferiorities. Her argument is that it is important to include this aesthetic within our analysis of participatory art, otherwise participatory art risks emphasising bodies in terms of their categorised roles in society.

...without engaging with the 'aesthetic thing', the work of art in all its singularity, everything remains contained and in its place - subordinated to a stark statistical affirmation of use-values, direct effects and a preoccupation with moral exemplarity. Without the possibility of rupturing these categories, there is merely a Platonic assignment of bodies to their good 'communal' place - an ethical regime of images, rather than an aesthetic regime of art (Bishop 2012: 38).

## **Transcendence and Facticity within Participatory Art**

In participatory art, we are not only experiencing an encounter as an individual but we are sharing the encounter with others as a group. As previously discussed, this experience we have as a group is significant in participatory art, since understanding and meaning is created collectively rather than individually. Being as a group, we experience ourselves as an object with others, the us-object, and as a subject among other subjects, the we-subject. Our position of being an object or a subject fluctuates as we move through and experience an encounter. I will first discuss the experience of the us-object in relation to participatory art and then the experience of the we-subject, before finally going through two case studies and how these dynamics have potentially manifested in each.

When we experience a moment of being a member of the us-object, we experience the view of ourselves from the outside as an object whole with others. We are united as this object by a common thread that ties us together during the encounter. We become whole as this specific object (with this specific common thread) and we enact this object as a role to be played within the experience of the presented encounter. In that moment, we are refused or we refuse our being an individual subject, with responsibility and agency over our own actions, in favour of enacting a role that allows us to be whole with others. This specific object that we are with others, this role that we are playing, frames our possibilities for movement and interaction within the encounter. We are whole with one another, tied together by this common thread and playing the same equal role, so that our possibilities for movement and interaction are the same possibilities for movement and interaction as the other members of the us-object.

To have the audience in a position that enacts a role which has specific possibilities for movement and interaction is a useful dynamic to bring about engagements by participants which fulfil and complete the artwork as set up by the artist. In the art encounter the role of the us-object is there, waiting to be fulfilled by the participant. The participant, who in a moment views themselves from the outside in relation to the encounter, fits themselves into this role. They are then put in a position to enact the interactions or reactions made apparent by the role which they

are playing. The role is therefore a tool to encourage or create participation of very specific interactions and responses. There is the possibility within participatory art for the artist to impose or presuppose the role of the us-object upon the participants, attempting to produce a form of social wholeness rather than an alienated or individual experience for each participant. Our being an us-object could be useful to bring about reflection and understanding of the roles we play in society and the dynamics of power that are presented therein.

However, if this role becomes too prominent without considering how other interactions might occur, the significance of the participation risks becoming a fulfilment of a list of instructions and, as Bishop claims, a reinforcement of roles of superiority and inferiority. The audience are not given the agency to resolve the work themselves rather they must fit into a role in order to interact and create the artwork. If they choose to act outside of the parameters of what has been allowed, they would no longer be participating. The participation would be a 'completion' of the artwork to the extent that without the participator acting out the specific and prescribed movements, the artwork would not function in the way it has been intended to function and the intended meaning could be lost. Participants' lack of agency in the work brings them into awareness of the artist's imposition and the assumed role they are expected to play rather than the possibilities they could have to generate understanding and respond to the work. If it is a role that goes against their natural behaviour and interactions within an encounter, then the experience of the artwork becomes fractured and disjointed. The participant will edge along on the periphery of the artwork, unable to be earnest in their negotiation of the artwork and unable to be immersed in the experience. Being aware of what is meant to be done, threatens to take away our choice and our possibilities and breaks the suspension of disbelief that allows for immersion. The experience of the viewer is no longer an 'authentic' reaction, rather it is a forced act, aided and abetted by the viewers' willingness to play along.

Since participatory art is not a pure experience of an habitual or authentic encounter in life, but is an experience which has been reconstructed by the use of and in the form of art, the participants already have a conscious awareness of their experience. Our feeling of being a *participant* inherently asks that we reflect upon our experience rather than just having an experience. This means that when the artist uses the role of the us-object to impose unnatural interactions onto the



participant, the participant is made aware of this imposition through the construction and form of art, and through the knowledge that there is artistic intention behind this experience. "Authentic" participation requires a kind of immersion that does not deny itself, an immersion where the form and construction of the art plays a role of creating and facilitating the suspension of disbelief and therefore the imagination of the participator. However, the immersion which boxes the participation within a specific role that a viewer may not be able to fit into, requires the participator to ignore their possibilities to act outside of the prescribed role and their own awareness of the experience as art. Bishop calls upon an argument of Jacques Lacan in response to this kind of participation:

Setting individual *jouissance* against the application of universal maxim, Lacan argues that it is more ethical for the subject to act in accordance with his or her (unconscious) desire than to modify his or her behaviour for the eyes of the Big Other (society, family, law, expected norms). Such a focus on individual needs does not denote a foreclosure of the social; on the contrary, individual analysis always takes place against the backdrop of society's norms and pleasures (Bishop 2012: 39).

Participation needs to provide the audience agency in an open experience where the individual is given more possibilities within their response without being overcast by the artist's intention and societies norms. To move away from the over constructed form of participatory art is not to lean towards a completely uncontrolled space. Such a space would have no clear possibilities of movement and any movement or action participators chose would lack value because of its minimal ability to influence the meaning and construction of the artwork. An aimless action with no consequence, especially no social consequence, does not inspire interactions and exchange.

Confronting an inanimate thing which has not been worked on, for which I myself fix its mode of use and to which I myself assign a new use, I have a non-thetic consciousness of my self as a *person*; that is, of my selfness, of my own ends, and of my free inventiveness (Sartre 1956: 426).

A situation in which the interaction has no possibilities extending further than being and creating for the self, does not bring the self into reflection about anything outside of oneself. To create an experience of depth, intimacy and value in a space of free inventiveness is daunting and challenging for a viewer rather than a space where participation comes easily or comfortably. An object that is not created with intention and purpose by an other, does not bring us into awareness of our being a part of a "we", instead the experience is individual and private, in which the person creates their own meaning and understanding, rather than the collaborative elaboration of meaning found and aimed for in participatory art. Participants still need to be given a framed situation, which provides suggested actions and implied rules and allows for an easy opening towards engagement. The actions need to be valued by the individual and by the other participants, it needs to move the situation forward and have actual consequences. A freedom of subjectivity and a space of possibilities is needed to balance the experience from purely going through the intended motions and align the experience closer to art's attempts of providing an outside perspective.

[One agenda, with regards to a call for participation,] concerns the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. An aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency. (Bishop 2006: 12)

I here turn to the we-subject to determine the extent to which this experience can still be social and collective and if it can take "place against the backdrop of society's norms" to the point where it "does not denote a foreclosure of the social". Can one explore what sort of experience the social bond is (if any) in the we-subject?

It is the world which makes known to us our belonging to a subject-community, especially the existence in the world of manufactured objects. These objects have

been worked on by men for they-subjects; that is, for a non-individualised and unnumbered transcendence which coincides with the undifferentiated look which we called earlier the "They" (Sartre 1956: 423).

The creators of objects are anticipators. They anticipate how their object is going to be used by us, the consumers. The objects around us communicate our actions upon them through their form and function, they dictate to us our available movements and possibilities as intended by the object's creator. It is this object's potential to be used by any transcendence, it is not particularly created for one person but could be used by anyone, and in this way these objects make known to us our position within a much larger group, a group of "anyones", all of which have the same transcendence. "I apprehend myself as interchangeable with any one of my neighbours" (Sartre 1956:424). This knowledge of being a part of a greater "we" does not just come about through manufactured objects, but through our everyday interactions with signs, symbols, people within the service industry, the way that space is created and organised, and being a spectator within an exhibition, are all interactions which indicate me as an *anybody*.

Artworks are manufactured and are therefore created with intention, anticipation and the assumption of an audience. The artwork requires and presupposes the presence of spectators, as when there is an audience it gains purpose and presence. It is a situation in which the viewer experiences their being an *anybody*, apprehending that people, just like the self, have the similar relations and possibilities towards that artwork. As Bourriaud further explains:

Form only assumes its texture (and only acquires real existence) when it introduces human interactions. The form of an artwork issues from a negotiation with the intelligible, which is bequeathed to us. Through it, the artist embarks upon a dialogue. The artistic practice thus resides in the intervention of relations between consciousness [sic] (Bourriaud 2002:22).

This is an essential component of Participatory art, as it particularly anticipates not only the presence of a spectator, but those spectators' potential interactions and possibilities for movement. The power to direct the participator is achieved through its form and structure, be it

object, encounter or situation. How the work accomplishes this is inherent within the methodologies of its creation.

...the "methods of employing" manufactured objects are both rigid and ideal like *taboos* and by their essential structure put me in the presence of the Other; it is because the Other treats me as an undifferentiated transcendence that I can realize myself as such (Sartre 1956: 426).

The viewers' possibilities for movement and action as intended by the artist are indicated through the form, structure and aesthetics of the artwork. Through this construction the viewer is encountering the Other, and entering into dialogue. It is the Other which has been anticipated to be encountered by an audience, that brings the spectator into awareness of being interchangeable with *anybody* (in so far as their abilities, qualities or perspectives may be interchangeable but with subtle differences and choices around an interaction) and makes the collective experience of the we-subject possible.

The members of a we-subject share an experience of the encounter, rather than sharing a common thread of object similarities like the one which ties the us-object together. The role the we-subject's members play is the role of being free 'anybodies' within the encounter, aware that one is an interchangeable player, with the same freedoms as any other subjective member. Our awareness of our possibilities for movement and interaction as members of the we-subject are brought about and framed by the encounter itself rather than a common thread shared as an object. Members of the we-subject are given agency and possibilities for movement within the presented encounter. The members of we-subject's movements can be different from one another, limited by the encounter which they share. It is the already framed encounter that provides possibilities and limitations on movement.

However, our experience of being a member of the we-subject is always an experience we have as a subjective individual. Our experience of being a member of the we-subject is a secondary apprehension rather than a primary and present experience, and it is an experience which only engages me, from my own subjective perception.

But the experience of the "we" remains on the ground of individual psychology and remains a simple symbol of the longed-for unity of transcendences. It is, in fact, in no way a lateral, real apprehension of subjectivities as such by a single subjectivity; the subjectivities remain out of reach and radically separated...I apprehend through the world that I form a part of "we" (Sartre 1956: 425).

Concentrating on participation's aims to activate the viewer as well as Bishop's claim that participatory art may 'repair the social bond', the us-object and the we-subject can be seen as dynamics used within an encounter to accomplish these aims. However, these dynamics ironically risk hampering these aims. The us-object can limit the viewers' responses resulting in a rigid or passive experience rather than an immersive and active one while the we-subject can result in having a limited or weak social experience, one of the individual rather than of a collective experience of meaning and understanding. To understand these dynamic's further I will look at how the us-object and we-subject come about firstly in Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A* and then in Anthea Moys' *Anthea Moys vs. The City of Grahamstown*. How much does individual agency change how we interact and respond to an artwork?

## **Participating in Brett Bailey's *Exhibit A***

Brett Bailey, is a white artist from South Africa, who produced a series of installations in various locations around the world. The particular installation to which I will refer is *Exhibit A* produced in Grahamstown during the 2012 National Art Festival.

Together as a group we, the audience members, were seated in a classroom. Here we were each given a number and were required to wait in absolute silence. As the minutes passed, a big man sitting at the table in the front of the class room called out one of the numbers at random. A person pulled out their chair with the familiar scrape on the floor, and stood awkwardly, people followed him with their eyes as he left the classroom. Then they carried on waiting as the big man checked his watch. In these moments, we were a group, aware of each other as festival goers, as audience members to Brett Baileys *Exhibit A*, each waiting for a number to be called out with which we were required to respond to in the same way: to stand up and leave the room, eyeing each other as we went. We were quiet, we were still and we were waiting, watched by the big man. Together we played this role; of being silent, complacent and watched. Until one of us stood and left, setting themselves apart from the group, freed in that moment to walk out, but still an audience member, still quiet and complacent but now a member who felt watched by all others as they waited. The awkwardness and intimidation of the rules and the big man, the anticipation of moving forward, of finally getting to see the exhibit, of having the number which was called out, made you an object for the other members as you stood to leave, playing a role specific to the rules and frames presented in the encounter. I knew when I stood up there was someone just a bit ahead of me and someone who would follow after me, discovering the way via the paper arrows and signs. I was not purely an individual in this encounter but an anybody, an audience member, moving through as all the others did. I was repeatedly aware of the other audience members during the experience, I saw them not so far ahead or felt them just behind me about to catch up, making me anxious to keep moving.

I went through a number of rooms, in each there was a display which mimicked the human zoo's that toured Europe during the colonial era. Room after room, performers stared at me as they stood unmoving in a moment that represents an atrocious history. Their look was powerful, they

looked me in the eyes, never staggering. It was not hesitant, nor submissive, not particularly angry, perhaps it was sad but the look was not asking for sympathy or inviting the audience members into the space and into the artwork to become immersed in a horrific story. Rather it was a look which set the audience apart from the performers. The look kept the audience outside and at a distance from the moment which was on display. They were forced to absorb an academic perspective of the historical atrocity but also a re-enactment now, presumably, with the complicity of the performer for at least fair pay. The quiet air was another enforcer of the rules of display; no touching, nor whispering, nor interfering, as if there was a hard sheet of glass keeping the audience and the performer apart. The person, as real and as present as they were, were not to be disturbed, were not to be spoken too, they were beyond the barriers and therefore beyond reach, beyond conversation. All the audience had with the performer was the look between them, a look fluctuating with who was the subject and who was the object. If I tried to be subject, if I tried to take over the gaze, I placed the performer back into the atrocity of history for which I am ashamed. If I was the object, if I turned away from their look, I turned away in shame. I was responsible in my choice of eye contact with the performers and through this interaction I was brought into awareness of my accountability. I was playing the role of being ashamed as the other audience members did. We were tied together with this common thread, an experience of feeling shamed by our interaction, playing the only role of being accountable.

Although Bailey claims in an interview with Anton Krueger that he was not out to deliberately shame people, but that he was shamed by his research and then he found images to “articulate” that shame, he definitely harboured expectations that the audience should feel shame. He further acknowledges this in a video interview by cue TV:

When I was doing my research, which is a lot of reading, a lot of looking at pictorial archives etc, I was struck by shame a lot, the shame that, one group of people has perpetrated onto another and so, I suppose that’s not what I am hoping the audience to take out but that’s what I know, that’s how the piece works, it brings out shame (Bailey interviewed by cueTV, 1:43 - 2:05, accessed 18th March 2014) .

Contrary to Bailey's claims, I believe that the audience's feeling of shame is a strong desire of Bailey's installations. This is partly evident through the particularly violent aesthetics in which the performers are set, the mood created through despairing music he uses and the texts he compiled. The texts often dehumanised the performer as most of the stories were historical rather than personal, the performer was a representation of a historical situation rather than of an intimate and compassionate story of a particular individual at a particular time. The characters the performers were playing could have been someone the audience member could relate to, such as a mother, a son or a friend. They were, instead, generic and nameless silhouettes onto which the historical background was projected. It can be seen that Bailey further influences this intention for shame when asked how he prepares the performers in an interview with Anton Krueger:

The first thing we sit and talk about is: what is your experience of racism? What does racism mean to you? Where does it go back in your lifetime? How do you deal with that? And that comes into the gaze, the fact that they are looking back (Bailey interviewed by Anton Krueger, 2013: 5).

The performers are put in the position to shame the audience through their reliving of past atrocities but this shaming or discomfiture presupposes and reiterates a divide between performers and audience. It is these intentions of Bailey's which tie a common thread around the audience, creating the experience of being a member of an us-object. By creating a work in which the audience is required to feel shame, the performers and the audience follow a predetermined interaction, one which heightens our experience as object. Bailey's intentions for the audience to be the object are revealed more obviously again through his preparation of the performers:

The performers are told, as they sit there, that the real performers of this piece are actually the audience moving through, and that they are the audience sitting and watching a lot of people walking through the space. (Bailey interviewed by Anton Krueger, 2013: 5 - 6)



As the audience reassemble outside after an experience in each room, there is a place to sit and discuss responses. The feelings of shame are heavy with obligation not only to the artist's intentions, but to others, the performers, the audience and the 'big other' of society. Although the beginning ticket process was designed to initially separate and create time in between audience members, the audience is expected to feel the same, and play the same role- not only of observation but of being responsible for the history.

The work does not comfortably allow for an audience which does not fit this role, which does not feel this shame. A member who does not shape themselves into this perspective is less likely to respond to the work as they are not given an option to explore it through a lens other than the pre-assumed one. The frame is constructed so that we stay complacent, where the audience and performer are never allowed the agency or given the possibility to cross over the barrier and change the encounter into something subjective and unexpected by Bailey. If the audience or the performers act or respond outside of Bailey's intentions the suspension of disbelief breaks, the immersion inside the artwork fractures and the artwork no longer functions as a responsive representation of the content. The frame Bailey has created makes it difficult for an audience to have a subjective moment, as when they do, they are no longer having an experience within the artwork. The audience members are in this way coerced into performing shame. This risks reinforcing the roles we play and experience in society rather than subverting or breaking these encounters.

*Exhibit A* was participatory in the sense that the audience's presence, movement through the space and choice whether or not to make eye contact with the performers created the work and its meaning. Without the audience the work did not really exist. It is interesting to note that images of *Exhibit A* never include the audience but are pictures of the performers and exhibits. It is as if, even through documentation, the audience and their possible complicity in the nature of such images can never be at one removed by observing another audience perceiving the work. Bailey thus constructs his audience as an us-object with a common thread of guilt, shame or horror in the reflection on colonial atrocities. This grouping can be powerful in its forceful unity - a moment to reflect on either a shared complicity in perpetrating or being subject to historical and ongoing human injustice. Bailey however denies an opportunity for his audience (and his

performers) to perform the role of we-subject. The individualism of both performer and audience are denied and create a divide. Divisions may be necessary for participatory art but the rules of engagement in this piece did not allow for either side to cross, bridge or contemplate the divide in a varying way. There is also little space to contemplate how such real life divides may be addressed outside of the artwork and thus it runs the risk of perpetuating such binaries rather than creating a meditation there on which may alter how we behave.



Fig. 1: Brett Bailey, “Trophies from Eden” *Exhibit A*, 2012



Fig. 2: Brett Bailey, “A Place in the Sun” *Exhibit A*, 2012



Fig. 3: Brett Bailey, “Dr Fischer’s Cabinet of Curiosities ” *Exhibit A*, 2012

## **Participating in *Anthea Moys vs. The City of Grahamstown***

To further illustrate how certain situations, spaces and structures provide directions and rules for engagement and how an artwork may bring about a greater sense of social and communal unity, I refer to Anthea Moys', *Anthea Moys vs. The City of Grahamstown*, a series of performance works held as a part of the main program during the 2013 Grahamstown National Art Festival as well as Moys' own Master Thesis, *Enacting Play: Performance within the Public Domain*.

The creative experience is not something that happens solely *within* the individual, nor is it something that happens *to* the individual, but rather something *between* two (or more) subjects. The recognition of this is significant as it allows the re-evaluation of the notions of subjective and inter-subjective space and how we are to think of experience itself, both within the psychoanalytical sphere and the wider cultural scene (Moys 2009: 26).

In each performance, Moys competed against local sports teams and associations namely: SABRE (South African Battle Re Enactments), the DanceSport and Ta Mtshizz Dance Club, the Pro Carmine and Victoria Girls Choir, the Rhodes Chess Club, the MARU Football Club and finally the East Cape Shotokan Karate. She spent three months prior to the festival intensively training in each discipline and getting to know the Grahamstown residents against whom she would be competing. Each discipline was one in which she had no previous experience and in each contest she had little hope of winning. The disciplines all have a previously accepted means of engagement, social constructs and rules, and each one is a frame in which Moys performed and the competitors participated.

There is something wonderfully appealing about being 'apart together' that attracts people to play together and to mutually withdraw from the rest of the world and create something that is, in itself, apart and different: something like a playground. Clubs, groups, and clans are created all the time as a form of separation from the rest of the world through the 'games' they play together (Moys 2009: 21).

In *Anthea Moys vs. MARU Football Club*, Moys played a soccer match against eleven of the best young soccer players in Grahamstown. A soccer game functions through the rules the players follow, but it is also a social structure, with rituals and roles not only played by the soccer players. The spectators of the game were not audience members of a theatre production or the quiet viewers in an art gallery, rather they take up the role of the rowdy, cheering, enthusiastic spectators one would normally see at a football game. Similarly, Maureen de Jager describes the crowd at *Anthea Moys vs. East Cape Shotokan Karate*, in her article "Striving to Be a Winner":

The effect was utterly captivating; the support from the audience electrifying. Spectators who had never even met Moys offered vocal encouragement, cheering her on when it looked like she might score and waiting in silent anticipation as she recovered from her injury. Notwithstanding the title of her performance - 'Anthea Moys *versus* The City of Grahamstown' - it seemed to me that The City had come out in full support (de Jager, 2013).

These performances encouraged a recognition of community. This results firstly from Moys putting herself in opposition to Grahamstown, as competition to the games and clubs within the city, she gives the city a common side by playing the 'foe'. Yet by having those whom she competes against as her instructors and working alongside her for three months, she changes the dynamics of the relationship from being purely competitive to being a relationship of camaraderie. The performance also warps the boundaries of the groups, giving them a different platform on which to engage with each other as well as the community at large. In the events such as the soccer and the karate, the spectators find themselves united in their support for Moys and the game. They become immersed within the game and choose to play along giving the game its meaning. "Play is enchanting and mesmerizing; it casts a spell over its viewers or participants and seems to transport them to another space where a limited order reigns" (Moys 2009: 20).

The participants and the spectators are able to immerse themselves within the games and perform these roles because of the dynamics inside the potential spaces that Moys constructed. In these

spaces the structure and rules are familiar, there are known limitations; some actions will break the rules and others make the play possible. The competitors and spectators know this frame, they play the roles which allow them to play the game and follow the rules. In this way they are members of an us-object, playing the same roles which the frame requires. However, these rules are part of the game: they provide possibilities and choices within that game and no game is played the same. In these moments the competitors and spectators retain their subjective positions. The frame makes the space safe, provides direction and a commonality and understanding with others, but it also allows for movement, action and experimentation and gives the space recognised possibilities. Simultaneously, however, Moys uses the familiarity of the structures and rules surrounding these events, to create a shift by going up alone against these groups and subverting the expectations. This does not break the game or change the frame, but brings the events further from life to allow for an outside perspective. Games are the creation of a separate world in which these rules make sense, and participants need to be immersed into that world in order to play along, take the game seriously and have a meaningful experience. The separate world we experience within games is not a concept alternate to art but alongside or *inside* art. In art we (re)create, we make a space of fiction, outside of the 'real' but to reference and reflect the real. Although the situations we create may not be real, the experience and the dialogue we have within them are. Although the rules and the structure might not make sense in the real world, in an alternate world or space they do make sense and it is the participant's belief in this order, that allows them to discover what's behind the curtain, 'play along' and have a meaningful experience.

Moys' work often asks questions about what has value and what is meaningful in our day to day engagements. She questions the meaning of the end result by placing emphasis on the journey and by making the final 'goal' unimportant in relation to the experience. In her events against Grahamstown, the odds against her were high and the end result was a clear one of failure. However, this underdog status is the very appeal which allows the audience to cheer Moys. Having received a prestigious award (Standard Bank Young Artist) she levels herself by challenging others at their own craft, ones in which she has no status, and in so doing humbles herself which generates herself as a likeable character – a good sport. In creating a dynamic in which she played out the aesthetics of failure, Moys shrunk the obvious goal of most competition

(that of winning) to place emphasis on the experience of play. But, because of this, the events risked becoming pointless and silly. She managed to counter this risk by creating an environment of immersion. She immersed herself into the events through her own engagements with the participants, her intense efforts to practice and her serious attempts to win. In return, everyone else was able to take the event seriously and play along. This allowed those interactions the opportunity to have meaning and importance. The games and events have a recognisable structure and they call upon the audience and players to enact certain anticipatable roles and rules in order for it to function. Immersion is therefore comfortable. It is this immersion by Moys, the participants and the audience, which brings the action of playing away from pointlessness and into a meaningful experience.

Nothing before or after the action mediates as much meaning as the action in that specific place and time. Here the givers, the players, the free subjects, revel in selfish uselessness. They revel in the paradox of this uselessness because in celebrating its uselessness it is meaningful and fulfilling within the action itself. ... The meaning lies completely within the action itself, not the end result. Any attempt to try and resolve this paradox would break this circle of play as play lies within the action (Moys 2009: 29).

The frame and structure of these events did not dictate how the participants and audience members should respond to the work, rather it was a frame that opened possibilities towards new methods of engagement and thinking about those experiences. The roles the competitors played were roles they already knew and chose to play. Their common thread *as* soccer players, or *as* ballroom dancers or *as* chess players were already part of their identity, already a part of who they are every day. The competitors' role of playing an object in each event and fulfilling the artwork, was a part of the frame that made them whole with the artwork and whole with each other and other groups enacted in her other events. They become whole as competitors all sharing the experience of playing against Moys' and taking a part in the Festival. Rather than Moys giving them a role that they should play, she chose instead to take on their roles as her own and play as a competitor with them. Her immersion into an already created structure challenges our experience of art but it also challenges the experience of those structures. By taking that

structure and placing it into an arts festival, it is no longer the day to day experience for the competitors and spectators, it changes their perspectives on an experience that is a normal but integral part of their lives and passions.

You know here in Grahamstown we only watch things that are happening in the festival. We are not part of it. When Anthea approached us and told us that this would be part of the festival, meaning that it will be part of the history, it will stay there, it will be in one of the books of festival. We wanted to be a part of that, instead of just watching every year... this is the first time, for all of us.

Wandile Duruwe, Founder of MARU Football Club

(<http://www.antheamoys.com/> accessed 18th March 2014)





Fig. 4: Anthea Moys, *Anthea Moys vs SABRE (South African Battle ReEnactments)*, 2013



Fig. 5: Anthea Moys Training, *Anthea Moys vs VG Girls Choir and Pro Carmine Choir*, 2013



Fig. 6: Anthea Moys, *Anthea Moys vs MARU Football Club*, 2013



Fig. 7: Anthea Moys, *Anthea Moys vs East Cape Shotokan-Ryu Karate*, 2013

## Conclusion

The viewers of an artwork fluctuate between moments of the us-object and the we-subject in the entirety of an experience. Sometimes the viewers act out the role present to them, and sometimes they are a subject with their own perspective, not aware of playing a role and rather just being themselves. They cannot be only one or only the other in a given experience but have the potential to fall from being an object at one moment to subject in the next. This way of being allows us to interact and respond to an artwork while being both immersed and having a perspective. An artwork that expects the viewer to be only one or the other does not engage the viewer as an active participant with others but risks alienating them when they cannot respond in their own honest capacity. They cannot be immersed within the seriousness of the work, and the work fractures in every moment that they experience themselves as a free agent. This is a pitfall of the engagement that happens within Bailey's work, and causes the work to reiterate the atrocities and the social divides that are in our society for those viewers who fall out of the moment of the us-object. In Moys' work, the frame and the roles people chose to play was a strength, immersing the subjects further. When they chose to act freely, their subjectivity did not break the work because the work does not initially deny that subjectivity. Just as the outside and the inside interact through encounters between one another, and through these encounters they are changed and redefined, so does our experience of being an object and a subject. Referring to Grosz:

The boundary between the inside and the outside, just as much as between self and other and subject and object, must not be regarded as a limit to be transgressed, so much as a boundary to be traversed...These boundaries, consequently, are more porous and less fixed and rigid than is commonly understood, for there is already an infection by one side of the border of the other; there is a becoming otherwise of each of the terms thus bounded (Grosz 2001: 64).

It is this fluctuation which makes us aware of our own feelings in relation to the Other's (in this

case the artwork's) intentions. This Other acquires a presence through simple spectatorship and is able to "look" back at the viewer, bringing us into a reflection of ourselves. We are in continual flux of objectifying the Other and being objectified. As Bourriaud questions, "Does it give me a chance to exist in front of it, or, on the contrary, does it deny me as subject, refusing to consider the Other in its structure?" (Bourriaud 2002:57) The Other in art does not just indicate us towards our selves but "it is because the Other treats me as an undifferentiated transcendence that I can realize myself as such." (Sartre 1956:426) During acts of participation, it is the Other that brings us into awareness of ourselves as interchangeable with others and ourselves as an object for others. During the we-subject, we experience ourselves as being a part of a larger transcendent humanity.

...one must discover oneself as *any body* in the center of some human stream. Therefore it is necessary to be surrounded by others...I have a lateral and non-positional consciousness of their bodies as correlative with my body, of their acts as unfolding in connection with my acts in such a way that I can not determine whether it is my acts which gave birth to their acts or their acts which gave birth to mine (Sartre 1956: 427).

This interaction that places the viewers into an experience, even a non-positionally conscious one, brings us into, if not a relation, then a rhythm with others. This rhythm brings about a sense of community for the viewers, even if it is not to the same degree as the experience of unity generated through the us-object. The us-object can be unifying in a sense of identification with others of my like or kind but risks limiting the viewers' experience and even further alienating them when they do not fit into the object that they are 'supposed' to fit. But the us-object can be used as a frame for participants to enact a role they know, a role they fit into and play every day as themselves. This role is still subverted by the artwork and still provides the opportunity for an outside perspective and a different experience for the participants. The degree in participatory art to which there is agency or possibilities of movement has consequences for the viewers' experience and their response to the created work as seen in the different approaches taken by Bailey and Moys.

When the individual thinks he is casting an objective eye upon himself, he is, in the final analysis, contemplating nothing other than the result of perpetual transactions with the subjectivity of others (Bourriaud 2002: 21-22).

**Chapter Three**

**The Disembodied Apparition in the Mind of the Participator:**

**Christian Boltanski's *Personnes***

## *The Object*

*There is an object. It is here. It is not an item that belongs in this place, but it is a thing which I recognise. I had opened the box which contained this object, almost casually and without expectation, although a part of me had known it was there, it was not the thing for which I was looking. I experience it with a kind of reluctance but a simultaneous peace. It seems strange that I would finally look upon it again after so long and that the reasons it was hidden, which were once inescapable, seem piteous. I take the time and really look at it, I almost try to recapture its previous intensity, I am struck by the uncanny nature of it. I am afraid but curious. This shining piece is a manifestation of what is no longer here, a presence of what does not exist and what cannot fit. It has been gone for so long that it is outside of time and place. Yet feeling it again in my hand, I revive the past it carries with it, I fall back into the object's place, and I remember the things I had glossed over and forgotten. I trace the accidents with my fingers, the blemishes which resulted from regretted clumsiness, or moments of anger or loss that led to the rough edges and sharp corners. Although the memories are suddenly painful, I am distanced from them, as if they are not my own but someone else's or perhaps a memory of a memory. Perhaps instead of feeling the pain, I have decided to remember the pain and now all I have is a memory twice removed from the experience. I realise the time and I am brought back into today. I put the object back into where it fits, and I go to back to finding the thing for which I had been looking.*

## Christian Boltanski's *Personnes*

*Personnes* (meaning both "persons" and "nobodies" in French) – is a visual and auditory installation which was presented by Christian Boltanski during *Monumenta 2010* at the Grand Palais, Paris. Let us go back to 13 January – 21 February 2010, the European winter. The show is set within the dim lighting of an overcast winter. The space is grey, hard and intentionally left cold. The chilly atmosphere and the desaturated lighting serves to accommodate the viewers' immersion in the desolation and despair that the work invokes. The ambience is heightened by the sound of human heartbeats, echoing and distorting. Their pulse is a measurement of time passing, a collective signifier of ourselves, our loved ones and our common humanity.

What principally interests me today is that the spectator is not placed before the work, but that he goes inside it. In opposition to a classic museum exhibition, where the art goes by as we watch it, the Grand Palais is a place encouraging an experience in which the spectator immerses himself, since the entire space is part of the work (Boltanski interviewed by Grenier, 2009: 8).

200 000 items of second hand clothes lie spread out on the cement floors, gently layered next to one another in demarcated encampments, lit up by a neon light and framed by four rusted poles. These 'encampments' continue on, one after the other and create a space of mass repetition. The stark, clinical lighting and the desolate space remove these clothes from the context of the living body they once ascribed identity to, and present them empty, crowded and categorised. Rather than crumpled or dropped, they are neatly, clearly and deliberately spread out next to one another. They are on display. This is similar to the methods of functional display associated with the lost and the found - that which allows for searching and rescuing, rather than aesthetically framing and spacing them. The viewer yearns to search and to rescue even if prohibited through the convention of 'do not touch the art'. In this way these clothes ask questions of the viewer. This functional method of display brings these clothes into a context that allows for an experience that is participatory. Without participation, even if merely on the level of thought projection, the clothes remain dead. To quote Bishop on the concerns of participation:



[One agenda, with regards to a call for participation,] concerns the desire to create an active subject, one who will be empowered by the experience of physical or symbolic participation. The hope is that the newly-emancipated subjects of participation will find themselves able to determine their own social and political reality. An aesthetic of participation therefore derives legitimacy from a (desired) causal relationship between the experience of a work of art and individual/collective agency (Bishop 2006: 12).

The participation I refer to here does not include the physical creation (by the artist) in the making of the work, but the more symbolic experience (by the viewer) of imagining the story of the work. Unlike Bailey's exhibit and Moys' challenges, the engagement between the clothes and the viewer is not a movement or action required by the viewer. Instead the space facilitates the viewer's immersion into a story or relations that the clothes inspire. The clothes are presented for the viewer to gaze upon, to scrutinise and therefore to speculate over, to discover and imagine the personal histories that these clothes embody through the smells they hold, the stories they provoke by their form, and the speculative memories in their worn out markings and stains. Immersion is necessary for the viewers to participate (which is similar to Moys' performances) but the viewers do not play as specific a role such as those played in Bailey and Moys. In *Personnes*, the viewer plays the part of a mourner - an active role of remembering but, unlike the cheering soccer spectator in Moys work, the viewer's role is particular to their own recollections and imaginings. The mass of clothing allows for plenty of chances to recognise something similar and almost familiar to the viewers' own past, and the stories that the clothes hold begin to unfold. In this way the viewer is a participator, a creator of the work, able to add to it, complete it and give the exhibition life.

I often work on pieces which include clothes, and for me there is a direct relationship between a piece of clothing, a photo and a dead body, in that someone once existed but is no longer here. Every time I work on pieces like these there are always people who tell me that they can sympathize somehow with the use of these materials...What is beautiful about working with used clothes is

that these really have come from somebody. Someone has actually chosen them, loved them, but the life in them is now dead. Exhibiting them in a show is like giving the clothes a new life – like resurrecting them (Boltanski interviewed by Garb, 1997: 19).

Whilst meditating on these clothes, the viewers fall into a space of incomplete remembrance as they try to grasp the history and the life of the clothes. The viewers' engagement with the artwork needs time, the time to break away from the present moment and become immersed in their own past and their own imaginings of the clothing's past. The clothes then have the potential to bring the self into awareness of its own lost identity within the past -an aspect of identity no longer known or acknowledged. Concurrently the clothes also bring one into awareness of others, as these clothes have not belonged to the self but to others. They can never be a completely comfortable fit within one's own memories and stories. The space the clothes are situated in makes them strange to us when in an expected context they might have just been a common item. Through their installation within this unlikely space, they feel desperately lost. Our moments of Uncanny Strangeness are experienced firstly in relation to a past unknown self in which the clothes strike a familiar chord. The clothes are strange yet familiar objects that show us an intimate perspective of a stranger that we can never completely know - intimate objects that are made strange through their dislocation. The self is brought into a moment of internal conflict: negotiating who they once were in relation to the item of clothing, and who they are in the present. The viewer experiences conflict by trying to remember the object's familiarity, a memory corrupted by the experience of the Other which it represents. The viewer's previously repressed qualities are reflected back and exposed through this represented Other in this strange and familiar object. These clothes make the viewer question their own past and identity through the use of the Other as well as bring the viewer into an experience of exchange with the Other.

I think what I was trying to do in my work was to take strange objects – objects that we know have been used for something although we don't exactly know for what – and show their strangeness. It has to do with individual mythology. The objects I display come from my own mythology; most of these things are now dead and impossible to understand. They might be insignificant things, or just

simple or fragile, but people looking at them can imagine that they were once useful for something (Boltanski interviewed by Garb, 1997: 18 - 19).

The viewers are members of the we-subject in their sharing of the experience as an audience; each person has their own individual relations with the clothes creating a very subjective experience. The factual past of these clothes is not given and the viewers are aware that their knowledge of the intimate story the clothes hold, will only ever be speculations. What is known however, and is brought upon the viewers over and over again through the mass repetition, is the ending of the story, that the clothes are no longer owned, warmed by the skin, or a part of the identity of the people who once wore them. They are no longer of use and have been left behind. Because of this, the viewers' story will always contain an element of loss or abandonment, and the mass repetition of these clothes, sharpens the encampment as a collection of what has been lost. All the potential stories the viewers have, are tainted by this fact, and the space becomes one of mourning.

This mourning is reflected by the viewers in their movement through the space. They informally perform this mood – their walk is determinedly slow and quiet, their heads downcast to gaze at the clothes on the floor, their bodies closed and stiff in the cold. The viewers' role as mourners is encouraged by the desolate immersive space, the stories common ending of loss and the quiet mood perpetuated by other audience members. It becomes a role played together, as a whole object. Moments of the us-object are discovered here in the collective role of mourning. This role is an intention of Boltanski and a clear response of the audience, much as “feeling shame” is an intention of Bailey's and an almost unavoidable response of the audience during *Exhibit A*. In Bailey's work I aligned this role of feeling shame with the us-object. In *Personnes* the role of “mourning” is an experience of being a member of the us-object as well, as the viewers are the same as a group in this act. However, what it is that is being mourned is more specific to each individual viewer than in the case of *Exhibit A* (in which it was much clearer exactly what the viewer was supposed to be ashamed of), and it is this latter feature that allows for a we-subject experience. Where the role played in Bailey's exhibit is necessary in order for a viewer to participate, this is arguably not the case for *Personnes*. Participants in *Personnes* are still likely to have an immersive experience even if they do not respond to the mood of mourning. They are

still able to engage with the clothes and the space, imagine stories of the strangers and remember moments of their own past. The artwork is not fractured when someone acts outside of this mood, because the artwork is not dependant on this mood and the subjective nature of the encounters allow the work to encompass more than one way of being.

These items of clothing lie so eloquently next to one another that it is a small step to seeing them filled and embodied. The encampments of clothes become mass funerals and the viewers, a griever for countless and unnecessary deaths. They become spectators as well as participators in an intimate space of mourning, yet it is a story they can never completely know and are therefore never fully a part of. They are placed outside of the mourning, but at the same time performing it and immersed within the observation of it. They complete the story of this installation through their subsequent projections of death and mourning onto the work. Yet, simultaneously, as observers, they are dislocated from the space, and become voyeurs of the death that their own performance creates. “The spectator becomes a voyeur, and is at the same time ashamed of his voyeurism. And there is a fascination, a specific kind of pleasure, in this.” (Boltanski, 1997:34) This project, uniting us in our humanity, also becomes a measurement of our own mortality, a reminder of our own ending both in the stream of humanity and the fragility of humanity collectively. This confrontation with death and its representation is initially imperative, for our own unconscious refuses the fatality of death, as Kristeva further discusses in relation to Freud and the Uncanny Strangeness:

Our unconscious has as little use now as it ever had for the idea of its own mortality. The fear of death dictates an ambivalent attitude: we imagine ourselves surviving (religions promise immortality), but death just the same remains the survivor's enemy, and it accompanies him in his new existence. Apparitions and ghosts represent our ambiguity and fill with uncanny strangeness our confrontations with the image of death (Kristeva 1991; 185).

Boltanski's work often has associations with death particularly the mass death brought about in World War II. Issues surrounding and relating to the Holocaust have become the 'brand' associated with Boltanski's work. But this is not the only reading that *Personnes* can have.

*Personnes* itself is not explicitly about death rather it is about mini deaths and losses. It is less focused on one incident and more focused on recognising the deaths that happen over time. I suggest it is an experience *through* time rather than *of* a specific point in time because the viewer travels with the clothes into moments of the past, to any moment in which the viewer can relate and sympathise with, thus the work becomes a collection of lost moments. The audience is given possibilities towards having numerous individual readings of the work. All that is presented is a generic but functional object, familiar but removed from the usual context, it represents an intimate history with a person. An object that could be the viewer's own but more significantly it is an object which *once was but is no longer*.

The viewer's move through the space as subjects with possibilities. Having a greater sense of humanity and the feeling of being a part of that humanity, are inherent in this installation - both in the clothes and the sound of the heart beats. The clothes bring the viewer in relation to Others, acting as signifiers for Others both in their very bodied presence and in the intimate stories they inspire. The clothes create exchange of memory and sympathy with Others, and the viewer fits themselves into the world of Others as whole with Others. Their stories are individual but still as interchangeable as the clothes themselves, still going through the space and having similar interactions and responses as other audience members. Further in the space, there is a tall mountain of clothes. A crane lifts and drops items of clothes to fall back again and again onto the mountain. The viewers watch as they fall, flapping and crumpling back into the mass of colour. "...in the mountain [of clothes], there's no more identity because you can't see if it's a jacket or coat—everything is mixed together." (Boltanski interviewed by Sarah Rosenbaum-Kranson, 2010) The clothes are no longer representatives of individual people but are whole, one mountain of material, no longer somebodies. Now the clothes are "anybodies" dropped and discarded and all the same. Even the stories are now lost.

The sound of heartbeats is a continuation of a collective project that started in 2005. Boltanski's ongoing collection is a permanent archive on the island of Teshima off the coast of Japan. The heartbeats are recorded from all around the world, creating an ocean of individual but similar voices. The sound represents a body, a being, a somebody, who will one day or might already be dead. It is a reminder of other's, as well as our own, mortality. The sound works similarly to the

clothes in the demarcated encampments. The presence embodied in both the clothes and the heart beats, bring the us into awareness of an absence, of someone who was once the incarnation of the stories - subsequently prompting our awareness of the death of others and the inevitable death of ourselves. These projects create a reflection of the self in relation to a greater human subjectivity.

Our awareness of others within the space comes about not because of Others but because of representations of Others. We are immersed in a space filled with Others who are no longer present. Their stories are there for us to imagine through what they have left behind. We are voyeurs, trying to peer in and discover who the Others were through the intimacy of their clothes. We discover a story of our own creation through the clothes which serve as reminders of our own stories. We experience a remembrance of a past self, a self that we are no longer aware of, a familiar but strange story that is and isn't our own. We experience a reflection of ourselves as an object in a similar manner that we experience ourselves as objects for the Other. Rather than just experiencing a reflection of ourselves in the present moment, we experience our past selves from the outside, through previously repressed aspects of our identity. In the next chapter, my own work similarly uses this potential but not actual presence of a body, as well as a physical performance of an Other. The interchangeable Other is also represented through objects which create imagined and intimate stories. The audience will become privy to a number of intimate dialogues with the Other, as well as dialogues from which they are apart and distanced. The audience will be the unseen voyeur as well as the uncomfortable intruder, the story creators as well as characters within a story, both inside and outside.



Fig. 8: Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010



Fig. 9: Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010





Fig. 10: Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010



Fig. 11: Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010





Fig. 12: Christian Boltanski, *Personnes*, 2010

**Chapter Four**

**Potential and Anticipated Participation During The Ineffaceable, My Masters Exhibition.**

**A Possible Story of *Ineffaceable***

**Artist's Meditations**

**The Characters**

**The Objects**

**The Spaces**

**Conclusionary Statement on my Intentions**

## **A Possible Story of *Ineffaceable***

The sun has already set as we arrive one by one outside the Makana Municipality City Hall. It is an old established building made from cut grey stone. A broken clock tower looms above. There is a group of us. I have seen some of these faces before but two of them are strangers. One is a friend, I know her well. We stand slightly awkwardly talking amongst ourselves as we wait. A person dressed administratively calls out our names and marks us off on her clipboard. As she does so, she hands each of us a nametag, an envelope and a plastic bag. She requests that we each put our name tags on and watches us tight-lipped until we do. The administrative woman begins to explain that inside each packet there is an object: "... please make use of these objects during *Ineffaceable*."

My name tag tells me that I am *The Unsaid*. I glance over to my friends name tag, she is *The Watcher*. From her plastic bag she pulls out a torch, she playfully tests it by pumping the lever inside her palm. The torch clicks and flashes. There is a man wearing a blue shirt next to her, his name tag reads *The Anybody* and his friend, a woman, *The Other*. A third person, pulls out a silver camera from the bag, and reveals that he is called *The Self* to an older man who is called *The Third*. The administrative woman comes over and shows him how to turn the camera on. A younger woman, who seems to be alone, is tagged *The Unseen*, she looks at an object that she pulled out the packet, it is small and fits hidden in her hand. She slips the object into her pocket and peels open her envelope. I turn to my envelope as well. Inside there is a small photograph, a short description and a Pick 'n Pay receipt for "P/PIES", "RICE NOODLES" and a "CARRIER BAG 24L". Something crackles in my plastic bag as I am reading the description. It is a two way radio. I click the trigger, the radio crackles and before I can speak into it, the administrative woman interrupts. A sound echoes in the old walls, it is of a woman, she is making an announcement of the kind that one gets on a bus trip. She is welcoming us, and telling us the route the bus will take, that refreshments and entertainment will be available and reminds us of the safety precautions and prohibitions aboard the bus. Then the administrative woman reminds us that upon completion, we must return our objects to the person who will be waiting by the exit. The person can be identified by the name tag. She gestures to the door and we all enter.

The door closes behind us and we are plunged into a quiet, dark space. The group reflect this quiet, their conversations fizzles to a whisper and then silence. My friend gets her torch ready, clicks it a few times and then awkwardly stops fidgeting. Ahead there is a long corridor. The floors are old wood, the walls are a mild office colour. There are a number of pot plants and rows of portraits along the corridor. In each frame there is a political figure, they stand solemnly staring out. It smells of paper and sweat. There are bodies standing, leaning and waiting. Their shadows stretch behind them and distort against the roof. They are strangers, yet they are recognisable, seen every day. A business woman, an old man, a working man, perhaps a couple together. We are funnelled into a line as we try to walk past them. Their faces are always looking away, upwards towards the ceiling, stiff and uncomfortable. A darkness falls over them, like a heavy liquid and hides their faces, their features have become generic shapes, a blur of what can be seen and what should be there. Their eyes cannot be made out, but even though they are unseeing they are aware of a passer-by. They seem to shift in relation to the movement of the group – a slight pivot of a torso or a stretching back of a shoulder. Then they are still again. Then they wait. It happens like a ripple of a shadow, a quick click of the neck, a sigh or an almost cough, and then waiting. Is it a natural shift in comfort? A breath finally taken? There is a fear of touching, of stumbling. I stand still next to them and their bodies seem to tighten, they seem irritated like there was a bad smell, their heads are still turned away, they are still waiting, but they are now aware of me. They swallow deeply, their chests go up in a silent sigh. I feel like I am making them uncomfortable. That I am standing too close. I should move on, but *The Self* with the camera has stopped in front of me, trying to take a photo. They are not moving any more, they are just waiting, they are waiting for me to leave, their head twisted uncomfortably away. I mumble something at them, but their heads turn further away. Finally I move on, and they seem to relax in relief. The corridor ends in darkness, like there may not be anywhere further to go. Only an empty office with a sheet of tinted glass mirroring our silhouettes. *The Watcher* switches on her torch and ahead we see two big old fashioned doors, slightly ajar.

The doors open into a hall meant for conferences and events, usually filled with chairs and people and noises, it is empty now and dark. But there is a sound, it is a loud rushing roaring sound coming from the stage, the heavy maroon curtain is drawn. The stairs to the stage are

blocked up, and all the doors along the wall have also been locked. Only one door to the right lit by a small bulb is open. There are two objects on the floor, they are ornate with twists and furls. *The Watcher* shines her torch on them, the patterns make an almost recognisable shape. Then *The Other* takes a mirror out of her packet and it becomes clear. Kneeling on the ground, *The Watcher* and *The Other* decipher the writing, calling out letters and words as they go.

The next door leads into complete darkness, we try to stick close together as we walk. *The Watcher* fumbles with the torch, pumping it every now and then, trying to light the way for the others of the group behind her. She shines back ahead and immediately illuminates a figure. Its back is towards us, a long brown coat in the torch light. There is another figure beside it, unmoving. I feel nervous as my radio crackles a voice, someone asks "Is anyone is there? uh-over." I whisper back a "yes" and a "uh over" as the group looks at me. *The Watcher* pans the torch right, and finds a figure waiting next to me. Its shadow falls high and personified on the wall behind it. After a moment, I see it as only an empty jacket on a rack, I realise there is no one. Then there is a shuffling noise coming from the previous figures, *The Watcher* shines the torch back towards them, their shadows move as she does, growing and crossing over. The torch settles upon the previous figures, still there, but empty like the one beside me. Their shadows shift as my friend breaths. I pass through the space with the others in my group, *The Watcher* is our eyes. Every now and then something shuffles, a cough, a whisper, or footsteps that are not ours. The torch keeps shifting, but only finds figure after figure, their shadows crawl away from us, watching us and leaving us. The figures dwindle down and we find a small staircase and a door, we pass through.

This next room is small, and bright. The walls are white, the floors creek. The two way radio crackles, "Who are you?" in a woman's voice. "I am *The Unsaid*." I respond awkwardly. On two of the walls are elaborate patterns making mirrored words. "So am I," the woman says. The ornate objects look like ceiling roses or plaques and old fashioned shields found upon buildings. I help *The Other* woman with the mirror, we read out the letters for the group, discovering the words as we do. *The Self* takes photos of the group and of himself.

Now there is a long thin corridor. *The Watcher* is still our eyes as we adjust to the darkness. To

our right there is a room. "Where are you? Over." asks the Walkie Talkie. It crackles with a loud Roar. It is a dressing room, with mirrors along the wall. It is empty. "In an empty dressing room. Over." The next room has a big wooden cabinet of multiple post boxes. They are numbered and they are locked. We can hear a noise from inside and there are lights shining out numerous key holes and open slots. *The Unseen*, who had been quite quiet reaches deep into her jean pocket and brings out a small grey key. It has a number for a key ring. Number 6. We open number 6 and we find photographs of people in their cars. Number 3, 4, 8, and 12 also definitely have something inside. Our key works on 3, 4 and 8 but not on 12. We find a light in one, a short film in the other and a sound in number 8. We decide to lock them again. *The Self* flashes another photo. As we are leaving the room, someone enters. Then another with a torch. *The Watcher*. There is a group just like us. A woman holds a two way radio. We greet them awkwardly and feel a need to rush to the next room.

We crowd through onto the stage. The curtain is still drawn. But on our left is a projected drawing of people on a bus. They are sleeping, reading a book, looking at their phones. A white light streams a path along the floor between the seats with hard plastic bones. The image rocks and sways with the road, like a boat along a river. And with each sway the people fade and reappear, shifting and stretching. The bus passengers are silhouettes, a dark mass of body and rough material, morphed monstrously. I feel like a child imagining the dark shapes near my bed to be creatures of teeth and hair and nails, waiting for me to sleep, waiting for me fall unawares. The rocking and swaying making me feel sickly and sleepy. And there in the windows reflection I stand, in the drawing, staring at myself from just a moment ago. *The Self* takes a photo.

We go down the stairs of the stage, looking at the empty hall from above as we do. We slip behind the blockade and through a door on the far end. The woman on the two way radio says that she is afraid of the dark. I reply that I am as well and *The Watcher*, gives me a cheeky and knowing smile. We open into a corridor, there are people sitting on chairs. Each swivel around to face us and wait patiently. "Next customer please," says the woman in front of me. She sits in a Pick n' Pay uniform and smiles casually. My friend comes with me, but the woman requests, "One at a time please." And we hear "Next customer please," from the Cashier a little further on. There is the sound of a beeping scanner and shopping trolleys. "Hello Sir, do you have a smart

shopper card?" The woman asks. "Would you like a packet?" I hand her my smart shopper. She scans it with an invisible scanner. "Can I check your receipt please?" I hand her my receipt from the envelope. She looks at my name tag, and writes down my name and the name on the receipt. She then hands the receipt back to me. I walk past the man wearing the blue shirt at one of the other cashiers. His receipt has not been accepted. The cashier is asking him to complete it. "You should have a pen," The Cashier repeats, "Please complete it." He scribbles on it, and the Cashier takes it, but does not return it.

We leave the Cashiers on the chairs and exit through an exterior door. There is a person waiting for us, they take our objects, tell us that the experience is almost complete and gesture to us to a parked car down the alley way. The car is empty but the brake lights paint the walls of the old city hall red. Disembodied voices echo from inside the car, heard through the opened windows. The car's door light is on, but only the voices seem to be present. It is a woman, she asks a question in the front seat, and beside her in the passenger seat a voice answers. The answer makes no sense, yet the conversation continues, every now and then it stutters and one sentence does not follow the next. Through the words one can glimpse a story, private and intimate matters are being discussed, slowly the mundane moments of conversation pass away and eventually the group disperses as newcomers get their name tags.

## **Artist's Meditations**

The guiding themes for this exhibition are familiarity, strangeness, voyeurism and dislocation. During the research and creation surrounding this exhibition, moments where these themes have manifested has heightened the encounter with the other and the reflection of the self. These themes have rippled out from the main themes that have informed this thesis, such as the inside and the outside, intimacy and distance, the Uncanny Strangeness and the disembodied/dislocated presence. During *Ineffaceable*, the participants will experience these themes in the roles they play, their interactions as a group, and the spaces they enter in which various art pieces have been installed.



## The Characters

In performing or being ascribed these roles, the participants are given access to interact not only with the space and the works but with each other. The roles provide determined positions within the group which alters the dynamic and encourages team work rather than a quiet, passive and individual experience. During these interactions with one another, the participants will fluctuate from being the us-object and the we-subject as a group in relation to the work. They will also fluctuate within the group itself as a mix of individuals, strangers and friends. (Quotations adapted from Emilio Rojas' *Little Friend* 1992)

### The Watcher

*"Without me, you will run the risk of travelling to the Land of Nowhere, where you will know the hells of immobility."*

I see but am not always seen, I am the voyeur, the witness and the guide. I can see what is to come while others cannot. I have power, but I am not free, I am a servant of the dependencies of others. I am their Watcher as much as I am a Watcher for myself. I go back for them, I move for them and I see for them. I watch over them and protect them from the dark. I am *The Watcher* and I hold the torch.

### The Unsaid

*"If I ask, will you answer?"*

I speak but not always with words. Sometimes I speak within the absence of my words and the spaces in-between. Sometimes the things I utter out loud are not as important as the act of speaking. Sometimes I just need to talk and be responded to, even if the words themselves are cheap, the exchange is what has value. I am *The Unsaid* and I carry the two way radio.

### The Other

*"I tell them what they need to hear but sometimes - just sometimes - I am not allowed to tell them everything."*

I am the one in relation to the self. I am always on the outside, always at a distance, often mistrusted, misconstrued and a suspect. I am the unknowable. The only thing you may know about me is truly how you may not know yourself. I am *The Other* and I have the mirror.

#### The Anybody

*“And he, who was just someone on the face of the earth, replied with a sad smile. ‘Madame, I don't sell what you ask for. I give it in exchange.’”*

I am the interchangeable. I am not particular but a silhouette, a blank shape defined by the space which encompasses me. I am the customer, the passenger, the applicant. I am a number in the waiting room, printed on a ticket. I am a part of the they. I am *The Anybody* and I hold a receipt and a pen.

#### The Self

*“The centuries in my veins represent time, which formed me. But my memory has lost track of them. What can you tell me about my past, present and future self?”*

I am the subject who moves within the moment, capable of perspective and distance. I decide on how to see the world, I frame it and try to capture it. However, once I have it captured, it is no longer present. It falls into the past and I can only access it upon reflection. When I am lost inside darkness, my sight becomes black and my perspective dissolves. I am blind to the frame relying on random chance. I am *The Self* and I have the camera.

#### The Unseen

*“There was a fifth door. I couldn't see it, but I could feel it somewhere near.”*

I am the one who is concealed, hidden and hard to find. I am the voyeur but the one who is never found out, never guilty, never caught. For I am on the inside and therefore disguised. I am drunk by the scene ahead, unaware of any other. I act until I am content, my surroundings only push me further into the depths of my intentions. I am *The Unseen* and I hold the key.

#### The Third

*“The reason for existence is not just to search and find but, rather, to be. Because we are both beginning and end, both death and rebirth, we must be what we really are, a constant act of giving.”*

I am the unnoticed arrival. I view the scene from the furthest point and can see it in its entirety. I am the distant spectator of all other characters. I can see their movements through the objects they hold but I do not hold an object myself. My acts are of my own creation. I am the distant discoverer, the unhindered actor and the curious guest. I am *The Third* and I carry endless possibilities.

## **The Objects**

### The torch

The torch is an item that affords the bearer the luxury of sight, illuminating the path ahead, the shapes in the dark. The torch's beam can also blind, behind which the seer can hide, his presence known but his identity masked, no longer vulnerable.

### The two way radio

The two way radio, can transmit and receive allowing the bearer to talk or listen, but not simultaneously. It is a conversation with an anonymous stranger, yet it is safe and trusted, it is a line out, a potential call for help. We associate them with security guards, the police and fire department, and the army. Yet, in all this seriousness, they are playful objects, our communication through them is gamelike, similar to the cans we used as phones when we were children.

### A mirror

A mirror is a tool of reflection and refraction. It reflects existing light and shows things in reverse. On it we find the marks of people's fingers or a trace of their recent breath. Through it we see our own selves and discover the image that we are.

### A receipt and a pen

The receipt is a common item. It is the documentation of an exchange. It details the exchange and in so doing it details the objects of a moment in our lives and provides a short story. The story is both of the exchange and of the subsequent moments in which we imagine the objects, the potential space of those objects and the kind of people who use those objects.

### A second hand camera

The second hand camera is a silver box. It is cheap, small and dented, making a loud buzz as it unwinds its lens. The photos it is used to take are the casual and intimate kind, repetitious and discardable, of friends and loved ones at bars, braai's and parties. The flash exposes dust marks, water droplets and scratches upon the red eyed faces. Sometimes they are smiling, sometimes

they are distracted and sometimes caught halfway through a smile and halfway through an unfortunate blink and doubling of the chin. The owner then turns it backwards upon himself, points and shoots. The camera itself is a story of these moments and in its potential and limitations, a constant repetition of this frame. It is an object that allows the photographer a moment of reflection in the space that he is in and the subject a moment of reflection of their own image.

A key

A key is used to open and close. It is the creator of the divide between the inside and the outside, the intimate and the public, the seen and the unseen. It keeps things which are precious safe and hidden. Or it keeps things which are nasty contained and separate. A key is specific to a lock, to an inside and to the bearer.

## The Spaces

Many of the themes including the choice of space itself reference moments in which we lose complex identity as we become a number in a system. This also brings us into an understanding of how we read and are read as a slightly shifting character in a repeating systematized dialogue of modern living.

The City Hall: Is an old established building with a rich history. The foundation stone, laid down in 1820, describes the intention of the site to become “The Settlers’ Memorial Tower”, but eventually became the Town Hall on the 24th of May 1882. It represents a hierarchy, both in its function to facilitate the Municipal Council (whose primary role is that of the political oversight of the municipality’s functions, programmes and the management of the administration) as well as in the actual structure and layout of building. A security guard sits by the door, sometimes he confronts you, but sometimes not. The offices to your left are for the general public, and look reminiscent of the DMV, a glass window, a place to queue and the smell of paper and sweat. Upstairs leads to better equipped and better smelling offices, ones with windows, pot plants and black leather seats. These offices feel relatively out of bounds. The building does not only run as part of the Makana Municipality offices, but as a space for hire for conferences, high school dances, weddings and birthdays within the local community. The building speaks thus both to official bureaucracy as well as more private civil rites of passage which happen in the space for hire. The spatial resonance of these dynamics of power and service is the reason why the space has been chosen to facilitate *Ineffaceable*.

The Queue: Is a constant routine in our day to day living. It is the faceless, unnamed numbered line. A moment of boundaries and territory, negotiating our own personal space with others as we wait.

The Clothes: They are the empty silhouettes personified in the dark, place holders for strangers’ stories. They are the imagined presence, evoking a feeling of vulnerability from the potential of the other’s look.

The Mirrored Text: The act of discovering, of sharing and collective understanding. These objects reference architectural features of colonial buildings but are distorted and remade with cheap materials. They are props and reference the sentimental decor of endless themed parties, rites of passage which are staged in a community hall.

The P.O. Boxes: Moments of strangers usually unseen are contained in numbered boxes, locked, the images and objects shine through the slit inviting but unattainable without a key. The intimate nature of the images once hidden, are now discovered, gazed upon, grasped and tampered with.

The Bus: Strangers sleeping yet exposed and vulnerable. They constantly shift, their shape becoming a part of the bus and of the darkness. They all have one thing in common, they are not at home.

The Cashiers: We encounter an interaction we have every day, the same encounter barely changing that brings us into recognition of being an anybody. A space of interactions with strangers, known in their roles within the environment of the shops.

The Car: Is an intimate enclosed and owned space, yet it is a space available, visible and public. A space in which we live in as we travel through our daily routines. A space in which conversation is born with acquaintances, friends and loved ones.

## **Conclusionary Statement on my Intentions**

This exhibition is itself a meditation on ways of being. The roles we are assigned, how we choose to perform these roles and how they are read by others, inform who we are and how we move through the space. This reflects who we are, how we interact and how we move through spaces everyday in real life. During *Ineffaceable* the viewer journeys and explores through a dark world filled with strangers and come out the other side. The dark space, the art pieces and props, the roles played and the tools given, are all a part of the frame to create encounters and interactions both with the work and between members of the group following the themes of familiarity, strangeness, voyeurism and dislocation. These are my intentions. To bring about an exhibition in which people share experiences, create meaning and have interactions with one another. The meanings that are discovered within these moments, be they profound or simply whimsical, are strongly dependant on the group's interactions with each other. As much as the frame I have created will lend itself to the themes that have guided me through the process, I cannot anticipate all the participants interactions with each other and the meanings that may arise out of those interactions. These meanings are secondary to my intentions, but are no less significant to my intentions, rather their value is beyond my grasp and therefore beyond what I can anticipate. The moments created through this exploration are all meaningful in their own right. This exhibition provokes the contemplation of these moments by creating a space where potential movements and interactions manifest.



## **Conclusion**

This thesis is not only a theoretical analysis of participatory art but is also an exploration that forms the basis for my practice. Outlining the philosophical concerns regarding our interactions has provided insight not only into the content of my practice but also the methods which I have used to create participation during *Ineffaceable*. It has informed me not only of the dangers of forcing participation upon the viewers but also of the strength of a frame that allows for and encourages unpredicted and stimulating participation. A frame where the encounters have an unnumbered amount of solutions and the experiences change as the people change; their own mood forming their experience and the meaning they create. The intended meaning is a guide for the artist rather than for the participants, a means to create the frame and build the encounter, a structure that allows for participation and provides the platform for the meaning of the work to develop and change. This means that the participants do not need to adhere to the intended meaning in order for the work to function. Instead, the participants are able to create their own meaning that the artist cannot anticipate or control. The participant has their own individual and ever changing experience, in the frame created by the artist but influenced by others, their mood, their relations. Their experience becomes a translucent top layer of meaning, moulding over the artist intended meaning to create a more complex and complete experience. The encounter is no longer an empty frame of intended meaning but is filled in, a complete picture created by the artist and the participants. When I wrote about Boltanski's *Personnes* in Chapter 3, I discovered that meaning can be completed through participation. However, rather than being a static "this is what it means," the meaning flows and fluctuates individually for each audience member. There is a constant layering of relations over the clothes as they remember and create stories. The meaning of the work is developed and changed. Boltanski's intentions are potentially filled but with meanings he may never know.

Throughout this thesis (as well as my exhibition) there are a number of opposing and fluctuating dynamics present which reform and remanifest as one another, particularly as the inside and the outside. They are the self and the other; the object and the subject; familiarity and strangeness; the participator and the spectator; the immersive and the disembodied; and the artwork and the audience. Participation is a constant pull and push between these contrasts, both in my exhibition and in this thesis. These almost counterposed roles in one moment provide a frame

and a structure, in the next provide agency and subjectivity. Both are needed during *Ineffaceable* as I aim for the participation to be neither imposing nor undirected.

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**Appendix: The Story Discovered**

In May 2014, Ineffaceable manifested within the rooms of the Municipality City Hall. Strangers became a group. They travelled through the exhibition together, knitted close by the darkness of the encompassing space, united by similar curiosities and common pursuits. Their dependance on one another, brought about by the various characters and objects, provided the hammer to the ice. People unfamiliar to one another shared an experience. Through their journey they discovered intentional as well as incidental opportunities of engagement.

People were first brought together huddled around the entrance. The administrator provided each with an object and an envelope. Participants waited, envelope in hand, nametag on their left shoulder. ready to enter the exhibition. Numerous groups came together at this point to read their characters outloud to one another and share who they were with others. Perhaps this came about through the desire to know the other “pages” to the story and resulted in the beginning of a shared experience with strangers. The Watcher’s role was already being performed, for she began to assist each reader by providing the light from her torch. Throughout the experience, the Watcher guided the group, protecting them, waiting for them, and calling out caution. The role of the Watcher also became a kind of curator, illuminating and framing the work and the space for all the others to see.





The element of chance played an important role during the exhibition. Firstly, the encompassing space, narrated by my constructs, was still relatively open to the groups exploration. The spaces were not untouchable, the artworks were not behind lines of territory, there were no rules of speed or direction, neither was there a map, guide or an outline provided. This allowed for a sense of freedom and exploration. It also further developed the dynamics and structure of the group. Members of each group were encouraged to wait for one another and keep up with one another by a number of factors including the encompassing structure of the space, as well as their dependencies upon certain objects and characters and finally by the administrator's suggestion. The speed of each group was unpredictable. Some groups, were slower, quieter and subdued, others excited and enthusiastic, some afraid and uneasy. The people who made up these groups, changed and created these resulting responses- from a headfast leader charging the group productively forward, to a scouring slow pacer, lagging the group in steady seriousness. The largeness of the space, the different structures, the illogical corners and unfamiliar layout, all encouraged the group to stay together and escort one other. A dark staircase presented a moment to hold hands and watch each other, while an empty corridor presented a debate of direction. An out of tune piano stopped some for a moment of mischievous playfulness while an out of place ironing board became estranged by darkness and light. These structures presented the space as being free to explore, with every participant affected by their ties to the rest of the group resulting in a different and unconfined experience, narrated and facilitated by the constructs I created.

The objects were functional tools used often predictably, but also provided opportunities of unscripted engagement with the work, space and other participants. Some of these objects were clearly defined by their structure and functional purpose, such as the torch, key and mirror. These tools encouraged engagement between the character and other participants, as well as with the space and the artwork itself. The object's function became performed by the participants as their assigned roles within the group, creating a social standing for different characters.

For example, the Other with the mirror was called upon to use the tool whenever a new post of undecipherable words were found. The participant as the Other, became the groups translator and

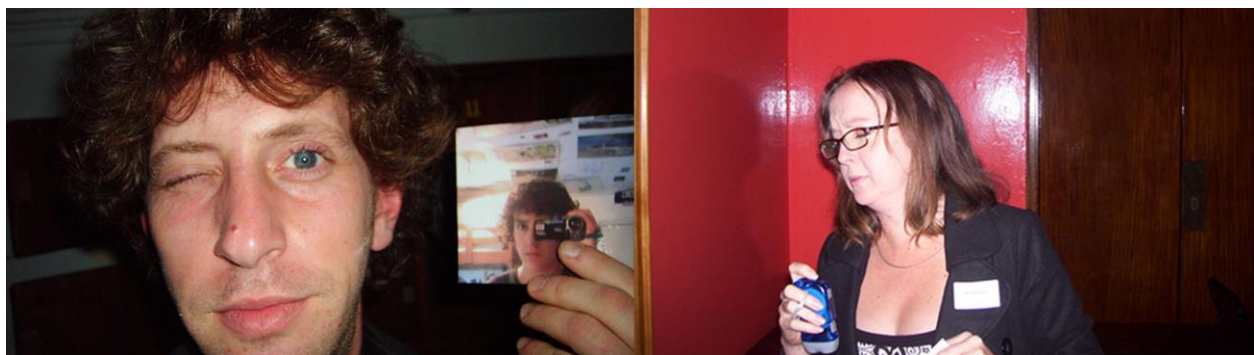
fulfilled the function of the mirror. Similarly the Unseen key bearer, was asked to unlock doors in which the key did not fit. Until the purpose of the key became clear, the Unseen's role within the group was muddy and incomplete, called upon at any opportunity in which the key might have fitted. The Watcher, as previously stated, became the groups eyes, guide, leader, and perhaps curator.

Other tools had less defined rules and their use was less predictable. I am speaking here of the camera and the two way radio. These tools were tied less to the constructs of the space, the group and the artworks. For instance, the two way radio was sometimes overheard and sometimes gathered around so all could hear. However, it was also sometimes a private moment for the Unsaid, held to their ear as they listen to an unshared conversation. The Unsaid chose what to say or not say into the radio, perhaps asking for suggestions from the group of what to do, but not bound by the other members. Their characters role within the group was not one depended on in order for the journey through the exhibition to function. The two way radio was a link to the outside, as well as a link to the second group. A discovery perhaps more sharply felt by the Unsaid more than any other member, when they found out who they had been speaking to. This link between groups was reliant on the interactions between the Unsaid and further changed the experience of each group. Groups which engaged with the two way radio in conversation, had a very different experience to a silent group, or even a group which asks another, which does not respond. The main question I am referring to here is, "Is anyone there?" This question could be the beginning of a narrative created and directed by the Unsaid, discovering, engaging and conversing with strangers. Or the question could be the eerie, strange noise, echoing without response into the encompassing dark space.





The Self's camera was also a tool that was not depended on, but did change the experiences of the groups in different ways. For some groups, the camera was an abrupt interruption as it flashed in the dark, resulting in uncomfortable photographs of half closed eyes and shielded hands. I suspect some Selves felt uneasy about taking photographs, choosing to rather abstain and be polite, taking a few photos at more private moments, capturing the artworks, elbows, the back of heads, roofs, floors and corners. The camera was also often used to break the fourth wall, looking for hidden or invisible cracks in the structure of the exhibition, such as a benign tissue left by some performer on a windowsill. On the whole however, it is evident that many Selves were unhindered by polite or shy protocols. Groups engaged with the Self and chose to create group photos, some members suggested photo opportunities and others joined in on half thumbed selfies. It also became a kind of guestbook, in which groups were able to leave messages for the artist. A group even switched to film, and began to have a conversation with the camera. However, unbeknown to them, the camera was unable to record sound, and resulted in a blurry silent movie of red figures speaking in the dark. Once again, the meaning that arose out of the personal experience of the participants, is quite literally beyond my grasp and there's a wall - in this case - silence, between me and them. These interactions were all dependant on the nature of the group, their playfulness or seriousness and their choice in how to respond meant that every group had a different but shared experience.





As people travelled through the exhibition, they would share their discoveries with “oh, look at this” or “come over here”. As one member of a group stopped to investigate something, they often attracted the curious attention of the rest. People were brought together in this way, throughout the experience. For example, the engagement between the mirrored words and the different groups often resulted in a game of spot and speak. People did not silently construct the words, but voweled them out as they read them, and repeated the words which others spoke. One person would try to translate the words, the next would correct her and together they created a chorus of incomplete and jumbled words. Once the group realised the use of the Others mirror, they all peered in to translate the words and the sentence was slowly sung out loud as the words were found in reflection.

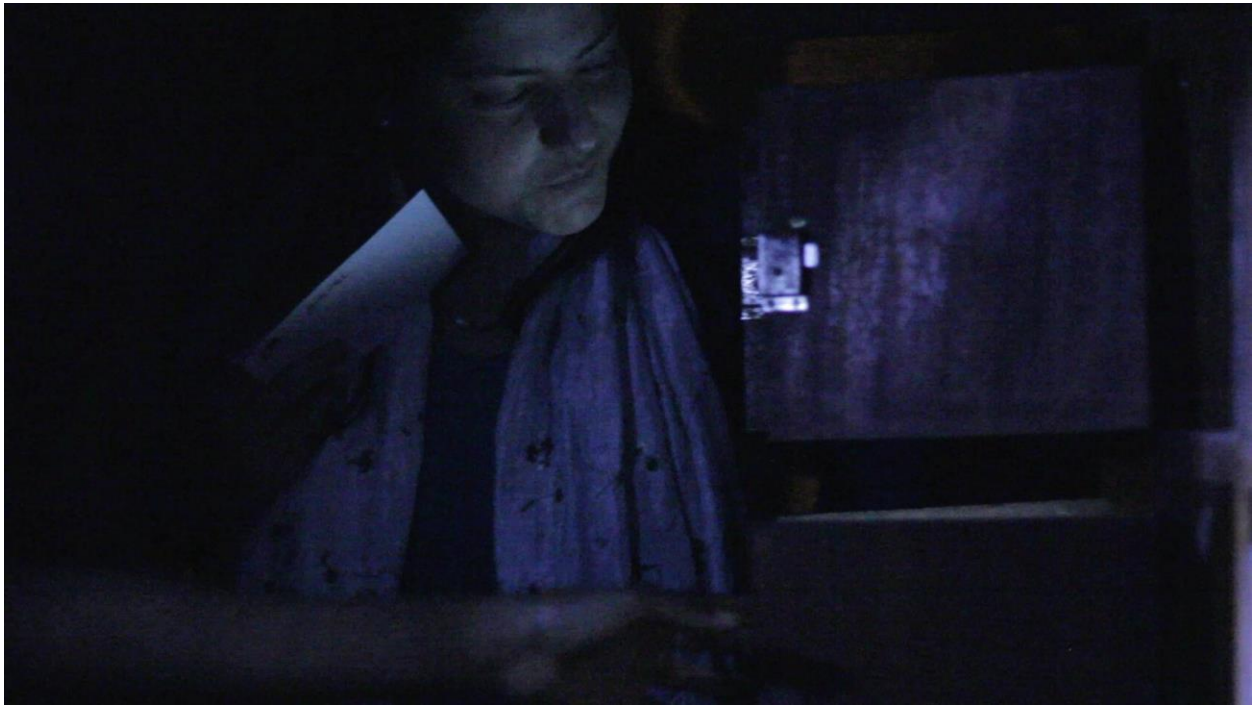




The Bus installation was the silent climax of the experience. When people arrived into this space, they became still and quiet, at least for as long as it took for them to recognise a familiar person reflected in the windows of one of the passengers. The roar of the engines, the movement the animation, its scope - wide across a stage rather than in a room to be transgressed - all seemed to change the way this installation was experienced. People quickly became the passive bystanders, privately experiencing the work up until the moment they began to notice themselves. When this occurred, the group once again engaged with one another. In one group, a participator noticed someone standing there in the window. The whole group moved to try see the figure themselves. However, since the group moved, the figure was no longer reflected in that window. The group soon realised that it was they who were being reflected and they began to move and shift with the bus, discussing what they saw and photographing it, sharing in the dance to find their own image.



While the bus may have began as silent and private, the post boxes were experienced more conversationally. It was an intimate moment shared, just as the content of the boxes, were intimate photographs found and seen. The group huddled together, as the Unseen used her key to unlock each box. When the group came across a film, they needed to bend down together or shift and lean on one another in order to peer into the box and see the film. When they came across the photographs, the groups would usually look through each photo individually. One person would hold the photo, while the Watcher would light it up. This meant that the group had to come in close, look over shoulders, and surround each other in order to see the photos. The photos themselves became stories to be commented on and were potential lookalikes to someone in the group. This installation could not easily be experienced with distance and required the physical intimacy of the group members entering each others space. This moment emphasises participants awareness of each others space and point of perspective, while also encouraging playful conversation and discovery within the group.



These group dynamics and shared moments were the lifeblood of the exhibition. Each group's rules for movement and engagement, were created by the people in the group. How they moved through the space, how they chose to use the objects and how they shared discoveries, all changed the way the exhibition was experienced. Each group had their own instigators, their own leaders, followers and wanderers: characters which were created by the groups themselves. These subtle engagements joined the dots between the more physical artworks, the space and the people in that space, and made the experience whole.