

Making the Obscene Seen: Performance, Research and the Autoethnographical Drift.

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The etymology of “obscene” is off scene, out of sight. The performer’s self has likewise been historically hidden, camouflaged in borrowed cloaks and the representation of other, just as the researcher’s self has traditionally been excised from published study, limited to the idea of observation from a distance; as though this act of disentanglement would somehow result in objectivity, as though “good research” could only take place when the researcher stays firmly outside the frame. Essentially, the researcher’s position has been regarded as neither interesting nor important, with the main schools of thought being that one’s research should echo that of a dispassionate observer, of an articulate everyman grounding findings within a coolly coherent body of sustained theoretical prose. As an alternative to this, autoethnography functions as a pedagogic and creative tool for focusing attention on the inevitability and indeed the *usefulness* of subject positions. Its concern is also with acknowledging the inevitable overlaps between the maker and the made and with a cautious relationship with truth. This caution is not something we need take as suspect. On the contrary, it stems from recognition that truth is simply the opinion that has been spoken by the loudest voices and that any “truth” is a half-truth at best.

In this shifting away from even the idea of belief in an external, discernible truth and towards a continuum that embraces doubt as its ever-central concern, autoethnography embraces the tentative and the open-to-revision, the process rather than product-driven and the interface between practitioners, practices, and people. This paper will argue that autoethnographical research and autobiographical performance are prime cultural agents in the interrogation and dissolution of assumed binaries between the watcher and the watched and the maker and the made. In its implicit acknowledgement that all observation is participant observation—because all observation is participatory and involving—and through its increased commitment to the use of the first-person pronoun in ways that locate the researcher/performer as the subject/object of the work, autoethnography has emerged as one of the very

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few postmodern conceits with something genuine to say about the ways in which art and research are moving forward into practices that are new and germane.

Our interest in staging the obscene, in making the once hidden visible is evidenced in art, live performance, and the mediatized theatre events of television, video, and film. The most public and overt of these, reality television, with its UK/Endemol flagship show *Big Brother*, exists and indeed thrives on exposing to mass spectatorship the banalities of life that were hitherto kept safe from view: the sleeping, snoring bodies, interspersed with 3 a.m. conversations, out-pausing Pinter and taking the nothing happens twice of Beckett's *Godot* to the dread end-point where nothing happens nightly. We can say that reality television participants present a performatized presence, without creating an automatically performatized "other", and this is important. Notwithstanding the occasional histrionics that come with playing to the ever-desired, never-absent camera, contestants are *being themselves*, albeit in ways that stretch Goffman's notions of self-as-construct to near snapping point.

Staging the ordinary comprises a challenge to the Barthesian ideal of the spectator/reader as someone who is "without history, biography, psychology; he is simply that *someone* who holds together in a single field all the traces by which the written field is constituted."¹ With a show such as *Big Brother* the viewer's history, biography, and psychology are central to the constitution of the work and central to its completion. In a Derridaean sense, we can argue that it is the readers and spectators who literally *make sense* of the work they encounter, rather than that sense being placed there by the writer.² Without some sense of being *simpatico* to the work, viewers/spectators can only function like non-believers at a religious service, observing what takes place before them without the sense of engagement that the work will generally require. This is a given of almost all programming: a television soap opera set in one of America's southern states, for example, will attract its strongest and most loyal audience from those who can empathize most clearly with its characters and locale. With *Big Brother*, however, where action is replaced by inertia, the viewer is not so much invited to understand what it is that is happening as to buy into the idea that something of interest is happening at all. Any observational analysis of the programme will reveal much more about the student than the studied. In many ways it was ever thus.

The body-in-performance strives for articulation through a type of exhibition . . . even when this is the exhibition of absence. The body strives for difference, even when this distinction is made manifest via a re-framing of the humdrum and the everyday. And this is what *Big Brother* provides. In giving us an extended snapshot of celebrity's twenty-first-century self-determination, the programme lays down an archive of its time that is as accurate as any we could imagine. And this is in part about empowerment. Believing themselves to be disempowered and disenfranchised by a society that seemingly values conservative maturity over the

excessive indulgences of youth, members of the show's core audience revel in the temporary importance of a group of televised kindred spirits. Recycling Warhol's dictum that everyone would be famous for fifteen minutes has become the truism of our time, the cliché of choice for a generation. Nevertheless, whether death-knell or celebration, his words are ringing true for all to hear.

Jo Bonney has described contemporary culture as the era of the self, a "product and reflection of a century that has given rise to the hedonism of the twenties, the radical individualism and activism of the sixties and the so-called 'me decade' of the eighties."³ For Bonney, "The nineties finally made room for the previously marginalized, diverse voices of this society, and the solo (performance) form has tracked these developments."⁴ Bonney is speaking here about live performance, and it is important to remember that the mass populism of reality television has its roots firmly in the esoteric practices of those twentieth-century live artists and performers whose work sought to erode the barriers between life and art in the same ways that Duchamp & Co. collapsed distinctions between object and *object d'art*, between the ordinariness of the item and the extraordinary transformations wrought by frame and relocation.

On December 31st 1999, on his forty-ninth birthday, Tehching Hsieh concluded a thirteen-year performance that was never presented to the public. Like his April-April *One Year Performance* of 1980-81, all that the art "contained" was the body of the artist. Our trust in the artist's integrity is what separates art from artifice: not a suspension of disbelief on our part so much as an act of ongoing belief. And what we believe in is that the work we are seeing (or not seeing) is absolutely not recreational. Performance takes on the significance of religion or politics, inasmuch as it is always with us, as work that provides sustenance, rather than being something one dips in and out of. In Cocteau's view, shared by Artaud, shared by Grotowski, shared by Beck, art engaged in fully is not so much a pastime as a priesthood.⁵ It becomes logical, therefore, that life and art, like the self and other, become blurred. Blurred and also interrogated. If art is part of one's being (of one's self) what is more logical than the self being part of one's art? So, Stanislavski makes art his life's work, as Artaud makes his life's work art. That is why we tend to give the benefit of the doubt to those radical practitioners and practices that from time to time test both our preconceptions and our patience. We do so because we have faith in their faith and belief in their belief. Because what it is that makes these artists radical is not their applaudable abilities, so much as their asking of one simple question: What can I do with performance? Simple as the question is, the responses are complex and confusing, cutting as they do to the heart of our contemporary uncertainties as to the boundary and purpose of this most immediate of all arts.

The body is ubiquitous: we each have one; and also unique: the shell of self we show the world. Body art tends towards the presentational rather than the representational. In this, the performer is likely to function as both story and

character—as subject and object. The performer positions herself as object since she is conscious of the processes in which she is involved. This is a tendency, not a rule. The things that distinguish body art, or live art, or performance art from theatre are tendencies, drifts, perceptions

Every space is a potential art space, every action a potential event, and this disturbs our conventional understanding of the distinctions between “theatre” and “life” and spectatorship and observation. When a Ukrainian man climbed into a lions’ enclosure at a zoo in Kiev on June 4th 2006, shouting “God will save me”, before removing his shoes and subsequently being mauled to death, the people witnessing this act were what? Spectators? Observers? Who can say with any authority? It is clear that the act of faith (misguided though it plainly was) required an audience of sorts, but what sort of audience? Observation generally assumes a calm indifference, as opposed to spectatorship’s more passionate engagement, but as we shall see these edges blur and fuse like all other elements of performance. Like it or not and understand it or not, we watch Stelarc’s hooked-up body hanging overhead in the same way we watch a jumper on a car-park roof, a high-wire act without a net or a shoeless Christian throwing himself to the lions. We watch with a morbid fascination: part fear, part hope, part horror.

In *Essays on the Blurring of Art & Life*, Allan Kaprow offered a distinction between “artlike art” and “lifelike art.”⁶ For Kaprow, lifelike art rarely fits within traditional ideas as to what art is: lifelike art can be about moving furniture around a house, dressing or undressing, arranging plants in a garden or merely leaning against a wall. In the 1960s Kaprow wrote “once the task of the artist was to make good art; now it is to avoid making art of any kind.”⁷ In the 1990s he said “The experimental artist of today is the un-artist.”⁸ For Kaprow—consistently—the point of any art is to discover art where nobody knew that it was. This is not dissimilar to Duchamp’s statement that art is what happens when an object is taken out of context and given a new thought,⁹ and it has echoes in Oliviero Toscani’s belief that whilst “Any idiot can see the beauty in something beautiful . . . The thing is to see beauty elsewhere. There is beauty everywhere if you are an artist.”¹⁰ Richard Foreman has argued that anything, even a “jar rolling across the stage” could be afforded the status of “theatre.”¹¹ Performance is about seeing something differently . . . and this can have as much to do with the (autoethnographical) gaze as with that which is gazed upon. Kaprow speaks of a student who was asked to do the stupidest thing he could think of, followed by the smartest. For the stupid act the student hung pickles to cook under electric lights, for the smartest he repeated the activity.¹² And so it goes.

The self is suggestive of autobiography, and we read a simplistic distinction between the actorly concealment of self behind character and the performative revelation of self through the work. As it is elsewhere, things here are not as simple as they seem. Autobiography, or auto-performance, does more than provide artists with the opportunity to make themselves subjects to be seen by spectators; it allows

them to see themselves in the process of being seen. Lacan described a state wherein “the visible me is determined by the look that is outside me.”¹³ For Barthes “You are the only one who can never see yourself except as an image; you can never see your eyes unless they are dulled by the gaze they rest upon the mirror or the lens.”¹⁴ A questioning of self through self’s construction. The self as subject does not, we see, amount to the self as given.

Mary Warnock reminds us that the idea of a person is not scientific. Rather, it is what she refers to as a “superficial concept.”¹⁵ The word “person” is suggestive of constancy, inasmuch as one might assume a binding reference to the past, so that I remain the same *person* I ever was regardless of changes in situation. One’s identity is constructed from labels in ways that one’s person is not. For Sartre, self is defined by memory: “The past is characterized as the past of something or somebody; one *has* a past.”¹⁶ In this context, the self’s ability to reflect on one’s past allows for the possibility of determining what it is that one will become. Conversely, we can say that a postmodern take on the narrative past suggests that it has lost a great deal of its authenticating power. We can go so far as to say, in fact, that the narrative of one’s past has inauthenticity as its defining feature. Autobiographical performances are ultimately authorized fictions. All that we can know as authentic is the here and now, and no art form trades on the here and now like performance. The self that was once kept off scene, rendered important only inasmuch as it was possessed of the capacity to dress itself in a costumier’s robes in front of paying spectators, has assumed centre stage in all of its low-rent mediocrity. And why should it not? Stage work has moved from the Prince of Denmark to Willy Loman, from the machinations and procrastinations of the rich and famous to the day-by-day drudgery of the anonymous and the ordinary, and what could be more vital in its very ordinariness than one’s own self?

That we continue to be as fascinated as we are with autobiographical performance, to the extent where the form has “acquired a position of unprecedented importance over the past thirty years” is, if we are to agree with Philippe Lejeune, because the work relies for its effectiveness upon a unique pact between performers and spectators.¹⁷ “When we sign on to this pact we expect to be told the truth about someone’s life, we believe that the people we encounter are *real*, that they live outside the text and go to the bank and grocery store as we do, and we bring this expectation to autobiography . . . *despite our realization that we are engaged with art, not life.*”¹⁸

Truth in art has always had a doubled status. On the one hand we crave the certainty that the signature and the artwork amount to a truth; on the other we accept that art is (for the most part) no more than a representation of the external “truth” it depicts. And, for the most part, this seems reasonable enough. Clive Bell insisted that art should have nothing to do with life. His contemporary Edward Bullough wrote in 1912 that “Explicit references to organic affections, to the material existence of

the body, especially to sexual matters, lie normally below the Distance-limit, and can be touched on by Art only with special precautions.”¹⁹ At these statements a large part of Euro-American society breathed a sigh of collective relief that all was in order. Everyone, however, did not share Bell and Bullough’s views. At the same time as they were making their claims for art’s lofty purpose Marinetti was publishing his Manifesto of Futurism, the Dadaists were waiting in the wings and Duchamp was exhibiting his urinal as a Readymade. The First World War was about to turn the wrath of machinery on its inventors and art was set to sacrifice its sense of certainty.

We can say that the performing of oneself is a feature of performance, even something central to it, whereas the submergence of self into character is a defining trait of acting, a phenomenon which Auslander describes as “The blending of real and fabricated personae and situations that occur when performance personae assume the same functions as ‘real.’”²⁰ We can also say that—as theatre is the place for the well-told lie—so performance may now be the place for revelations of truth. This is a large claim . . . it calls for questions of the nature (and possibility) of truth itself. What is meant by the term, in this context, is that body art and performance allow for the possibility of performers revealing themselves without the consequences such “truths” would lead to in their daily lives. Performers, no less than the rest of us, can tell secrets to strangers precisely because it doesn’t really matter what those strangers think.

It is in the nature of the work that we—those strangers who watch—are always kept slightly off our guard, always a little uneasy, unsure and undecided. In this sense, being undecided about what to call works of performance emerges as a logical response. Deirdre Heddon reminds us that “Performers have the ability to move in and out of classifications”²¹ and that the categorising of genres requires “boundaries, and boundaries are constructions which create and depend on both the inside and outside to have either. The boundary, though, is a point of bleeding, a potential seepage of one into the other. Boundaries are neither permanent nor immutable, but are subject to social, historical, political and economic forces.”²² In the introductory notes to *Theatre Praxis* Christopher McCullough is happy to use the seemingly separate terms “Drama” (to do) and “Theatre” (to see) loosely and to regard them as eminently flexible. “As long as we are aware of the interchangeable aspects of the two terms through common usage I see no point in labouring precise definitions.”²³ Marvin Carlson’s assertion that “performance is an essentially contested concept” further reinforces the idea that work is no longer easily pinned down into discrete and watertight categories.²⁴

The relationship between autobiography, autoethnography and performance is one that is rarely mediated by overt difference. The roles of writer, director and performer may be radically diverse activities, but with autobiographical performance they are likely to be adopted by the same person. And there is a clear

logic to this. A disempowered subject seeking a platform for her or his voice does not necessarily want that voice diluted by difference: be this through the macro of gender, race, sexuality, nationality or culture, or the micro that comes with subtle variations. Far from remaining in the domain of the rich and famous, autobiography has been developed into the chosen form for members of minority and marginalized groups. Furthermore, the deployment of autobiography into performance has often incorporated complex critiques of identity construction, alongside evidence of the performative “self”.

The here and now suggests solidity, two givens that join at the hip to make performance, but borders are crossed and dismantled in performance as often as they are reinforced, and the here-and-nowness of performance can be employed as a means of exploring transience and liminality. The work of a number of performance artists trades on a destabilisation of culturally stereotyped expectations, often by adopting an exaggerated sense of “otherness” within the work. Accordingly, what we see when we watch work is often no more than our own mirrored expectations and the labels we use to describe it say much about our own spectatorial desires and fears.

Spalding Gray’s celebrated monologues, such as *Swimming to Cambodia* and *Monster in a Box* traded on the spectatorial and oftentimes critical misnomer that what was being participated in was an intimate and to some eyes *honest* encounter between the watchers and the watched. Gray’s carefully crafted texts are a type of heightened, poeticized faux-diary of the writer’s own experiences, filtered through his assiduously acted East-Coast neurosis. And the work was *acted*, rehearsed, refined and played out (minimally) to maximum effect. Gray’s performance writing is at once continuous and fractured, discrete and incremental, revealing the changes in Gray’s life at the same time as it takes as its subject the subject of self. Richard Coe believes that if the writer’s self is to be made subject then it needs to be “transmuted into something durably significant, it needs to possess a vitality and originality which is very far from common; and it needs further to be spurred on by the imperious urge to impart a message or impart a truth which may not be allowed to vanish, or else by a dose of vanity so strong that never, for one instant, can the author doubt that his own existence, in all its intimate and unmomentous detail, is supremely meaningful to the world at large.”²⁵ For Susan Sontag, the diary, or journal, provides a means of *creating* a self as well as *expressing* one, of not simply recording an actual, daily life so much as offering an alternative to it.²⁶

Diary-like though it may at first appear, Gray’s writing differs inasmuch as diarists tend to write in the moment, without foresight. Gray’s texts, whilst often utilising the present tense are written, reflected upon and edited after the event, with the description of events having a more complex relationship with that which might or might not have occurred than Gray’s delivery would lead us to assume.

Nothing that is framed by or as performance can ever speak for itself, and yet theatre's greatest conjuring trick has been to seduce us away from this fact.

Gray's life experiences were the stimulus for his writings, but professional performance was the peg on which they hung, and his work was always tailored towards this end. Autobiographical performance functions around the "I" on the page and the "I" on the stage: one is a paper construct, the other is personal, and neither can be true. The forms deny truthful communication precisely because their methods are so innately artificial. We can read this in the light of the distinction Barthes made between the self who writes, the self who was and the self who is: Barthes's challenge to the popular idea of a stable, real and essential self reveals in its place a fabrication, a fictive truth.

In conversation with Bonnie Marranca, Gray wondered "Could I stop acting and what was it I actually did when I acted? Was I, in fact, acting all the time, and was my acting in the theatre the surface showing of that? Was my theatre acting a confession of my constant state of feeling my life as an act? . . . Now there was the new space between the timeless poetic me (the me in quotes, the self as poem) and the real-time self in the world (the time-bound, mortal self; the self as prose). The ongoing "play" became a play about theatrical transcendence."²⁷ Gray's musings here are important to our understanding of the role of self and art, because, as Gray acknowledged, his work was about the space between a knowingly constructed performance self and a "real time" self which, Goffman, notwithstanding, is less poetically made. In fact, Goffman was always careful to stress that we put on acts, *whether we are aware that we are doing this or not*, and it is this phenomenon of playing roles without any knowledge of doing so that distinguishes the self in (performance) quotes from the self or selves of one's daily life. What we saw with Gray's work was the representation of experiences, offered up to us in ways that invited empathy, engagement and *belief* at the same time as we were never quite sure about what the performance persona revealed or obscured. Susan Bennett reiterates this when she writes that "his performance work is created out of what Gray would have the audience see as his everyday life, the quotidian experiences that make up his autobiography."²⁸ In constructing his texts for performance Gray first relied on recollection, trusting to his memory of events. These memories were spoken onto tape and then, before his words were transcribed, Gray would, as he described it, "listen to a tape of what I said and wonder how I can make it a little more dramatic and funny by juxtaposing a little hyperbole here and play with it a little bit there."²⁹

Derrida felt that words were to be drawn from the body like blood from a syringe; Harold Pinter says that words are the things we deploy to cover our nakedness. Words and the body: words and the body that bleeds. Unlike the camera on which Chris Burden's *Shoot* was recorded and unlike the words we use to describe it, the bullet hole that remains in his arm provides its own testament

and the text that abides is not written in ink. As a form that deals with the flesh of the seen, performance knows that the bodies it displays function as the limits of possibility. The body as marked, the body as “other”, the body as our most familiar and most strange. The obscene body placed centre-stage subverts the very form that frames it, forcing us into a relationship with the forbidden and the unspoken, with the ordinariness of everyday behaviour and the extraordinary focus that comes with performance.

The body and the self are also centre stage in research. If ethnography, broken into its two constituent elements, is *ethno*: people and *graphy*: writing (hence *autograph*) . . . a trying to make sense of cultural groupings, then autoethnography is a trying to make sense of our activity of trying to make sense. It is an innately heuristic and performative activity, wherein one’s learning to learn becomes as important as one’s understanding of subject. The subject of the research may in fact be the subject of self; or, with more than a(nother) nod to Goffman, the self-as-subject.

In its incorporation of the researcher’s own thoughts, feelings and emotions into the study autoethnography raises questions as to the legitimacy of the “I” in writing, just as autobiographical performance asks questions of the “I” in the act. The issue of how centrally one chooses to locate one’s self in research is misleading: the self that observes is also always looked upon, and not least by the researcher. As a fundamentally relational activity ethnography offers nothing if it does not offer writing as a form and process of discovery, as something active rather than passive, as an activity through which we begin learn what it is that we think we might know. And this often results in studies which are written as stories rather than being presented as more clinical written reports. This is key inasmuch as research stories, like performance, seek almost always to elicit some kind of emotional response in the listener/reader/spectator.

It is key also in that stories, of course, are not often seen as the stuff of research papers, and in this sense research and performance can seem to split off into separate worlds. What matters most, and most often, are the claims made by authors, alongside place and purpose of publication and one’s target audience, and in this regard research papers and performance re-join. Just as one defining feature of an academic paper is its rigorous referencing of other sources, and another is the journal, publishing house or conference through which it makes itself known, disseminating its findings to a group of peers, so performance is given a sub-label not least through the seeming pedigree of performer and spectator, alongside the particular sanctioning of the work by its venue. Autoethnography then might differ from its more casual cousin autobiography through little more than a shared perception based on features which, whilst subverted, are still recognisably *academic*. In the same way, performance art is given that label for a variety of reasons, none of which make any *a priori* assumption as to quality. Despite its marginalisation

by certain scholars, autoethnography is no more a device for avoiding a rigorous engagement with theory than autobiographical performance is a means of avoiding the difficulties of representation: theory is embedded in ethnography to the same extent that (re)presentation is a given of performance and writing one's self into the work does not mean that all else of value is written out.

In prioritising "I" the work does much to turn everyone involved, presenters, readers and spectators alike away from "us and them" into "we". That's a large claim to make and like all claims it looms larger still in print. But we can look to feminism for a type of confirmation. We know that feminism did much to push autobiographical performance into something known if not quite common through the stress it places on making particular starting points and experiences a valid and vital part of one's work: and that feminism, through self-evident and embodied connections between the artist and the art has had a large part to play in the international drift towards autobiographical writing *per se*. We know, for example, that from the middle of the 20th century feminists abandoned any belief in the idea of the genderless mind, recognising instead that imagination is unable to avoid conscious/unconscious impositions of gender. Feminism did much to propel those studies into culture-determination which stress the impossibility of separating one's thought processes from the "self" that has been positioned socially, sexually, and historically. Images, readings and representations of women that did not acknowledge the stereotypical assumptions that were implicit in seemingly non-gendered perspectives were exposed through feminism to a new scrutiny: one that would no longer accept the divisive, unequal and oppressive as the objectively arrived at norm. The female experience, then, began to take on positive affirmations. The Female Aesthetic arose—expressing a unique female consciousness and a feminine tradition in literature—as it celebrated an intuitive female approach in the interpretation of women's texts.

Art, like feminism, has always been about empowerment. Disempowered by the impositions of an adult world our children play with dolls: items smaller, weaker and more vulnerable than themselves, things that can be manoeuvred and manipulated. And so as adults we opt for art that allows us to speak: to say who and what we are; to make ourselves visible in the world, even if only for the time it takes to aestheticize and articulate our case to a darkened auditoria. The charges of indulgence may pour in but there is nothing more political than this and no form more pertinent than performance. According to Kristen Langellier, the strength of performance is in its capacity for immediacy and passion, in its evocation of empathy through the performers' and spectators' bodily presence as they share a common space.³⁰ It is through this sharing that transgression occurs, as personal stories disturb, disrupt and displace both normative narratives and assumptions as to subject. In the same way that visual art is no longer satisfied with the representation of landscapes and still lives, so performance is no longer the prime domain of

the well-made play. In its engagement with structurally complex frameworks of representation, recall and relocation and in its recognition that no all-encompassing notions of identity are able to exist the peculiar circularity of memory is brought into abrasive contact with the supposed linearity of performance as a time-based durational form. It is this abrasion that results in Carlson's notion of performance as a "dangerous game" and also as a "double agent," as a form that is at once private and public, intimate and exposed, complicit and critical.³¹

Performance, like research, like learning, like life, is a striving to appreciate, create and articulate particular experiences. "Truth"—or what passes for truth—might well be an aim but it is never a realisation and validity is ultimately as much a question of context as content; lived experiences, in their re-telling, become stories of the past and the fact that memory is only ever an act of the present means that everything becomes sullied by time. We can remember as best we can without ever believing that our memories of events are to be trusted, which is why forms that show doubt and uncertainty are the most honest we can find. There are (if we dare use the term without recourse to inverted commas) truths of the past and truths of the now, but neither one of these travels well.

Despite the deconstructionist ravages of postmodernism, narrative remains the way that we disseminate the increasing complexities of life through the expanding fluidity of language. The inclusivity of autoethnography allows for a maximisation of experience, offering multiple and immersive readings from a viewpoint that acknowledges the intrinsically subjective nature of observation, analysis and recall, allowing for the fact that stories are never merely told by the teller. Rather, they are invented and created, fashioned and made, uttered always and often unwittingly in the image of the speaker: and how we are expected to tell our stories has massive import on our ways of telling. The expectations and demands of spectators and readers play a large part in determining the choices we make (or think we make) as tellers. As the once provocative too soon turns into prescription and conventions quickly become conventional we do well to remember that there are no binaries between the teller and the tale, the performer and the role, the researched and the researcher.

There are precious few, also, between the spectator and the spectacle. As spectators we project our own characteristic and character-driven fantasies onto the narratives we watch. These fantasies are more often than not unconscious wishes, which we are unable to bring to easy fruition in our daily lives. In this way the wishes and desires that we perceive as belonging to on-stage, on-screen and on-page characters are primarily the result of spectatorial projections. From this point on our unconscious desires determine our conceptions, transforming a series of idiosyncratic fantasies into that which we choose to call "understanding the text". The phenomenon we refer to as scholarly reading is no different in kind to any other: the scholarly elements, such as they are, stem from the manner of articulation and

the ease with which one is able to cross-reference opinions, lending validity and gravitas to the otherwise commonplace. Ethnography, of course, is a spectatorial act. We watch, we note and we make sense. And like all spectators we have no choice but to alter and construct as we go. Acknowledging one's own subjectivity isn't an add-on so much as a stripping away of the subterfuge that comes whenever we seek to present as factual that which is eight parts fantasy fulfilment.

Through notions of performative and inscribed space as liminal sites, where the personal is in endless dialogue with the public, autoethnography exists to re-acquaint us with that which art always knew and academia too often forgets. In holding up its mirror something of the performer's nature is always also captured in the frame. If it is true that we know the artist by the art it is no less the case that we know the art a little better when we add flesh to the signature at bottom right of the canvas. Who, after all, would not choose to know the hand that writes and the I that sees?

Notes

1. Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, ed. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977) 148.
2. Jacques Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1978).
3. Jo Bonney *Extreme Exposures: An Anthology of Solo Performance Texts from the Twentieth Century* (New York: Theater Communications Group, 2000) xiv.
4. xiv.
5. Jean Cocteau, "On Art," *New York Times* 8 September 1957: 57.
6. Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California P, 1993) 104.
7. 110.
8. 111.
9. Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1997) 176.
10. Ritsaert ten Cate, *Man Looking for Words* (Amsterdam: Theater Instituut Nederland, 1996) 78.
11. Erik MacDonald, *Theatre at the Margins* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1993) 17.
12. Kaprow 110.
13. Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1996) 113.
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