The Therapeutic Real

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MA Photography

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Fig. 1

INTRODUCTION

The Therapeutic Real

Reverend Death is Jon Ronson's documentary about a Unitarian Universalist minister and assisted suicide activist, George Exoo. The film trails a seemingly "maverick" and "libertarian" individual over a number of years, revealing his complex relationship with death. Exoo, who has a very "hands on" approach and claims to have helped kill over a hundred people, begins to blur the line between carer and predator. There is further confusion when a taped phone call materializes of Exoo in conversation with a woman, persuading her to drink poison during a remote suicide. Towards the end of the call his demeanour changes, and he seems to experience something bordering orgasm, which arguably shows him deriving sexual pleasure from someone dying. The footage is subsequently shown to Dr Richard Badcock, the case psychologist for Harold Shipman, who declares that "George is drifting into amorality, he has lost his moral compass. He's not just staring at the abyss, he's in serious danger of falling into it." In a strange turn of events, Exoo surprisingly divulges that the tape was in fact a hoax staged to demonstrate the procedure, but the decision undermines his integrity. Badcock is presented with the confession, yet his opinion does not change, revealing that although it was faked, an element of truth exists. The procedure may have been a simulation, but because it was based upon past actions interlaced with fantasy, he was reliving the experience of killing. At this point, re-enactment and reality collapse, they combine to form an inseparable and fleeting moment. The body language and facial expressions at the point of 'orgasm' reveal a truth that is impossible to hide, that Exoo feels pleasure when participating in the act of death, and he is reliving a moment as if it was happening.

JR: You said it, that it showed him to be sexually aroused, but if he faked it then does it still hold up?

RB: Yes, I wouldn't change that part of the comment; I think it makes him feel good all over.

JR: Even though he was talking to a dial tone?

RB: Yes, you know there's an element of fantasy in this, it doesn't matter who he's talking to really, it's the activity that generates it's own satisfaction as it were[1]

1 Quotations in this section are all drawn from Jon Ronson, "Reverend Death." Channel 4, 100:00. May 19, 2008.

This obscure episode introduces an idea I have been considering, that through staging it is possible to create the 'real' (authentic). Staging, as referred to here, involves the use of people, for participants it feels as though it is real, and for viewers the response and reaction witnessed, appears authentic. This is not deception – making something appear real when it is not – it is about finding a way to make the participants forget about the staged environment, and experience emotions as though they were really happening. In *Reverend Death*, it occurs accidently and exists momentarily, indicating that, given the correct set of circumstances, it can appear.

2 Quotation and subsequent explanation drawn from Tate, "Jeff Wall: room guide, room 3," http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/jeff-wall/room-guide/jeff-wall-room-3 [accessed September 25, 2013]

Authenticity

The pursuit of authenticity within staged situations is nothing new, and has been a subject of debate within photography since its outset. Italian Neorealist cinema attempted to construct heightened realism through the use of non-actors, casting individuals to play themselves in order to draw upon direct personal experience, and Jeff Wall applied similar principles to his own work, transferring ideas from film to stills. His "cinematographic"[2] photograph *Mimic* (1983), appropriated a documentary aesthetic and explored how fleeting moments could be restaged, whilst preserving a sense of immediacy. The image was freed from the conventions of straight documentary photography, and presented a complex topic using a radically new approach. The artist recreated a racist gesture he had witnessed on a street in Vancouver, and, in doing so, performed an instant that was impossible to capture spontaneously.

The concept that staging can pave the way for truth is undoubtedly counterintuitive, but as David Campbell points out in his essay on the topic of theatricality within photojournalism, "staging is not the same as faking"[3]. He calls for greater transparency to uncover the constructedness of photography, in order to better understand the mechanisms used to tell stories. For him, staging does not imply that something is faked, it means it is being controlled for a specific purpose, so by uncovering the process one gains insight into reasons why an image exists.

3 Campbell, David. Thinking Images V.16: Osama Bin-Laden and the Pictorial Staging of Politics. http://www.david-campbell.org/2011/05/06/thinking-images-v-16-bin-laden-and-pictorial-staging-of-politics/#p4 [accessed July 6, 2013]

Re-enactments

Our experience of the world happens more and more through the navigation of media, "a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning".[4] Ideas are formed through the imagery presented to us, removing us from actual life experiences, adding another layer of distance that evokes a desire to experience the real, close up. Inke Arns attributes this less direct experience to problems with simulacra, leading to the social obsession with re-enactment, making a distinction between artistic re-enactments that "instruct and inform, or emancipate"[5] and other

4 Jean Baudrillard, Simulacra and Simulation, trans. Shelia Faria Glaser (Michigan Press, 1995), p. 79.

forms, which offer "immersion, personification and empathy"[6]. As we find out in the first chapter of *History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-Enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance:*

> Re-enactments repeat archived, historical events; they replace 'false' memories […] re-enactments make it possible to fully comprehend what the images mean through one's own physical experience and perception. By eliminating the distance between the historical event as represented by the media and the immediate present, between actors and audience, the re-enactment enables an experience of the past and present.[7]

In this example, the presumption is that actors perform the re-enactment, but what happens if people re-enact past events and memories they were actually part of, rather than trying to act out someone else's experience? What could the benefits of this be, how might this affect the real, would it be *more* real? Jeremy Deller touches upon these questions in his re-enactment of the National Union of Mineworkers strike of 1984, a symbolic struggle and dispute that lasted over a year. *The Battle of Orgreave*[8] was filmed by Mike Figgis, and involved over eight hundred people, many of them former miners, a few policemen and participants drawn from battle re-enactment groups. Located in a field close to the Orgreave coking plant, and finishing with a cavalry charge through the village, the work attempted to address the original imbalance in media coverage. Rather than basing the re-enactment on media footage, which was biased and mediated in favour of government policy, Deller overcame this problem by using testimonies from the individuals present at the strike. The outcome was that people involved in the original strike were able to relive the event, revisit old memories and reactive the past. This allowed space for fresh insights and new understandings, and led to what amounted to a rewriting of history due to the reinterpretation of the media portrayal.

Domenico Quaranta points out how artistic re-enactment is becoming increasingly popular, not just within mainstream culture but the arts as well[9]. Like staging, there are many reasons for re-enactment, but in some circumstances when simulation and staging is leant upon in a precise way, something unusual occurs. As Robert Blackson notes, "Re-enactment is distinctive in that it invites transformation through memory, theory, and history to generate unique and resonating results."[10] It is this "transformation", unique to re-enactment, that interests me; it promises something other types of straight staging cannot, and seems a key component in the search for new ways of connecting with the real. Images need purpose and often this is lacking within the staged, begging the question: what is the point? In the methodology used in the creation of tableaux such as Walls, the real doesn't rupture through because it doesn't truly exist. Apart

5 Inke Arns "History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance." Agora8 Contemporary art from Eastern Europe, http://www.agora8.org/reader/Arns_History_Will_Repeat.html [accessed Sept 18, 2013]

6 Arns, "History Will Repeat Itself: Strategies of Re-enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance."

7 Inke Arns History Will Repeat Itself:Stategies of Re-Enactment in Contemporary (Media) Art and Performance (Hartware MedienKunstVerien & KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2008), pp. 7-8.

8 The Battle of Orgreave, DVD, directed by Jeremy Deller. (2001; UK, ArtAngel, 2006)

9 Domenico Quaranta, "Re:Akt! Thing That Happen Twice," in Re:Akt! Reconstruction, Re-Enactment, Re-Reporting, eds. Antonio Caronia, Janez Janša, and Domenico Quaranta (fpeditions), p. 55.

from the artist who observed it, no one involved in the creation of the image has experience of the event being staged, so there is a distinct disconnection; what are we supposed to take away from this? In comparison to the episode with George Exoo, it is fake, using an approach that is too passive and falls short of isolating where the 'real' truly exists, succumbing to surface level realism without any depth.

10 Robert Blackson, "Once More. With Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture." Art Journal 66, no. 1 (2007): p. 29.

The Real

Possibly it is time to reconsider how we might find the 'real', the places in which it may reside and the ways to coax it into the realm of the visible. The following chapters will look towards filmic, and literary examples in search of a very specific type of realism only glimpsed at in Reverend Death, involving the use of repetition and re-enactment. Feeling increasingly drawn towards fiction and the idea that it can tell greater truths, I will be using the contemporary novel and filmic references in support of this idea. Realism within staged photography, I often feel, is ineffective, and more recently I have started to question the authenticity of work. The idea that a simulation can contain truth is fascinating as it opens up the possibility that staging could do the same; and if simulation can also appear real to the person participating then the real can exist in staged environments. Simulation, re-enactment and repetition all feed into this idea of staging, and somewhere in this complex mass must be a strategy for attaining greater realism. Lately I have been considering this crossover, and others, such as where fantasy, memory and trauma conjoin, and the possibility that these could be used to conjure the real from the staged. This area of interest I have called the Therapeutic Real, a terminology to begin to isolate and understand a kind of staging involving this psychological subject matter. The following chapters will investigate staging linked to the therapeutic, the point at which simulation can become real, and issues surrounding this topic. It is an exciting prospect, that something constructed could once again be spontaneous and feel real.

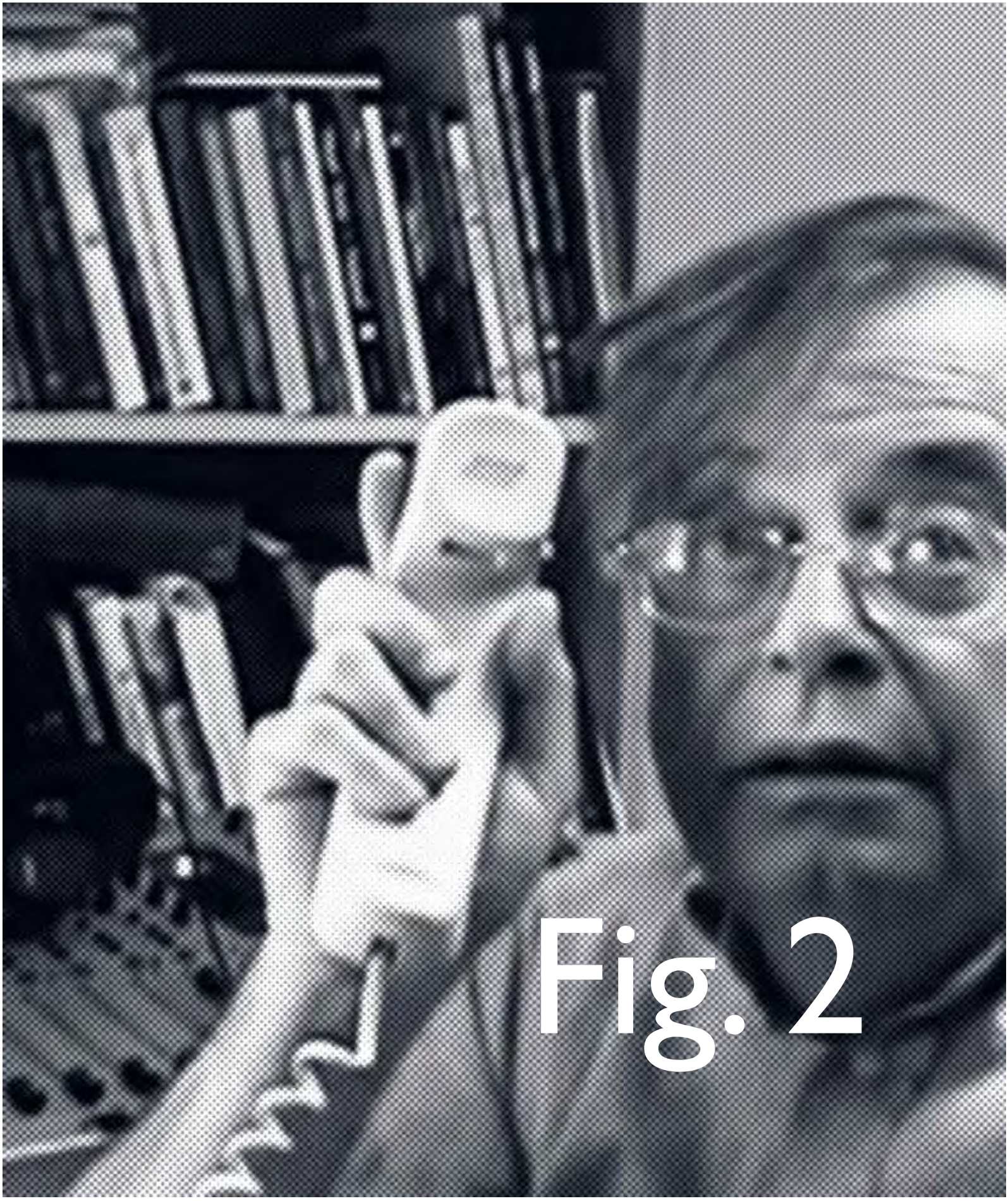
Fig. 2

CHAPTER ONE

Authenticity & Process

As part of the 2013 public lecture program at the Architectural Association, the Belgian artist David Claerbout hosted a talk shedding light on his practice that investigates temporality and phenomenology through digital and photographic means. Known for his large-scale video installations that explore the convergence point of still and moving images, he used the opportunity to showcase his impressive venture into CGI. The work in progress, the majority of which was still being rendered, sat alongside older video projects such as Bordeaux Piece (2004). Bordeaux Piece is an epic film lasting nearly fourteen hours, played against the backdrop of the articulation of the day, and described by the artist as a "projection pretending to be a tableau"[1]. Claerbout combines observations that draw upon his photographic and filmic interests into what emerges as contemplation on both light and time. Taking place in a house designed by contemporary architect Rem Koolhaas, the film develops in parallel with the diurnal progression of morning to night, with light and form dictating everything. Shot in real time, initially over a two-week period, the camerawork, dialogue, directing and sound adhere to the formal conventions of cinema, whilst the script is an unorthodox re-enactment of the same ten-minute scene, seventy times, over what appears to be a single day. In the talk, Claerbout outlined the plot that involves three main characters, a producer, his girlfriend and her lover (the son). He then displayed three-second extracts from the same section of each scene in order, to illustrate how Bordeaux Piece functioned, and further explained that many of the scenes (conceived as "radically sunny"[2]) had to be reshot for continuity reasons due to cloud. For a film about light this made perfect sense, but the intervention undermined an important part of the film: its authenticity. To create seamless transitions, scenes with light fluctuations had been replaced, which meant it was then impossible to observe an actor's chronological fatigue. The sequencing had been disrupted, and 'authenticity' within the film was affected by the subsequent editing decisions.

1 Searle, Adrain. "Adrian Searle Encounters…a Teacup Falling 70 Times in a 14 Hour Film." Guardian: Art and Design, June 1, 2009.

2 Claerbout, David. 2013. On David Claerbout. http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/VIDEO/lecture.php?ID=2046

Integrity

I attributed a similar inauthenticity to Eadweard Muybridge's *Animal Locomotion* (1878), originally commissioned as a scientific study, subsequently presented as such, but involving very unscientific methods. In the quest to freeze motion and deconstruct movement, Muybridge used multiple camera setups in formation, but the complexity of his arrangements caused technical difficulties. Richard Dorment explains how Muybridge occasionally re-shot photos within a sequence, or dropped movements from a sequence when a camera failed, adding that this "invalidated any pretence the photos might have had to scientific accuracy"[3]. The editing solutions mislead the viewer into thinking what they see is properly sequenced, and to conceal discrepancies between negatives, and maintain visual consistency, Muybridge used elaborate printing layouts as Marta Braun describes:

> Another creative solution he came up with for gaps in a series or an incomplete series was to make lateral and foreshortened views congruent on the page. He would replace a missing image by enlarging one image to fill the space of two, by printing one image in a series twice, by removing the central section of an image and abutting the remaining parts or by substituting a view of an empty backdrop taken from a viewpoint consistent with the rest of the series.[4]

Process

The editing decisions in both *Bordeaux Piece* and *Animal Locomotion* impacted the integrity of the artworks, and, in the pursuit of perfection, truth was lost, bringing up the question of how and why it might be important to retain (true) aspects of the way work is produced? This matter surfaces in an essay by Errol Morris, when, due to a lack of information regarding a photo, the integrity of a photographer and his work is brought into question because of missing information regarding its creation. Morris attempts to find the truth about Roger Fenton's famous Crimean war pictures,

3 Richard Dorment, "Eadweard Muybridge At Tate Britain," The Daily Telegraph: Art Reviews, September 6, 2010.

4 Marta Braun, Eadweard Muybridge (Critical Lives) (Reaktion Books Ltd, 2012), pp.199 - 207.

Valley of the Shadow of Death (1855), and embarks upon a journey prompted by doubts about Susan Sontag's ability to "[…] order the photographs in a hierarchy of authenticity based on what she imagined were Fenton's intentions."[5] Image analysis showed how poor research, and reliance upon both logic and psychology, could lead to incorrect assumptions. It highlighted people's willingness to accept claims of fakery rather than looking at data, and also revealed how the story behind the creation of photographic based imagery today carries considerable weight, and the nuances of how or why work is created plays an ever more important role. In *Making Space: Image Events in an Extreme States*,[6] Johanna Drucker compellingly argues for images that reveal their own making and allow for greater critical engagement. She denounces the traditional idea that documentary can make the invisible visible through shock tactics (de-familiarization), and instead proposes a radical new alternative (re-familiarization) in which process becomes more transparent, highlighting the importance of questioning and revealing the structure behind the production of imagery. This once again raises questions about process in relation to authenticity, why it matters if one decides to reveal this, and the

5 Errol Morris, Believing is Seeing: Observations on the Mysteries of Photography (Penguin Books, 2011), p. 53.

6 Drucker, Johanna. "Making Space: Image Events in an Extreme State." Cultural Politics 0 (2008): p. 38-39.

Fiction

Bordeaux Piece is admittedly a subjective example of inauthenticity, but importantly it led to my research about the real and made me doubt what was being presented. It got me thinking about authenticity, staging, fiction and reality; a topic recently discussed in Stranger than fiction: Should documentary photographers add fiction to reality[7]. The article looks at contemporary photographers taking inspiration from literary and cinematic narrative forms, and who blur these boundaries. Seeing their diverse strategies, one of which involved re-working historic events that were never documented and chronicling the results, reveals how the treatment of truth in respect to documentary is fast changing. New ways of expressing and presenting narrative are being sought which is opening up the subject area to new possibilities. The question of why people are turning to literature was not considered; could it be literature offers new models for handling the subject of authenticity and realism that photography has not yet explored?

7 Laurent, Olivier. "Stranger than fiction: Should documentary photographers add fiction to reality." British Journal of Photography (August, 2013.), http://www.bjp-online.com/british-journal-of-photography/feature/2285829/stranger-than-fiction-should-documentary-photographers-add-fiction-to-reality [accessed September 1, 2013]

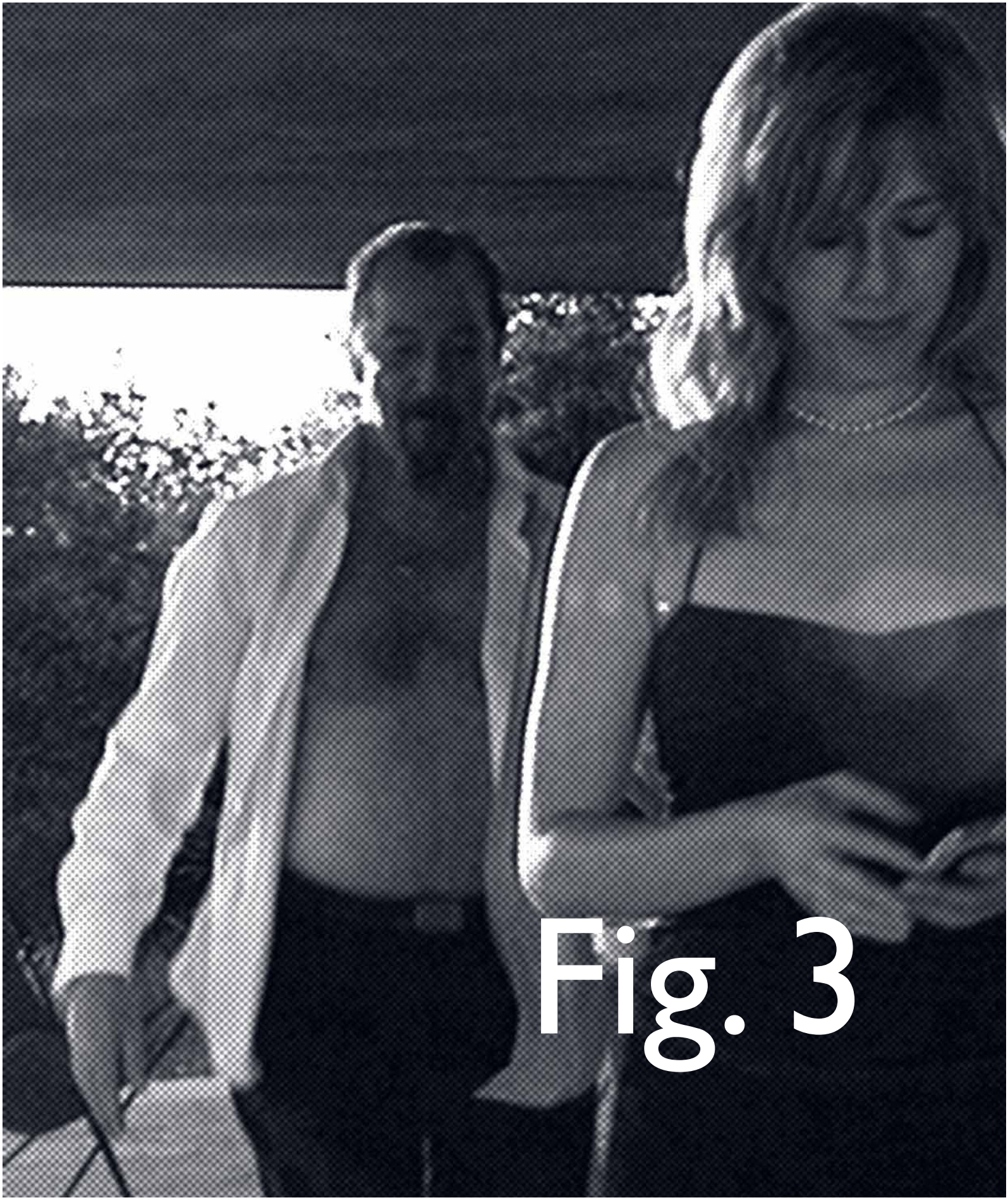

Fig. 3

CHAPTER TWO

The Heists

I was first introduced to Tom McCarthy's Remainder at Anne Hardy's book club, during her artist residency at Camden Arts Centre in 2011. It's a philosophical writing about logic, repetition and the metaphysical, structured around space, event, mediation and violence. Originally rejected by mainstream UK publishers, McCarthy formed the International Necronautical Society with philosopher Simon Critchley, their intention being to investigate the role of death in literature, art and culture. The INS holds live events, hearings, radio broadcasts and produces publications, overlaying art and literature. Remainder combines these areas of interest, and as McCarthy explains:

> I saw an opportunity […] through the humorous-but-serious environment of art: using galleries, magazines, institutions and so on to elaborate a network of associates, to create and extrapolate a structure that would start out as a fiction and become increasingly real.[1]

1 Tom McCarthy, "Tom McCarthy Interviewed By Kathryn Kuitenbrouwer," Book Ninja, http://bookninja.com/magazine/fall2007/mccarthy.htm [accessed April 3, 2013]

The nameless narrator of McCarthy's Remainder is recovering from a head trauma, resulting in a substantial financial settlement of £8,500,000. Whilst deep within the oblivion of coma, images of stadiums, cricket pitches and running tracks surface, and as memories flutter back there is the realization that a mental reordering has occurred. Insignificant sports events are now readily recounted in immense detail, and a deluge of diagrams, patterns, vectors, geometry and mathematics overwhelm both his thoughts and dreams. A gagging order, put in place by the bodies responsible, prohibits him from discussing the accident. From fragments of data leftover he divulges that "Technology. Parts, bits" falling from the sky are to blame. Doubting his mental ability to recollect,

all he is left with are vague images of an event he is unable to remember, and which induces a tendency to repeat stuff. Irreparable damage to the motor controls function of his brain means he undergoes rerouting physiotherapy, enabling him to move once more, but he's consumed by the notion of inauthenticity. He's simulating everything, rather than just doing it. Feeling his movements are always "plastic" rather than "flaccid"[2] he obsesses over actors' movements in films:

> The other thing that struck me as we watched the film was how perfect De Niro was, every move he made, each gesture was perfect, seamless […] he seemed to execute the action perfectly, to live it, to merge with it until he was it and it was him and there was nothing in between.[3]

1st Re-enactment

Standing in a bathroom he sees a crack in the plaster that triggers a kind of Proustian memory. He cannot accurately place the strong déjà vu he experiences, but he remembers a building, a neighbour practicing a piano, an old lady frying liver who he passes on the stairs, someone vacuuming, and cats on a roof. Most of all he recalls that all his movements had been "fluent" and "natural" [4], and so the crack becomes the catalyst for a filmic re-enactment that quickly gathers pace. Naz who works for TimeControl, a logistics and time management company is hired: Madlyn Mansions is procured, and then painstakingly restructured to resemble his memory. From here, the project is overseen with additional crew, including props, makeup, and live-in extras, all of whom are generously paid to partake in endless rehearsals on a production scale equivalent of a movie. Unlike his fantasies, he discovers that perfection is a possibility with limitless funds, so he concentrates on minutiae, spending hours fussing over the plaster around the crack, the precise smell of liver, the notes played on the piano, and the way his shirt brushes on woodwork. The "ground zero"[5] of the re-enactment becomes a conversation he has on the landing with the lady employed to fry liver, something he practices relentlessly. The delivery of an improvised phrase "Harder and harder to lift up" produces a state of euphoria allowing him to effortlessly interact with the atmosphere around, and the sense of merging with matter. The repetition of the re-enactment gets close to creating realism, but there is something missing, and the element of chance solves it. His reworking of memory over and over again acts as a kind of therapy, but paradoxically it turns out that it's always the 'remainder' (the spontaneous words

2 Quotations in this sections drawn from Tom McCarthy, Remainder (Alma Books, 2007)

3 McCarthy, Remainder, p. 23.

4 Quotations in this sections drawn from McCarthy, Remainder

5 A phrase used by McCarthy in a talk at The Architectural Association, "McCarthy, Tom: Artist Talk," AA website, http://www.aaschool.ac.uk/VIDEO/lecture.php?ID=1209 [accessed July 10, 2013]

uttered by the liver lady, an accidental shooting of an extra, or phantom shard) that creates the greatest feeling of authenticity.

2nd Re-enactment

Throughout ***Remainder*** the narrator accedes to a "mode of authenticity"[6], through repetition and re-enactment. The next re-enactment, although equally mundane, is a progression away from a basis on pure memory, which was the initial reasoning for the re-enactments. This time, the sight of his old Fiesta sparks the recollection of a tyre shop, and upon visiting it in person he experiences what he believes to be a miracle, when the windscreen reservoir of his car being refilled instantly empties and seemingly transubstantiates. Due to a mechanical malfunction, the antifreeze is instead diverted into the car interior, where it covers his trousers, much to the delight of the narrator. This real life episode prompts an immediate re-enactment that takes place in a warehouse, putting an extra in place so he can relive the moment from a new perspective. Once again he achieves a sensation similar to before, a tingling and weightlessness that is prolonged by slowing the duration of the actual performance. He realizes that slowing everything down, having things half speed, slow motion or at normal speed but twice as long, allows him to dissect scenes into sub-moments. These instants open up space, allowing for a protracted experience of time and an immersion into a micro world.

3rd Re-enactment

As events unfold, it seems as though repetition, memory and experience combine with various types of simulation to create a feeling of authenticity for the narrator. The re-enactments now take on a new direction, and swerve towards the replication of criminal incidents. A recent shooting leaves a drug dealer dead, and the spot where the victim fell the narrator declares "sacred ground"[7]. Their shared experience of being hit by something and slipping into a void gives this re-enactment purpose and looking at the scene from a materialist perspective, through the dealer's eyes, he imagines the man's last glimpses of life. The narrator expounds his affinity with the dealer, and hints it could be death that is the ultimate reality:

> The truth is that, for me, this man had become a symbol of perfection. [...] he'd done what I wanted to: merged with the space around him, sunk and flowed into it until there was no distance between it and him – and merged, too, with his actions, merged to the extent of having no more consciousness of them. He'd stopped being separate, removed, imperfect.[8]

6 Tom McCarthy, "Illicit Frequencies, or All Literature is Pirated: an interview with Tom McCarthy," 3:AM Magazine, http://www.3ammagazine.com/3am/illicit-frequencies-or-all-literature-is-pirated-an-interview-with-tom-mccarthy/ [accessed July 10, 2013]

7 McCarthy, Remainder, p. 185.

8 McCarthy, Remainder, pp. 184–185.

4th Re-enactment

The final re-enactment completes the transformation, from the mundane to the criminal. A heist, re-enacting rehearsals of a robbery (re-enactment of an enactment), but in a real bank, without the staff's knowledge goes dramatically wrong. A chink in the carpet (a phantom shard), present during practice but absent in the bank, trips an extra who accidentally fires his gun, killing another. When they realise the heist isn't fake, it's too late, an invisible line has been crossed and there is now no difference between the real and unreal, it's merged. For the narrator this is exhilarating, it alleviates the feeling of fakeness and he descents into a psychotic episode. His unwitting accomplices regroup where rehearsals had taken place when the narrator, so caught up in a daydream replaying the shooters motions, compulsively fires a gun and kills another person. They continue with the last part of the plan, which is to escape via chartered flight from Heathrow, and after take off are called back by air traffic control, who raise the alarm. With nothing to lose, the narrator hijacks the plane but rather than issuing a destination he orders the plane to fly in the fixed banking pattern.

The Heist

All these re-enactments, which veer towards simulacrum rather than mimesis, illustrate how repetition can have miraculous affects. The narrator creates zones of mimesis, and through re-enactment tries to create an extreme authenticity of "being rather than simulating"[9], but it is always the unplanned that creates authenticity and the repetitive element turns events into private rituals. Interestingly, Derren Brown touches upon this topic in his 2006 Channel 4 special called The Heist,[10] that, like Remainder, involves a bank robbery. Brown uses the cover of a motivational seminar and documentary to persuade four members of a group to steal £100,000 in what they believe is a genuine armed robbery of a security van. He uses various psychological tools, including conditioning, anchoring and suggestion, to get the group into a mental state in which they would willingly rob a security guard at gun point, without ever directly being told to do so. Brown focuses the participants on the idea of stealing, keeping them responsive but manipulating them, so music, the colour green and a "do it" phase become powerful tools. He then teaches them a technique to instantly access strong emotions, generates a trigger for this, and cleverly transfers it to a track by the Jackson Five Can You Feel It (later attaching aggression to this motivational state so he can tap into a powerful darker side). Just four unknowingly proceed to the final part of the heist, set outside the Bank of England, where a host of hidden cameras await. Each person is asked to bring a toy gun issued in one of the seminars, and positioned in such a way that they have to walk past a security van to a meeting point after being dropped off in a taxi. As they make their way up the road, various stimuli reactivate their conditioning, and upon seeing the guard, they automatically pull out their guns, grab the money and commit armed robbery.

9 McCarthy, "Illicit Frequencies, or All Literature is Pirated: an interview with Tom McCarthy."

10 Derren Brown: The Specials Series 19 Episode 1. "Heist." Derren Drown: The Heist, 48:34. January 04, 2006. http://www.channel4.com/programmes/derren-brown-the-specials

Playing and Reality

In *Playing and Reality*, a book by the English psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, the importance of play is discussed in relation to both children and adults. He builds on already established ideas of human nature involving inner and outer reality; with inner psychic reality happening inside one's head, and external reality happening outside these bounds. Winnicott postulates the existence of a third intermediate area that these realities both contribute to, which is concerned with the "illusory" and which he calls "experiencing". The "illusory" is linked to our cultural experience later in adult life, and "experiencing" is connected to "potential space" (space between mother and child) and "transitional phenomena"[11] (objects such as comforters that children use to rid anxiety). Not only do we find out that play is healing, facilitating growth and health, exciting because instinct is inherently understood, but also that it leads to a search for the self. Playing gives a person the ability to use their whole personality and be creative, and then through being creative the individual finds the self. In the chapter entitled *Search for the Self*, Winnicott observes:

> This gives us our indication for therapeutic procedure - to afford opportunity for formless experience, and for creative impulses, motor and sensory, which are the stuff of playing. And on this basis of playing is built the whole of man's experiential existence. No longer are we either introvert or extrovert. We experience life in the area of transitional phenomena, in the exciting interweave of subjectivity and objective observation, and in the area that is intermediate between the inner reality of the individual and the shared reality of the world that is external to individuals.[12]

11 Quotations in this section drawn from Donald Winnocott, Playing and Reality (London: Tavistock Publications, 1971)

12 Donald Winnocott, Playing and Reality, p.64.

The Heist demonstrates how fiction can become real and that McCarthy's writing may not be so farfetched. In his novel, the 'real' exists 'intentionally' in circumstances the narrator knowingly partakes, and 'unintentionally' when people are unaware of a simulation until revelation shatters the illusion. Since play requires compliance, the heists of Brown and McCarthy could never heal, or in essence, be therapeutic either. In *The Heist,* emotion is used as an anchor that forces participants to act instinctively, the criminal act becomes a simulacrum and for the people involved it is indistinguishable from reality. Brown found a way to exploit this fleeting moment by building an environment in which participants are involuntarily involved, and as soon as the manipulation is laid bear the simulation vanishes. His heist uses deception in a clinical and sophisticated manner, getting to the core of our psychology to trigger response, but in its wake there lies confusion, shock and bewilderment.[13] In this simulation model of the real it is the architect of the idea who derives pleasure, and those aware of the deception that marvel at its complexity, but it is unclear what the participant gains from this experience? Considering *Remainder* in the

13 There is an extensive reading list on Brown's website covering topics of magic, psychological and social experiments, memory, body language and hypnosis. (http://derrenbrown.co.uk/the-core/).

terms laid out by Winnicott in his thesis, the re-enactments, if interpreted as a kind of play-acting, could be seen as an instinctual attempt at healing; something subconscious and natural, that when willingly participated in, offers a space for self-therapy. This gives a new way to think about re-enactment more generally and how they might be used, but more importantly, it indicates a place that the therapeutic and the real could exist.

Fig. 4

CHAPTER THREE

Filmic Revelation

The Act of Killing[1] (2012) is a documentary by Joshua Oppenheimer based in Indonesia. It is a curious blend of fact and fiction, surreal staging and stark personal confessions, revisiting memorable events of a small group of men and delving into the darker side of humanity, journeying into the imagination of killers. It follows Anwar Congo, a proud grandfather who danced, drank and partied his way through life. This charismatic individual and a number of close business associates from North Sumatra welcome the opportunity to discuss, reminisce and revel in their past. Anwar's lifelong passion for American movies is such, that when Oppenheimer presents an opportunity to re-enact stories from his youth, he accepts; the chance of a shot at the silver screen is too much to turn down. Anwar's friends also accept the challenge of producing short films, and with complete artistic freedom they all base the re-enactments on their favourite film genres (musical, western and gangster). In 1965, Anwar was a small time gangster making money selling black market cinema tickets when the government was overthrown. He, paramilitaries and other "freemen"[2] (as they referred to themselves) formed death squads under the new military dictatorship, and were given the task of controlling the population. Over the coming year they assisted in the anti-communist purge throughout Indonesia, helping to murder an estimated million people. Using propaganda as justification and a way to rid their conscience, they killed and raped for pleasure anyone they wanted, without fear, reprisal or punishment. The film begins, with Anwar cheerfully showing his dance moves, shuffling around an enclosure where he used to club and strangle people to death. Recalled so impassively, the delivery alone shocks, the honesty of such accounts are rare but as one is to discover, this was nothing out of

1 The Act of Killing. DVD. Directed by Joshua Opperheimer. (2012; UK: Dogwoof, 2013)

2 The Act of Killing

the ordinary. As the re-enactments get more ambitious, they become ever stranger, with extras recruited from the persecuted communities that still live alongside the perpetrators of the genocide.

It becomes evident that these men have no limits or remorse for their actions, and in fact are proud of these appalling crimes. One re-enactment stages a town massacre in which residents were raped, burnt and slaughtered, and in another they use the son of a man they killed in an interrogation who painfully relives his father's last moments. Anwar, however, gradually begins to open up, at times seeming deep in thought, admitting having nightmares, haunted by visions of people's eyes that he can't forget, as he watched them die. In one of the studio shoots, Anwar swaps roles, becoming the torture victim, and he sits on a stool for questioning. The proceedings and intermittent beatings momentarily halt when his friends become concerned, he is visibly weak, eyes tightly shut and breathing with difficulty. In the past, Hollywood films were the inspiration for new ways to torture and kill, so after a short pause the re-enactment begins again, using Anwar's preferred instrument of death. Anchoring a length of the wire, then wrapping it around his neck and pulling taught, the simulated strangulation begins, but Anwar goes limp. He finishes the scene with difficulty but can't do it again, shaking and looking faint he exclaims "I feel I like I was dead for a moment". Anwar starts to question his actions and doubt about what he did creeps in. There are other instances where he forgets about the cameras and crew; consumed by thought and incapacitated by emotions he is experiencing. Staging the past is having an unforeseen effect upon his conscience, something important seems to be taking place as he is forced to consider perspectives other than his own, and think about the suffering inflicted upon thousands. He is battling deep psychological issues, and the resurgence of memory makes it real once more, as revealed in a discussion with Joshua:

3 The Act of Killing

4 Quotations in this section taken from Gilles Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, trans. Paul Patton (London: Athlone, 1994), pp.90 – 163.

5 The John David Ebert Chanel, "Gilles Deleuze's Difference & Reptition Discussed by John David Ebert 1/2," Youtube, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Po78dF40mrk [accessed May 18, 2013]

> […] I can feel what the people I tortured felt because here my dignity has been destroyed. And then fear comes, right there and then, all the terror suddenly possessed my body. It surrounded me and possessed me.[3]

Deleuze

Once again there is an example of the past becoming present, what Deleuze refers to in *Difference and Repetition* as a "past present". The chapter *Repetition for Itself*[4] describes three different levels of time, the second of which is "Active Synthesis" that explains the force of memory and implicates authors such as Proust, and the Proustian type memory in *Remainder*. John David Ebert simplifies Deleuze's concept[5] explaining how, with "Active Synthesis", memory creates a discontinuity in the passage of time, the "I" fractures into an "I" and "self" creating two poles in which memory oscillates

along an axis between "past present" and "present present", bringing the past around and into the present. This type of repetition, along with "Passive Synthesis" forms a traditional circle of time that binds the cardinal points and stabilises the human into the traditional idea of the subject. It is this return of the past, amongst other things, which links *The Act of Killing* to my next example, Gillian Wearing's 2010 production called *Self Made*; a reality television show and psychotherapy hybrid described on the project site as an:

> Artwork, social experiment and performance project – bringing together a diverse group from the British public, non-actors every one, and offering them the chance to discover something about themselves through performance.[6]

Self Made

Would you like to be in a film? You can play yourself or a fictional character. Call Gillian – so said the advert, and from the hundreds that responded, just a handful of people were chosen. Careful casting screened for specific personality traits and the group formed received mentoring and support from specialist Method Acting coach Sam Rumbelow who helped unlock "memories, impulses, anxieties, fears, fantasies"[7]. They were offered the opportunity to escape the banality of the everyday, and given basic training to connect with emotions hidden beneath the mask of the projected self. Each volunteer was pushed to their limits, entering an interior world that broke down barriers and questioned their sense of self. The participants all reacted to the challenge presented in very different ways, but one young man's performance in particular was strikingly different. James, a psychologically scarred young man with aggression issues due to childhood bullying is asked to "Re-enact a common even in his past which was being bullied"[8]. James has to choose from a selection of actors those who are to be bullies, someone to be bullied, and people to play bystanders; then to stand aside and direct the teenagers, prompting dialogue, correcting movements and perfecting the scene. As it evolves, he becomes increasingly seduced by its realism, completely engrossed by the characters interactions and reactions, immersed in the world, living the past and but also the moment. Later in the film, James reenacts a chance meeting that occurred on the underground, where he unexpectedly challenges someone who used to torment him. A rough set build marks the carriage, an actor stands in, and as James delivers his lines he alarmingly raises his fist as if to strike his co-actor. There's a cut, and the scene continues with a dummy replacing the actor, but James's emotions erupt as he relentlessly punches, kicks and knees the bully in

6 Gillian Wearing, "Self Made a film by Gillian Wearing," http://selfmade.org.uk/about/ [accessed September 01, 2013].

7 Wearing, "http://selfmade.org.uk/about/."

8 Self Made. DVD. Directed by Gillian Wearing. (2010; UK: Cornerhouse, 2011)

a sustained attack of surprising force, aggression and violence.

Method Acting

The success of *Self Made* can to some extent be attributed to the Method Acting training provided by Rumbelow, a style originally pioneered by Constantin Stanislavsky and further developed by Lee Strasberg. Fundamental to "The Method" was Strasberg's belief in relaxation due to the fact that "when there is tension, one cannot think or feel"[9]. The concept revolved around sense and memory exercises that allowed for "(re)creation and (re)experiencing"[10], and key to this was imagination which he divided into three aspects: impulse, belief, and concentration. "Affective Memory", based on a deep rooted emotional experience from the past was used as an instrument by actors in order to "[…] become capable of the kind of living on the stage which is essentially reliving."[11] As part of this sensory training they were made to concentrate on objects that formed part of this memory, remembering the senses experienced at the time, and from this emotion could be reactivated. An actor then fused personal emotions with a character, drawing from a bank of memories that could be produced on cue:

> We would allow the actor a minute before the emotion was needed to carry out the affective memory. When an emotional response was needed at a point in the middle of a scene, the actor knew that he had to start the affective memory sixty seconds before, and that the emotional reaction would be ready exactly on cue.[12]

When the actor had mastered an ability to react emotionally then advanced training was started that allowed him/her to fully merge with the role they were playing. Improvisation, scene analysis and interpretation were all important aspects to Strasberg[13], and logic underpinned much of what he taught; everything was carefully deconstructed, rigorously inspected, thoroughly contemplated and analysed. The people that came through his school were trained instruments to act, and, in *Remainder*, it is Robert de Niro, an actor schooled by Strasberg, who becomes an object of obsession for the narrator. The training that such people undertook was intense and could span many years, a considerable difference to the three-week crash course in *Self Made*. Comparatively, Wearing's film was greatly lacking in tuition, yet the bullying scenes with James yielded dramatic and realistic results that didn't appear acted. In response to the film Rumbelow remarks:

> Strasburg […] made it clear that talent was irrelevant and that only the willingness to engage in a creative process defined

9 Lee Strasberg and Robert H. Hethmon, Strasberg at the Actors Studio (NY: Theatre Communications Group, 1991), p.88.

10 The Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute, "History," http://www.methodactingstrasberg.com/history [accessed September 13, 2013].

11 Strasberg and Hethmon, Strasberg at the Actors Studio, p. 109.

12 Strasberg and Hethmon, Strasberg at the Actors Studio, pp. 111 - 112.

13 These points are drawn from The Lee Strasberg Theatre and Film Institute, "History," http://www.methodactingstrasberg.com/history [accessed September 13, 2013].

> an actor's work. And it is the participants' willingness to work from their own humanity, which is the greatest asset of this film. […] This film is not about them, it is from them. All creative beings work from the self, though all of them had no real body of work or formal training[14]

Method Acting is placed at the heart of *Self Made*, but as Mark Fischer points out…"There's no suggestion that Self Made endorses the discourses that inform Rumbelow's practice […]"[15]. This seems to cast doubt upon *Method Acting* as a stand-alone technique for producing the 'real', a point that is well worth considering. Elia Kazan, a former student of Strasberg's and co-founder of the Actors School wrote in his autobiography:

> I, among others, turned against Lee's kind of instruction and sought simpler and more "present" methods of arousing emotions, ones that were less self-hypnotic, which would, for those reasons, present a more lifelike performance on stage.[16]

The Real

The complication with Method Acting is determining what is actually being presented in relation to real experience. Real emotions are uncovered and brought to the surface for the actor to re-experience, and these have to be shaped, moulded and harnessed. They are appropriated from the past and forced into the present upon demand, interwoven with plot and made to fit an imaginary character. The 'real' is present in many levels and different forms, but impossible to separate; an actor may give a convincing performance but the real is inseparable from fantasy. I would argue that the bullying scenes in *Self Made* do not appear to be acted because they are pure reaction to pure memory, literally a window into James' past. It was a raw response that didn't fully engage with the complexities of Method Acting, and like *The Heist* a certain level of psychological understanding drove the entire process. Similarly, when Anwar was pretend tortured, he didn't so much 'play' another character as sit and consider his past actions that in turn re-activated old memories and produced visible discomfort.*Self Made* and *The Act of Killing* both result in an individual rethinking the past and re-contextualising the present, opening up old wounds in an attempt to heal burdening psychological problems. What we

14 Gillian Wearing, "Self Made a film by Gillian Wearing," http://selfmade.org.uk/sam/ [accessed September 23, 2013]

15 Mark Fischer, "Self Made," Sight and Sound, http://old.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound/reviews/releases/self-made.php [accessed September, 22].

16 Elia Kazan, A Life (London: Andre Deutsch Limited, 1988), p. 707.

17 Fischer, "Self Made."

see is a search for the self and a bid to find answers to personal questions via a very public arena. Subjects willingly surrender and intentionally lock themselves into an emotional journey, that once started is not as easy to halt. It creates a complicated dynamic between the individual and the documentation itself, leaving a conundrum:

> […] whether we are dealing with 'revelation' at all, or whether what we are witnessing is an effect of the filming process itself."[17]

Fig. 5

Conclusion

In a chapter of Return of the Real, Hal Foster uses a theoretical model borrowed from Lacan to build a theory of what he calls the "Traumatic Real". He bases the argument around the neo-avant-garde, and uses opposing readings of Warhol's Death in America, that fit into two basic post-war models of representation, understood, respectively, as "referential" and "simulacral". Foster shows how these divergent readings that are "referential and simulacral, connected and disconnected, affective and affectless, critical and complacent"[1], can exist simultaneously within the "Traumatic Real", which defines the real in terms of trauma. Lacan describes the traumatic as a "missed encounter with the real"[2] and Foster shares his opinion that "repetition is not reproduction"[3]. He goes on to explain his paradoxical idea that "Repetition serves to screen the real understood as traumatic. But this very need also points to the real, and at this point the real ruptures the screen or repetition."[4] In a Baudrillardian world, the "Traumatic Real" punches through and reveals the real, and, as we have seen, the simulacrum is often attributed to creating 'real' issues.

1 Hal Foster, Return of the Real (MIT Press, 1996), p.130.

2 Hal Foster, Return of the Real, p.132.

3 Hal Foster, Return of the Real, p.132.

4 Hal Foster, Return of the Real, p.132.

In all the cultural manifestations I'm uncovering, people are constructing, re-enacting and fabricating, but I'm not convinced that the true reason is to feel real as in *Remainder*, or to bring attention to the real as in the *Traumatic Real.* How one structures and controls a situation and works with people, whether photographic, filmic or performance based, is crucial in producing realism. What I found in *The Act of Killing* and *Self Made* was a strange bond that fused the subject and process; they were reliant on each other, as the documentation didn't just record events, it enabled the moment to occur. In relation to my search for the real, it is the truth-value of the subject that still interests me, how real experience comes into existence within the construct of a re-enactment and it's documentation. Interest in this this moment began when it became apparent that a simulation could reveal truth, that the human psyche could not be controlled sufficiently to supress fantasy. The experience of the past in this case acted a kind of truth serum, body language reflected this and we gained an insight into a persons repressed desires. The idea of simulation was further expanded in my literary search for the real that occurs in *Remainder*. Re-enactments of varying types are used to reverse the feeling of inauthenticity, and even though in each circumstance this doesn't always happen, we are shown scenarios in which simulation could become real. *The*

Heist, The Act of Killing and *Self Made* all use re-enactments and simulations that closely resemble McCarthy's novel, demonstrating how fiction can become fact, but also questioning whether literary fiction might be more real than we first conceive. The re-enactments encountered in these 'documentaries' all involve the traumatic, memory, emotion and fantasy, and through an understanding of the psychological it is revealed how simulation can be made to appear real. We see how different techniques are implemented to produce greater realism, but, as in the case of "The Method", realism is slippery and subjective. There are many approaches to producing the 'real', but maybe one needs to ascertain what kind of real this might be? The real I was interested in was re-introduced via the idea of 'play' as a form of healing. Since 'play' requires consent, if we imagine re-enactment as a form of play then an individual must knowingly partake to be healed. This narrowed and defined the criteria for the *Therapeutic Real*, a terminology I invented that allowed me to investigate a type of staging that I never saw discussed, and which I didn't fully understand. I wanted to rethink staging in relation to photography, as the more I thought about the topic the less satisfied I became with the results. The irony is I never found any examples of photographic practice that dealt with the 'real' I sought, it only appeared in filmic formats. At the start of the essay I talked about the importance of uncovering process, and I wonder if this type of realism can only exist with documentation of this type. Are the properties of photography insufficient in telling a story of this sort, or is it the length and scale of a production that is the factor in such moments arising? It seems plausible that, rather than bringing attention to the real, people might be motivated by an underlying desire to be healed by the real. It is an intimidating way to deal with personal problems, but our modern day obsession with social networking makes placing the private in the public domain, normality.

What can be concluded from this unearthing of the real? Is there really a way to pin down my findings and decipher the *Therapeutic Real*? Through my research, what I have found is that using re-enactment and simulation it is possible for a person to relive a past moment, and the emotional impact (traumatic nature) increases its intensity that can be amplified through repetition. The subject must be conscious of their involvement, and characteristic of the re-experiencing is that it psychologically heals the individual. By this I mean that they are able to work through problems and confront deep rooted emotional problems that ordinarily would be inaccessible. The re-experiencing can take various forms and gives the subject the freedom to re-enact a memory from new perspectives. In fact, this can potentially enhance the emotional recall. The memory must belong

to the person re-enacting, because attempting to imagine another's experience is very different from recalling your own, and confuses the 'real'. The subject will reach a point during the re-enactment that the memory ruptures and overwhelms the present, transporting them back to time it occurred. To the viewer the subject is visibly absorbed, and for the participant the experience is of loosing themselves in the moment, they are completely focused.

I suppose whether the Therapeutic Real exists or not is irrelevant; what is important is to think about new ways to approach old subjects. This area of realism is undoubtedly complex, and the more one researches the subject, the more involved it becomes. Using the idea of the *Therapeutic Real* has helped focus my search and exploration of this niche interest in the real, and maybe it can now be used as a platform from which to put into practice what has been learnt. Photography still has unchartered territory in regards to adequately dealing with realism, and this research is just a starting point for dealing with problems that arise from constructed imagery.

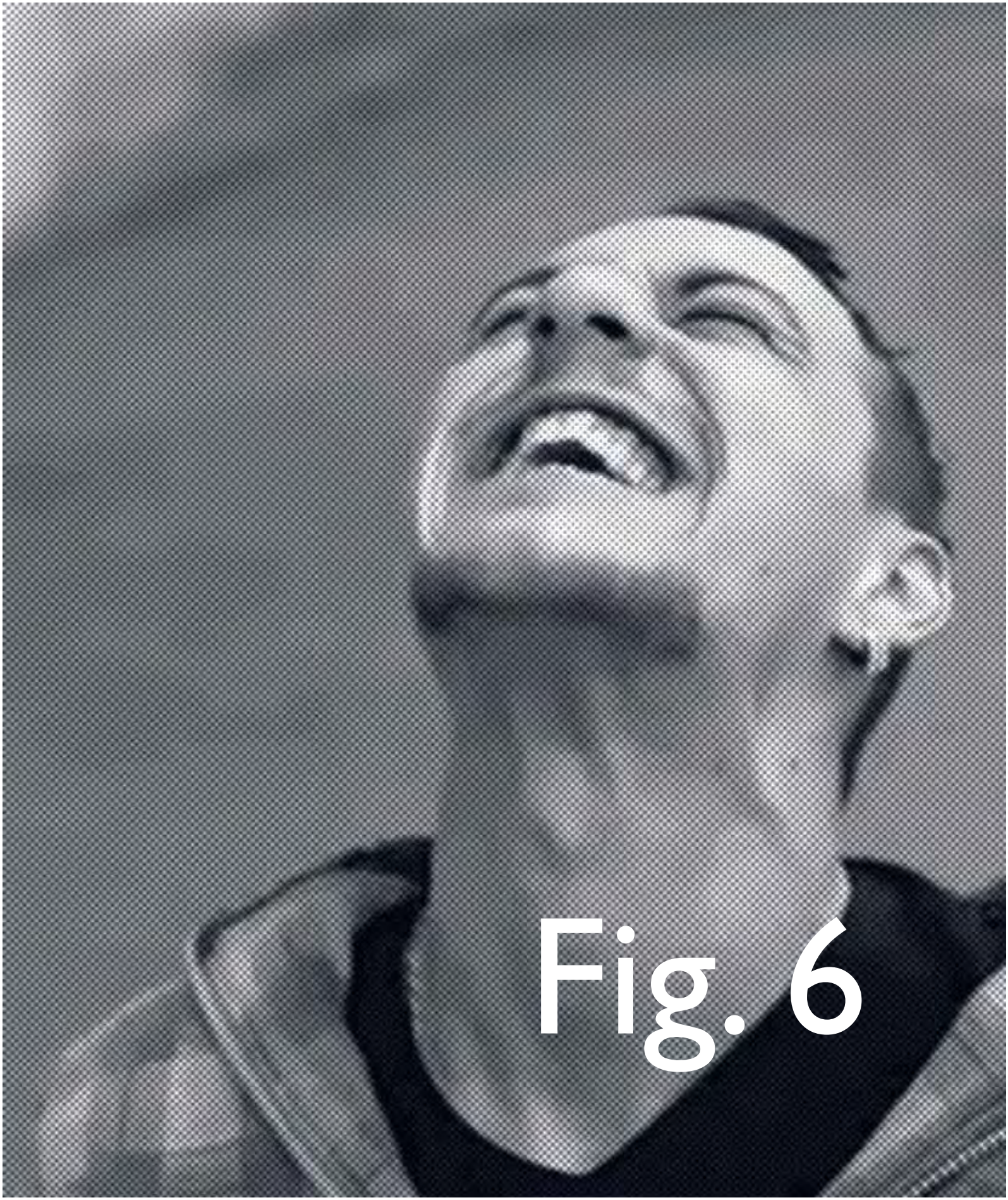
Fig. 6

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