



IF I CAN'T DANCE,
I DON'T WANT TO BE
PART OF YOUR REVOLUTION

EDITION III
MASQUERADE

EPISODE 4
VAN ABBEMUSEUM
EINDHOVEN 19–20/03/2010

MAGAZINE 5
SARAH PIERCE

IF I CAN'T DANCE, I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR REVOLUTION

TRAJECTORY

ARTISTS

Keren Cytter
Jon Mikel Euba
Olivier Foulon
Suchan Kinoshita
Joachim Koester
Sarah Pierce

PROLOGUE

Overgaden
Copenhagen
Summer 2008

EPISODE 1

de Appel arts centre
Amsterdam
Fall 2008

EPISODE 2

Sala Rekalde
Bilbao
Winter 2008/2009

EPISODE 3

Project Arts Centre
Dublin
Spring 2009

EPISODE 4

Van Abbemuseum
Eindhoven
Winter/Spring 2010

A WORD FROM THE CURATORS

A WORD FROM THE CURATORS

This magazine announces the upcoming, final, episode of Edition III – *Masquerade*. This episode is going to take place in the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven on March 19 and 20 from five o'clock in the afternoon until eleven o'clock the following morning. The programme will consist of an exhibition, including works from the collection and new installations, performances, films and lectures, presented in the 'Oudbouw' of the museum in a choreographed programme that will last from 'dusk till dawn'.

This magazine also shares with you some views on the work of Sarah Pierce. As you may know, this series of magazines announcing the different stages of the project, contains an 'artist in focus' section. So far the magazines have looked at the work of Suchan Kinoshita, Jon Mikel Euba, Joachim Koester and Olivier Foulon. The last one, dedicated to the work of Keren Cytter, you'll receive in the course of February and will include detailed information on the programme in the Van Abbemuseum.

Final episode

With the upcoming fourth and final episode, we'll conclude a two-year project that has had different, international instalments. In the summer of 2008, we started the project with a prologue in Overgaden arts centre and Karriere bar in Copenhagen. From there we travelled to Amsterdam where we presented the first episode of the project, including an exhibition and a performance programme in the de Appel arts centre and other institutions in the city like the Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam. The next stop was Sala Rekalde in Bilbao in the Basque

Country. There we presented an exhibition and a programme of performances, music and lectures. In the meantime spring had begun and we moved on to Dublin where we presented the third episode at Project Arts Centre. There we played on all stages of the institution, their gallery space and two theatre spaces.

Now we are preparing the fourth and final episode for the Van Abbemuseum. Here all six artists that we have asked to develop new works will present the final stage of their contributions. Keren Cytter, Jon Mikel Euba, Oliver Foulon, Suchan Kinoshita, Joachim Koester and Sarah Pierce all will give 'acte de présence'.

Parallel to our travelling project, in the last two years we've presented a monthly programme of performances in Frascati Theatre in our hometown Amsterdam. Here a number of artists articulated, in mostly newly produced performances, their view on the notion of masquerade. These artists were Ruth Buchanan, Yael Davids, Luca Frei, Aurélien Froment & Youri Dirckx, Emma Hedditch, Ivana Müller, Maria Pask, Jimmy Robert, Stefanie Seibold & Maria Teresa Diaz Nerio. The greater part of these artists will be present in the final event in the Van Abbemuseum as well, reinterpreting their performances conceived for the black box of Frascati, for the museum's white cube spaces.

Sarah Pierce

The current magazine looks at two works by Sarah Pierce, both produced by If I Can't Dance...: *An Artwork in the Third Person* (2009)

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and *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* (2009-ongoing).

These works reflect on the notion of 'being student' which Pierce develops "as a state of immediacy – the quality of being in direct and instant involvement with something that gives rise to a sense of urgency or excitement." They deal with the (historical) relationship between performance and 'presentness'.

The first work was produced in the Netherlands in collaboration with students of the Dutch Art Institute in Enschede. The video was shot in Smart Project Space in Amsterdam on the occasion of Paul O'Neill's exhibition *Coalesce: Happenstance*. The installation these videos are part of, was most recently installed in Project Arts Centre's theatre space. The installation consisted of stage elements arranged throughout the whole space in different heights. On top of these elements the video portraits were dispersed. The dark space was lit with coloured theatre spots and was furnished with props from a local theatre depot. In the space there was also a display of archival material, like posters and correspondence, accounting of the history of Project Arts Centre as a space for theatre and visual art.

The second piece was produced in Bilbao in collaboration with local students in art, sociology and politics. The video was shot in an artist's studio complex in Bilbao and reflects a gathering in which the students were invited to watch Jean Rouch's and Edgar Morin's film *Chronique d'un Été* and discuss it afterwards. Like Rouch's film, where there is a moment in which the film

is screened for the 'characters' participating in it, the video was immediately edited in Bilbao and screened in Sala Rekalde in the presence of the students who had collaborated.

Maeve Connolly and Caroline Hancock will reflect on these respective works in the next pages. We hope you'll enjoy reading them and invite you to come and see the work in real in Eindhoven.

Frédérique Bergholtz, Annie Fletcher and Maaïke Gouwenberg

IN THIS MAGAZINE

IN THIS MAGAZINE

This magazine is the fifth in a series of six magazines accompanying the current edition. Each issue presents one artist 'in focus'. The first four magazines were dedicated to the practices of Suchan Kinoshita, Jon Mikel Euba, Joachim Koester and Olivier Foulon. In the present issue, the work of Sarah Pierce will be of special interest. The texts in this magazine are written by Maeve Connolly and Caroline Hancock and reflect on two of Sarah Pierce's works: *An Artwork in the Third Person* (2009), as presented in the most recent instalment of Edition III – *Masquerade* in Project Arts Centre in Dublin, and *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you Happy?*, (2009-ongoing).

Sarah Pierce is based in Dublin. Since 2003 she has used an umbrella term, The Metropolitan Complex, to describe her practice which uses archives, exhibitions and papers – often opening these structures up to the personal and the incidental. She studied at Cornell University and the Whitney Museum Independent Study Program. Currently she is preparing a PhD in Visual Culture at Goldsmiths, University of London. A solo exhibition of Pierce's work, curated by Grant Watson, was mounted in Project Arts Centre in Dublin (2006). Her work was included in various group exhibitions, such as *Nought to Sixty* at ICA London (2008), *Left Pop*, in the 2nd Moscow Biennial (2007), and *If I Can't Dance...!s Feminist Legacies and Potentials* in MuHKA Antwerp (2007-2008). She regularly publishes The Metropolitan Complex Papers, and continues to collaborate with Annie Fletcher on the Paraeducation Department, which they began in 2004.

Maeve Connolly is a writer and lecturer based in Dublin, where she teaches on the MA in Visual Arts Practices at the Institute of Art, Design and Technology (IADT). Her research explores concepts of public space in contemporary art and culture, informed by histories of art, film and television. She recently completed *The Place of Artists' Cinema: Space, Site and Screen* (Intellect/University of Chicago Press, 2009), which examines the social, economic, political and cultural conditions shaping the production and exhibition of artists' film and video over the past decade. Previous publications include a co-edited collection of texts and artists' projects on television, entitled *The Glass Eye: Artists and Television* (Dublin: Project Press, 2000) and various articles and reviews, in *Afterimage*, *Artforum*, *Art Monthly*, *Boundary 2*, *CIRCA*, *Contemporary*, *Frieze*, *Screen*, *Third Text* and *Variant*.

Caroline Hancock is a freelance curator, writer and editor based in Paris. Since 1998, she has worked at the Centre Pompidou and MAMVP/ARC in Paris, Tate Modern and The Hayward in London, and most recently at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in Dublin. She curated a Lynda Benglis retrospective (traveling to the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven; Le Consortium, Dijon; RISD, Providence; New Museum, New York) while based at IMMA and co-edited the accompanying monograph. She has contributed to publications on drawing, museum archiving practices and the work of Rhona Byrne, David Hockney, William McKeown. In 2008, she was awarded the Joanna Drew Travel Bursary to travel to Algeria and is currently researching related exhibitions projects and exchanges.

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A QUESTION LIKE A LOOP

Black Box

The Project Cube is a dark space and it serves as the site, setting and staging area for *An Artwork in the Third Person*. Inside this Black Box, reflective surfaces, luminous forms and precious objects compete for attention. Some of these precious objects are just paper documents from the Project Arts Centre Archive, presented under glass and dramatically lit from above. Others are more esoteric, including an assortment of ornamental lamps, embroidered cushions and upholstered stools arranged on a tiered black structure made from stage risers. Macramé baskets and beaded curtains are suspended overhead, catching the beams from coloured spotlights. In amongst the cluster of craft artefacts, video images of faces and colourful texts are visible on flat-screen monitors. The Cube is a quiet space and the voices of those on screen are not audible. In order to listen, one must climb onto and around the structure, locating the headphones attached to each monitor while taking care not to mistake an ornament for a seat.

Locations

The students from the Dutch Art Institute (DAI) are depicted mostly in close-up, with occasional glimpses of hand gestures, or details of legs and feet. Many of the interviewees refer to the fact that they are sitting in a gallery and fragments of unknown artworks often appear in the background. Each video ends with a credit, identifying the date, the name of the interviewee and the city (Amsterdam) where it was recorded. But there are no establishing shots of this other gallery, and no cutaways to

the interviewer. Pierce remains off-screen and mostly unheard, her words replaced with text. At the moments of transition from one question to another, sounds of a rock band playing or practicing somewhere else are heard.

Uncertainty

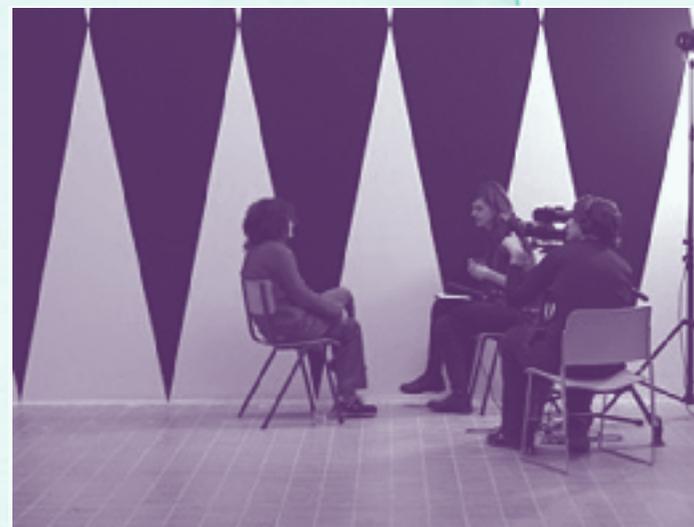
If these video documents deliberately allude to unidentified spaces through sound and image, many of the paper documents initially seem easier to place. An address (East Essex Street, where Project is still located) is visible on several hand-written letters. But precisely because they assert a direct, material link to the exhibition location, these archival artefacts actually generate uncertainty. If they were sent from Project how did they find their way back to their point of origin? Perhaps, in fact, these are file copies and not quite letters at all....

Professionalism

A press release from February 1977 announces a public seminar on The State of the Arts in Ireland at Project Arts Centre and all 'artists, craftsmen, teachers, students etc.' are invited. An agenda has been set; a panel consisting of a politician, two educators, an Arts Council representative and an artist will examine 'the feasibility of forming an artist's union'. Other documents reveal tensions between the Arts Centre's aspirations towards professionalism and its self-proclaimed status as a radical, artist-led organisation. This is most obvious in a series of formal letters from the Visual Arts Secretary and the Visual Arts Chairman following an exhibition of student work at Project.

MAEVE CONNOLLY – A QUESTION LIKE A LOOP

MAEVE CONNOLLY



The matter at hand is the appropriate compensation for a sculpture unfortunately destroyed during the opening, by a 'drunkard'.

Research

The Cube is a multi-purpose space and, as is the case with such spaces, it is highly flexible in theory. In practice, however, flexibility tends to be constrained by logistics, resources and the force of habit. To combat the tendency to repeat tried-and-tested arrangements, Pierce has studied the stage, lighting and seating plans produced over the past four years. This aspect of her research process does not generate obvious traces or artefacts – in the

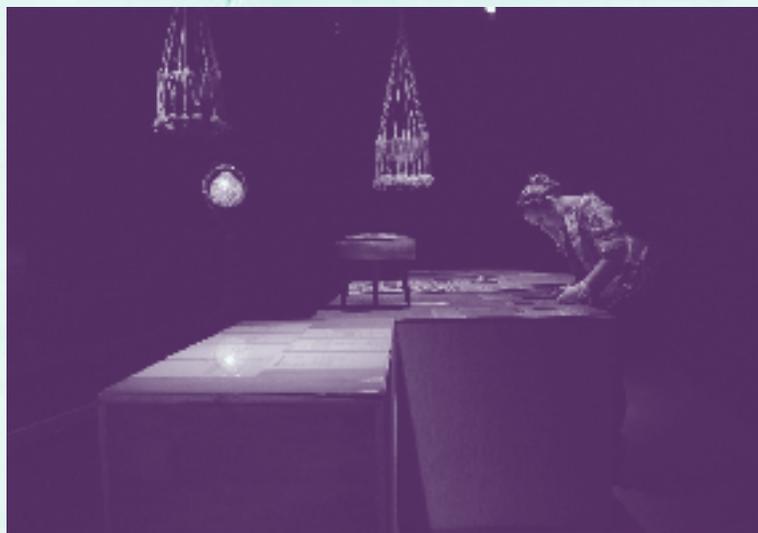
manner of the archival materials and video interviews – and instead yields only a sense of disorientation.

Television

The Black Box setting, the use of lights and props and the exploration of the roles of artist and student, emphasise the proximities and parallels that exist between art and theatre. But *An Artwork in the Third Person* also invokes a third term – television. This is not just because of the prominent presence of monitors displaying video interviews, during which one participant mentions watching 'a reality TV show on MTV... a very dumb kind of thing...'. It

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is more precisely a consequence of programming a screening and discussion of Rouch and Morin's *Chronicle Of A Summer* (1961) as part of the installation. Despite the absence of cameras, the experience of sitting together under the coloured lights amongst the monitors and props is a little like being present at the recording of a particularly esoteric TV show.

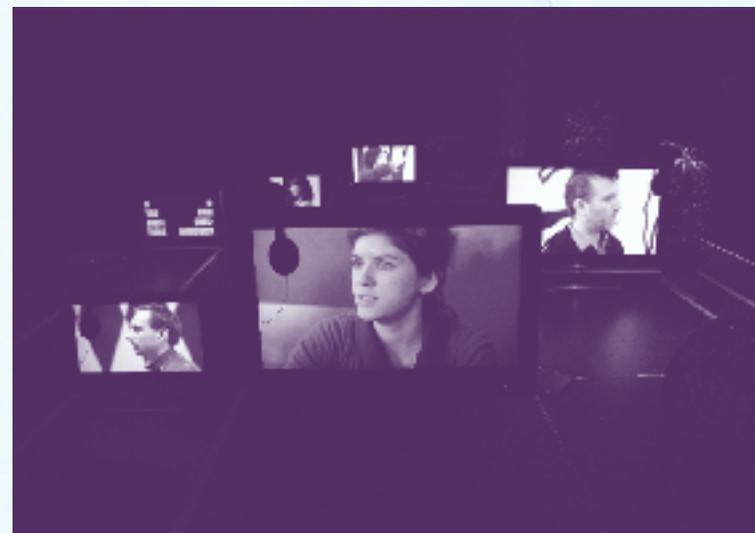
Images of Artworks

A black and white poster incorporating images of sculptural objects advertises an exhibition entitled 'Foundation Studies', which might once have taken place at Project. Presumably student art works, these objects loosely

resemble some of the hand-crafted things dispersed around the platform. Verbal images of artworks are also offered by the present-day students in response to Pierce's opening question. The phrasing is slippery; 'describe an artwork using the third person' or 'describe an artwork in the first person'. At least one student tries to imagine an artwork *as a person*. Subsequent questions introduce further ambiguities, and further images of artworks in the form of the interview itself; 'when do you think an artwork becomes a work?...' 'do you think this is an interview or an artwork?...' 'do you think people in the space right now think this is an artwork?.'

Sarah Pierce – *An Artwork in the Third Person* (2009) CAPTION
8 single channel dvds, stage risers and lighting, archival materials. Installation view, Project Arts Centre, Dublin

MAEVE CONNOLLY



Temporalities

The state of immediacy that Pierce associates with 'being student' is one of directness, urgency and excitement. Is this state produced or perhaps undermined by traditional art school pedagogical notions of 'immersion' or 'activation' intended to assert the importance of the present moment? Might there be multiple temporalities at play in art education? Educators and their managers are often oriented towards a future structured by milestones and key performance indicators. But traces of the past still tend to persist in art school environments, whether as folktales concerning the exploits of past students or in the more tangible form of

unwanted or unfinished artworks abandoned around the campus.

'The Academy and the Blackboard'

A number of newspaper clippings from 1977 are interspersed amongst the posters and letters from Project's archive. They chart a dispute between the Curator of the Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin (now the Hugh Lane) and several members of the Advisory Committee concerning the status of a blackboard by Josef Beuys. The residue of a performance that took place several years earlier, the blackboard was included in an exhibition against the wishes of some artists on the Committee. In a 1977 con-

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tribution to *The Irish Times*, entitled 'The Academy and the Blackboard', art critic Brian Fallon defends the Curator's autonomy but not the work of Beuys, who he dismisses as an 'Establishment figure' not unlike the 'defunct' academicians in the permanent collection. In retrospect, the incident seems to signal resistance against emergent notions of curatorial authority but, at the same time, a tacit acknowledgement of the exhibition as the moment in which an art work comes into being.

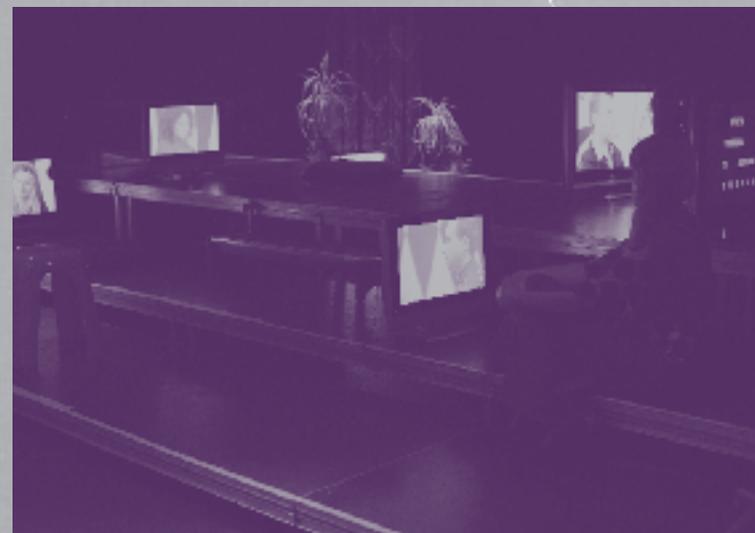
A Question Like A Loop
'How do you separate your life from your art? Do you find these questions difficult? Where do

you think you are going as an artist?.' Pierce's interviewees are artists but they are also students. Their involvement is voluntary, informed by their knowledge of Pierce as an artist with an interest in pedagogy who has also occupied the role of educator. A complex power dynamic is apparent in the videos. Conscious that they will be identified by name and perhaps judged on the basis of their responses, the interviewees take the process seriously. Some deal with the situation by saying as little as possible. Others say a great deal even while they struggle to articulate their experience. One pauses often for words and demands more time, choosing her words carefully and comparing

Sarah Pierce – *An Artwork in the Third Person* (2009) **CAPTION**
8 single channel dvds, stage risers and lighting, archival materials. Installation view, Project Arts Centre, Dublin

Opposite page: Sarah Pierce in conversation with Caroline Hancock, Project Arts Centre, Dublin

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the form of a question to a loop.

The Masque
Perhaps all questions are 'like a loop', simply because they attempt to elicit a response. Each interview ends with a statement that might also be a promise; 'Now I'll give you a fair crack, you can ask me a question'. Several questions are posed but no answers are forthcoming, on screen at least. Because Pierce's subjects occupy the dual roles of artist and student and constantly direct their attention towards her, the situation of the interview is a little like a courtly Masque in which courtiers play at being actors for the pleasure of their sovereign.

Unlike the Masque, however, *An Artwork in the Third Person* does not function as a spectacular entertainment to be consumed from a privileged vantage point, but rather exists somewhere between discursive event and artefact. Although a provisional arrangement of props and documents, staged in a particular configuration for a specific time and place, it exists in memory as an almost tangible multi-faceted construction, designed to be experienced from several angles, taken apart and, in the right hands, reassembled into something new.

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CHRONICLE OF A METROPOLITAN COMPLEX OR “ARE YOU HAPPY?”



Chronicle of a Summer
Chronique d'un Été (Chronicle of a Summer, released in 1961) was filmed by anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin. They decide to openly test the possibilities of cinéma vérité, or direct cinema, by capturing snapshots of everyday life in Paris during the summer of 1960, inviting their friends, patients and strangers to interact and take part in a sociological experiment. Marceline who works for a company that analyses psycho-socio studies is initially sent to ask passers-by: “Are you happy”? The question is declined in various forms to a mechanic and his entourage, Renault factory workers, couples,

students. Their natural habitat or environments are recorded. Rouch and Morin appropriate reality in the streets in synchronicity with the statement of intent in the Nouveau Réalisme manifesto earlier that year. Debates ensue around tables indoors and outdoors interspersed with references to current affairs such as the war in Algeria or events in Korea following a student revolution in the spring. Everything is filmed in real time with no analytical voice-over which would have been typical of previous ethno-fiction (except for Marceline's off-screen account of being in a concentration camp replayed while she walks alone through the streets of Paris). A group of them even get

CAROLINE HANCOCK



sent on holiday to St Tropez to continue the conversation – “Vive Les Vacances” say the newspaper covers. On return to Paris, Rouch and Morin analyse the result, question its scientific value or success. They are highly aware of the systemic flaw in the exercise due to the unusual presence of the camera. In the final scene, they even invite their subjects/objects to view and critique the film themselves.

This film contains a host of interests that Sarah Pierce repeatedly engages with in her ongoing project *The Metropolitan Complex* such as archives, creating situations for debate

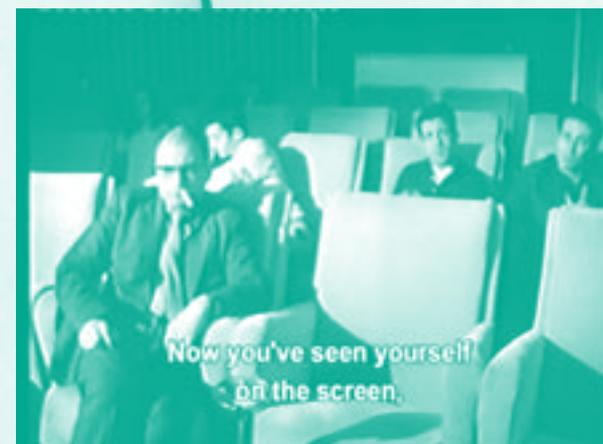
to occur, and student activism. The choice of the question “Are you happy?” suggests a degree of indulgence arguably specific to a Western context then and still now. Paris at the time was on the verge of losing its identity as the metropole versus the Algerian colony for instance. The war, begun in 1954, led to independence in 1962. Contemporary neuroses, hang-ups or complexes are laid bare from disenchantment with the daily working class routine, with political action, bourgeois comfort or consumerism to personal traumas. Pierce appropriates *Chronicle of a Summer* as a tool to pursue their interrogations today.



But I wonder if it's feasible



I may not be able to cope.



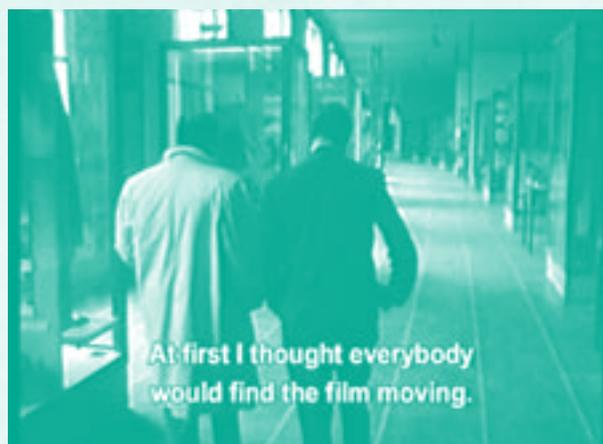
Now you've seen yourself
on the screen.



What's not true? Cameras can't lie.



It was a meeting of like minds.



At first I thought everybody
would find the film moving.



CAPTION Sarah Pierce – *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* (2009-ongoing)
2 single channel dvds; 5 min 49 sec and 51 min 46 sec

Previous page: Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin –
Chronique d'un Été (*Chronicle of a Summer*) (1961)

CHRONICLE OF A METROPOLITAN COMPLEX OR "ARE YOU HAPPY?"



The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?

As part of the second episode of *If I Can't Dance's* third Edition devoted to masquerade, staged in one incarnation at the Sala Rekalde in Bilbao, Sarah Pierce invited local students in art, sociology and politics to a screening of the original French version of *Chronique d'un Été* with Spanish subtitles, followed by a roundtable discussion. She filmed both moments for her 2009 and ongoing piece *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* First of all she prompts a process of identification – individually with the characters or with the project as budding sociologists. They debate

the validity of such a question and what today's political correctness would render quasi impossible. Aware of how forced the scenes are due to the laboratory status of the film, by extension they wonder whether they are actors in their current situation.

Pierce creates a convivial platform – around a table with food and drink – to allow for relation and confrontation. She explores the use value and high impact of a conversation, a dialogue. "Why pretend the printed word means more than what is said between people?", she says. The process of socialising, participating and communicating are seen as constructive,

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thought-provoking and therefore creative.

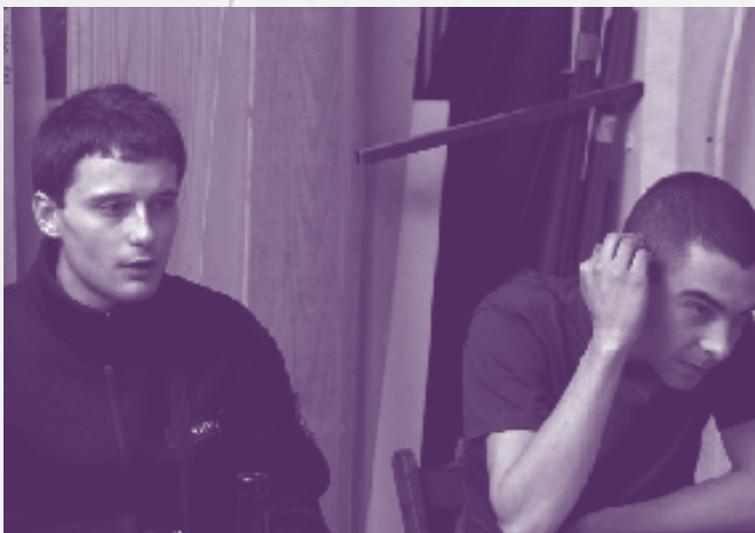
By proposing the viewing and analysis of this film in the Basque country, Pierce encourages parallels between the discussion in 1960 and their present circumstances. Nationalism and a quest for autonomy and self-determination are regularly made manifest by ETA. The students are given the choice to talk in Basque or Spanish but unanimously elect the latter language – even though they identify themselves strongly as Basque. Rouch and Morin's film transcends its own historical moment and carry its concerns into the present or future, enabling self-reflexivity well beyond its context.

Mise en abîme¹

During the third episode of Edition III – *Masquerade* at Project Art Centre in Dublin in June 2009, Sarah Pierce screened *Chronique d'un Été* and video footage of the Bilbao roundtable. The subsequent conversation with the Dublin audience dwelled on the subject/audience of Paris 1961 and that of Bilbao 2009 as well as parallels with the Irish socio-political situation. Pierce's installation *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* will be presented at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in the form of a projection of *Chronique d'un Été* and two monitors respectively showing her edits of the Bilbao audience and the Bilbao roundtable.

CAPTION Sarah Pierce – *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* (2009-ongoing)
2 single channel dvds; 5 min 49 sec and 51 min 46 sec

CHRONICLE OF A METROPOLITAN COMPLEX OR “ARE YOU HAPPY?”



An ongoing process, Pierce could repeat this exercise in various metropolises thus activating novel circumstances and adding layers to the debate. The subject is the audience is the subject in a potentially endless *mise en abîme*. Already embedded in the Bilbao recording is the distancing inherent in the simultaneous translation by Ines Zarza from Spanish to English. An interpretation increases subjectivity and lessens the exactitude of equivalence. Different languages imply cultural baggage. The multiple re-enactments or screenings will add new layers of complexity or generations or reality.

Pierce insists on the relativity of the original,

on lending perspective to a situation in order to highlight a question that should constantly be posed: what is the truth? The answer to this question is surely as relative as any notion of what happiness is.

Documents – Vérité or Masquerade?
Fifteen issues of the journal DOCUMENTS were published in Paris between 1929 and 1930 confronting, as stated on the cover, archaeology, fine arts, ethnography, doctrines and varieties (or popular culture). It famously grouped the ideas, interests, editing and writing of Georges Bataille at the Cabinet of Medals in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Georges Henri Rivière,

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Michel Leiris and Marcel Griaule at the Musée de l'Homme, art historians such as Carl Einstein, poet Robert Desnos and so forth. They presented socio-cultural “evidence” through arresting image juxtapositions and explosive texts, famously exploring rituals, base materialism, the formless, civilisation, in the Critical Dictionary. It was a tool inciting informed questioning of truth. Direct exposure, a multi-disciplinary approach and field study were encouraged. Influenced by Marcel Mauss, the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule was Rouch's professor and mentor; he travelled on the Dakar-Djibouti expeditions in the early 1930s and is renowned for his studies of the Dogon people

and the films *Au Pays des Dogons* (1931-8) and *Sous les Masques Noirs* (1938). The colonialist sounding, judgemental voice-over in these films was criticised – the removal of physical distance from the subject had not enabled objectiveness.

Rouch and Morin's on-screen debrief takes place within the displays of the Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Mankind in Paris), supposedly one of the headquarters for the study of humanity and their research base. They pace up and down and discuss the relative failure of their enterprise. They sought to film unvarnished reality, truth or ‘vérité’ but realise the

CAPTION Sarah Pierce – *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* (2009-ongoing)
2 single channel dvds

CHRONICLE OF A METROPOLITAN COMPLEX OR “ARE YOU HAPPY?”



methodology is doomed from the outset due to people's inevitable reaction – performance – in front of the camera.

“More wine?” – this question posed in Bilbao comes after a point of heated debate when the translator could no longer do justice to the argument due to the overlay of voices. A passage of tension is humorously and conveniently dissipated. At the end, one of the students asks another: “If happiness does not exist, why did you not jump off a bridge?” A response is promised, but only off-camera. Once again the limitations of this documentary form are palpable.

Invitation to Emancipation
Through *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?*, Pierce continues to express her longing for political and aesthetic engagement and critical debate and her openness to the potential of failure. It captures the spirit of her belief in personal liberty and self-expression. It questions any societal obligation to appear happy and fustigates pressures, prescription and any repression of independent voice. Her art calls for action, participation, dialogue and thinking. Here and now.

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Footnotes

1. The *mise en abîme* is a tactic that Pierce also puts into practice in a performance at FOUR in Dublin in January 2009, *Kevin Atherton and Sarah Pierce in Dialogue*, revisiting Atherton's earlier work and reviewed solo at Project Art Centre in June.
2. See exhibition catalogue *Undercover Surrealism. Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS*, ed. by Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, Hayward Gallery Publishing, London, 2006.

Participants

Uxo Anduaga, Koldo D. Bizkarguenaga, Diego Carbajo, Borja De Aramburu, Ander Díez, Sandra González, Daniel Mera, Txema Rodríguez

Interpreter

Inés Zarza

Camera

Sal Kroonenberg

IF I CAN'T DANCE... ON TOUR – VAN ABBEMUSEUM

The Van Abbemuseum is the only museum in the Netherlands to concentrate exclusively on modern and contemporary art from the 20th and 21st centuries. Since it opened in 1936, the museum has built up an impressive collection of over 2,700 works of art. The Van Abbemuseum has the largest El Lissitzky collection outside Russia, a collection which forms a continual source of inspiration for new exhibitions. The museum also possesses masterpieces by renowned artists such as Picasso, Chagall, Kokoschka, Beuys, Gordon and McCarthy. The collection was international in outlook from the outset, and has been formed around ensembles of artists and works that together make up a coherent pattern. A large proportion of the present collection comes from Northern and Western Europe and the USA, but in future the museum intends to enlarge its scope to include contemporary Dutch work and art from the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe which has hitherto barely been represented.

The Van Abbemuseum is not averse to challenges and believes in the fruitfulness of bold experiment. It is neither the medium nor the discipline that dictates the acquisitions and exhibitions, but the artistic cogency of a work in relation to its form and the social context in which it is – or originally was – shown. The curators in the Van Abbemuseum regard art unequivocally as a form of interaction, of action and reaction. The museum stimulates ongoing innovation in its presentation formats, which thereby contribute to the current interpretation of works of art. It also initiates research,

forums and international exchanges. Through-out these activities, the museum relentlessly questions its own function in contemporary society and in the currents of debate that suffuse it. The Van Abbemuseum pursues a role as an inspiring meeting place and as an actively engaged knowledge centre.

The Van Abbemuseum produces a regular programme of temporary exhibitions. On the one hand these include major solo shows by influential artists from the 1960s to the present, and on the other they include large group exhibitions that concentrate on political, economic or social issues. For Dutch artists, in particular, the museum functions as an international platform. The social and experimental stance of the Van Abbemuseum offers many a guest exhibition-maker the space to concretize his or her distinct perspective in the museum's labyrinthine new building.

A visit to the Van Abbemuseum instils the idea that art is part of a greater whole, a part of the world around us and of the ground on which we now stand. How is art that was made in the past related to what is going on now, and what may happen in the future? How does art go about portraying and constructing a contemporary image of the environment in which it exists? These are questions which, while they may not receive a direct answer, are invariably raised by a visit to the Van Abbemuseum.

IF I CAN'T DANCE I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR REVOLUTION

IF I CAN'T DANCE... AT HOME – FRASCATI THEATRE

The monthly event *If I Can't Dance Tonight* functions as a zone of experimentation and as a recurring element within the various, moving activities of *If I Can't Dance...* as a rolling platform. While abroad, *If I Can't Dance...* wants to keep the discourse in Amsterdam going and let the notion of the masquerade unfold its complexity.

Hosted by Frascati Theatre in Amsterdam, *If I Can't Dance Tonight* offers a programme of (newly commissioned) performances, instantaneous exhibitions, conversations with artists, screenings, music etc. The *Tonight* events desire to provoke new ideas in the field of performative art practice in general, and to investigate notions of the masquerade in particular.

The first six *Tonights* introduced the artists who are commissioned to develop new works in Edition III – *Masquerade*. These events have hosted conversations between Suchan Kinoshita and artist and dramaturge Igor Dobricic, Jon Mikel Euba and writer and curator Peio Aguirre, Joachim Koester and writer and curator Lars Bang Larsen, Olivier Foulon and *If I Can't Dance...* director Frédérique Bergholtz. Keren Cytter presented a programme of films and Sarah Pierce performed Kevin Atherton's *Are there any questions* (1978).

The subsequent series broadend the scope of perspectives on the notion of masquerade as articulated by respectively Emma Heddtich, Maria Pask, Jimmy Robert, Ivana Müller, Stefanie Seibold & Teresa Maria Diaz Nerio, Ruth Buchanan, Yael Davids, the Otolith Group & Will

Holder, and Youri Dirckx & Aurelien Froment. Upcoming *Tonight* will present a performative installation by Luca Frei.

From its inception in 2005, *If I Can't Dance..* has explored performative practices in visual art, both within the context of the 'white cube' and the 'black box'. The collaboration with Frascati in Amsterdam offers the exciting opportunity to explore performance within the parameters of the theatre. The artists in the *Tonight* series will give acte de présence in the Van Abbemuseum during the final episode of Edition III – *Masquerade* on March 19-20, and are asked to revisit and reinterpret their performances within the context of the 'white cube' of the museum space.

Here is a short description of Frascati Theatre: Frascati is a theatre production platform that aims to programme and produce small-scale, innovative, national and international theatre works. Housed in a former, nineteenth century Italian coffeehouse, Frascati is located in the famous Nes, the main street for theatre presentation in Amsterdam. Frascati opened its doors for the performing arts in the 1960s and is presently the largest ground level theatre in Amsterdam, hosting approximately 600 performances a year. Main focus of Frascati is the engagement with theatre makers who occupy a central position in social discourse and who seek a direct confrontation between the stage and the audience. Frascati theater is especially renowned for its interdisciplinary approach to the programming of the performing arts.

DISCURSIVE PROGRAMME

READING GROUP / MASQUERADE READER

In 2006, *If I Can't Dance...* has initiated a monthly reading group consisting of a variety of artists, critical thinkers, writers and various other readers from in and outside the field of contemporary (performance) art. In the past, a range of texts in the field of feminism and gender studies have spurred critical debate.

Since the fall of 2008, the *If I Can't Dance...* Reading Group looks at the topic of masquerade, investigating its cultural, social and political meanings and manifestations. With the help of critical texts and visual material, the Reading Group tries to create a space that will enable creative disagreement, unexpected links and in-depth debate. It departs, in short, from a spirit of an open-ended discussion.

Since 2008 up until today, this ongoing collaborative investigation dedicated to the conceptual framework of masquerade, has been further articulated through two research projects conducted at the Dutch Art Institute in Enschedé and the Piet Zwart Institute in Rotterdam. Together with more than thirty artists and theoreticians, *If I Can't Dance...* has been exploring the notion of masquerade from a critical and interdisciplinary perspective addressing questions such as transgression, gender identity and subversion, gesture, the carnivalesque, construction of subjectivity, authorship, mimesis, and alterity.

On March 19-20 *If I Can't Dance...* will be presenting the final episode of Edition III – *Masquerade* at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven. As part of this event, *If I Can't Dance...* will be

launching a publication that aims at articulating and materializing the outcomes and ideas that emerged during the long-time process of investigation and discussion of this topic through the Reading Group and the research projects.

This publication is conceived as a patchwork of critical sources and artistic material that engage the subject of the masquerade from multiple perspectives. More specifically, it comprises a selection of theoretical texts drawn from diverse fields of knowledge like performance studies, gender studies, anthropology, sociology, postcolonial studies, literary studies, and philosophy. Each of the selected texts is preceded by commented annotations or short reflections/introductions written by different participants in the Reading Group in an effort to translate our dialogical approach to the subject matter. In addition, the publication will also feature several original essays by internationally renowned curators and theoreticians/writers that have distinctively contributed to the *Masquerade* edition like Yann Chateigné Tytelman, Lars Bang Larsen, Peggy Phelan, Sue-ly Rolnik, and Steven ten Thije. All texts will be interspersed and disposed in conversation with contributions created by the artists who have been attending the research projects at the Piet Zwart Institute and the Dutch Art Institute.

The *Masquerade* Reader is made possible thanks to the inter-institutional collaboration between *If I Can't Dance*, *I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution* (Amsterdam), Van Abbemuseum (Eindhoven), Dutch Art Institute (Enschede), and the Piet Zwart Institute (Rotterdam).

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WORKSHOPS DUTCH ART INSTITUTE / PIET ZWART INSTITUTE

In the academic year of 2008-2009, *If I Can't Dance...* coordinated the research project *Masquerade* at the Dutch Art Institute/Master Programme/ArtEZ Institute of the Arts in Enschede. Artist Stefanie Seibold taught the course. A selected group of students met and worked with invited artists, theorists and curators and developed a project culminating into a performative ten-day exhibition titled *The Office of Lost Gestures* at the LAB, a contemporary art space in Dublin. The presentation of DAI in Dublin ran parallel with *If I Can't Dance...*'s presentation of episode 3 of Edition III – *Masquerade* in Project Art Centre in June 2009.

In the academic year of 2009-2010, *If I Can't Dance...* set up a second research project *Masquerade* at the Piet Zwart Institute/Postgraduate Studies and Research Master of Fine Art/Willem De Kooning Academy in Rotterdam. Writer/curator Lars Bang Larsen taught the course. This research project involved group readings and a programme of guest lectures. In addition, the participants of the project were attending the performances in the *If I Can't Dance Tonight* series. The day after, in the Piet Zwart Institute, the artist and an invited conversation partner elaborated on the departure points and aims of the performance, encouraging an exchange of ideas with the workshop participants on aspects of research, production and reception.

WORKSHOP DUTCH ART INSTITUTE (2008-2009)

Tutor: Stefanie Seibold

Coordinator: Joris Lindhout

Guest lecturers: Frédérique Bergholtz, Francesco Bernardelli, Rick Dolphijn, Flora Lysen, Wendelien van Oldenborgh, Sarah Pierce, Dieter Roelstraete, Iris van der Tuin, and Marta Zarzycka

Participants: Buba Cvoric, Tereza Maria Diaz Nerio, Tzvika Gutter, Rana Hamadeh, Seda Manavoglu, Barbara Philip, Eva Schippers, James Scunca, Marina Tomic, Veridiana Zurita, Yen Yitzu

WORKSHOP PIET ZWART INSTITUTE (2009-2010)

Tutor: Lars Bang Larsen

Coordinator: Tanja Baudoin

Guest lecturers: Francesco Bernardelli, Yann Chateigné Tytelman, Dominic Eichler, Lars Bang Larsen

Artists and conversation partners:

Ruth Buchanan and Binna Choi, Yael Davids and Vanessa Desclaux, Kodwo Eshun/Anjalika Sagar/Will Holder and Grant Watson, Aurélien Froment and Myriam Van Imschoot
Participants: Giles Bailey, Diana Duta, Priscila Fernandes, Sarah Forrest, Bitsy Knox, Rachel Koolen, Serena Lee, David Lehman, Anna Okrasko, Susana Pedrosa, Linda Quinlan, Marnie Slater, Timmy van Zoelen, Lee Welch, Camilla Wills, Annie Wu

COLOPHON / PARTNERS

COLOPHON

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EDITOR
Frédérique Bergholtz

TEXTS
Frédérique Bergholtz
Maeve Connolly
Caroline Hancock

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Maureen Mooren
& Daniel van der Velden
DESIGN
Maureen Mooren together with
Sandra Kassenaar

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I Don't Want To Be Part
Of Your Revolution

The If I Can't Dance... team consists of:

STAFF
Frédérique Bergholtz, Director
Hans Schamlé, Administrative Director
Maaïke Gouwenberg, Curator
Annie Fletcher, Associate Curator
Tanja Baudoin, Research Assistant
Iberia Perez, Research Assistant
Marcel van den Berg, Website Editor

EXTERNAL
Claire Beke, Communicatie in Cultuur
Sal Kroonenberg, Photography
Maureen Mooren, Graphic Design

BOARD
Gabriëlle Schleijsen, Chair
Esther Gottschalk
Emily Pethick
Daniel van der Velden
Grant Watson

ADDRESS
If I Can't Dance,
I Don't Want To Be Part
Of Your Revolution
Westerdok 606-608
1013 BV Amsterdam
info@ificantdance.org
www.ificantdance.org
+31 (0)203378711

PARTNERS

PARTNERS EDITION III
Overgaden, Copenhagen – DK
de Appel arts centre, Amsterdam – NL
Sala Rekalde, Bilbao – ES
Project Arts Centre, Dublin – IE
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Theater Frascati, Amsterdam



SPECIAL THANKS
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Plaza Futura, Eindhoven





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I DON'T WANT TO BE
PART OF YOUR REVOLUTION

EDITION III
MASQUERADE

EPISODE 4
VAN ABBEMUSEUM
EINDHOVEN 19–20/03/2010

MAGAZINE 5
SARAH PIERCE

