

PROCEEDINGS OF THE PERFORMING SPACE 2023 CONFERENCE

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My Space-Power of Weakness

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My Space-Power of Weakness

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Abstract

The 21st century proliferates that desire to compose, manage and maintain a reality we do not live, whilst conceal or deny the one we do. Where daily performativity is that manifestation of those hegemonic systems of imposed societal synchronicities and unseen forces that demand our excessive expressiveness, incessant subjectivity that results paradoxically in our invisibility and objectivity. This paper will ask: have we become unconscious to consciousness? As Žižek has mused, are zombies more alive than we are, because they know they are dead? while we vegetate in the symbolic (2008, p. 221). Are the hegemonies of the seen symptomatic of our estrangement from what constitutes experience? What form can that emancipation through performance take to reclaim that actuality of place and self, if we are not to endlessly reiterate what we were, instead of make manifest our being and liveness of who we are?

Keywords: Concealment, Paradox, Emergence, New Embodiment

Concealment

This paper proposes alternate considerations of a corporeal if paradoxical potentiality beyond those hegemonic conventions of status, machismo, and competence, and instead expand upon an actuality of appearing and emergence as one demonstrative of a powerful weakness, defiant vulnerability and as a result a liberatory pedagogy. This powerful weakness is that meeting of an expansive virtual and an implosive actual. This is to say that vulnerability and precarity may be a means of emancipation through a performative appearing of our *unseenness*. In Edouard Glissant's Poetics of relation he discusses the notion of camouflage language and Gramsci's concept of the subaltern, whereby this imposed representation is clearly not to our advantage. In contrast, unseenness does not constitute being invisible but instead proposes to make claim to a form of event space akin to a coming into appearance. As Deleuze and Guattari make clear, the actual is not what we are but what we are continually in a process of becoming (2009, p. 112), as such representation is what has been and not what is or will be. This is in place of what is missing or concealed through those sedimentary actions and behaviours which instead of liberating our actions enslave us in them further as that separation of our thinking and doing is upheld.

Figure 1

Still from performance My space by Greig Burgoyne.

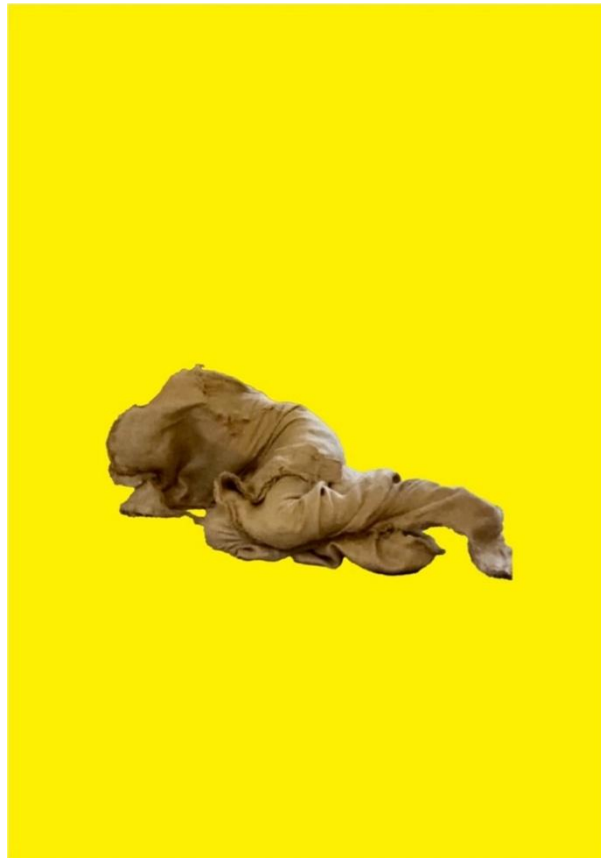


Figure 2

Still from performance My space by Greig Burgoyne.

**Paradox**

Our excessive exposure and endless duplication in ever accelerating quantities of pointless stereotypical content and 'performativity' result in our absence and non-visibility. In consequence, it is a depleted consciousness not an extended one, leading to an impoverishment of experience and indeed living. We are submerged in that enclosed circuit of re-presentation and the incessant demands of endless re-distribution. In opposition, *My Space* enacts new contingencies of weakness, play and incompetence as veritable actualities as the means for us to emerge, instead of objects for widespread commodification and indeed exploitation in the name of wellbeing. Our complete exposure to world is our complete withdrawal from it. To contest this will be to discuss the performance *My-Space* from 2024, this will be to highlight the potential of that visual withdrawal. In doing so, make manifest a more pertinent actuality we will call our power of weakness, as such an event space of our coming into appearance. To discuss *My space*, it will help to put these concepts of coming into appearance, power of weakness and emancipatory practices into context.

Figure 3

Still from performance Classic workout by Greig Burgoyne.



In 2022 Burgoyne presented the performance *Classic workout* at the Museo dell' Arte Classico, Rome (see fig 3). Its performers were contained within hand fabricated hessian sacks that neatly concealed if not constricted their body (and subsequently their means to move freely) from head to toe. Selecting poses from statues within the museum collection, the performers attempt in choreographed sequences to reiterate the chosen gestures or actions. The heroic, grand and hierarchical gestures of war, heroism, ego and power dissolve as limited movements and constricted actions ensue in their place. They sit between potential and futility. But this is a strong futility, not indicative of our weakness per se. The grand sweeping movements found in the statues the performers were directed by are not achievable within the tight sacking. The bodies that perform those micro-gestures were present but not seen. Instead, they seek perhaps to come into appearance. It could be said they are more visible because of their concealment, as a result more present. The use of hessian is deliberate. Its uniformity chosen by Burgoyne presents neither a front nor back. As such the body is removed from the confines of image, and instead is a total body of mutating form. The context of hessian is indicative of both its contingency and utilitarianism. It is a material found in the construction industry and processes associated with traditional sculpture. From wall building to statues, hessian is used to maintain the moisture needed for that workability of the material e.g. clay, cement. It does this by concealing the material, as such maintaining a potentiality. The object in the process of being constructed, therefore is beyond beginning whilst not concluded. What we experience through *classic workout* is *an evolving midst*. Its actuality an inventory of weak if not pathetic actualities but importantly

an assemblage indicative of the real. Real here is distinct from apparitions of the real which are evident in the Lacanian symbolic phase of our development and subsequent incorporation into the world through language. As a result, this incorporation is akin to a sedation from that which defines experience.

My Space (2024) was a performance given in October 2024 for the annual festival organised by Performance Art Bergen Norway. Burgoyne was the invited artist for that year. The artist is concealed inside hessian sacking. Its unconventional shape was determined by the mapped accumulation of spaces where he was present through navigating his studio. Collating together all the sections of space together he navigated, he gets inside the hessian and then enacts a 'work out'. This is less a meeting of Absurdity and logic and more a collision. It is a collision of the hegemonic concealment as maximum exposure and minimal presence, versus maximum presence and zero exposure. He is present but not seen, but what is appearing is not demonstrative of our means to get stronger and fitter, but a working *away* from those imposed synchronicities and actions that perhaps prevent our emergence. Edouard Glissant suggested that to represent that bodily immersion in the world is to limit by default what and who we are. As performing publics, in expressing ourselves we are dispensing with our authentic selves in that desire to fit the imposed selves given to us. bell hooks in her book *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* has suggested that the marginal that hegemony has made vulnerable, fragile, non-conformist, but perhaps authentic and this is where being human is situated, if we are not to be its actors with a prepared script.

Emergence

In *They know not what they do: Enjoyment as a political factor* (2008) Žižek laments our distancing through our avoidance or negation of the real. One example he cites is through the removal of all those actualities we are told are not beneficial for us, as such symptomatic of an increasingly risk-averse experience of world. Examples he cites include sugar free drinks, alcohol free beer, caffeine free coffee, fat free cream, etc (Žižek 2008, p. 76). Keeping our distance, maintaining that disconnect from the world may indeed be our means to survive it or perhaps our demise from it. The very aspects that bring something to the thing, by their removal, give us that Lacanian stand-in for the real. This is a reality-lite with all the real stuff taken out, as such not real. In contrast, for our purposes in this text we will suggest that the real is indicative of that pre-reflective state in which the body is driven by its consciousness, not simply by its intellect. This is because whilst our actions are informed by a past, present, future trajectory, the body is also making those decisions instantaneously through its projected consciousness — which is to say a future, present, past trajectory, in such a way that our consciousness is ahead of us. As a result,

that contestation of agency versus force of will at work in *classic workout* is what subsequently informs *My space*. In its unseenness the body is beyond image and those limits of objecthood, as a consequence unbound in that state of becoming and ongoing presentness. It is from these conceptual frameworks and contexts that *my space* exists. In extending this unseen presence is to make manifest that which is beyond appearance, indicative of a more profound corporeal liveness and emerging authenticity.

Figure 4

Still from performance My space by Greig Burgoyne.



My Space explores the corporeality as elemental, not as our ongoing production as 'things' amongst things, whereby the reception of the body is absorbed in its realisation. Instead, *My space* discloses an ontology beyond exteriority and aesthetic appearance, in a co-created intersubjectivity whereupon "the visible is pregnant with the invisible" (Merleau-Ponty 1965, p. 163) as Merleau-Ponty would say. In contrast to the sedimentary and enclosed nature of mass performativity, its ungrounding is established through that reciprocity of two depths: the expressed world and beholder of that worlding, leading beyond an exhausted limbo and an outdated framing that is representation. In contrast to the sedimentary and enclosed nature of mass performativity, its Heideggerian ungrounding is established by that intentionality, as Husserl called it, between the object of sorts we see, and that diverse content that reality constitutes we are sensing through the experience as a

result. *My space* may therefore be indicating that clash, not the harmony of the seeing 'I' and the body that lives it. This implies an implosive and absent worlding indicated by its reflective gestures grating against an expansive pre-reflective striving for world. If "capital produces a banalising generalisation of the body" (Nancy 2008, p. 91) by all its imposed actions and aims, in contrast, *My space* exists between the aims of the subject and will of the object, whereby we encounter that reciprocity of two depths: the expressed world and beholder of that worlding, which in taking us beyond the exhausted realms of representation "appears to me as that which is beyond appearance, totally present but never totally known" (Dufrenne 1973, p. 221).

New Embodiment

In considering both these manifestations and potentialities, it might be beneficial to reflect upon performance and its regard for time that is non-linear. Phillip K Dick speaks of *multiverses* which generate numerous realities simultaneously. Our inability to perceive these numerous realities he called time slips, demonstrative of an infinite production of veils, assuring the coherence of a reality while all along hiding the ontological realities beneath that flow. Through our societal performativity it could be said we have become nothing but stations within a vast network where thinking and action never unite, and we exist as ghosts of ourselves in that world of programmed realities in which we project imaginary perceptions of real conditions of existence. *My space* reclaims the absent body from its slumber. In doing so, the body is made present by that process of resurfacing through performing those actions, gestures thus revealing a phenomenology of that power of absence as presence. Where the image always promises more than it is (2009, p. 97), the concealed image in *My space* sits between that threshold of both being in the world and being outside it, looking in. In this way, the outcomes envisage the performance as twofold. The intensification of those veiled realities as new ontological states of that performativity, and secondly but more significantly the advancement of a phenomenology of unseeness, whereby the interiority of the absent body, its power of weakness is unveiled in that agency of our ongoing, if precarious emancipation. This is to bring forth the distance that representation brings about. What is absent and unseen is now closer than its representation could ever be.

Performance is thus a paradox no less. Akin to a surface of inexhaustible depth, Levinas suggested this "non representability is the surplus of the lived body over the representation of it" (2015, p. 43). To elevate what that concealed surplus may now constitute, *My Space* is that rupture of the optical unconscious, whereby allowing those reactivated territorialisations of a previously hidden if not absent corporeality seen by a maximum concealed-ness. In doing so, reveal not our conformity and ongoing adaptation to those imposed conditions of body, site and space, but a precarity and play toward a social, corporeal and indeed political

emancipation that may be at its most profound when we are not seen but instead in that situation of endlessly coming into appearance. In a word, alive.

Figure 5

Performance still from My space by Greig Burgoyne.



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