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Published

2012

Journal Title

Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art

DOI

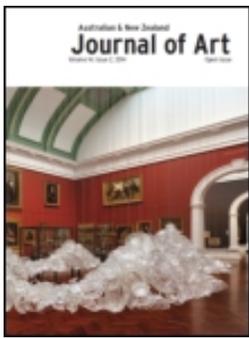
[10.1080/14434318.2012.11432636](https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2012.11432636)

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To cite this article: Susan Best (2012) Against Identification: Gerard Byrne's Brechtian Tendencies, Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, 12:1, 225-241, DOI: [10.1080/14434318.2012.11432636](https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2012.11432636)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/14434318.2012.11432636>



Published online: 18 May 2015.



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PLAYBOY PANEL: NEW SEXUAL LIFE STYLES

discussion

a symposium on emerging behavior patterns, from open marriage to group sex

PANELISTS

MADLINE DAVIS, 33, is a past president of the Niagara Frontier District of the Mattachine Society, a homophile civil-rights organization. She was a delegate to the 1972 Democratic National Convention, at which she made an impassioned plea for gay equality. After graduation (with a B.A. in English) from the University of Buffalo, where she also obtained a master's degree in library science, Ms. Davis worked as a solo folk singer and as a vocalist with the New Chicago Lunchee rock band in such coffeehouses and night clubs as The Bitter End and The Gaslight in New York City and the Limelight Gallery in Buffalo. She was married heterosexually for a year and a half before coming out to her husband, a life style she has followed for the past ten years. Her contributions to the gay movement have included many original songs, a one-act play, *Liberella* (a take-off on *Cinderella* in which the heroine runs off with

the fairy godmother), and numerous talks before church and P. T. A. groups, the Lions and Elks clubs and college students. She currently lives in Buffalo with her Lesbian lover of two years and works full time as a librarian.

BETTY DODSON, 44, is known for her efforts "to liberate women" through her work in the feminist movement and "to liberate society" through her explicitly erotic art. Ms. Dodson's celebration of the art of heterosexual and homosexual lovemaking, which depicts behavior, has been disorganized to masturbation shows at such New York City galleries as the Wickersham. In June of this year, a retrospective of her work was presented at the Kronhausens' International Museum of Erotic Art in San Francisco. An ardent sexual libertarian (in 1971 she served as a judge at the second annual Wet Dream Film Festival in Amsterdam), Ms. Dodson is currently conducting a "body and sex workshop"

for women that she hopes will raise their sexual consciousness.

AL GOLDSTEIN, 37, is the cofounder and irrepressible editor of *Screw*, the nation's best-selling underground sex tabloid. Since its unique blend of raunch and humor first appeared on November 4, 1968—the day Goldstein reminds us that President Nixon was first elected—circulation has steadily grown to 122,000 copies a week. The rise has been accompanied by increased harassment from law-enforcement agencies, and Goldstein has made many court appearances to defend what he calls "The World's Greatest Newspaper" against a wide variety of obscenity charges. An erstwhile news photographer who once spent four days in all Havana jail falsely charged with—of all things—spying for the CIA, Goldstein is currently visible as "the King of the Philistines" in *Screw's* first film production, a hard-core epic titled *It Happened in Hollywood*. His company also publishes *Gay*, a weekly homosexual tabloid, and



LOVELACE: If you don't have an orgasm daily, you become very nervous, very uptight. I do, anyway. I think there would be a lot fewer problems in the world if everybody enjoyed themselves sexually.



POMEROY: A stable marriage can tolerate a great deal of outside sex—in a limited way, seen as insertion of a penis into a vagina. But with emotional involvement, a stable marriage can get into trouble.



PERRY: I believe I've always been gay. At the early age of five, when I used to go to the movies in Tallahassee, Tarzan turned me on. I used to fantasize, wishing he'd throw me around.



GOLDSTEIN: If my wife cheated, I'd kill her. She's part of my property. I mean, I am a sexist. And since I pay the bills, I feel I own her, the way I own my car, and I don't lend my car out to people.



DODSON: Everybody's first orgy is mind-boggling. I remember mine. Half of me was thrilled, half terrified. I didn't know the social rules. What should I wear? How should I get out of what I wear?



VAN DEN HAAG: The dangers of bisexuality are comparable to those of LSD. For some people it's harmless, as far as we know. In others it has precipitated a breakdown requiring institutionalization.

MENTHOL
11 mg. "tar",
1.0 mg. nicotine.

11 mg. "tar", 1.0 mg. nicotine.

Against Identification: Gerard Byrne's Brechtian Tendencies

Susan Best

The work of contemporary Irish artist Gerard Byrne exemplifies the principle that underpins the theory of knowledge called perspectivism: that is, the idea that the perspectives of different individuals and groups contribute to what can be known about something. Byrne's model of ethical communication depicts the social world as comprising such fundamentally different perspectives. His work achieves a concatenation of viewpoints through a unique updating of one of the most well-known modernist theatrical techniques, Bertolt Brecht's *Verfremdungseffekt*, the alienation effect or 'A-effect'.

While Byrne's use of Brechtian techniques is frequently noted, his highly innovative approach to using them is not explored. His originality lies in his revival of the complexity of Brecht's A-effect, revealing what I call Brecht's additive approach: the addition of distancing techniques alongside modes of engagement, identification, and bringing close. I will explore a selection of Byrne's video installations that demonstrate this additive approach, namely, *New Sexual Lifestyles* (2003), *1984 and Beyond* (2005–7), and *An Exercise with Questions and Answers* (2008).

Brecht: Emotion without Crude Empathy

In a recent interview with Danish curator Niels Henriksen, Byrne reveals the importance of Brechtian ideas for his work. He says:

One of the figures I am definitely inspired by is Brecht. Invariably Brecht stands for a process-based structure, as well as, of course, a dialectical politicised structure, which might be a little more questionable at this point.¹

The last statement, which expresses doubt about the contemporary relevance of Brecht's political aims, underscores Byrne's departure from the standard reading of Brechtian theories.

The political aims of Brecht's work have been central to his legacy, dominating the early commentary of his friend and contemporary Walter Benjamin.² They also underpinned the debates of the 1970s and 1980s about the pertinence of Brechtian ideas for film theory and practice that occurred in the British journal *Screen*. Griselda Pollock summarised the political purchase of the *Screen* scholarship for feminist politics as identifying the power of dis-identificatory practices for enabling critical reflections on identity.³ The A-effect facilitated the emancipation of disempowered

groups from the grip of debilitating stereotypes by disrupting forms of realism that suture viewers into various sexual, racial, and class-based roles. In the visual arts, the heyday of such ideas was the 1960s and 1970s, as Philip Glahn has recently shown.⁴ George Baker argues that in the critical art of the last decade, Brecht's 'pedagogical didactics' have returned.⁵ This emancipatory, educative role for cultural production is seemingly set aside by Byrne. Or rather, his art teaches us about ethics rather than politics.

In his interview with Henriksen, Byrne singles out Brecht's distinction between the actor and the performer as his principal concern.⁶ For Brecht, this distinction is one of a number of techniques intended to generate the A-effect and to cut across crude empathy. This attack on crude empathy is at the core of the A-effect; even when Brecht softened his approach in the late 1940s, his rejection of empathy remains unchanged.⁷ He criticises crude empathy because it 'entrances', and creates an uncritical or unreflective spectator who is 'entangled' or who identifies with the main characters and is 'carried away' or 'hypnotised' by the drama or actions.⁸ The A-effect aims to cut across these standard practices of illusionistic theatre.

There is a tendency to think that dramatic or filmic experience is thereby rendered highly intellectual or devoid of feeling. However, as Brecht's defenders indicate, he also advocated humour, wonder and naivety, pleasure and lightness of touch.⁹ Moreover, he supported the use of emotion, a much-overlooked fact. Brecht carefully distinguishes between emotion and empathy. As he put it,

The rejection of empathy is not the result of a rejection of the emotions, nor does it lead to such. The crude aesthetic thesis that emotions can only be stimulated by means of empathy is wrong.¹⁰

While Brecht does not explain what these other stimulations might be, his comment is provocative, challenging the common perception of his work as solely appealing to the intellect.

The unusual combination of emotional engagement without crude empathy is precisely what Byrne's work offers. As George Baker and Mark Godfrey note, Byrne deploys the more familiar Brechtian techniques that interrupt and disrupt the narrative and distance the audience.¹¹ However, his work also reveals a complicated combination of emotional engagement and disengagement that his critics consistently overlook. This departure from the typical understandings of Brechtian method prompts us to look more carefully at Byrne's source: Brecht's distinction between actor and performer.

For Brecht, the distinction between actor and performer highlights the 'double role' of actors: they are supposed to appear both as themselves and as the role they are playing. To hold these roles apart, the actor must not dissolve into the character. Rather, according to Brecht, the actor:

has just to show the character, or rather he has to do more than just get into it; this does not mean that if he is playing passionate parts he must himself remain cold.

It is only that his feelings must not at bottom be those of the character, so that the audience's may not at bottom be those of the character either.¹²

Such fine discriminations between the actor's and the character's feelings might suggest a highly intellectual theatre, where the joys and values of entertainment are lost or sacrificed. However, Brecht himself presents his technique as an addition rather than a subtraction. When Charles Laughton plays King Lear, Brecht says, the audience gains Laughton's 'own opinions and sensations, which would otherwise have been completely swallowed up by the character'.¹³ This doubled transmission gives the audience a measure of interpretative freedom not possible with crude empathy.

Crude empathy, then, lacks this added dimension. The audience is allied with the main character in the manner of the psychoanalytic concept of identification. In other words, an assimilation of the position of the other takes place, premised on the recognition or construction of sameness. This process of internalisation becomes more complex, rather than being destroyed, by the addition of at least one other viewpoint: the actor as him or herself.

The desire to disrupt the processes of internalisation and identification are not limited to Brechtian theatre and film. The suspicion that psychology, or an interest in subjectivity, necessarily favours bourgeois individualism is a common feature of much political criticism. A contemporary variant of this longstanding anti-psychologism is analysed by Ruth Leys in her recent book, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After*.¹⁴ She examines the shift in holocaust studies from a focus upon survivor guilt to the survivor's experience of shame.

Leys notes the widespread rejection of internalisation, that is, the dismissal of the immersive psychological model of identification, which she calls mimetic. Instead, non-mimetic models of performativity are championed by theorists such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Giorgio Agamben. Arguing strongly against the current trend to privilege the performative, Leys insists that the immersive and anti-mimetic are inseparable. Rather like Brecht, she advocates the additive model of dialectics where opposing forces are in constant interaction, rather than the either/or logic of contemporary performative theory.

This additive approach is most evident in Byrne's video, *An Exercise with Questions and Answers*. Like most of Byrne's work, this video is based on historical records. In this instance, the records are psychiatric interviews with Nazi war criminals made in preparation for their prosecution at the Nuremberg trials. This subject matter adds a level of gravity to this work that is less evident when content is drawn from popular culture. For example, his source for *1984 and Beyond* and *New Sexual Lifestyles* is *Playboy* magazine. The additive technique is applied very differently in each of these three works. *1984 and Beyond* represents the most extreme deployment of distancing techniques, making it the ideal work to begin with, as it is the least additive and the least psychological.



Irritation and Engagement: 1984 and Beyond

Margaret Eddershaw explains that from his earliest days as a writer/director, Brecht wanted to 'reduce—not eliminate—the audience's empathy with the characters on stage in order to aid their intellectual understanding of the events presented'.¹⁵ *1984 and Beyond* departs from this attenuated approach to alienation by almost eliminating the generation of empathy with the characters. Godfrey has a more extreme view, arguing that the work eliminates empathy altogether; he asserts that it produces 'pleasures and frustrations (but never empathy with the characters)'.¹⁶ The 'characters' are various science-fiction writers of the 1960s, played by Dutch actors, who present their views about the then portentous future year of 1984. The original material, drawn from a 1963 *Playboy* roundtable discussion and reformulated as slightly arch dialogue, retains a strong sense of the written, rather than the spoken, word. The work is shown on three video monitors dispersed throughout a room and accompanied by twenty black-and-white photographs and vinyl text adhered directly to the wall.



For those who are not especially keen on science fiction, the content for this work is quaint but hardly compelling. One could even argue that there is little need to use distancing techniques with this material; time, and the obscurity that time has delivered to most of the participants, has already partly accomplished the task. The use of elaborate techniques of defamiliarisation with such obscure material could be seen as over-kill. Indeed, this work deploys so many distancing techniques that it is hard to concentrate on the textual material presented; the interruptions and disruptions generate such a high level of interference that the work is almost irritating.

The non-naturalistic tenor of the dialogues concocted by Byrne is further amplified by a battery of other anti-mimetic strategies. Among them are the actors' Dutch accents, the anonymous fashion in which the writers' views are reported (the participants' names are only presented on the intertitles between scenes), and the positioning of the video monitors in relation to one another, which makes one conscious of watching and being watched. In a sense, the challenge of this work

is to think about what is engaging or interesting about these writers' views now. Where are the mimetic elements that Brecht's method requires to counterbalance the accumulation (one might say barrage) of anti-mimetic strategies?

What engages here are precisely the anti-mimetic elements of carefully choreographed scenes and crisp modernist scenarios. The beauty and precision of the *mise en scène* are provided by two buildings in the Netherlands, both of which exemplify modern architecture. Both by Dutch architects, one is Hugh Maaskant's Provinciehuis in Den Bosch, the other Gerrit Rietveld's reconstruction of the 1954 Sonsbeek Pavilion at the Kröller-Müller Museum and Sculpture Garden. In the latter, one also sees exquisitely situated modernist sculptures by British artist Barbara Hepworth.

In keeping with the superb settings, the actors' costumes and accessories—such as spectacles, pipes and even glass tumblers—are vintage gems worthy of a BBC historical drama. The double-breasted, primrose-coloured cardigan—with a super-wide, ribbed collar—worn by one of the writers, is a particularly delightful and distinctive period piece. Other sources of engagement are drawn from the performing arts; the rhythm and movement of characters, and the well-paced succession of scenes, engage the spectator in the manner of music and dance. The attractions of careful composition and well-choreographed movement illustrate Brecht's assertion that emotion can be generated by means other than crude empathy.

The dialogue, which might be imagined to be the focus of the work in the manner of theatre, is an embellishment, an odd confection that gives the choreography purpose. As if to confirm the unimportance of the dialogue, the camera often tracks the reactions of listeners rather than showing the faces of speakers. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, the dialogue has a largely phatic function or purpose—it shows communion. The jocular, urbane, pipe-smoking men enjoy the riffs of conversation and speculation in the manner of the jazz-saxophone player whose music sets the tone for the loosely connected scenes. The goodwill and great civility of these exchanges distracts from the spectacular silliness of the writers' visions of the future. For example, they imagine their own vital importance as science-fiction writers for relating to any alien life forms that might be discovered in the future. The inventions of the future these writers emphasise are not technological achievements, but, rather, products that will ease men's lives, such as an oral solution to shaving, or clothes that are as disposable as Kleenex. On the political front, they assume the polarised military powers of the 1960s, the USSR and the US, will pass one another around 1980 as each heads in the opposite direction. The net result will be, one writer concludes, that the US will be redder than the USSR by 1984.

Their various imaginings do not isolate the contribution of any individual writer; rather, the men collectively embellish the absurd themes being thrown around for discussion. Without the alienating effects, the dialogues might be experienced as amusing, rather than just a little absurd. The high levels of stylisation somehow quell the desire to laugh, just as they sweep the beholder into the rhythm and tempo



Gerard Byrne *1984 and Beyond* 2005-7, three single-channel videos on monitors, twenty black-and-white photographs, vinyl text. COURTESY GREEN ON RED GALLERY, DUBLIN

of the exchanges. One could say that distraction is honed to perfection in this work, so that the various forms of distraction and interruption are also the absorbing elements in this peculiarly engaging and disengaging work.

Byrne exhibits the video components alongside temporally indeterminate photographs of American everyday life, by which he aims to show the continuities between the past and the present and thereby forestall responses, such as 'didn't they get it all so wrong, and how naïve'.¹⁷ However, these photographs do not readily perform this function. Rather, what prevents the superior positioning of the viewer is the hyperbolic deployment of distraction techniques. Previously, I referred to these excessive interruptions as verging on irritating; it is more accurate to say that they are irritating *in a particular way*. Mild irritation, such as that generated by Byrne's work, short circuits the attainment of the high moral ground that sustains much judgement. In particular, it precludes the resort to ideological critique that enables easy self-aggrandisement by judging the past as deficient relative to a more enlightened present. Irritation disrupts this too comfortable position and ruffles the viewer in more unpredictable ways.

Sianne Ngai has recently shown how provoking the reader's irritation complicates the two stock modes of generating empathy: sharing a character's feelings, and 'volunteered passion', an expression coined by Philip Fisher to describe the literary occasions when the reader supplies the missing feeling for a character.¹⁸ She argues that irritation cuts across both responses while also cutting across both identification and disidentification. She makes this point while analysing Nella Larsen's novel *Quicksand* (1928), a classic of the Harlem renaissance. Ngai describes how the reader's irritation with the main female character, who is presented as overly sensitive, enables the novel to elude the compulsion to be expressive so often mandated by the 'uplift aesthetic'.¹⁹ Art demonstrating an 'uplift aesthetic' is generally expected to render the new enlightened version of an identity sympathetically. Irritation, by contrast, is abrasive, prickly, and ornery, and thereby facilitates and respects the opacity of feeling. As Ngai puts it, irritation serves the novel's 'right to *not* express, and to *preserve* its expressive vacancies in particular'.²⁰

Byrne has no need to do battle with such expectations; the strictures of the uplift aesthetic do not apply to him. However, his work just as carefully constructs an ethics of spectatorship through mild irritation. Viewers are provided with a model of respectful discussion, the dramatisation of which shows the sharing of different views in a constructive fashion. Indeed, the overall affective tone of the discussion is affable and urbane. The distancing mechanisms, however, obscure both the men and dialogue from close scrutiny. Viewers cannot easily judge them as individuals. Or, rather, when watching the videos, it is hard to concentrate on the men or the dialogue. Thus, the amassed strategies of interruption and interference, and the mild irritation they generate, shift the emphasis from content to tone. In addition, the spectator may be mildly entranced by the visual splendour of costume, choreography, and location. With their attention thus shifted, they are much less inclined to judge the content, or the characters and their views—one neither embraces nor rejects them. The suspension produced in the viewer is an unusual

result, approximating the kind of non-judgemental, evenly spaced attention required of a good psychoanalyst. Or, if one does judge them—which, indeed, I have done here—there is no individuated speaker with whom one can identify in order to embrace or reject him.

Interest and Interruption: *New Sexual Lifestyles*

The formal arrangement of *New Sexual Lifestyles* is similar to *1984 and Beyond*.²¹ Three video monitors are set up as an installation, complete with accompanying photographs along the walls. While the photographs in *1984 and Beyond* were intended to reflect the continuity of the 1960s to the present, displaying seemingly timeless images of American everyday life, all but one of the photographs here show the exquisite modernist house in which the filming took place. Cantilevered over a river, Goulding Summerhouse was built in 1972 in Enniskerry, near Dublin, by the Irish architect Ronnie Tallon. The photographs thus reiterate the location. Further, the Summerhouse, as an example of modernist architecture, also speaks of a forward-looking sensibility. The view out of the vast windows of the Summerhouse is emphasised in most of the photographs. Their large scale replicates the dimensions of a window aperture, thereby appearing to puncture the exhibition space itself. The remaining photograph shows the opening page from the 1973 *Playboy* roundtable that provided the script. Below the headline 'Discussion Playboy Panel: New Sexual Life Styles' is the subtitle 'a symposium on emerging behavior patterns, from open marriage to group sex'. Photographs of six of the participants appear below the small section of text that introduces one further panellist and two of the pictured ones.

New Sexual Lifestyles is inherently more engaging than *1984 and Beyond*. First, the subject matter is people's sexual lifestyles—a topic that generates much more interest than dated visions of the future. Sex sells, as we are constantly reminded. Moreover, in this case, the headline suggests that the sexual behaviour to be debated will be exciting, new, and controversial, rather than some mundane canvassing of typical conjugal rites. Most importantly for generating traditional narrative interest and engagement, the panellists emerge with relatively distinct personalities. Even if it is not possible to identify every one of the participants, at least seven of the twelve are described by the short biographies and photographs from *Playboy*. They are Madeline Davis, Betty Dodson, Al Goldstein, Dr Ernest van den Haag, Wardell Pomeroy, Troy Perry, and Linda Lovelace. The inclusion of women in the discussion dissipates the antiquated boffin-like air generated by the exclusively male group assembled for *1984 and Beyond*, while also significantly contributing to the differentiation of the group.

The other five characters and the actors who play them are identified in the description of the work that appears in an exhibition catalogue produced for the Venice Biennale. The characters are listed as John Money, William Simon, Robert H. Rimmer, and Eberhard and Phyllis Kronhausen. In addition to the specifically

named participants, there are distinct perspectives on sexual matters presented in *New Sexual Lifestyles*. Indeed, most of the panellists represent particular sexual identities; for example, the two swingers (the Kronhausens), the lesbian feminist (Davis), the pornographer (Goldstein), the porn star (Lovelage), and the gay man (Perry).

As the list indicates, panellists were carefully selected because they represent 'new' sexual lifestyles and because they were likely to disagree, which further underscores their 'individuality'. While they are more individualised than the panellists in *1984 and Beyond*, they are nonetheless viewed through similar distancing techniques. The script is again theatrical rather than naturalistic, although the participants here are sitting down as if they are having a roundtable discussion, unlike the many scenes in *1984 and Beyond* that feature unnatural groupings of standing figures that recall theatre or dance, thereby deliberately flouting the more naturalistic requirements of film.

The accents of the actors do not match those of the original participants—instead of the expected American accents, most have Irish accents—which creates a mismatch between actors and roles, but a match between location, architecture, and people. While the actors slyly peep from behind these roles with the occasional smile or fluffed line, they mostly stay in character. Although the narrative is hardly delivered in a wholly naturalistic way, there is a sense of the additive approach to character advocated by Brecht insofar as one is made aware of actor and character as conjoined and yet distinct.

In *New Sexual Lifestyles*, the assemblage of the scenes also contributes to the sense of disruption and distancing. A number of the discussion points that structure the roundtable and organise the scenes are repeated across the three video monitors. Each time a scene is repeated, it is edited and/or filmed slightly differently. In some cases, different reaction shots are shown, in others there are small differences evident in the dialogue, or its pronunciation, to indicate that a different take of the same scene is being shown. These subtle differences, and the use of repetition itself, are further sources of distraction and interference with the narrative.

The debate between characters is thus framed by a series of devices that emphasise the artificiality of the exchanges. Nonetheless, their disputes, and the individual stories and vignettes, remain engaging. One of the most heated exchanges takes place when Goldstein, the editor of *Screw* magazine, refers to his wife as his possession—'part of my property', he puts it. As his viewpoint is immediately challenged by the group—in particular, by Madeleine Davis who instantly expresses her sympathy for his wife—and followed up by Goldstein's own acknowledgement of his hypocrisy, there is no need for the viewer to volunteer their passion (to invoke Philip Fisher's terms). The cast gives Goldstein the kind of drubbing that completely nullifies his comment. Not only is he reprimanded, he is artfully mocked with the suggestion that he might consider having a 'deep loving relationship with some of your property, like a sofa'.

Throughout the dialogues are comments about the need to 'try to empathise with sexual experience' and an insistence on being 'tolerant and non-judgemental'.

The prerequisite of such tolerance is, of course, the capacity to acknowledge the existence and legitimacy of other positions and perspectives, even when they are ones with which we cannot agree. The idea of disagreement is exemplified in *New Sexual Lifestyles*; it demonstrates not only the existence of conflicting positions and perspectives but also the way these conflicting views enter into debate. In other words, perspectivism enables and facilitates debate; it does not result in a relativism where supposedly all things are equal, everyone can have their view, and everything supposedly goes. The other cultural cliché that is challenged by this debate is the oft-cited assumption that the modern or postmodern self is fluid and changeable. On the contrary, selves here are subject to the rootedness and inflexibility of position while also being presented as one of many perspectives.

Rehearsal, Repetition, and Character: *An Exercise with Questions and Answers*

Installed at the 17th Biennale of Sydney in 2008, *An Exercise with Questions and Answers* combined mimetic and anti-mimetic tendencies in yet another way. Distancing techniques began at the work's entrance. The video was presented in an exceptionally dark room made possible by coating the walls with black paint and baffling the light from the projector. A double-sided screen and one sound speaker were situated close to the entrance drawing the beholder into the room; however, this appeal was only intermittent as the different scenes were separated by short sections of black. If someone arrived at one of these moments of almost-pitch darkness, his or her initial navigation into the room was very difficult. The extreme darkness kept many spectators at the threshold of the work or reduced them to wall-patting their way inwards, affording some minor amusement to those vision-adjusted spectators already sprawled on the floor. The consciousness of other spectators that the multi-monitor works facilitated was continued using these other means.

On the screen, only one character appears: a Nazi prisoner. He is answering an American psychiatrist's questions. The prisoner is shown with minimal props to create the scene of his questioning—his cell with bed and desk, somewhere in Nuremburg in 1946. Alongside the props of his confinement are the stacked chairs of a makeshift rehearsal hall, so that the *mise en scène*, as well as the method of shooting the scene, reflects both naturalism and theatricality. Camera movements are accentuated with oddly cropped frames, jerky movements to find the correct subject, and protracted moments showing the camera adjusting focus.

The psychiatrist's commentary is delivered off screen and in the past tense, as if he is reading from his notes. He nonetheless presents the material in the manner one would expect of a scholarly report: careful, considered, with acute observations about the prisoner's psychology and mood. His accent is 'in character'; appropriately, he has an American accent. He is not directly part of the screen illusion, except insofar as he frames the prisoner's account of himself and his life. Nor is the translator present, who is mentioned and clearly vital for the exchanges to take place. In addition to ambient sounds on the set, the other key voice is that of the



theatre director, who instructs the actor on how to deliver the lines or work with the various props. The actor's German accent falls away during these exchanges. The director's accent is hard to place; her voice has a wavering mid-Atlantic quality, at times sounding Irish, at times American.

Her interaction with the actor does not intersect with the psychiatrist's commentary, leaving that testimony relatively free of interference. Different perspectives on the Nazi's testimony, however, are accentuated: the psychiatrist in the past, the director in the filmic present, and the actor as distinct from the character. In other words, the alienation technique is cleverly amplified by including not just stage directions, which is one of Brecht's suggestions, but also the naturalistic repetitions and variations of a rehearsal, which enables the inclusion of the making of the performance itself.

Despite these distancing and framing devices, where viewers know the actor as Rolly or Roland but not as an identifiable Nazi war criminal, the Nazi's story nonetheless draws the beholder into the action. The work of identification is partly mobilised through the conventions of therapeutic and dramatic humanisation. That



is, the war criminal, while presented as a slightly repellent character—who is cold, arrogant, and peevish—is also made understandable, if not likeable, through the highly conventional means of telling the story of his personal history. Viewers learn of his unfortunate loveless marriage, his affair with the woman he should have married (his childhood sweetheart), his adoration of his mother, and his admiration for his father (a lawyer who is disbarred for representing both sides in a divorce case). Most importantly, information about his military life is excluded.

Unlike *New Sexual Lifestyles* and *1984 and Beyond*, the narrative here has a strong sense of progression with changing moods and character development. Despite being presented as a video loop, there is a clear beginning, middle, and end. Indeed, precise dates are given in the psychiatrist's voice-over for the times of some of the interview segments. In terms of narrative development, particularly noteworthy is the prisoner's acceptance of responsibility for his actions (although, of course, viewers do not know what those actions are). He is glad his suicide attempt failed and decides that, unlike many other defendants, he is not going to blame Hitler for his own crimes. In other words, he decides not to adopt the entrancement defence

or any variant of it, despite admitting that he sacrificed everything for Hitler. He emerges, like the father of his narrative, as a man of some honour, at least when it comes to the issue of admitting responsibility for one's actions.

This narrative is disrupted by the revelations of filmic and theatrical illusion, and the noise and interference these interventions create—visual, aural, and spatial. What is quite remarkable about the modes of distraction in *An Exercise with Questions and Answers* is how they build a more complex picture of the character by providing different perspectives on the event and its central figure. Just as the four sound speakers in this work animate the space of exhibition, so too the perspectives of the camera, the director, and the actor make the character multi-dimensional and yet open to scrutiny. In this work especially, Byrne highlights the psychological complexity that can result from the A-effect when it is used additively. In *An Exercise with Question and Answers*, three main perspectives are added together to show the character: the criminal's character is presented naturalistically by the actor, analytically by the psychiatrist, and as subject to interpretation by the director.

These different points of view are both intriguing and challenging; they are not presented as alternatives to choose between but rather as different positions to take into account. To use this approach with such volatile historical material accentuates the power of Byrne's additive technique. The additive mode of presentation of *An Exercise with Questions and Answers* has a curiously anaesthetising affect, as if the overload of perspectives and information both stimulates and interferes with judgement, precluding easy condemnation, but encouraging analysis. Brecht's chief aim for theatre—to facilitate thinking and criticality—is well and truly realised by this work, which holds in tension contrasting positions, demanding that the audience thinks about such tensions as well as feels them.

Disagreement and Perspectivism

If impersonal methods, such as the alienation effect, aim for a form of detachment akin to so-called 'objectivity', then Byrne's work might help to decipher what this word can mean for contemporary audiences. In his work, detachment does not result from the kind of transcendence much criticised by feminist theorists as aligned with objectivity, reason, and masculinity, the antidote to which is often assumed to be the acknowledgement of perspectivism. One form this antidote routinely takes is the presentation of one's own position as necessarily partial and subjective. The artist or author attempts to speak from his or her position in a self-conscious manner, an approach often associated with the idea of situated knowledge. However, Byrne does not use this approach; his subjective position is not at issue in his work.

A concern with self-expression, however, is an extremely common approach in contemporary art concerned with identity politics, with or without self-conscious or self-reflective presentation. In the early 1990s, Hal Foster identified the return of this kind of self-expression after decades of adherence to the alternate ethic

of impersonality. He succinctly characterised this strain of art as informed by 'a politics of new, ignored and different subjectivities'.²² The emphasis on the issue of difference, of course, reiterated an important theoretical concern of both art and politics of the 1980s. One of the unforeseen consequences of this widespread valorisation of difference has been the damping down of debate, which Ruth Leys has analysed. She argues that this avoidance is one of the unfortunate consequences arising from the shift from an explanatory model of subjectivity that considers the moral worth of actions to the performative model of shame.²³

In *From Guilt to Shame*, Leys describes how postmodern accounts of subjectivity, such as that of shame theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, disregard questions of intention and meaning while emphasising materialist accounts of affect. Leys acknowledges the precision and brilliance of Sedgwick's work but nonetheless concludes that it proposes a theory of affect that gives 'primacy to the feelings of a subject without a psychology and without an external world'.²⁴ This drastic curtailment of the complexity of subjectivity and its external relations leads to what she calls the 'primacy of personal differences'.²⁵

She contrasts Sedgwick's anti-intentionalist approach with the critique of such positions by Walter Benn Michaels. She relates how Michaels's book *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* identifies a widespread theoretical tendency that favours the materiality of the text and the identity and subject positions of the reader over the intentions of the author. She explains how this leads to a shift away from discussion and debate:

Differences become intrinsically valuable because a concern with disagreements over beliefs and intentions is replaced by a concern with differences in personal experience. The result is that when people have different experiences or feelings, they don't disagree, they just are *different*.²⁶

Michaels, she points out, emphasises that while we may have ideological disputes—conflicts about beliefs, and disagreements about what is true—what we feel is generally not subject to public debate.²⁷ While it is possible to debate how and what we feel in relation to both art and events, it is nonetheless uncommon. For example, in art criticism, we could argue about over-reactions, perceived failures to react properly, misapplied emotions, projected feelings, and so forth, but curiously we do not. The situation described by Leys as the 'disarticulation of difference from disagreement' militates against debate and discussion.

The acknowledgment of different views, without the inclination to debate or discuss them, is the peculiar way in which perspectivism has taken root in contemporary criticism.²⁸ Perspectivism should be the precondition for disagreement and discussion by facilitating awareness of a field comprising other views and opinions that are as strongly held as one's own. However, in practice, it leans more towards the opposite. Rather than leading to communication based on an awareness of the range of positions, perspectivism has led to a strange repetition of the autarchic subject generally associated with pre-feminist masculinity—a subject who

only refers to itself. This self-proclaiming subject underpins much contemporary art informed by performative models of identity politics.

In most instances, contemporary art impelled by identity politics is the work of previously oppressed groups, and, in deference to that history, a unidirectional ethics is applied. The model for this approach to ethics can be found in the work of philosophers such as Emmanuel Levinas. His ethics takes most account of our obligations to the other—he advocates unlimited responsibility for the other considered as the one in need—with no mention of reciprocity or rights. In short, the central feature of his ethics is an orientation towards the other with a large measure of self-forgetfulness.²⁹ Translated into the context of art, the viewer takes on the burden of responsibility for the other, while the artist is aligned with the Levinasian other, of whom nothing is asked. The intersubjective relation so constituted is radically asymmetrical, inscribing the other in the position of recipient of benefaction, and leaving the viewer defenceless and open to possible manipulation, exploitation, or, as Levinas admits, persecution.

Byrne's work offers an interesting corrective to this entrenched response to perspectivism. By taking debate and disagreement as his subject matter, he is able to show not one position or his position in particular, but various positions taken on different issues. The viewer is thereby given a double view of perspectivism. On the one hand, at the level of the dialogue of his videos, perspectivism is presented as enabling conflict and contradiction, where each person is equally convinced of the truth of their viewpoint. On the other hand, the distancing that results from this array of viewpoints, coupled with the various alienation effects, encourages the viewer to be disengaged from any particular viewpoint, and thereby remain relatively impartial or objective. Reducing identification in this fashion helps to reduce personal investment and the narcissism and self-interest this usually entails. The viewer's horizon is thereby stretched by putting aside personal concerns.

To return to the language of Brecht, it is suggested that distance from the self facilitates engagement with others and their concerns, even when they are not shared concerns or concerns with which we might empathise. Byrne's additive approach makes it possible to listen without a well-laid empathetic track to follow. In this kind of impersonal distance, we glimpse what was once at stake in the call for thinking about differences: the demand for real recognition and dialogue within a field of contestable and contradictory claims about identity. Byrne's work suggests that recognition may now be better served by a type of argumentative and irascible perspectivism tempered by the unlikely bedfellow of the impersonal view.

1. Niels Henriksen, 'Interview: Gerard Byrne', *Kopenhagen*, 7 August 2007, <http://www.kopenhagen.dk/index.php?id=10479>, accessed 18 November 2008.

2. Walter Benjamin, 'What Is Epic Theatre?' and 'Studies for a Theory of Epic Theatre', in

Understanding Brecht, trans. Anna Bostock (London: Verso, 1998), 1–13, 23–5.

3. Griselda Pollock 'Screening the Seventies: Sexuality and Representation in Feminist Practice: A Brechtian Perspective', *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London:

Routledge, 1988) 179–81.

4. For an account of Brecht's influence on American political art of the 1960s and 1970s, see Philip Glahn, 'Estrangement and Politicization: Bertolt Brecht and American Art 1967–1979' (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2007).

5. George Baker, *Gerard Byrne: Books, Magazines, and Newspapers* (New York: Lukas and Sternberg, 2003), 15.

6. Niels Henriksen, 'Interview: Gerard Byrne'.

7. Brecht's 1948 essay, 'A Short Organum for Theatre', is often seen as a softening of his hard-line approach; see, for example, Frederic Jameson, *Brecht and Method* (London: Verso, 1998), 36.

8. A-effects aim not to put the audience in a 'trance'. Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, trans. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 193. Being 'entangled' and the 'hypnotic experience in the theatre' is also discussed in Brecht, 'The German Drama: Pre-Hitler', *Brecht on Theatre*, 78. The idea of the audience being carried along or 'carried away' is discussed many times; see Brecht, 'The Question of Criteria for Judging Acting', *Brecht on Theatre*, 58.

9. Pleasure and lightness of touch are discussed by Sylvia Harvey, 'Whose Brecht?: Memories for the Eighties', *Screen* (May–June 1982): 53–4. Margaret Eddershaw draws attention to Brecht's view that the theatre should be entertaining and fun. Eddershaw, 'Actors on Brecht', *Cambridge Companion to Brecht*, ed. Peter Thomson and Glendyr Sacks (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 280. Peter Brooker discusses Brecht's preference for the model of comedy rather than tragedy and the associated emotions of 'pity and fear'. Brooker, 'Key Words in Brecht's Theory and Practice of Theatre', *Cambridge Companion*, 212. He also notes the valuation of wonder and naivety (209, 215).

10. Bertolt Brecht (1940), 'Short Description of a New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect', *The Twentieth Century Performance Reader*, ed. Michael Huxley and Noel Witts, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), 101.

11. George Baker, *Gerard Byrne*, 70. Mark Godfrey, 'History Pictures', *Present Tense through the Ages: On the Recent Work of Gerard Byrne* (London: Koenig Books, 2007), 22.

12. Bertolt Brecht, 'A Short Organum for the Theatre', 193–4.

13. *Ibid.*, 194.

14. Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame: Auschwitz and After* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

15. Margaret Eddershaw, 'Actors on Brecht', 279.

16. Mark Godfrey, 'History Pictures', 19.

17. Niels Henriksen, 'Interview: Gerard Byrne'.

18. Philip Fisher, cited in Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*

(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005), 188.

19. Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings*, 200.

20. *Ibid.*, 201.

21. In the case of *1984 and Beyond*, there are photographs and a wall text in vinyl letters on a black-painted wall. Significantly, the text is the opening quote from 'Art and Objecthood', Michael Fried's infamous essay denouncing minimalism and theatricality. The quote is from Perry Miller's biography of American theologian Jonathan Edwards.

22. Hal Foster, 'Postmodernism in Parallax', *October*, no. 63 (Winter 1993): 10.

23. Ruth Leys, *From Guilt to Shame*, 150.

24. *Ibid.*, 148.

25. *Ibid.*, 150.

26. *Ibid.*, 154–5.

27. *Ibid.*, 155.

28. *Ibid.*

29. Levinas's demand for an ethics that precedes and exceeds ontology, and that concentrates on what is due to the other rather than the self, leads to, what he refers to as, unlimited or infinite responsibility for the other: a responsibility not expiated by deeds, but, on the contrary, increased by them; one that even opens the subject to the danger of persecution by the other. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being of Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 124.