

DAN FINSEL

“INTRODUCTION TO ‘AFFECTIVE MEMORY WORK: THE CAGE; CLASSICAL CONDITIONING, THE ANIMAL EXERCISE (CAT IN HEAT), THE “MAN-MAKER”, SENSE MEMORY, AND REPRESENTING THE REPRESENTATION OF REPRESENTING THE REPRESENTATION OF REPRESENTING THE REPRESENTATION OF...OF PRODUCTION (PART 1)’.”

JANUARY 10 – FEBRUARY 14, 2015

Opening reception is Saturday, January 10, from 5 to 7pm.

Richard Telles presents a new exhibition by Dan Finsel, an immersive installation featuring a single-channel video, a sound-emitting sculpture, and a series of color photographs. Being Finsel's second installment at the gallery, many formal echoes can be found from his first, most immediately in the treatment of the closet doors and skylights. In a move of redaction, black T.V. paint replaces the patterned colors, while black plexiglass encloses the formerly painted skylights. One also finds formal echoes going further back: the space is covered in a Rosco brand black “show” floor, referencing Finsel's first solo exhibition at Parker Jones Gallery, Los Angeles in 2010, which featured the same “show” floor, but in white. Such formal and conceptual allusions only multiply over time through each exhibition to the next. Yet, this installation most pointedly serves as an introduction to a planned series, wholly entitled “Affective Memory Work”¹, a continued exploration of the eponymous Stanislavskian and Strasbergian method acting techniques—not only as they relate to the psychological and cultural conditions of production in performance, film/video and art objects, but through the subjective lens of representing production itself. As such, this exhibition should be seen as part of an imagined, but yet to be fully conceived project, that toys with the convention of a ‘finished’ presentation, thus functioning as an introduction.

The conceptual centerpiece of the exhibition and the starting point for Finsel's project is a video entitled *Affective Memory: (A / The Cage)*². It is the first of a series in which each video focuses on a different “personal” object, thus regarded an “Affective Memory Object”³, before depicting an ostensibly choreographed performance by the artist; in this iteration, the object in question is a small cage. Using method-acting techniques in concert with the “Affective Memory object”, Finsel depicts a durational and rigorous study of the self: on one hand, its physically conditioned associations to emotional display as it relates to “Affective Memory Recall”⁴ and classical conditioning—which entails him (the actor) recalling a personal event from his experience, encoding a conceivably related emotional gesture to that experience—and on the other, drawing from that ‘role’ and codified gesture within the performance to depict a conglomerated “dance” between agency and automatism. He calls into question our choices of movement in general, suggesting that we are simply following a scripted depiction and reaction of and to emotion. Each performance begins with a very codified representation of a particular emotion, and from this Finsel engages with what he assumes is a natural series of physical reflexes, thus hinting to our nature as emotionally conditioned vehicles. Put in other terms, his

¹ A project reflective of his ongoing research/investigation into the social phenomenon of method acting, and the underlying social, psychological and cultural sciences surrounding and relative to, in whatever degree, this theatrical practice/self investigative medium/pseudo psychotherapeutic “science”.

² The sculpture: “Affective Memory: Cage” (2014), first shown at Francois Ghebaly Gallery in 2014 within the context of Ramiken Crucible gallery was created as a preamble to what was this upcoming work, exhibition and project. In the case of that object, the idea is that it is a frozen representation of a cinematic trope, surrealistically visualizing the psychological relationship within the “performer”, about the “Cage”. You are looking through the eyes of the “performer” looking at their “Affective Memory Object”, in a movie where an artist playing a “performer” is looking at a hypothetical “Affective Memory Object” overtaken briefly by the associative affects of her personal object. “Affective Memory: Cage 2014, is an illustration of how I would see the cage object in the video “Affective Memory: (A/The Cage) 2015.

³ Affective memory objects are non-physical objects held within the intuition or imagination of the actor for help in the retrieval of their associative memory and/or emotion. Starting typically as a physical, personal object chosen by the actor for personal content and associative quantity, these objects are then tasted, touched, smelled, heard, and looked upon. This sensorial process is an exercise of creating physical associations which then in memory allow for more entrances to that desired place, in a sense. That single place is/can be a very dirty place, though. Capital “D” dirty, depending upon the individual. This dirtiness is something that itself can direct one to multiple other places in memory, leading ultimately to a process similar to that of shifting through a hoarder's storage unit.

⁴ Affective Memory or Emotional Recall are procedural practices within the Stanislavskian and Strasbergian forms of Method acting. Mostly similar, these notions are used more as a psychological “tool” to unearth memory and enhance the verisimilitude within a performance to that of a lived event. The actress or actor thus is asked to select a particular personal event from their lived experience, as to draw from and connect to the concurrent role and/or scene within a performance. Using a procedure of recollection both through their trained sensorial memory of that event and/or a constructed or authentic associative connection to a personal object, they essentially produce a mimetic representation from their memory of their original emotions to that “original” lived experience. Ending with the presentation of “self” through character or pretense.

recollection is trained through a sensorial memory (real or imagined) of the “Affective Memory Object”; or in this case, the cage, thereby producing a mimetic “representation” of his emotions as they were in the “original experience”.

The conceptual underpinnings to the video continue outward and throughout the exhibition, by use of the endless black backdrop, a reactive, and recurring material theme in the physical and temporal space of the viewer. This supplants the green screens in some video works of Finsel’s past, bringing about an almost completely different space for mental projection. His use of the “un-activated” green screen had allowed for the metaphoric representation of an insinuated space that the viewer could “hypothetically” project upon the video with a scene, setting, or context in mind. The inherent quality of the black backdrop, typically used in theater, film and television production, however, is inactivation, appearance through disappearance, serving as anonymity, as a literal highlight to the acting or emotional display. Both the green screen and the black backdrop, through different superficial neutralities, tightened the viewer’s focus on the performer. Yet, the black backdrop is inherently a space for mental projection by the viewer, whereas the green screen is there to be “keyed” out in order for a scene to be inserted behind the performer by the artist or filmmaker. Without any image being “keyed” in though, it still remains a potential space for a viewer’s mental projection, except this time, with its technical illusion machine made overt. Finsel also modeled his performances for each of these two backgrounds. In front of the green screen, he performed an exaggeration, a version of himself with a fictional biography, while in the current video series he is performing “authenticity”. He is not performing a “character” or caricature, but rather an attempt to perform the “self”: an obviously futile notion here, due to the blurred lines of identity in the performance of any “self”.

The black background impinges into physical space as well, and into film production itself: the black flooring and paint that partially comprise this exhibition are products of Rosco, still best known for the products it originally manufactured: filters for entertainment lighting. Finsel began using Rosco Green Screen paint in his first series of videos starting in 2008, and again, used this flooring for his installation: “I could be anybody, I could be somebody”, 2010.

The objects that populate the exhibition—the photographs depicting digitally manipulated c-stands, as well as clashes between Rosco black paint and Finsel’s feet—extend the conversation to the generalized notion of what is seen and unseen in production, however alongside individualized concepts of the self and how Finsel (the artist) must disillusion himself from the roles he performs. The sculpture on view, based on a Wenger Corporation portable stage setup, comically literalizes the psychic density that underlies “Affective Memory Recall”, by emitting audio from Finsel’s performance “Animal Exercise (Cat in Heat)”. The “Animal Exercise”, another famed exercise of Strasberg, asks the actor to pick an animal that might relate to the character they are to play. By starting as this animal she is supposed to metamorphose her performance of that animal into the assigned character, thus providing yet another system of associative mimicry.

The photographs of C-stands, digitally manipulated into different formations, bearing the appearance not unlike those from high-budget television commercials of silvery industrialized products, as well as the fetishistic, reflective sheen of various cinematic cyber-oriented tropes, also recall the mandala paintings from Finsel’s last show here at the gallery. This time, such filmic production elements that create and undergird the production of the video, are contorted through Finsel’s subjective matrix. Anachronistically placing what starts as a “document of a tool or product of production” (akin to Christopher Williams) into a surrealist trope filtration process, Finsel assumes that the genre of art making that centers on the “revealing of the hidden elements of production” is thus then objectified as a process in and of itself. Removing himself from the conversation in some regards, we then begin to locate Finsel’s tendency for Role Play in the creation of the objects themselves. Note the subtitle to this particular series: “Representing the representations of representing the representations of ...of production”.

The images of the Rosco brand black TV paint, aforementioned that it has been used to paint the large closet doors, the frames for the photographs, and sculpture, which splashes upon the performers’ feet, brings the nexus of the production elements and the body to the fore, creating a physical reaction, in tandem to the mental one—between the Affective Memory Object and personal memory—which can only be made manifest through the artist’s performance. Thus, again in slight reference to his painted photographs of his last exhibition, though literally in this case, Finsel spills the branding color upon himself in a reflexive gesture, noting metaphorically the inescapable contusive qualities, (that if we reach far enough metaphorically) and the black screen representing “conditioning” itself... shit. This situation, the

situation is, it's really a situation where I can talk about what happened but it ultimately doesn't matter because it happened⁵.

My general interest in Method Acting is because if I had the chance, I would sleep sleep sleep with Daniel Day Lewis⁶, I would become his life partner, and spend the rest of my days making shoes and drinking tea on the Irish Countryside, both in and of itself as a cultural phenomenon but also as a metaphor for the visual and emotional production of self and our individual notions of subjectivity on a everyday level, on an everyday level. The processes and exercises of method acting clearly serve to highlight and exaggerate the normative psychic motions, structurings and unconscious procedures of psychic life in general and automatic motion, but are a child of a scrutinization and delineation process wheeling a commercialized mythologization medium.

Dan Finsel recently held a solo exhibition at CAPC Musée d'art Contemporain, Bordeaux, France in 2014; the same year, he was included in group exhibitions at Kent Fine Art, New York and Francois Ghebaly, Los Angeles; in 2013 he was included in a group exhibition at Institut d'Art Contemporain, Villeurbanne, France. Finsel also held a solo exhibition at Ballroom Marfa, Marfa, Texas, and was included in "Made in L.A." at the Hammer Museum, Los Angeles in 2012. Finsel lives and works in Los Angeles.

⁵ What I think ultimately happens, and what I actually do in my mind, is just count down from 100, and let shit just take over. Its really amazing what happens...things do happen, things actually happen, things, things inexplicable but clearly planned, things, thingy things, a thing, thing. I coordinate all of it, intuition aside, I don't believe in intuition. It's basic. Strategy and manipulation, April Fools and Whoopie cushions.

⁶ Rebecca Miller is also extremely intriguing and only furthers this life goal, as we would/could share in the quiet and subtle love tokens of our shared partner.