



(Gerard Byrne) It's not really a collaborative relationship, but it is a creatively productive and nuanced relationship. It's not collaborative in the sense that it doesn't lapse into the orthodoxies of collaborative authorship.

(Sven Anderson) Right, it's pretty clear.

(GB) It's not the collaborative duo Anderson and Byrne. [laughs]

(SA) Right, right! [laughs]

(GB) That wouldn't work! [laughs]

Over the years, Gerard Byrne has gradually looked beyond the generalized services that technical and engineering suppliers traditionally offer media artists. With the expertise of sound artist Sven Anderson, Byrne has sought to build a tool kit of modular playback variations and shutter systems that in effect turn the exhibition space—its Site and its Zeit—into a versatile medium. Just as the space of one minute can expand to anchor decades of memories or contract to pass without reference, and philosophers and physicists continue to grapple with the projection, reflection, and interrelatedness of time and space, Byrne's approach to this malleable medium is one driven by possibility. In this Paper, PRAXES Editor Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch talks to Byrne and Anderson about how playback itself can constitute a flexible space, custom-fitted rather than just a technical operation. By tracing the trajectory of their working relationship—one neither classically collaborative nor simply AV-service oriented—they unfold chronologically their intersects of interest and the breakthroughs informing successive works in Byrne's oeuvre. While maintaining distinct practices, Byrne's concerns founded in representation and Anderson's artistic competencies in live experience (space, sound, acoustics, noise, atmospheric) model their ways of working—not necessarily the resultant artwork. Introducing the immediacy of a phenomenological approach confronts what Byrne identifies as his tradition's difficulty with real-time and its implications of a reality beyond the representation. At PRAXES, the collaborative act of scripting lighting and playback becomes another means of articulating relationships and differences between disparate works. Through molding and calibrating the complex multi-layered configurations they have developed, a critical space emerges distinct from, yet engrained in, the logic of the institution or gallery space and the currents of its context. Like in their working relationship, the technical thus becomes a foothold in a symbiotic evolution of the temporal conditions and constructions that the works themselves investigate.

We're here to discuss not only the relationships, and the proceeding implications, between video and the industries where we encounter this medium—from broadcasting to the gallery space—but also the relationships internal to the production process itself, which includes your work with Sven Anderson. Before we jump to the present, perhaps we can re-stage the moments prior to your working together. What led you, Gerard, to seek out the technology?

I was doing the Sydney Biennale in June of 2008 and was working on *Untitled acting exercise (in the third person)* (2008), a single-channel work. I had an idea for a shutter that would start and stop to project an image. I think the analogy that I had in mind was a slide projection. I was interested in the flat quality of the slide projector, like a curtain revealing the projection of the slides.

It all developed from a conversation in the hallway of the studio building in which we were both working. We started out talking about building a robotic shutter, but eventually found ourselves discussing a more elaborate

I was interested in the visceral character of the projected light in relation to the material and the space. In rendering this scenario, a dynamic about surround sound developed where you have voices coming from off camera, so to speak, but you only ever see this prisoner of war figure. You see and hear his voice and see his lips sync, so you can locate his voice.

The shutter I developed with Sven was working in relation to what would happen, for example, when the shutter kicked in and the room went black. The audio mix would shift completely to a very spatialized mix in the room, and then when the shutter opened again and an image returned, the audio would tend to gravitate back towards the axis of the image.

It was natural, wasn't it? It wasn't like you were editing two different spaces; it was all continuous. When the shutter would cut down, it was just like hearing the director as if the cut had been called.

Your second project together was marked by a grappling with Minimalism, which seems quite appropriate in terms of temporality. Did it set a specific tone to your continued work together?

The project *A thing is a hole in a thing it is not* (2010), which has formed the core of the work Sven and I have done, makes Minimalism its referent in working through questions of the temporal regime of the gallery space within an art historical context. Actually at that point I wanted to work with the shutter again since I had reservations about the idea of the gallery space as a type of cinematic space.

Subsequently, even though I'd shown the work, I was still revising it—something I do quite a bit. I returned to work with Sven because we realized there were possibilities that would just take time to work out. For me, flexibility at that late stage is still a part of working on the work. It is quite legitimate to realize that these works—although they're using AV and video—are ultimately installations that have to be amended on a space to space basis.

We found this adaptation to be an absolute practical necessity. You just cannot show the work the same way in any given circumstance. It has to be changed—for different reasons, often technical reasons, but also ...

... it could be spatial concerns.

I remember the conversations we had at that point. We developed a plan for rigging that system, and it came back to a longer conversation about how you work. That was the first time I gathered you were interested in having control and that having control would be beneficial to you. Unlike with some artists (I do work with other people in a purely technical sense at times), with Gerard it was apparent that if this was opened up by developing a tool, in house, it wouldn't be something to trip over, rather something to stand on—a platform.

It was ambitious, you invested in development, which not many artists are likely up for. It's easy to grant authority and responsibility to a technician.

That's an easily established relationship where you know what to expect. This was something different from the outset.

Whether it be a relationship I might have with a cinematographer or with Sven, it's not a question of delegation but a question of complete trust in terms of how something is rendered. The relationship I have with the woman who produces video for me is also built on a very long-standing confidence. I might be cast as the central character, but it's really more of a constellation.

Connecting with Sven and working together, I had ideas, I had patterns, I had relationships that I wanted to manifest in terms of the inspiration of *A thing is a hole*. I wanted repetition; I wanted dispersal; I wanted staccato; playback. I know I wanted these things, but I also didn't want to get embroiled in tech. So an option seemed to be, you hand off all of that to an AV company, who then at some level, takes control.

Yeah, post-production.

Not necessarily in any calculated way, but invariably it's a service position. That was one scenario I opted against. Instead, working as we have led to the evolution of a system, partly in response to problems that emerged. In solving questions of synchronization, you open possibilities about composition.

You've said that the realization of the work only happens within the space and yet perhaps it is never fully realized. How does this site-relevancy fit within the phases of production?

It's quite dynamic trying to balance flexibility with the integrity of individual works. Looking at all of the fragments of content and negotiating the relationships between them, that's my first task for Gerard—to troubleshoot. There is a certain logic in terms of spatialization, narrative, and timing that is worked out through problem-solving and auditioning solutions.

The equipment is not off the shelf, yet it's flexible and really fast in terms of adaptation. Gerard sets things out ahead of time and we build on the experience from one show to the next.

While literally a productive one, your working relationship is quite heavily based on methods of deconstruction. Even in very basic terms a technological solution arises after a breakdown of the integral parts—only then is reassembly possible.

Sven is an astute judge of how these things work, and not only that, but you take it on as a set of questions to deal with, and that's not the work of a technician.

It's really not the work of a technician.

Yet, it's impossible to lock down all aspects before we get there and start seeing how it works in the space.

[Sven laughs]

Essentially the equipment that we use now is a mixture of elements coming from theater production and point-of-sale advertising. They're all controlled remotely, and that's the nature of the technology. It's widely used in shopping malls and chain stores ...

Pretty much anywhere you see video ...

It's bizarre—loads of people are doing this—but it is interesting to see the technology as forms emerging out of specific situations.

Especially if you think about the needs of those industries. You're working in an art context and you bring in technology from theater and there's a certain logic, I guess, because it originates in similar ethics, but the advertising source was such a strange door to open.

Art historically you can look at the incorporation of house paint, for example, and how that has been equated with the re-conception of the readymade. What you're talking about here is maybe a shift within the use of video that has much more to do with the custom made, that process of using the industry standard and customizing it. You've used the term "in house," which feels so appropriate here.

Yeah, it's also purposefully—at least on certain levels—very, very flexible. On other levels the pre-sets are frustratingly rigid.

You're right, it's not designed for our purposes when it comes to a certain quality we're looking for in a gallery situation—we're not going to find it in most advertising contexts. Despite our openness with the media and its physical prominence in the gallery space, in general, it's transparent.

This whole system is working to deliver content to distributed points, which are different screens or places in different rooms. It's a control network, and depending on how you take in a show, you might not really be aware of it at all, but the more you engage with relationships between different elements, the more you become aware that there is something hidden in the system making everything very precise.

An orthodox video playback scenario in a gallery—with a dvd or a hard drive in a singular or multiple channel work—is ultimately premised on a temporal configuration where the work has a linear form: a beginning, a middle, an end, and repeats with a hiatus in between or loops. That configuration, that orthodoxy, is bound to a set of expectations that are engrained from cinema. The set-up we're using as a means—this hybridization from theater and retailing—is really just a question about trying to work with video material in a way that doesn't completely jettison the cinematic. In a sense, if you look at the way I edit, there is a grammar there that is highly indebted to cinematic grammar, but it tries to diverge in terms of temporal expectations and configurations.

Our schematization offers more possibilities for authoring the work, it does and will feed back into the way that the works come together, freeing up certain constraints to work on a higher level with the content.

It's interesting to talk about technology in terms of this openness, when a lot of times what you're looking for are very specific qualifications, qualities, or capacities of a technology and then to be able to choreograph them in a way as you do to open them up. Whereas language was "affixed"—as Mike Fitzgerald put it in your 2010 conversation—to the works of Minimalism, your work seems to disavow such retrospective structuring and instead uses "cinematic grammar" as a precursor of reception. Looking at these installed choreographies, it seems you're also developing proper grammar, language together.

I think that's true. There's a point at which we both have a syntax for dealing with these works. We've spent time developing a protocol for controlling and understanding what gestures and what language, and what flexibility, what choices we can make in situations, and that's really what's become unique about the working relationship. Beyond a technical crew installing, there's this really strange moment when Gerard and I just have to stand there and take it all in, and that's the moment of decision-making; that's the most open moment—one of possibility. I wouldn't say it's invisible work from an outside perspective, but there's an internal language hidden to the final experience.

To me, words like "pattern," "repetition," or "relationship" are productive terms in the sense that when I make one of these installation works—at least in so far as I am the author—my understanding of my input is very much based around ideas of patterns in relationships and it's not based around finite configurations. Works are adaptable in terms of their actual configuration or their actual playback. It's the idea that how a play is performed might actually evolve over time as different productions manifest. What I feel I've authored is actually a type of relationship that I hope to hold on to in different iterations—in each instance of the work being shown.

I think it is quite different in character to a lot of the large-scale video installation work of the last 15 years or so, where a lot of that work is based around very architectural concerns and ideas of multi-screen, multiple perspectives, synchronized video, and very much built around geometry; it's really preoccupied with ...

Stable geometry.

... stable geometry. When I started to work on *A thing is a hole*, I had no interest in the geometry, rather dispersal—the idea of video material temporally dispersed throughout a space. Contrary to the cinematic space as hermetic and the contrivance of the gallery turned into a cinema, I am much more interested in something connected with the street, as they say, to the outside. Going right back to works of mine fifteen years ago there's an ongoing interest in the works having an indefinite character.

Especially in the more recent works—*A man and a woman make love* and *A thing is a hole*—it's actually impossible to see the whole work in one viewing because literally it addresses a multiplicity of perspectives at any given time. It very purposefully, in so far as there is an interest in geometry, eschews any possibility of a master perspective.

**No, not in a tricky way.
It's just an attitude.**

Disconcertingly open! [laughs]

But not in a tricky way.

It gives a lot to the viewer. That crosses over into my work because I'm interested in sound in public space. It's very open, things are always overlapping and competing with each other, but it's extremely open.

Disconcertingly open. [laughs]

These “open” relationships seem to have evolved within your practice to apply a poly-relational logic first to internal parts of one work and then extend to the exhibition field and broader contexts, opening up to the street. Interestingly, a show that brings this to the fore is your recent exhibition in the Hessel Museum of Art at Bard with your wife, Sarah Pierce, titled “Monogamy.”

There was a flattening the distinctions of what constituted a work, or what constituted a work of mine, or a work of Sarah's. Tech started to enunciate relationships between works that were not made in direct dialogue.

“Monogamy” really exploded everything in these terms because it was about articulating differences and overlaps between their two separate practices.

Together with a huge parasitical theater lighting system we could articulate gestures on small levels with a dialogue between one gallery and Gerard's work and Sarah's work in the next gallery space over, but then we could do a massive lighting change throughout the entire gallery space; all the lights would go red, for example.

That would be listed as an event, giving the viewer a lot of expectations in terms of time and sequencing and breaking those expectations up.

I'm quite preoccupied with this idea of expectations, what people expect in a given situation, and how expectation is something that's being formed. An instance in that show that I still hang on to as being somehow really telling was—I remember standing in a work of Sarah's ...

... *Future Exhibitions* ...

... at the diagonal opposite end of the museum to the gallery housing *A thing is a hole*. But because of the acoustic character of the museum, sound travels around the whole building. One of the videos of *A thing is a hole* features a reenactment of a piece by Robert Morris with a column falling. So the column topples over in that gallery—CRASH—hits the ground, and you hear it. At that moment in the gallery I'm in with Sarah's *Future Exhibitions*, the lighting changes. At some level there's an ambiguous relationship. You instinctively understand it's not a causal relationship, but certainly another kind of relationship. Interesting in its particularity, if you step back from it, it's quite unusual to have works constructively intervene with each other in such a way. And yet things have to co-exist all the time.

The way that one work really presses on another work.

That's the responsibility of this.

It's funny, I'm realizing our conversation focuses a lot on the idea of the exhibition as a medium, as a form to be worked on.

Yep, yep.

I've come to realize that is quite important in terms of my artistic process. Increasingly the choice to work within a gallery or a museum context seems less like the default option. I now have to introduce this proprietary way of showing my work with this very specific set up that essentially, up until now, requires Sven Anderson. It initiates a discourse around the act of exhibition making, right?

And the influence ...

One of the problems with the emergence of the curatorial is the idea that somehow the artistic practice can get boxed in as a discrete form to be shuffled around according to another discourse of logic. Mine is not an antagonistic relationship, but it's a relationship that's dialogical, I'd say, and certainly reflective of the idea that the exhibition space matters to artists.

Yeah, but as much as it claims a bit of authority, it's very open. I imagine encountering the possibility of your work from a curatorial perspective—it's definitely a different way to approach time in the museum or gallery context.

That leads to your interest in the relationship between broadcasting and real-time. The timetables you've developed, although enlisting intricate programming—Sven's coordination and encoding—are overtly analog in their format.

One might characterize the general drift of artists' use of video as a drift towards the cinematic aesthetic—at least in terms of a certain strain of video usage (the alternative being the very casual diaristic or ad hoc mode). As soon as artists started using video projectors, the spectra of the cinematic seemed to appear. Throughout my work with video, whether projected or not, there's a pre-occupation with video as a medium tied, not to cinema, but to broadcasting. Although I don't broadcast video, the relationship between broadcasting and "Real Time" is very important—and has informed my work with Sven on real-time scheduled playback.

There's a very simple connection in that broadcasting, at least in the traditional sense of it, happened in real-time. The 9 o'clock news happened at 9 o'clock. [laughs] This real-time playback media from advertising can be accessed outside the gallery space. But in our case, in practice, we've only used it to create this sense of a real-time clock, it's not a question of uploading material remotely. It also relates to this idea of a TV schedule, what's on at Monday at 6pm, etc.

I'm struggling a bit to articulate exactly why that's significant. At times when I explain this idea to curators, they immediately associate it with a screening schedule, but I'm still trying to find the words to articulate the difference, and there is a difference. It's not just a difference of scale or dimensionality but it's how the playback of the work is not determined from within the institution, it's determined from elsewhere. The power play is displaced—it's outwitting the gallery space.

That manifests in practical terms, at least in the instances we've realized so far, in the 2013 shows "A state of neutral pleasure" at Whitechapel, the exhibition at Bard, and the exhibition modules at PRAXES. In these instances displaced control is manifested in the mediation of the playback schedule. It is done using the very casual handwritten or very basically produced schedule, which is clearly not the voice of the institution speaking, so you have a strange idea of where is this coming from and who is controlling this?

Like diegetic sound and non-diegetic sound.

During the day different works play at appointed times. A tiny spotlight on the wall reveals a little print out, which is strangely informal but gives you clues about the pace. Some of the works occupy all five of the screens and some occupy only one. You create expectations. Within given works there are interruptions. So you have larger chunks of content and then times when the shutters are being used quite frequently, there are also gaps between some of them—certain dead time within the gallery. People sit and look at their watches waiting for the next thing to happen. I remember talking about it as a sort of train schedule, like waiting for the next train to come through. It really is different than a screening schedule, because it's open. There's a certain continuity, and it's all happening in the same space, so you can continue to pass through it.

This reminds me of course of Brecht's work, with estrangement and how you are looking at the underpinnings of the theater, of theatricality, and introducing these forms of distancing. Gerard, could you see your relationship with Sven's work as another form of this element of distancing?

Exactly, there are very direct connections to Brecht and his legacy. There is a theatrical character to this configuration in so far as playback is not continuous; playback is scheduled at specific times, again connecting to the analogy of TV broadcasting. There is also a connection to theater in having a matinee and then an evening production. These things are structured and finite. It's an area certainly addressed, but for me there is definitely all sorts of manifestations of an alienation effect, within the works themselves, and also to playback and also to the spirit of Brecht in the connection to vernacular language and the connection to the street outside the theater. This idea that the space of the theater, or the space of the gallery in this instance, is adjacent to the street. People come to the gallery from the street and go back to the street when they leave.

Gerard Byrne has worked with the sound artist Sven Anderson for years, together developing a tool kit of technology, protocols, and programming to realize a particular kind of playback for Byrne's complex film or video installations. In this Paper, PRAXES Editor Cassandra Edlefsen Lasch moderates a conversation between the artist and his technical companion.

Sven Anderson is an artist working between Ireland and the US since 2001. Anderson's work explores the act of listening within diverse architectural, physical, social, and emotional contexts, with a focus on public sound installation and urban sound design. Alongside his own practice, Anderson works as a system designer for the artist Gerard Byrne. www.svenanderson.net

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