



An Instinct, A Continuance

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Sandra Johnston

An Instinct, A Continuance (2023)

An Instinct, A Continuance is a new exploratory video installation by Sandra Johnston based on physical movements constructed for camera that are interconnected with archival photographic material and textual forms referencing colonial residues of WW2. This project developed with GOMA furthers Johnston's long-term experimentation with non-verbal communication, looking at how we move and express ourselves as emotional conductors, being incessantly changeable - both sociable and insular in our patterns of self-construction.

The exhibition is centred on a series of performative interpretations of a score derived from Franz Kafka's iconic novel, *The Trial*. The editing process involved filtering down the text by extracted out only the actions of the characters. This interrupted text then becomes a physical score functioning separately from the original narrative by merging the intentions, behaviours and interactions between the characters into one inseparable cacophony.

By deconstructing *The Trial* into an itinerary of actions what is lost are the distinctive aspects of the novels characters, contexts and the objects that inform their emotional motivations and enriches how each gesture should be interpreted. Therefore, actions become disembodied and deliberately indecipherable as a cohesive narrative, which in turn allows space for the unscripted secondary reactions of pausing, memorizing, responding and failing all to becoming integral to the work. What evolves is a sense of dislocation in observing a body obey instructions that must be grappled with over and over, a torturous repetition - in essence a choreography of fear.

Alongside these performative responses to the deconstructed Kafka text the exhibition also encompasses a body of historical archival material from WW2 derived from original photographs taken by the Red Cross organization recording prisoner of war theatre productions in various camps in Poland and Germany. These photographs offer an unexpected glimpse into the creativity that persisted in these POW camps despite the circumstances of attrition and oppression. In some respects, they can be considered as a means of rethinking how the colonial presences of the British army continue to reverberate in Ireland, recognizing in these images a reversal of the habitual narratives of power, conquest and control into a more vulnerable representation that offers different viewpoints on the humanity of the soldiers. Tied to this recognition is an understanding that within these British regiments, despite the Irish government's neutral position in WW2, over 50,000 Irish citizens fought within the British military and over 10,000 were held in German POW camps.

An Instinct, A Continuance is conceptualized through notions of social literacy, the ways in which we function beyond acquiring language skills through becoming also socially entrained, learning how to interact within structures of power. Kafka's trial charts a process of bureaucratic persecution through which no cause or explanation is offered as the character Josef K. struggles to redeem his situation within ever tightening cycles of repression and paranoia. In contrast, the POW photographs document acts of camaraderie and ingenious reinvention as a form of resistance in circumstances of incarceration. Mute and fragmented these images remain intractably stuck in the context of their production yet offer the potential for imagining slices of script and plot between the gaps.

These two conceptual strands follow on from Johnston's recurrent investigations into socio/historical trauma by activating literary and photographic sources as prompts for studying the body's systems of self-protection and acts of recovery.

