

December 2nd 2016

Dear Friends in London,

During August 2016 a group of us met every Tuesday at Artists Space Books & Talks in New York to read five texts from Ian White's forthcoming book, *Here Is Information. Mobilise* edited by Mike Sperlinger. Now we are celebrating the launch of the book with you here, in the form of this open letter.

On the suggestion of Mike we read the texts *Palace Calls Crisis Summit*, *Foyer*, *Performance*, *Audience*, *Mirror: Cinema, Theatre, and the Idea of the Live*, *Division* and *Whose History?*.

In our first meeting, and in all subsequent meetings we established how some of us knew Ian and others had not, but that reading together could be a live situation, which brought with it the chance to discuss information that is current to us. Our friends in North Braddock, Pennsylvania shared some of Ian's writing during the same time.

I never met Ian, and I also didn't know about him or his work before the reading group. After the group started I realized Ian had worked with several friends of mine that live in the UK and are artists and filmmakers. So I saw that he had been a big influence, a generator of space and ideas, around film and performance, for a lot of people. But I came to him solely through his writing, and then through the discussions this writing ignited in the group. I liked how the short essays required a few reads, not because they are inaccessible, but because they are packed with detail and form. It's as if the paper was another platform for experimentation for Ian, without falling in an illegible category, on the contrary. The commentary is sharp. As a reader I felt invited to his thinking process. The text transformed and advanced as I transformed and advanced with it. What I mean is: it felt alive and growing, even when it is printed and fixed in a piece of paper.

I never really thought of Ian as a capital W writer, but I remember laughing loudly when I read his blog posts for LUX, and thinking in new and challenging ways about essays and program notes he published. But with the publication of his collected writings I realized that there is a lot of important work that I had never seen before. As Ian began transitioning more into performance, it felt like a natural extension of a practice and a life that defied categorization. It's been really nice doing this reading group because it provides a lot of connective tissue. About the political and social potential Ian saw in physical spaces and about his insistence on disrupting familiar conventions and experiences, or in his words "Liveness." It felt good to get into a real space with other people and to read some of his writing closely. And in a way it was exciting to know that his writing interested people who didn't know him personally because I think it means his ideas will continue to resonate for a long time.

At our home in Pittsburgh it was only the two of us reading Ian White one night in August. It was certainly lively, though. And it required us to really go in deep, to pick apart Ian's ideas, help each other slide into his idiosyncrasies and cognitive leaps. It was thrilling, a great way for us to connect. We chose two texts—*Whose History?* and *Foyer*.

We were an extended limb of the group reading for one night. Our kitchen is/was one of those spaces that Ian described in *Foyer*, "it [became] a situation as well as, or even instead of—a location that is architecturally, culturally, or socially determined. A place that [slid] between positions, potentials, instructions, openesses, closures".

Those in NYC at the reading group perhaps benefited from the collaborative close reading of Ian's work—collective impressions and questions coming into a form that attempts to represent him. Specific art memories, specific encounters are recalled and discussed, and then brought to life. A performance may be ephemeral; we believe a liveness extends through all of us.

Almost immediately we began speaking about the news. There was a section in Ian's text *Palace Calls Crisis Summit* that described his experience of watching a cable news channel in the middle of a film festival and the "bizarre correspondence" that began unfolding between what he was seeing in the festival and in his hotel room. He says, "Events unravelling on the English-language news are conversations that I'm carrying with me during

the day, from the television into the auditorium in increasingly bizarre correspondence, like a growing community.” We spoke about the change that took place between when Ian was writing and the new(s) correspondences taking place now. A month before we began meeting, Diamond Reynolds had livestreamed her boyfriend Philando Castile’s death after being shot by police. We spoke about watching the intervention in the Turkish coup attempt on the app Periscope that people were livestreaming from their phones. Later a much smaller group of us would watch Emily Wardill’s film *Sea Oak*, which presents interviews with rhetoricians from the Rockridge Institute in Berkeley, one of whom discusses the shift that took place when conservatives entered the reality creation business leaving those in the “reality-based community” at a supreme rhetorical and political disadvantage. Of course, the Bush aide who grouped that rhetorician into the “reality-based community” in 2004 did not discuss what these realities consisted of--what it is to be based in reality, not only in terms of one’s analytic experience and navigation of the world but also, much more importantly, one’s circumstances.

Ian began his blog “The Lives of Performers,” with the sentence, “What can be said about who and what cannot be, still.”

In mid-August we met to discuss Ian’s text “Foyer.” Looking back now at my printed copy of the essay, I see that during our discussions I wrote at the top of the first page: “Pasolini – Structure in motion.” The note serves as a reminder of a comment made by one member of our reading group, an association they raised that had formed in their reading of the text. Three months later it is hard to recall the specificities of the remark, or who made it, just that it was eloquent and offered up another layer to my understanding of Ian’s thinking, as have many other remarks made during our meetings in the intervening period. After that particular meeting of the group I sought out Pasolini’s 1965 text *The Screenplay as a ‘Structure that wants to be another Structure,’* a title that in itself resonates with Ian’s conception of the cinema auditorium as “a place that slides between positions, potentials, instructions, openesses, closures. Say, the site of language rather than inscription.” Reflecting now on the experience of collectively reading and discussing Ian’s writing, a passage from this essay stands out:

“The sign of the screenplay therefore not only expresses “a will of the form to become another” above and beyond the form; that is, it captures “the form in movement” – a movement that finishes freely and in various manners in the fantasy of the writer and in the cooperating and friendly fantasy of the reader, the two coinciding freely and in different ways.”

I like to think that in gathering regularly throughout August and into the Fall to read Ian’s writing, alongside other texts that have surfaced in our discussions, and films that have intersected with Ian’s work, we have constituted a “structure in motion” in debt to the structures and spaces that Ian formed and reformed at every complex level of his lived work. The group has been at once a site of shared learning, a “cooperati[ve] and friendly fantasy,” and a “medium of transmission” – in Ian’s words, paraphrasing Barthes on Racine: “a situation in which we are all actors and viewers, equal with a thing presented ... ‘fixed between the world, a place of action, and the Chamber, a place of silence.’”

Yours Amelia Bande, Richard Birkett, Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Emma Hedditch, Jordan Lord, Ryan M. McKelvey and Matt Wolf.

Participants in the reading group - Arias Abbruzzi Davis, Amelia Bande, Richard Birkett, Ginger Brooks Takahashi, Harry Burke, Christina Chalmers, Daniel Chew, Stuart Comer, Lauren Cornell, Andrea Geyer, Emma Hedditch, Chrissie Iles, Alhena Katsof, Nicolas Linnert, Jordan Lord, Ryan M. McKelvey, Tin Nguyen, Leah Pires, Nick Relph, Carissa Rodriguez, Lise Soskolne, Valerie Tevere, Matt Wolf.

August 2nd -

*Palace Calls Crisis Summit*

The Kenneth Williams Diaries

Materials from Costa Vece, installation at Oberhausen film festival, 2003

August 16th -

*Foyer*

Dorothy Richardson, *Continuous Performance* from *Close-Up* magazine, 1933

Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum’s Ruins*

August 23rd -

*Performance, Audience, Mirror: Cinema, Theatre, and the Idea of the Live*

Documents from Anthology film archives planned renovation, mainly images of the Courthouse theater before it was built. Jonas Mekas Essential Cinema and Peter Kubelka's theater design at Anthology Film Archives 1970-74 – regarding notions of pure cinema and architectural interventions in film spectatorship.

August 30th -

*Whose History?*

*Division*

Lis Rhodes, *Light Reading*

Lis Rhodes, *Whose History?*

*Division* read collectively

Further reading/viewing:

Emily Wardill, *Sea Oak*

Adam Curtis, *Hypernormalisation*

Adrian Piper, *The Triple Negation Of Colored Women Artists*

Cheryl Harris, *Whiteness as Property*

Lynn Spigel, *Make Room for TV*, regarding the history of screens in domestic spaces.

Marina Abramovic, *The Artist is Present* – regarding problematic or accepted notions of "liveness"

Hito Steyerl, *Politics of the Archive*

Periscope & Black Lives Matter – regarding liveness and alternative representations of news in video

Ian's Horse Hospital show with telephone interruptions, regarding Ian's early strategy of interruption as liveness.

Emily Roysdon & Ian White at Berlinale Forum presentation juxtaposing slides of Emily's untitled (David Wojnarowicz project) with Rosa von Praunheim's film *It's Not the Homosexual Who is Perverse, But the Society in Which He Lives*. Talking about Ian's interventions in conventional film screenings through radical juxtapositions

Documentation of Ian's *Ibiza: A Reading for 'The Flicker'*

Naomi Murakawa, *Auditing Black Pain: The Affective Economy of the Prison Industrial Complex* – talk on police use of "tactical empathy"