



PLAY MODE

CURATED BY ANNE WALSH

FRANCIS ALYS
LUTZ BACHER
STAN DOUGLAS
BIA GAYOTTO
JOSEPH GRIGELY
EVAN HOLLOWAY
ANA MENDIETA

TO: THE READER
FROM: ANNE WALSH

RE: LET'S PLAY ART WORLD

CC: LUTZ BACHER, FRANCIS ALYS, EVAN HOLLOWAY, ANA MENDIETA, STAN DOUGLAS, BIA GAYOTTO, JOSEPH GRIGELY

I'm composing in the stupidest possible word-processing program, America Online email, to ease the anxiety, to make this performance less unnatural for me, more obvious to you. The Curator is in Play Mode's catalogue mode, which includes, but is not limited to: think mode, read mode, look at slides mode, talk to artists mode, correspond mode, worry mode, write mode, doubt mode, excitement mode. As curator (surrogate parent/shrink mode) the job now required of her is to soliloquize: tell you what, when, how come, what else, why, why and why. But she's reluctant to do that job. She knows that she began this process in sibling/fellow analysand mode, i.e. as an artist, so stepping out of that mode feels treacherous and traitorous. (Who needs who more: the shrink or the analysand?)

RE: THE TITLE OF THE SHOW

It's a gross cliché, but this is a culture of representation and "play" is its operative verb. Play and mode were put together with an image of the play button in mind, the commands and responses from my vcr, my remote, my tape player, CD player, anything that records experience or plays it back, or both. I go on vacation to Hawaii with my family and my uncle videotapes us being tourists. We have a terse, lugubrious dinner and then settle into the rattan to watch the video. Everyone livens up. We have already forgotten 90% of the day, and there it all is. The next day, will we be/act differently for having seen ourselves the night before? Instant replay. Geez, I should be taping myself writing this. Instant replay. Instant replay, please. Wouldn't it help with domestic squabbles, not to mention rewind or fast forward? Or pause, during sex or on more enjoyable vacations? Stop, when all else fails. It's a gross cliché, but this is a culture of representation and "play" is its operative verb.

RE: THE WORD PLAY

(The Short History of a Title, Act Like I Know What I'm Doing Mode, continued.)

I chose Play to cover my attraction to art works where something I could call a performance was present in their conceptualization, production or reception. I was drawn to works whose makers, like myself, viewed performance as indistinguishable from expression and experience of "self," to artists who seemed to explore the possibility that our knowledge of ourselves is contingent on our performing ourselves for ourselves.

From Interpreter mode, I'm calling this "the performance of representation."

RE: WHY MODE?

I don't know anymore. I'm in sad mode right now. Remember, this was chosen months ago. What I've come up with is that something in the now common use of the word "mode" as a tag-on to various activities or subjectivities (see the list I gave in paragraph #1, and add to it things like sex, shoplifting, work, travel, anxiety, yoga, holiday, etc.) seems related to my notion of emotional life being profoundly performative.

RE: MY NAME IS TITLE

I was asked to reassure the institutional forces behind this exhibition months ago and choose a name, which is like having to title an art work when you're in the middle (at best) of making it. When months from now Play Mode appears on one of its artists' résumés, what will their next curator imagine it to mean? Will she have to struggle to justify including that artist in her show, called Natural Visions or Criticality at the Millenium? No matter what, she will do what I did, bring her desires and her meanings to bear on each of the artists' work, assembling a show that is as much an image of herself as the elaboration of any theme. Curator-mom or Curator-sister, we're all projecting, identifying, and interpreting like crazy.

RE: THINGS CHANGE

Not every artist who seemed to define "play mode" agreed to exhibit (pun intended). (Another version of this catalogue would have been to make it the Salon des Réfuseurs and discuss the works I didn't "get" for the show.) I made substitutions, and those substitutions influenced further substitutions. Dr. Frankenstein couldn't exactly be a chooser. Sometimes he had to take a thief's brain, a priest's heart. So, like Frankenstein's monster, Play Mode is organic and constructed. And now it's out of my control.

p.s. Why don't blenders have a play button instead of on? What if multi-speed blenders had tease, flirt, play, tango, tickle, maim, maul, murder? (See Donald Barthelme's Games are the Enemies of Beauty, Truth, and Sleep, Amanda Said).

p.p.s. Privacy as a space of "naturalness" is no such thing. See Lydia Davis's Wife One in Country or Evan Holloway's Black Cabinet.



DEAR BIA

RE: SELF-SERVICE

Artists should treat themselves as well as they treat their studio visitors. In your case that would mean a well-brewed pot of coffee and some excellent cookies sometime in the late afternoon, sitting on your futon in Altadena. Milk comes from there.

The odd thing about sitting on your futon with that coffee was that I kept thinking about the furniture in the room. I was asking each chair: are you important to Bia? What about you, little table?

RE: GAMES CHAIRS PLAY

CC. DONALD BARTHELME, LYDIA DAVIS, FRANCIS A.

Four individuals set up your four chairs twenty-four times in your studio for your camera and you. So I know that the chairs did not move themselves around supernaturally. But assuming they did, what were their motivations? Was it a tournament of "Imitate the Humans," with rounds of Chinese Acrobats, Job Interview, Matador, Obligatory Family Photo, Ass Fetish, Dinner Party, Top Model, and Shy Peoples' Anonymous?

RE: IS IT ME OR IS IT YOU?

CC. LUTZ B., JOSEPH G.

Okay, accepting that the chairs were moved by people, it's really no surprise that now I'm reminded of shrinks' offices. If you're doing solo in the group room, you're imagining those couches and swivel chairs heavy with bodies, you're wondering who likes to sit where, or if they switch around, if they fight over the seats, if part of the social work is in negotiating the furniture. What if you bought the same furniture as in your shrink's office and installed it in your living room?

The people who arranged your chairs fantasized about them, and now I'm fantasizing about those arrangers: the person who doesn't let the chairs near the camera, or the one who flips them upside down so often (that's you, Bial)—their legs up in the air so immodestly—or the one who keeps them strictly together, allowing no desertions, no spotlight-grabbing. But then there I go... it must be me who wants the close-up, me who's obsessed about my ass, me who wants the limelight.

Make sure you watch Lutz's video. See if you don't end up wondering what I'm wondering about your pictures: who is the subject, is it me, or you, or them?

DEAR READER,

re: Welcome to the show

In one of my favorite episodes of *Seinfeld*, Kramer rescues the original set of the Merv Griffin show and installs it in his apartment. It takes up his whole place, so when Elaine, Jerry or George drop by, they are literally "on set," plopped onto one of Merv's four bucket seats. Kramer has become Merv so it gets very silly; his friends try to converse with him about their lives only to find him responding as though they're his celebrity guests.