

L I M I N A L

performance at the threshold

Liminal Performance Group, Portland Oregon

2001 LIVE Biennial of Performance Art

At Dynamo Arts, Vancouver, BC

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Character Descriptions and Scene Synopsis:

Objects for the Emancipated Consumer

Characters

Marchant: A detective with a defective memory hired to find a man and a woman. The pictures in his wallet are there to help him with his case. By the time he reaches the airport to catch a flight, he forgets who the people in the pictures are. Which pictures are of the suspects? Which ones are of the informants who can help him? Which picture is of the murderous villain who he must avoid at all costs? Are they all just pictures of his family? Failed memory is just the beginning of the detective's problems.

Georgia: A young lady traveling for the first time. She is chasing her brother who is hopping from airport to airport and may commit suicide any day. They communicate over cellphones and the internet. Just when she thinks she has found her brother, he is on another plane and she must track him down again. She is desperate to stop him, even if she has to keep him running to do it. She knows that she will outsmart him one day.

Richard S.: An upstanding office manager who is accused of an ambiguous crime by a judicial message that he receives in his e-mail. The e-mail instructs him to await notification of his trial. Included with the form are several poor quality surveillance camera photographs taken of him in public and private spaces. He leaves the center of the city to avoid spies and to determine what his crime may have been. He is certain that he will find sanctuary at the airport. At a phone booth, he finds a case of anonymous credit cards from many international banks. He successfully buys a plane ticket with a card and is weighing the ramifications of leaving town.

Jennifer: An apocalyptic denizen of the Airport. Weeks earlier, as she was walking with her husband to catch a plane, she heard voices that convinced her to abandon her husband and hide in the dark recesses of the airport. She walked for days through the endless concourses. Finally, the voices led her to a small door at the end of an all but abandoned terminal built in the 1950's that was recently replaced by a new terminal designed by the architects

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Herzog & de Meuron. Behind the door was a long hallway that led to a maze of the airport's inner mechanical organs. In one particular room full of pipes and ducts leading to air passages throughout the airport, she found a valve labeled "CO Exhaust All Ducts—DO NOT OPEN: FATAL." She tightly gripped the valve switch for longer than she can remember. Eventually she fell asleep and let go. When she woke several days later, she believed that there was some special reason that the voices had led her to such a powerful valve switch. She was omnipotent over the airport. She thought of her husband searching desperately for her and decided to stay.

Moore: Jennifer's husband. He is taken with technology and is doing everything he can to find his wife with the help of data he's collecting. He loves airports and flying and believes it is the real city and that the world outside is a dangerous hinterland of the past. He tries his best to find Jennifer. Sometimes he feels a sinking sensation that his world is not what it appears to be, at other times, he catches glimpse of her, or smells her perfume and drives himself to continue looking.

Amanda: An corporate humanist with obsessive-compulsive disorders who investigates cases for an aviation corporation that has "a lot of things at stake." Her executive superiors have put her on the trail of persons who are threatening airport operations. She is a good investigator because she thinks outside of the corporate mindset. Poetry and love are her driving passions, but her work denies her these "frivolities." To sublimate her desires, she creates many obsessive-compulsive issues with which to concern herself like her certainty that someone is poisoning her food, or that she might step on a contaminated syringe, or that her friends are all conspiring to throw her in a psychiatric hospital.

Episode 1: Objects

Scene 1: The detective loses his gun.

Marchant meets Georgia and offers to buy Georgia a drink. She refuses, saying that she has things to do. He doesn't believe her and insists. She reluctantly agrees to join him. Marchant pulls out his pictures to show to her and fails to notice that his gun has fallen onto the floor. Georgia tells him that he can't have guns in the airport. He casually asks her why she thinks he would have a gun and does not wait for a reply before telling her that he has forgotten who he is and who he is looking for. She tells him that she has seen every person in his photographs, but does not know where. Marchant leaves puzzled with his gun still on the floor. Georgia picks it up, and keeps it.

Scene 2: Amanda ignites the paranoia of Richard S. with an ATM machine.

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Amanda reveals that she cannot look at a clock more than seven times each day. She has already reached her limit on this especially slow day and asks Richard S. for the time. She grows suspicious of his uncertain reply and asks him for his papers. He gives her a credit card instead. She asks him to prove his identity by using the card at an ATM machine. He submits to her request and tries to remove cash but does not have the correct PIN to access the account. She tells him how important it is to have credit in an airport and that criminals are everywhere. For all she knows he too may be in trouble. Richard S. nervously flees. She recites a line of poetry as she watches him disappear into the crowd.

Scene 3: Jennifer, hiding from Moore, presents an in-flight monologue near her Carbon Monoxide Valve while wearing an oxygen mask.

While taking in pure oxygen from an unknown source through a mask, Jennifer explains that people are treated like cattle in the airport for their own safety and well-being. She describes all the bad and deadly things that can go wrong in air travel like lost luggage, terrorist attacks and plane crashes. She explains that flight is impossibility made real by faith. Faith, she adds, is only possible through a higher power that will reveal itself to her and others in the airport.

Scene 4: Moore, tracking down Jennifer, displays the skills of crisis management and entices wary travelers with interior designs by Phillipe Starck.

Moore assures us that flying is safe and efficient and will soon replace all other modes of transportation (except hallucinations). He describes all of the safety precautions that an airport takes on a daily basis, and reveals the many ways that airport staff help travelers. When his arguments fail to calm the masses, he changes the subject by pointing out the many wonderful products that can be purchased in an airport. Consumerism and air travel, he explains, are the ultimate rights of a free society. Finally, he adds that airports are the symbol of a new international multi-culturalism. He quotes Phillipe Starck who says that living in one place is “obsolete.”

Episode 2: We suddenly realized that the feeling isn't mutual.

Scene 1: The clash of airport ideologies.

Amanda tells Moore that the audiences of travelers are “bodies of habit riding on an escalator of hope” over lunch. Moore counters her assertion by pointing out the glory and dignity of those who abandon time and space by living in the “transparent air of super sonic motion.” Amanda interrupts the argument with one of her many compulsions and her refusal to eat a whole plate of food.

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Scene 2: The accused interrogates the interrogator.

Marchant questions Richard S. about his photos. In a panic Richard S. exclaims, “Well certainly none of them are of me!” and asks Marchant if he believes that a guilty conscience is a sure indicator of guilt. Marchant tells Richard S. that to have a guilty conscience, one needs to have a memory. Richard S. asks Marchant if his conscience is clear. Marchant responds that he can’t remember. Richard S. confides in Marchant that he remembers everything and that he is clearly guilty of nothing. Marchant asks him how he can be so sure. Richard S. distracts Marchant and disappears. Once he is gone, Marchant tries to remember if he was just speaking with someone.

Scene 3: Jennifer tries to convince Georgia to forget the past.

Jennifer asks Georgia where she is traveling. Georgia replies that she doesn’t yet know and is waiting for her brother to tell her where to go. Jennifer tells Georgia to forget about her brother and go wherever she wants. The thought upsets Georgia and she refuses. Jennifer tells Georgia that her relationship with her brother is a useless memory because it only exists on a telephone line. Georgia responds by calling her brother and arguing with Jennifer while she accuses her brother of denying her presence beyond the telephone line. Georgia becomes more confused than ever, hangs up the phone and runs away.

Episode 3: The fragility of desire.

Scene 1: Amanda steals another’s hunger.

Amanda watches Jennifer aching from hunger. When Jennifer’s hunger becomes unbearable, Amanda comes closer to take pictures of Jennifer as she doubles over in pain. Jennifer begs Amanda for help and threatens her life if she doesn’t give her any. Amanda asks Jennifer if she just expects the airport to feed her without anything in return. Jennifer grows faint, and tells Amanda that she should seek out the hidden dangers awaiting her instead of callously watching the suffering of others. Amanda becomes obsessed with knowing what dangers lay ahead for her.

Scene 2: Marchant searches for his gun.

Marchant realizes that his gun is lost and retraces his steps (which he cannot remember) to find it. Moore and Georgia observe this and approach Marchant. Moore asks if he can be of assistance and Marchant tells him that he is just looking for a picture of his wife. In a surreal pantomime, Marchant starts pulling invisible guns out of his pockets and aiming them like James Bond at invisible assailants. Georgia produces Marchant’s gun and gives it to Moore. Moore is surprised and lectures Marchant on the penalties of such a severe infraction

against airport security. Marchant cries on the ground, lamenting his existence as a “man without a gun.”

Scene 3: Technology strips Richard S. of his bankcards.

Richard S. tries to remove cash once more from a bank machine. The machine refuses. He begs the machine to give him money. It refuses and he tries another card. The machine starts to eat all of his cards as he puts them in. He is horrified, yet fascinated by the machine’s power over him. He puts all of his cards in and cheers and cries while the hungry machine one by one swallows them. At the end, he exclaims, “just a C-note, a C- note for all my cards!” He waits, but there is no response. He collapses, exhausted.

Episode 4: Getting to know your infrastructure.

Scene 1: Marchant and Amanda falsely conspire to commit fraud in order to catch each other in the act.

Amanda suspects that Marchant may be the man she is looking for and pursues a hidden line of inquiry by asking Marchant if he is in the aviation industry. He lies and says that he is so that he can get information from her. She asks him if he has ever considered taking advantage of his “situation.” Marchant asks her if she wants to conspire to artificially inflate airfares. Amanda accepts and they shake hands. Simultaneously both accuse the other of criminal behavior and announce their true identities. Angry at their errors in judgement, they fight briefly until Amanda pushes Marchant against a wall and he asks her if she would like to be seduced. Amanda begins to aggressively wipe away an invisible stain on the wall, but Marchant stops her and kisses her deeply. Amanda breaks free and departs.

Scene 2: Richard S. begs Moore to arrest him and toss him in the airport’s jail.

Richard S. confronts Moore and tells him that he is guilty of credit card fraud. Moore tries to calm him and tells him that he can’t be guilty because criminals don’t reveal their guilty conscience. Richard S. explains that he really didn’t steal the credit cards, but accidentally found them. Moore ignores him, and offers him a free hotel room in the airport to make up for “any inconvenience.” Richard S. refuses the hotel room claiming that it will only make things less certain than they already are and insists that Moore turns him over to airport security and throws him in “airport jail.” Moore responds that the airport has no jail but that the hotel should suit his needs quite nicely. As Richard S. grows more distraught, Moore tries to placate him with duty-free shop gift certificates, a free shoe shine, fresh coffee, carte blanche at the magazine racks and a tour of a DC-9 cockpit.

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Scene 3: Georgia encounters Jennifer on her self-guided tour.

Georgia creeps into the bowels of the airport and unsuspectingly finds Jennifer. Between them is the valve labeled “CO Exhaust All Ducts—DO NOT OPEN: FATAL.” Georgia reads the sign and looks in horror as Jennifer puts her hand on the valve switch. Jennifer tells Georgia that the valve is the only thing coming between community and death. Georgia pleads for community by upholding the value of responsibility, citing her loyalty to her sick brother. Jennifer discusses all the wonderful places she could fly with the money her brother gave her. Georgia puts her hand on Jennifer’s, and pushes in the opposite direction that Jennifer is. Both characters hold there, until they run out of energy and collapse.

Episode 5: Despite all advances, technology still can’t account for taste.

Scene 1: Where a group effort fails, but individual satisfaction with a meager existence in the dark prevails.

Moore gives the actors a tour of their surroundings. The actors follow Moore, but as he tries to explain the great future of airport technology. All are disinterested in what he is talking about and are instead trying to explain their character’s inner motivations to each other. Moore battles for their attention, but they refuse to listen. In the confusion, he contacts his voice mail system for further instructions. It tell him that he must give a complete tour without missing a single detail. Amanda grows irritated and tries to lead the group away. At the moment that she deviates from the path the lights go off. The lights go on again when she steps back in place. Georgia tries to call her brother, but when she picks up her phone the lights go off again. When the lights go up, Richard S. tries to flee, but Moore pulls out Marchant’s gun and tells everyone that they must work together to solve this issue. A debate ensues about whether they should do the tour the way that the computer wants them to, or find a way to subvert it. They fall into such disagreement that they move off in different directions, which makes the lights go off. One by one, the characters pronounce that the darkness is “sort of peaceful” and continue on their way.

Episode 6: Simple patterns, complex behaviors.

Scene 1: Marchant and Richard S. tire of trying to remember and start at the very beginning.

Marchant arrests Richard S. Richard S. asks Marchant to tell him what crime he is accused of. Marchant looks at his photos, trying to construct a scenario, but gives up. He asks Richard S. to help him. Richard S. tries to connect the photos to the many small infractions that he has committed in his average life. The more

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he remembers them, the guiltier he feels and the less Marchant is sure of his mission. Richard K. finally begs Marchant to handcuff him, but Marchant is unable to do so without a crime. Marchant asks if there can be an investigation without a suspect. Richard S. takes from his pocket a printout of the e-mail accusation that was sent to him by the courts and suggests that the suspect is hiding out on the internet, taking on other people's identity. Filled with enthusiasm, they construct an electronic suspect for their new case.

Scene 2: When apocalyptic weaponry no longer does the trick.

Horrified by the deadly gas valve, Georgia accuses Jennifer of foolishly trying to commit suicide and genocide at the same time. Jennifer defends her plans by pointing out how her control over the life and death of travelers gives her a sense of community. The two women fight and accidentally turn the lever. They wait and listen for the valve to do something. The valve is inert. Jennifer pulls the lever several times. Georgia laughs and tells Jennifer that she has been foolishly putting her faith in a relic of the machine age. Jennifer becomes depressed, knowing now that the valve will respond to her faith with silence. Georgia sympathizes with her compatriot and throws her packets of money and instructions on the ground exclaiming that she is "done with being on the listening end of someone else's phone call."

Scene 3: Look at yourself.

Amanda and Moore meet. It is late. She is engaged in another compulsive behavior, and Moore is sending an e-mail of tasks to the airport computer server technicians. Amanda sees what he is writing and accuses him of preparing a list of tasks that will be resent to him in his voice mail the next day. She accuses him of being his own boss. She asks if anyone actually ever hired him. He is shocked and tries to deny it. She asks him why he would commit such a strange level of self deception. Moore can't answer, the actor too is at a loss. Amanda tells him that he will never again be his own boss. Moore pulls out the gun and tries to arrest her for impersonating an official. She asks him what he is talking about. Moore takes a stack of hand written papers out of his desk and asks Amanda if she recognizes her own poetry. Amanda denies that the poems are hers and Moore begins to read a passage. Hearing the lines, Amanda breaks and admits her transgression to her corporate identity. Moore too is deeply moved by the words and points the gun at his head. Amanda tells him to stop and asks him if he will help her write one poem before he shoots himself. Moore agrees, puts the gun down, and together they start to compose.