



No12

Discretion – A Shaggy Dog Story

I never wanted to work for the News of the World. Never mind keeping art and life separate: my duties here have obliged me, regardless of my own will, to play a little at gutter journalism. Well, Sunday supplement at least, which is perhaps worse.

At the opening of the latest show, “Supervision”, at Galerie Kai Hoelzner, any of the usual pretense of going to such an event to see some art was rendered superfluous by the lack of it on show. What you had instead was a white cube version of a therapist’s room. A flat Mies couch, a chair set back from it at an angle, with a cowhide rug in between, consumed the small, always crisply clean gallery space. A photo of, and by, Gilbert and George from the 1970s was on the wall facing the foot of the bed. “It’s what I like to look at to relax,” the gallerist informed me.

In the back office, viewers – if the term is still appropriate – were invited to make appointments for one-to-one visits to the show. You were given the therapist’s role. Appointments would take 30 minutes or so. The chair was for you, the couch for the patient: Mr Hoelzner himself. He explained that he had undergone a number of sessions, over months, of professional supervision with a psychotherapist. The proposition was that the patient/gallerist would retell a condensed version of the issues and outcomes that had arisen over the half-hour, and the therapist/visitor would listen, and had the right, but not the obligation, to ask questions. I booked a slot.

One or two other preceding conditions are important. The course of supervision was undertaken with the idea of using it as the basis for a show from the beginning. However, the therapist was not at first aware of this. On being informed towards the latter stages of treatment, she apparently took a little convincing that the whole thing had not been done under false pretenses. Mr Hoelzner assures me that she was in the end satisfied that he was undertaking it for genuine reasons, but then, he would, wouldn’t he? We only have his word. She was not present at either the opening or later appointments to verify that fact or any other.

Now, I am about to give a description of what I experienced whilst visiting an exhibition. The thing is, this involves the revelation of intimate material that I would normally never betray, were it a close friend that told me, and it is stuff that only a close friend would ever usually tell you. That inclination towards discretion is only furthered by taking on the therapist role, of which patient confidentiality is a central law. In describing the show, I flout that principle, and cannot escape the feeling that I am rendered gossip-monger, and betrayer of secrets. My actual role of viewer, and reporter, contradicts the very position the show put me in, and the more I relate here, the stronger the betrayal, and also the clearer the revelation.

I should add, perhaps, that any witness is at bottom unreliable, and you also only have my word that the following is some of what was really said – who knows just how off my memory is; it was a few weeks ago and I wasn’t taking notes – just as we only have the subject’s word for everything else.

So, I sit down, the last appointment on a warm autumn Friday, the light in the gallery dimmed. My patient lies down, and after some moments, begins talking.

“I haven’t been satisfied with being a gallerist for some time. I miss the feeling of being part of a family. I always want to get some love back, but I find that I always have to give love out. The artists, they always need something, they need constant reassurance, they always need encouragement, or an arm round the shoulder. They never think that I might want it too.

“When I was a child, my parents split up. I stayed with my father. I remember, I was about 6 at the time, and my father received a telephone call. It was from my mother, and I could understand clearly that it meant that she was leaving him. He cried, and I understood that I could help him, that he needed comfort from me. Ever since then, I knew that I needed to look after him, and the roles were reversed.

“And as a gallerist, I always am the father figure. But sometimes, I want to be the child, too. When I started this gallery, I had six artists, which became nine, and now it is three.”

I needed to ask: “Why?”

“Mainly because of this process, the supervision. They didn’t want me to talk about them; they were worried what I would reveal. They are never satisfied. They need a gallery so much. One of my artists, I took him straight from the academy. I can see that he really needed, and needs, to know that he is in a gallery, that he has a gallerist. It gave him somewhere to belong; it provided him with his identity as an artist.

“Some of the artists complain that they aren’t making enough money. And I always have to ask, ‘Is that what you’re doing it for?’ It’s not what I’m doing it for. Or they want recognition.” He evidently found that a little ridiculous. He scoffed.

After some more returns to the theme of the parent who has missed his own nurturing, I had to ask why he had become a gallerist at all.

“I never studied art. I used to be a writer. I wrote literature. I studied philosophy. When I was a student, only eighteen, I had a friend in the art academy. One week I was hanging out with him in the classroom, and the professor was going to come for a plenum. My friend said, ‘why don’t you stick around?’ So we waited and waited and it got very late, and I couldn’t imagine that there would still be a plenum. Sometime around eleven in the evening, the professor finally arrived. I was a little embarrassed, and didn’t know what to do exactly, so I got up and introduced myself and shook his hand, and told him that I was not an art student. He found it very amusing that I would do that, and asked me what I studied. He said ‘Philosophers are always welcome here,’ and gave me 50 marks to go and get beer and pizzas for the class. So we went out and got it, and came back, and started talking about art until five in the morning.

“I loved it, I felt like I was part of a family. I often went back. I was welcome, it was an open atmosphere, and I was accepted. You only find that family feeling with art, and that’s what I wanted to create here, with the gallery. I had finished writing books for the time being, and wanted to set up that feeling

here.”

I had to follow up with: “Why not become an artist?” And was answered with a common German tic:

“I didn’t study it. And it’s difficult to get recognition. You always operate in these circles at a certain level, and I’m on some middle level. Sometimes I meet people who are really high up. You like to think that you can be accepted on their level. But it doesn’t happen. It’s always an illusion.”

I wondered if the show was both simply to vent his emotions, and to try to show the gallery in another way, from another angle, but to give a realistic portrayal (a self-portrait of the gallerist as a middle-aged man, I think now). Yes, it was, but it was also simply to put the viewer in another position, he told me. But we were getting out of character a little, so I stepped back in, asking: “Do you want to have children?”

Now here my memory, and perhaps my nerve and my indiscretion, fail me. There had indeed been a desire, and an attempt, and a failure, to have children. Well, that’s indiscreet. But the details, of which there was one or two more, escape me.

Looking back, given my memory transcribed as I have it here, the tone is lost, and in truncation, what came across in the room as nuanced, complex and ill-defined, now may come over at turns arch, pathetic, ridiculous, absurd, and probably skewed. My gut reaction in the room was that I was being offered a largely sincere account, though I had no way of telling what had been left out. But I would have to declare myself a relatively gullible witness. The roles were especially revealed late in the session. My patient/actor dropped character again and revealed, with a little relish, he had been trying to provoke me with his whingeing about artists. It certainly hadn’t occurred to me to take it personally.

My reaction to hearing the tale was complex in its emotion: it was warm, ingratiating. I reveled a little in the intimacy proffered, I have to admit, which quickly overcame any initial embarrassment or discomfort. Confidences when thrust upon one can be aggressive, though they were moderated by gentle, bitter humour here.

Pleasure in the privilege of disclosure didn’t last too long before it was countered by a slight suspicion, of both the veracity of the source, and of oneself and one’s own voyeurism. The small thrills of inappropriateness are rekindled now in the telling. And to the recklessness with which he has exploited himself, his job, his gallery, and his artists as base cattle feed, as sheer subject matter rather than content, I doff my cap.

Ricarda



Sandy

Sound of 12

Ursula

Penne Ratte

Knoblauch in dünne Scheiben schneiden und in Olivenöl anschwitzen, Rosmarin, wenig Oregano dazu. Mit geschälten Tomaten aus der Dose und Tomatenmark löschen, etwas kochen lassen, mit Salz, Pfeffer und etwas Zucker zu einem guten Sugo abschmecken. Ziehen lassen. Eine Aubergine in dünne Scheiben schneiden und mit Salz, Pfeffer und Öl im Herd grillen und beiseite legen. Einige Ringe von einer roten Zwiebel mitgrillen. Nudeln kochen und den Tomatensud, Auberginen, Zwiebel, schwarze zerquetschte Oliven sowie einige Anchovis oder was sonst zur Hand, dazugeben und mit viel weiterem Olivenöl im Topf vermengen und servieren. Dazu billigen feingeriebenen Packungs-Parmesankäse.



Riana



Josephine

Michelle



Lea



How to recognize a wrong artist

To Tita



Katja

THE LOOK ALIKES





Hallo 2012 tschüss CFA

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