

Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève



Cally Spooner, *DRAG DRAG SOLO*, 2016

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Opening 2 February 2018, 6pm
3 February – 18 March, 2018

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Curated by Andrea Bellini

The Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève is proud to present ***DRAG DRAG SOLO***, the largest solo show by Cally Spooner to date, in which the artist presents three distinct bodies of work on separate floors of the institution. The first is in the past, as a closure; the second remains in the present, in formation; the third is in the future, as a speculative event.

Sitting somewhere between a retrospective and a rehearsal, the exhibition arrives at a moment when reality can feel degraded. Here, Spooner considers how subjectivity and its bodies are shaped by technological and performative conditions, as well as how and where language undergoes damage.

Beginning from the position of a writer, Spooner considers her work equally to be that of a choreographer: arranging language across a page, then through a space, placing writing in a moving performer's body. Evolving over long periods of time and across a variety of venues, her works are carried by casts, text and objects, which embed in the living and mediated fabric of her practice. Reflecting on the erosion of voice and language in neoliberal and technological milieus, her absurdist scripts, fictions, films and events render the behavior of invisible violence in the digital age. Comedic and dystopian replays of political, economic and media rhetoric become critiques of corporate performance and chrono-normative history alike. Considering these as corrosive to both life and utterance, she responds by presenting rehearsals and duration as a mode of resistance.

At the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, on the second floor, is Spooner's *And You Were Wonderful, On Stage* (2013 – 2015); a 5-channel film installation which has more in common with a live choreographic event than cinema. On the third floor, works created between 2015– 18, comprising objects, sound, drawing and live events – in varying states of aliveness and deadness – create an ecosystem of fact and fiction, hinting at a 'novel in progress'. Finally, in the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève's Cinema Dynamo will be the early research stages of Spooner's yet-to-emerge performance company, OFFSHORE. In advance of its launch this spring in London, Spooner will create a series of workshops in collaboration with HEAD – Genève, Geneva University of Art and Design and the École Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Lyon.

DRAG DRAG SOLO as an entirety takes its title from a ten-minute silent film by Spooner, commissioned by the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève for their Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement in 2016. The film absorbs, and is affected by sounds in its proximity, which have thus far included Bruce Nauman's film *Violent Incident*, live radio, an alarm clock, as well as sound works by Spooner herself. Considering the chance to be thrown out of sync by sources outside of oneself, *DRAG DRAG SOLO*—both film and exhibition—equally contain an awkward subtext; the leaking intersections between collaboration and solo performance.

The exhibition is made in partnership with the Swiss Institute, New York, where it will manifest in a new constellation in December 2018. A new publication by The Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève and Mousse Publishing, containing scripts, scores and drawings from *And You Were Wonderful, On Stage* (2013-2015) will be published during the exhibition. A comprehensive monograph on Spooner's work to date is currently being organized by the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève in partnership with Vleeshal, Middelburg and The Madre—museo d'arte contemporanea Donnaregina, Naples, due for release in late 2018.

Cally Spooner's recent solo exhibitions include The New Museum, New York and The Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (in 2016), Vleeshal, Middelburg (2015). She is author of *Collapsing In Parts* (Mousse, 2013) and *Scripts* (Slimvolume, 2016).

Performances

Live performances will take place in the exhibition the following days

Friday 2 February, 6.30–9pm

Saturday 3 February, 5–6pm & 8–9pm

Saturday 17 March, from 12pm (public rehearsal)

Sunday 18 March, from 3pm, followed by a reading by Cally Spooner at 4pm

For more information

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Artist's Statement

"Contra to the traditional historical precedent of the performance medium, I choose distance over presence and within that is my enquiry. I'm not a fabulator I'm an instigator then a manager, overseeing others from the wings. Text, recorded image, bodies are all a media. There is distance between text and speech, a distance between the recorded image and live event, a distance between bodies hired to deliver my work, and my ideas. But I'm wondering whether I need to hold such drastic binaries. If the binaries are real, how wide is the distance between? Can I operate in the ambiguous moment these oppositions fold over each other, and muddy? A mediation, mediator or Medium bridges a distance – between that which you can say or do, and that which you can't quite reach on account of it being too impossible, too far away (like contacting the dead, or being heard by a person who is angry with you and with whom you are angry, or reaching a remote island, accessed only through TV). Outsourcing may conjure a mental image of offshore call centres, but I'm considering it in the broadest sense: as how we delegate to a stand-in; to language engineered by bodies or institutions or industries outside of our own body, which have the power to organise our thinking, and provide us with their language to do our speaking, thinking, even our emotional work for us. In my work, I am becoming more mediated, less present, as I outsource my live events to hired bodies. Often, I rethink these live events into film; I mediate them more. I use techniques like single take, first takes, little or no editing. In doing so, permanent, fixed images arrive because an activity was filmed once, then left, but was not stretched beyond what it landed as. I want to make work in a grey area; where live events sometimes becomes more, not less living because they have been mediated, and where I become more, not less, present because of my absence. This is about opening then closing the distances between what seems mediated, and what is not; moving in-between. Keeping this movement in-between – a rehearsal of means, not endings – is what I'm mostly trying to do."

Cally Spooner Interviewed by Cecilia Alemani

Biennale de l'Image en Mouvement 2016 catalogue, 2017

Description of the works

2nd Floor: Past

And you were wonderful, On Stage, 2013-2015

5 Channel HD Film Installation, Flat screen, 45 minutes

And You Were Wonderful, On Stage is an immersive five-channel film installation that shows the single-take recording of a musical for six continuously rolling cameras. Gathered in a film studio, a cast of performers and a film crew meet for the first—and last—time, together delivering a repertoire developed with Spooner over a number of years through previous performances and exhibitions elsewhere. Over forty-six minutes, their non-stop motion sometimes creates coherency, and at other times does not, to land as a composite, a multi-person performance-to-camera.

Central to *And You Were Wonderful, On Stage*, is Spooner's script delivered as a soundtrack by a chorus line. They gossip through appropriated tweets, YouTube comments or news headlines, meshed with Spooner's own prose, all relating to celebrities, athletes, and politicians who have outsourced their performance to a technology; including Beyoncé's 2013 lip-syncing scandal during Obama's Presidential inauguration, and sports star Lance Armstrong's doping confession to Oprah Winfrey. The libretto is made from meeting notes taken by Spooner at an advertising agency. These recall a marketing practice where employee's private lives and aspirations are extracted for use in a TV commercials. Speech is adjusted and tweaked, then handed back to the source to perform a scripted version of themselves to camera.

In the installation the chronology of the six cameras is left untouched and distributed across five screens, to make a work that has more in common with a live choreographic event than cinema. This is the first presentation of *And You Were Wonderful, On Stage* since its premiere at Stedelijk Museum in 2016.

3rd Floor: Present

A tear engineered in 1856 by Rodolphe—the adulterous lover of Flaubert's Madame Bovary—is dripped onto a breakup letter and sent to the heroine via messenger. The casanova's 19th century emoticon arrives at a moment when the life of the other becomes inconvenient and emotion cannot be conjured from his own body. "There ought to have been some tears on this; but I can't cry; it isn't my fault" he says, but not to her. Then, having filled a drinking glass with water, Rodolphe dips his finger and lets a big drop fall onto the paper, leaving a pale stain on the ink. Taking the incident of the false tear as a lynch pin—a barely wet metaphor—Spooner considers how life is 'outsourced' or assessed in the present day, and what distances are thereby created between bodies. A number of works made between 2015-18, fluctuate between facts and fiction. Together they hint at a 'novel in progress' that mines the gaps where language fails, goes missing or erodes.

The sum total of the 3rd floor is for Cally Spooner a fiction. Or more specifically – a novel for 2018, expanded as exhibition and very much in progress, knowing that fiction is always only a few degrees removed from reality. True to this literary logic the show on

this floor is an editorial version, which will be picked up, re-edited and rearranged in December 2018 at the Swiss Institute in New York.

Self Tracking (the five stages of grief), 2016

Sienna X express tanning mist streak free natural colour, pencil, coloured pencil, data from the artist's metabolism (2012 - 2016), data from Artfacts.net on the artist's career rank, (2012-2016), data from XE The World's Trusted Currency Authority on the British Pound measured against the Euro (2012-2016)

Circling the peripheral walls of the galleries is a continuous line of spray tan. Standing in for a typical average or 'normal range' skin type, the band becomes a backdrop for biological, economic and environmental data extracted between 2012-2016 from test results or automated points based systems and replotted in Spooner's wall drawing *Self Tracking (the five stages of grief)*. A first line, drawn with pencil by hand, traces the artist's career rank as measured online by Artfacts.net, reaching its climax in the space at the maximum height Spooner could physically reach. A second line of a fleshy coloured pink tracks the simultaneous fluctuations in her thyroid and stress levels. A third meanwhile charts the course of the British currency measured against the Euro on XE, 'The World's Trusted Currency Authority'—recording a dramatic drop in the final month of data collection.

Spooner created the work in October 2016 when the British Pound, already in a state of decline following the Brexit vote, plummeted overnight to its lowest value in three decades. Responses from banks and currency specialists were swift, with HSBC declaring the GBP to be in the final and most gloomy stages of grief.

**The FX market is exhibiting an uncanny resemblance to the five stages of grief. First, following the Brexit vote came the denial — theories circulated whether a second referendum would have to take place. Second was anger — claims the vote was unfair. Third was the bargaining — arguments maybe it wouldn't be that bad, what if the UK followed the Norwegian or Switzerland model. Now the fourth — a gloom is prevailing over sterling.*

David Bloom, chief currencies analyst at HSBC
Financial Times, 7th October, 2016

This humanisation of the currency and the statement was retracted just a few days later when it became clear that the crash was due to a human error known as 'fat finger' in trading: a clumsy typo accidentally omitting a zero from a transaction, causing a dip that puts the politics of world-wide finance into question, if only for an instant.

Self Tracking (the five stages of grief) reflects the multiple and intertwined ways by which humans have, throughout time, self-tracked; and now use technology to quantify, evaluate and narrate the self in the 21st century: hours slept, steps taken, calories consumed, medications administered. Ninety million wearable sensors were shipped in 2014 to help us gather data about our lives. Numerous works on the third floor, bound by Spooner's wall drawing, appropriate the devices and rhetoric of such systems of control to compose a fiction, just a few degrees removed from reality.

Room 1

Bed Time Beats, 2016

**Hotel alarm clock from The Limelight, Aspen set to Bedtime Beats™:
The Secret To Sleep™**

An alarm clock, originally from the Limelight hotel Aspen, CO, USA is set to an inbuilt button labelled BedTime Beats, The Science of Feeling at Home™. This is a function bought by many hotels from a company called Hotel Technologies™, catering for soundscapes to match the rhythm of guests' metabolisms. BedTime beats supposedly guarantees guests to fall asleep and—at the touch of a button—wake up as demanded. Continuously running on Aspen time (GMT-7), the work functions as ready-made, a displaced time-keeper of the exhibition suggesting metabolic synergy, rest and temporal dis-synchronicity at once.

Room 2

Soundtrack for a troubled time, 2017

FreeSpace Loud Speakers, DS 100SE WH 3 Way Passive Compact, 1 stereo amplifier, 1 Behringer Xenyx QX1002USB USB Mixer

In *Soundtrack for a troubled time* (2017), a performer counts in his native Spanish in the right channels of the sound system. The numerical monologue is choked by barrages of water being bucketed over him. From the left channel, the sharp thwack of a golf club obviously and relentlessly drives the ball and cuts through the exhibition space. The two-channel sound is presented on three white Bose FreeSpace speakers, designed to invisibly blend in with its environment to inspire atmosphere and affect from no discernible source. Spooner came upon these speakers in an immersive sound installation at Gatwick Airport, where the bank HSBC replicated the sound of the Yangtze River throughout the South Terminal. It was unclear what particular product this installation was attempting to sell. In *Soundtrack for a troubled time*, abstract language and numbers appear to disintegrate while the presence of a breathing, choking body is increased and rendered as a fiction.

Room 3

DRAG DRAG SOLO, 2016

Single channel projection, filmed through museum glass, without sound, double-sided room-dividing screen

Suspended diagonally in a third and middle gallery, *DRAG DRAG SOLO* is a mute moving image work—a silent movie of sorts—that absorbs the external sounds of other sound producing works or noises in its vicinity. A film of three dancers, projected on either side of the screen, runs on loop. One dancer performs a solo at the front of the frame, skilfully and unimpeded, whilst two further bodies in the back drag each other across the space in opposing directions. *DRAG DRAG SOLO* lends the title to the overall exhibition at the Centre d'Art Contemporain Genève, which originally commissioned the work for its Moving Image Biennial in 2016. The film in turn is a spin off from the artist's long-term project *On False Tears and Outsourcing*, presented at the New Museum in New York earlier that year. On the ultimate day of the presentation, Spooner asked the six dancers—

who were the main material of the exhibition—to change into rehearsal clothes and perform the choreography they had generated over two months for one last time. Shot through the glass wall of the museum wall, in a simple archival manner—straight take, sequence by sequence—*DRAG DRAG SOLO* distills one episode of their repertoire.

Room 4

He wins everytime, on time and under-budget, 2016

Two Bose 5 second-generation Virtually Invisible® single cube speakers, stereo audio of dancer Magdalyn Segale performing rugby training at gbAgency (Left channel) and Ivanka Trump talking to Fortune 400 about her business venture ‘#womenwhowork’ during her father’s presidential campaign (Right channel), amplifier.

Through the left channel of a Bose lifestyle speaker (advertised as “virtually invisible” novelty a few years ago, now already out of date) we hear the sound of a dancer, working on a particularly exhausting rugby drill with a bad cold. In the right channel is Ivanka Trump’s voice talking to Fortune 400 about her business venture ‘#womenwhowork’, a productless enterprise for women that trades in organisational, hosting, and empowerment tips. The recording was made in the run up to the US presidential elections in 2016, when #womenwhowork became a political surrogate for Ivanka’s father, Donald, attracting many female voters to his economically driven politics. The title of the work is a quote from Ivanka, introducing her father at a republican rally and herself as a “successful business woman, mother, wife.” The electoral candidate’s daughter thus acts as direct product of and fleshy proxy for the Trump enterprises: suggesting that the codes of corporate performance will be fulfilled with her father in the presidency: the mastery of money and time.

Early Research: Method, 2016-2018

Bronze cast of the artist’s ear, fiction, fan mail, paper, offset print

Spooner’s *Early Research: Methods* hint at novel in progress, forming as a hybrid of fiction, medical research and fan mail. The fragments thread together ideas about trauma, protest, reverie and hysteria—states in which the body disobeys the mind. Scattered across the floor, stacks of paper carry offset-prints of segments of text and are held down by bronze casts of the artist’s ear. The severed ears collapse the spheres of the administrative-managerial and the bodily-intuitive, as is typical of Spooner’s work. As paperweights, the bronze ears evoke the artist’s methods of research, correspondence with a wide range of collaborators, and arrangement of text as much as bodies in space; at once, they open the site of the intimate and diaristic, both erotic or personal.

3, # 5, # 6, # 7, 2016 and 2017

Plastic Resin, 3D prints

Along with the stacks of paper are presented 3D prints of earlier *Early Research: Methods* that have in the meantime been sold. 3D-scanned and printed before being handed over to a collector, the original paper stacks have morphed into a fossil, loose sheets into the solid matter of resin. In the process of passing through economic and technological transactions, the objects rise in value while appearing increasingly ossified, ready-made, with the language on the original lost.

By all accounts this was a very ordinary man, 2018

(A new character workshopped throughout the exhibition to enter the novel-in-progress)

Orator, language, soap

A performer inconspicuously roams along the seams and lounges in the corners of the landscape of *Early Research: Methods* and 3D prints. Casually, he handles a pale bar of soap, throws it up in the air so it boomerangs back into his hand. Occasionally, he picks up a stack of paper and begins to read fragments of text out loud. *By all accounts, this is a very ordinary man*, is workshopped with performer Michelangelo Miccolis throughout the exhibition, to develop a new character in Spooner's novel in progress. The performance to occur at regular intervals in the exhibition, builds on Spooner's investment with Hannah Arendt's work and especially her concern with how 'cliches' and a 'banality of evil' creep into language—or into our lives precisely through the reification of ready-made and catch-all, if equally watery and slippery phrases. It further takes its cues from Francis Ponge's poetic work around banal objects, where soap becomes a metaphor for the movement and behaviour of speech morphing from cracked silence to foaming words.

4th Floor: Future

OFFSHORE, 2018 - ...

The fourth floor hosts the early research stages of Cally Spooner's yet-to-emerge performance company, *OFFSHORE*. In advance of the company's launch this spring in London, Spooner is organizing a series of preparatory workshops titled *AGAINST THE PERFORMATIVE* devised in collaboration with the HEAD – Genève, and the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Lyon. These workshops will help build the organizing principles of *OFFSHORE*.

In *AGAINST THE PERFORMATIVE*, Cally Spooner considers the performative negatively; as an invisible, attritional violence, in which a subject's language is created by sources outside of the uttering subject's body, such as industrial, governing or media power. This language is then handed to a subject to consume and carry, as though it were their own, thereby quantifying and degrading the subject's language and agency. Through the workshops, Spooner tests where we might gain—rather than lose—knowledge, and build—rather than erode—vocabulary.

OFFSHORE frames itself as an ongoing exercise in the restitution of language and voice, in the accommodation and organization rather than control of bodies, as well as how to sympathetically and reasonably throw one another 'out of sync'. Finding its full name from wherever it happens to gather, at the time of going to print, *OFFSHORE* has thus far gathered for a total of seven days. First *OFFSHORE IN BILBAO (A REHEARSAL)* then *OFFSHORE IN BELGIUM (A DURATIONAL EVENT)*. The company will be officially be inaugurated and de-centralized in April 2018, *OFFSHORE IN LONDON*.

Warm-up, 2016

Dancer, stretches

Duration: unknowable.

A single performer stretches continuously, warming up in preparation for an unknown and endlessly deferred event—the future. She roams the gallery at her own free will, occupying different undesignated spots throughout the visitors' route in a constant negotiation between rehearsal and a never-to-be-realised presentation.