

Re: Hello from Cambridge + an invitation from the List Center

From workingartist@protonmail.com <workingartist@protonmail.com>

To @mit.edu>

CC @mit.edu>

Date at 2:19 PM

Dear ,

It was wonderful to meet recently and discuss *Contract*.

reflecting

on this language, lifted from the way I originally [described](#) the piece at Duplex in 2022:

The artist's *private sphere* is the space wherein subsequent market-value is not only initially produced, but repeatedly dipped back into to reify, increase, and uphold said market value, once established; Giovannitti seeks to make access to it—rather than free, or paid in a form of cultural capital or sweat equity—costly. She embarks on a fool's errand: making transparent and concrete the opaque systems of eroticized exchange facilitating value extraction from artists by those in positions of material and cultural power. The art market's current system of value extraction from artists relies on both parties' aspirational uncertainty toward what the other might eventually offer them, facilitating participation in an intimate game of possibility, innuendo, dangling, and exploitation. The system glitches when the terms are made plain, potentially allowing new forms of value production to occur.

What I've highlighted in red remains the simple core of the piece: the artist's "private sphere" (her body; her interpersonal relationships; her history; her "identity"; her studio) exists traditionally (and in particular *now*, when an artist's biographical history is so frequently used by galleries and institutions to suffuse her work with value) as a *site of extraction*; through *Contract* I am attempting to turn into a *site of negotiation*.

But I'm struck by the arrogance in what I wrote; the idea that "the system glitches" when "the terms are made plain." First, it takes quite a lot to glitch *a system*; and second, made plain to whom? Systemic scripts are so powerful as to be biopolitically embodied; we can't just opt out of the way our economies work and circulate within and among us. If my work illustrates anything it's this. We often don't know when we're lying to one another nor ourselves.

But I was arrogant because I was trying to prove something.

I have less to prove now, and people have many more ideas about what I might "eventually offer them," given the book I published in the interim. I used to analogize the piece to sex work;

beating a dead horse, and like doing that it adds nothing. Per Deleuze and Guattari: "The truth is that sexuality is everywhere: the way a bureaucrat fondles his records, a judge administers justice, a businessman causes money to circulate; the way the bourgeoisie fucks the proletariat ... there is no need to resort to metaphors." Or Gary Indiana: "If you need money you're always the bottom." And what really happens, in 2026, when opaque erotic exploitation is "concretized," "made transparent"? I fear very little. Too, the art market has and I'm no longer a proper whore.

I'm less interested now in the materialist thrust of the piece than its more evasive affective dimensions, I don't anymore think "the system" glitches so much as the piece itself does,

Contract positions itself as a solidly materialist intervention, a concretization to point toward shrouded channels of exploitation—and on its most basic, conceptual, surface level, yeah it is. But I think something more complicated underneath.

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considering privacy theorist Lowry Pressly's [writing](#) on "two conceptions of privacy: the 'citizen's sense of privacy,' on the one hand; and the 'artist's sense of privacy,' on the other," originally theorized by Joshua Rothman, who argues that "those who take the citizen's view concern themselves with 'other people and how they might affect us . . . how they could use information about us for their own ends...' [versus] those who . . . take the artist's view and see privacy as [resting upon] 'an intensified sense of life's preciousness and fragility . . . [and a] notion that, when it comes to our most abstract and spiritual intuitions, looking too closely changes what we feel. It has to do, in other words, with a kind of inner privacy, by means of which you shield yourself not just from others' prying eyes, but from your own.'" *Contract* troubles each of these notions of privacy as they relate to both the libidinal and informational economics of the "art world."

Pressly argues that these two notions "are far less distinct than Rothman supposes," that in fact "citizens" desire privacy at all precisely because it "preserv[es] a condition of potentiality, flux, and play *in which the life of the citizen and the life of the artist are most alike.*" [italics my own] In this way, artists provide a particular frisson for non-artists—"citizens"—in that artists, at least in the public imagination, make their home in potentiality, flux, play, fragility, intensity, abstraction, spirituality.

I believe those who spend their time privately visiting with artists (curators, collectors, gallerists, critics) as one facet of their economic life in some ways conceal their apprehensive desire for the "artist's sense of privacy" (a desire to encounter their own opacity and be made aware of their hidden selves, and through this grow nearer to life's preciousness) underneath the more obvious and professionally sanctioned "citizen's sense of privacy" (meeting to determine "information" about the artist and their work that is not necessarily publicly available). *Contract* engages the tension between these privacies: simultaneously based on an information-gathering choreography, yet proceeds through questions that force unsettling and existential examination of the self (*Why are you here? Who are you? What do you want from the Artist?*), getting at what the Contractee shields "not just from others' prying eyes, but from [their] own." After all, the most common answer to "What do you want from the Artist?" is "I don't know."

Now, if the role of the artist is preserving this very kind of "inner privacy"—facilitating abstraction and obfuscation so as to make something where the whole is greater than its parts; something ineffable,

excruciating, inexplicable— in its attempt at penetrating this “inner privacy,”
does shift rote psychosexual/
psychoeconomic power dynamics to a situation of confusion and potential; still, I don’t know that this
something else is “a new form of value production.” And what is most interesting to me now
is how this *something else* remains elusive, a mystery not only but also to the Artist.

A negotiation— —instrumentalizes consent. Psychoanalyst Avgi Saketopoulou writes,
“Consent ... does not only encompass conscious processes unfolding between people; it also implicates our
interiority. When we consent to something, we open ourselves up to encountering the otherness in ourselves
... [T]he self cannot be fully known, [and] we are always somewhat opaque to ourselves, and, therefore ...
consent negotiations always involve more than we think we bargained for: they involve a confrontation with
what is irreducibly alien to us about ourselves. This confrontation assumes risk.”

which is
the unknowable, affective dimension of debt and dependency. In its being related to but uncannily dislocated
from “studio visit,” “meeting,” “coffee,” “martini,” “date,” “interview,” “checklist,” it is designed to disturb or
disorient. Crucially, the Contractee is taking a risk. So is the Artist. “Making the terms plain” isn’t actually an
antithesis to “both parties’ aspirational uncertainty toward what the other might eventually offer them,
facilitating participation in an intimate game of possibility, innuendo, dangling, and exploitation;” one doesn’t
overtake the other but instead the two things knock into one another, producing a friction or a collision, which
means heat, wear, tear, or wreckage. “Choreography 2” isn’t yet public;

From the
jump, then, the Contractee is forced to acknowledge their desire for something unknown to them and to
shore up that desire with a non-refundable deposit.

Perhaps *Contract* is simple domination and humiliation. perhaps there’s no need to define it
at all; perhaps its meaning should be shielded not just from others’ prying eyes, but *also my own*.

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A meeting place for the “condition of potentiality, flux, and play in which the life of the citizen and
the life of the artist are most alike;” in which the citizen comes to *become like the artist*, to participate in
making art, which costs.

If institutional critique is now
fully assimilated into the institution, anticapitalism now fully assimilated into capitalism—who’s really getting

off? Are we tacitly participating in a circlejerk? Is it possible for *anything new* to happen? And by new I mean, “interstitial,” “surprising,” as in, per *Confession Prototype 1*, being held all of a sudden in the mouth of a whale, “not yet swallowed and not yet spit out.”

thereby imbuing it with the value and frisson of whatever else I spend my time doing there as I work—feels most alive, peculiar, and least didactic.

In this version,

This is something a wealthy individual might take on, if there's something commensurate they'd like from me in return; or something an art institution or gallery might take on, as it's a choreographic intervention into the vexed relationship between the libidinal economy and the information economy, wherein when there are multiple perspectives on past events that involve gray area bad behavior and/or sexual exploitation, only the party who can afford ongoing litigation controls "the truth."

I'm eager to hear your thoughts

Sincerely,
Sophia

Sent with [Proton Mail](#) secure email.

