BELOW THE SURF
Steven Warwick on Georgie Nettell at the Kunstbunker
Forum für zeitgenössische Kunst, Nürnberg

At the end of the 1999 movie "The Truman Show," the title character, Truman Burbank, is reaching the edge of his staged reality, in which he is the unwitting star of a TV show watched by millions. Truman finds the exit door, and the Steve Jobs-esque network director (via a godlike projected voice) attempts to persuade him not to leave. This scene is reminiscent of a similar one that occurs when confronting the decision to delete/deactivate a Facebook profile, where one is emotionally manipulated into staying, reminded of friend networks and interactions which have occurred on the site, constituting an integral part of the social logic of our current landscape. Truman ultimately exits the fictional universe he's been inhabiting, transmission ceases, and the audiences watching at home simply ask what else is on.

Rewatching the movie, I was shocked at the idea that we could be entertained at the thought of such a concept. Within barely a year's time following the release of the film, reality shows like Big Brother appeared on the scene, social media following not long after. Having watched the film as a teenager, I was suddenly catapulted into a remembrance of things past; only to be jolted back, seconds later, into the present, and the scandals over privacy concerns currently looming large. In Georgie Nettell's exhibition "Deeply Subjective and Intensely Personal," the London-based artist continues her exploration of themes of (online) self-expression and domestic settings in relation to the housing crisis, previously developed in shows like "The Comments," or in her collaborative work with Morag Keil. The

exhibition's title successfully threads the narrow divide between being playful on the one hand, and exposing the inchoate desire to belong to the social landscape on the other.

Walking through the show, viewers are invited to gaze into a series of five video works, all titled "Are you extroverted or are you neurotic?" (all 2018), presumably shot on a GoPro or similar device, detailing various domestic and everyday situations from the artist's life, filmed as if the camera, captured with a voyeur-like view, was in fact spying on its own user. These works invite us to create a psychographic profile — trends identified through market research classifying population groups according to psychological variables such as attitudes, values, or fears — of the artist based on the cues Nettell chooses to present (supposedly) of herself, to us. This mimicks how Cambridge Analytica also created similar profiles from data and "like" posts from the Facebook platform in order to compile a database of user attitudes (extrovert/introvert, etc.) with the aim of influencing future behavior. The viewer is left to decode the videos as if in a bizarre mix between a Robbe-Grillet novel and the carefully structured reality of Big Brother, with several objects and details documented. In the five videos, we are shown various scenes shot from first-person perspective (akin to a first-person shooter computer game) of the artist: in bed, looking around her room, staring at the ceiling, cutting her toenails to a shoegazey song, taking out the rubbish, slurping a bowl of noodles in the kitchen. There are others focused around a desk, in which a marker and key ring resembling the letter "i" are photographed on a smartphone (later to be used in another artwork in the exhibition), while a book, "The Social Construction of

Reality," by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, lies open next to it on the desk. The book is a sociological work from the 1960s, foundational in part for having first introduced the term "social construction."[1] In other videos, everyday actions are juxtaposed with cultural and social markers: snapshots of a brick wall on a housing estate resembling the letter "T," or a kitchen drain piping the letter "E (the letters appear later in the show as part of the works "Natural Language 1–2 (reality/civilisation)."

Actions like these are more performative, a nod to us seeing the rest of the works in the show, a somewhat hyper-self-conscious and deconstructive mimetic gesture of the process of making content. Is the artist being extroverted? Or neurotic? Or neither? The video's title and actions hint at the performative nature of acting (out) online, in particular on social media, where one is only too aware of being watched, directed to an audience's desire for certain cues. Social media use has been strongly linked to having debilitating effects on mental health. As long as everyone is in on the same cue, all appears to be ok. Or is it? In a kitchen scene, the chewing sound of noodles is constant and deliberately artificial, to comedic effect; a hyper-constructed non-verité, flipping Godard's adage of cinema being "truth at twenty-four frames a second." The clanging of the spoon against the bowl and accentuated slurping reminds one of the ASMR phenomenon popularized on YouTube channels, in which users in search of a dopamine rush can look up their favorite sounds, such as rustling papers, to calm themselves down in a stressful situation.

Whilst French theory, simplified into the espousal of a doctrine debunking any claim to objective truth, has been, according to some,

Georgie Nettell, „different paths through the same set of information based on what you already know or want to know", 2018

remolded into the current discourse of "alternative facts" by the Far Right, we find ourselves in a Batesonian double bind over self-expression: can one perform self-expression (online) while simultaneously being cognizant of one's own impartiality? The show asks us to confront the limits of wanting to know that which lies outside one's immediately perceived set of knowledge and values. Writing near the end of his life, Gilles Deleuze warned: "In the societies of control […] what is important is no longer a signature or a number, but a code; the code is a *password* […] Individuals have become 'dividuals' and masses, samples, data, markets, or 'banks' […] Everywhere *surfing* has already replaced the older *sports.*"[2]

The final works one encounters are two sets of photographs ("Natural Language") spelling out REALITY and CIVILISATION from objects resembling the Latin alphabet (as above mentioned), and a button which one is invited to press upon leaving the show, as if in an airport or public/private service to express customer dis/satisfaction, titled "different paths through the same set of information based on what you already know or want to know." Once pressed, an alternating sentence constructed from multiple voices states in English, and then German, "reality is just someone else's tired explanation." Perhaps

by sidelining the binary of on/offline logic, by way of deviation, or Nettell's particular way of hate-fucking social media, one can distinguish between early online utopian aims of communication and discourses in cyberspace, and the supposedly safe space that one's online platform profile provides. For what is it, other than a space that is both deeply subjective *and* intensely personal? Once this is clear, perhaps one can begin to circumvent the current hysterical desire for proselytizing truth.

"Georgie Nettell: Deeply Subjective and Intensely Personal," Kunstbunker Forum für zeitgenössische Kunst e.V., Nuremberg, May 3–June 17, 2018.

Notes

1   Peter L. Berger/Thomas Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge. New York 1967.

2   Gilles Deleuze, "Postscript on the Societies of Control," in: October, 59, 1992, pp. 3–7, here pp. 5–6.