

Maeve Connolly, 'Abstraction and Dislocation in Recent Works by Gerard Byrne', *CIRCA: Irish and International Visual Culture* 113, Autumn 2005: 31-42.

Gerard Byrne has recently exhibited three new works that encompass, or consist entirely, of moving image elements; *Exercise for Two Actors and One Listener* (EV+A, Limerick City Gallery, 2004), *Homme à Femmes (Michel Debrane)* (Green on Red Gallery, Dublin, 2004) and *In Repertory*, (Project, Dublin, 2004). Although it is possible to identify many continuities with earlier film and video installations *Why it's Time For Imperial, Again* (2002) and *New Sexual Lifestyles* (2003), most notably in the exploration of performance, the newer works place less emphasis on the display of photographic prints as a historical reference or supplementary narrative.<sup>1</sup> This is perhaps surprising, given the fact that the photographic image has long functioned as a core element of Byrne's practice, and has formed the principal content of exhibitions such as 'In the News' (Green on Red, 2002) and 'Herald or Press' (Douglas Hyde Gallery, 2002).

The aim of my article is to consider this apparent shift in presentation, through reference to a recent in-depth analysis of the photographic image in Byrne's work. Written by George Baker, and entitled "The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne", this text is published (in English and German translation) in the illustrated monograph *Books, Magazines, and Newspapers*.<sup>2</sup> While the text predates the three new projects exhibited in 2004, it anticipates recent developments in Byrne's practice in interesting ways, and also raises a number of questions concerning the broader context of critical reception. Before turning to Baker's essay, however, I want to first consider the place of photographic imagery within *Why it's Time For Imperial, Again* and *New Sexual Lifestyles*.

*Why it's Time for Imperial, Again*, a work that has been exhibited widely both in Ireland and internationally, employs an 'advertorial' for the Chrysler Imperial car, published *National Geographic*, as its starting point. The advertorial purports to document a conversation (presumably invented) between Chrysler chairman Lee Iacocca and Frank Sinatra at the launch of the 1981 Imperial. Byrne's film version omits the car, and showroom context, and instead

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<sup>1</sup> My description applies specifically to the presentation of these works. In the past, Byrne has sometimes made changes to installations, or even remade specific projects.

<sup>2</sup> George Baker, "The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne", in Gerard Byrne, *Books, Magazines, and Newspapers*, New York and Berlin: Lukas & Sternberg, 2003: 7-88.

stages the dialogue three times in a variety of interior and exterior urban spaces (around the greater New York city area) so that the flow of the narrative, already highly artificial, is continually interrupted by sudden and unexplained disjunctions. The project is deeply concerned with technological and social obsolescence, as suggested by the desolate urban landscape, and as performed by the male protagonists.

The continual slippages and dislocations also invoke further absences - such as the phantasm of a consumer whose trace can only be found in outdated advertisements. Byrne has emphasised that old magazines provide an important evidence of changing “aspirations and self-identities”, tracking “shifts of consumer identity and differentiation across the decades”. He also notes that, which they may be collected, popular magazines are not “cherished” like old Pop songs or old TV shows.<sup>3</sup> Evidence to this effect is provided by a series of photographic prints, accompanying the film, which depict both the original *National Geographic* advertorial and an extensive collection of back issues stacked in the second-hand section of Chapters bookshop (in Dublin). This abandoned archive is a testimony to the availability of *National Geographic* in Ireland, where it once functioned as a source of fascinating information about ‘Americans’ - as well as the natural world. But while these photographic images claim the status of ‘evidence’, it might be more accurate to read them as props within a stage set, since the full installation consists of a television monitor, headphones and several chairs, all placed on raised dais, suggesting an odd cross-over between a theatrical stage<sup>4</sup> and a contemporary public library.

When presented at the Douglas Hyde Gallery, *New Sexual Lifestyles* also encompassed a series of photographic prints, this time with a more pronounced local connection. The source text for the video is a panel discussion on the theme of sexual behaviour, originally published in *Playboy* in 1973 and featuring an array of psychologists, journalists, porn industry professionals and critics. Most of the roles are taken by Irish actors and the conversation (presented in segments on several television monitors) is inter-cut with onscreen questions, taken from the original article. The setting for the dramatisation, and the subject of the photographic series, is a modernist summer house in the Wicklow countryside, which was built for the Irish arts patron Sir Basil

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<sup>3</sup> This quote is from an interview with Byrne, originally published in *Untitled Magazine*. See [http://www.extracity.org/dedicated/dedicated\\_byrne.htm](http://www.extracity.org/dedicated/dedicated_byrne.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Baker notes that Byrne has described the dais as a ‘rehearsal space’, “The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne”, 67.

Goulding in 1972. Although inaccessible to the public, this space echoes certain aspects of the Douglas Hyde Gallery, hinting at a complex history of Anglo-Irish patronage of the arts. This doubled exploration of Irish modernist architecture also offers a vision of the 1970s that is totally out of synch with dominant representations of Irish society during that period. In addition, the photographic series serves to extend the exploration of desire and fantasy well beyond the arena of sexual behaviour into the realm of domestic material display and consumption.

Byrne has emphasised that, in *New Sexual Lifestyles*, the photographs “work as a dialogue with the video, on the one hand they substantiate the work contextually and spatially, and on the other they operate like out-takes, a slightly detached vision that operates at a different speed. They also serve to physically index the fact that this is a re-construction. They evidence the contemporary situation of the video.”<sup>5</sup> The photographs also underscore the ‘televisual’ quality of the work, which echoes both the setting and the conventions of the studio chat-show, or ‘magazine’ programme. Byrne has identified *After Dark*, Channel Four’s infamous late night discussion show, as the key point of reference - perhaps because it exemplifies the obsolescence of television genres. The key issue is that television’s generic categorisations are continually reformulated, so that the once risky territory of sexuality quickly become the mainstay of daytime programming.<sup>6</sup>

Themes of technological obsolescence are highlighted in George Baker’s analysis of Byrne’s work<sup>7</sup> but Baker also addresses himself to a number of intriguing parallel issues. These include a perceived crisis within contemporary criticism, which may be linked to the prevalence of moving image practice within contemporary art. He develops an expansive argument, concerning the status of narrative and abstraction in ‘post-modern’ culture and art, through reference to Byrne’s practice and (less directly) recent debates around the projected image, in *October*. It is impossible, within the scope of my essay to fully do justice to this argument, while also considering the newer works produced by Byrne, so my aim is simply to engage with

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<sup>5</sup> Byrne, *Untitled Magazine*, [http://www.extracity.org/dedicated/dedicated\\_byrne.htm](http://www.extracity.org/dedicated/dedicated_byrne.htm)

<sup>6</sup> ‘Televisuality’ takes a different forms in *Why It’s Time for Imperial, Again*. The jerky handheld camera work clearly echoes the style of TV crime drama, but the ‘Sinatra’ character also recalls *The Sopranos*, underscoring the complex relationship between cinema and ‘quality’ television.

<sup>7</sup> Gerard Byrne contributed a short text, and images, to a discussion of obsolescence initiated, and edited, by Baker. See Byrne, “My Two-pence Worth”, *October* 100, Spring 2002: 19-22.

Baker's text in the hope of raising issues for further discussion.

Baker's analysis is developed principally through reference to the work of Benjamin and Brecht, but it also draws upon theorisations of late-capitalism developed by Hal Foster, Fredric Jameson, among others, to explain the "ephemeral" and elusive status of much contemporary art. Citing a range of international artists, including Pierre Huyghe, Philippe Parenno, James Coleman, Matthew Buckingham and Thomas Demand, Baker notes two parallel currents, which may or may not be linked. The first is the prevalence of the projected or suspended image (encompassing video, film, slide, the light-box) within contemporary art practice as a whole and the second is the widespread exploration of narrative and/or cinematic convention within photography. With reference to the first of these trends, he suggests that images are "now everywhere and in motion, floating like restless ghosts in the spaces once reserved for static paintings in frames and heavy sculptures on pedestals".<sup>8</sup> These trends are sketched rather than analysed in detail but many of the key issues have been flagged in an *October* roundtable discussion on the projected image, featuring (among others) Baker, Hal Foster and the artist Matthew Buckingham.<sup>9</sup> In his contribution, Foster articulates a profound suspicion with regard to the prevalence of what he variously describes as "pictorial", "virtualised" and "immersive" projected imagery, arguing instead for an emphasis on the apparatus of projection.<sup>10</sup> Baker, however, is more attuned to the tension between virtualised presentation and the thematic exploration of virtuality - a tension that he recognises most clearly in the work of contemporary French artists, in particular Pierre Huyghe.<sup>11</sup>

Another key issue raised by Baker in the *October* roundtable discussion, more directly revisited in "The Storyteller...", concerns the notion of a 'crisis' in contemporary criticism. Within the earlier text Baker notes that, as film and projection have gradually come to dominate contemporary art (and in particular 'mega-exhibitions' like Documenta) "we are witnessing an intense relativisation of the field of the art institution, the art critic, and the art historian, by film history, cinema history, film theory".<sup>12</sup> In his discussion of Byrne's work, he also suggests that

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8 Baker, "The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne", 40.

9 "Roundtable: The Projected Image in Contemporary Art," *October* 104, Spring 2003: 71-96.

10 Hal Foster, "Roundtable on the Projected Image in Contemporary Art", 75.

11 George Baker, "Roundtable on the Projected Image in Contemporary Art", 78.

12 Baker, "Roundtable on the Projected Image in Contemporary Art", 94

criticism has failed to go beyond the mere cataloguing of these developments in search of a 'social explanation', because "the social forces subtending this shift have become increasingly unrepresentable".<sup>13</sup> This notion of 'unrepresentability' is, he suggests, key to Byrne's practice and to the contemporary context of artistic production.

Baker sets out to complicate the (widely accepted) notion that, in the culture of postmodernism, capital has become so abstract that it tends to be embodied in *images* rather than in products. He acknowledges that, a consequence of this process, images have become inherently social forms, the forms in which "the social reproduces itself and is produced".<sup>14</sup> But, drawing upon the work of Hal Foster and Fredric Jameson, he proposes that the *reverse* may also be true - images have been pushed to the point where they themselves are now abstractions.<sup>15</sup> Jameson, he notes, questions the view that postmodern art has been characterised by a simple *return* to realism, figuration and narrative. Instead, Jameson insists that "postmodernism is not really figurative in any meaningful realist sense [...]it is now a realism of the image rather than of the object".<sup>16</sup> Working within this framework, Baker goes on to examine the processes of abstraction that are central to Byrne's practice. He notes that Byrne has created an ongoing series of captioned photographic stills of Lough Ness - which directly address the question of 'unrepresentability'. He goes on to extend this analysis through reference to Byrne's ongoing 'In The News' series, which combines ambiguous photographic stills and lengthy captions, at times featuring oblique references to theoretical concepts. In particular, he highlights an image of a lake on land that is owned by the Guinness family. The caption reads as follows:

Lough Tay, Wicklow, Ireland. '...less than ever does the mere reflection of reality reveal anything about reality. A photograph of the Krupp Works or the AEG tells us next to nothing about these institutions'. Bertolt Brecht, quoted in Walter Benjamin, 'Little History of Photography,' 1931".<sup>17</sup>

For Baker, this claim by Brecht functions as a key early acknowledgement that appearance itself

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13 Baker, "The Storyteller...", 41

14 Baker, "The Storyteller...", 41

15 Baker references Hal Foster, "The ABC's of Contemporary Design", *October* 100, Spring 2002: 191-199 and Fredric Jameson, "The End of Temporality" *Critical Inquiry* 29, 2003: 659-718.

16 Baker, "The Storyteller...", 74.

17 Baker, "The Storyteller...", 53

had become “abstract”, and as a consequence that reality and realism lay elsewhere. He notes that, in the cited text, Brecht went on to state that the “reification of human relations - the factory, say - means that [these relations] are no longer explicit. So something must in fact be built up, something artificial, posed”. The significance of Byrne’s practice, for Baker, is that it puts Brecht’s model into practice, often by attaching a second layer of abstraction to images that are already mute. Through this layering of artificiality, whereby captions “from journalism, a host of potential lies and fictions, collide with images we are meant not to trust”, the inheritance of realism is claimed. This is by no means the only invocation of Brecht within Baker’s discussion. At an earlier point he also proposes that Byrne’s *A Crime Dramatically Reconstructed, Again* (1998-2002) can be read as a Brechtian ‘model’. This work takes the form of a single reel of 16mm film with operatic accompaniment. The action is as follows; a man dressed in medical scrubs (Byrne’s twin) enters a featureless space, inserts a set of headphones into a hole in the wall and listens, apparently in ecstasy, to a recording of the tenor Caruso performing “E lucevan le stelle” from Puccini’s *Tosca*. In the film version, the action is repeated in a series of twenty-five different ‘takes’ and prefaced by a Lacanian psychoanalytic schema, which implies that the voice of Caruso can be read as a representation of the maternal.

This version is, however, the latest of five different drafts of a work begun while Byrne was in art school, mainly shot on video, each of which refigures various ‘realist’ codes of narrating the established components and may not, in fact, be the ‘conclusive’ version. For Baker, this psychoanalytic framework is less significant than the many processes of substitution performed by the work and he suggests that the ‘crime’ of the title is, in fact, the recurrent play with realist codes of representation. This crime is never seen - instead what is seen is a work given over to “a destiny of continual reconstruction, a perpetual ‘re-make’”, a work that explores “the separation and autonomization of its various parts and their endless recombination, their permutation”.<sup>18</sup> In the subsequent moving image works, *Why it’s Time For Imperial, Again* and *New Sexual Lifestyles* this model is extended - so that processes of ‘repetition’ become the basis for an exploration of the ‘New’.<sup>19</sup> Both of these projects, Baker suggests, constitute an attempt to release ‘stories’ from the mass-media, seizing upon forms of communication (the advertorial, the staged symposium) that were never intended to function as models. A key element within

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18 Baker, “The Storyteller...”, 39

19 Baker, “The Storyteller...”, 66

this practice is the artificiality, or ‘in-authenticity’ of the dialogue itself, which was never meant to be performed, “autonomizing further these already autonomised structures”.<sup>20</sup>

Baker points out that the significance of these abstracting processes only becomes apparent in the “post-productive” moment of finance capital, which is characterised by the “freeing” of money from the products and industries “to which it was previously attached, and by which it was originally generated”.<sup>21</sup> Elaborating on Jameson’s analysis of postmodernity, he emphasises that the supposed ‘return to figuration’ in art practice is in fact the cultural expression of an epoch of *total abstraction*, an “expression of the new freedom to recode and [...] deterritorialize all residual content”.<sup>22</sup> This process of deterritorialization, through which capital becomes ‘free-floating’, has also, he suggests, contributed to the prevalence of ephemeral, projected images and to the re-inhabiting of obsolete genres and media - most significantly film and photography. For Baker, it is this critical engagement with the industrial ‘discard’, within an attenuated exploration of artificiality, that points towards a critical reformulation of Brechtian realism in Byrne’s practice.

This analysis is persuasive and insightful, but Baker’s emphasis on the ‘free-floating’ character of contemporary film and photographic practice cannot easily be elaborated in relation to Byrne’s work. In particular, it cannot fully account for the fact that Byrne has often favoured modes of presentation *other* than projection - for example, the monitors employed in both *Why it’s Time for Imperial, Again* and *New Sexual Lifestyles*. His emphasis on processes of deterritorialization also tends to obscure the significance of parallel processes, which could perhaps be understood as forms of “localisation”, within the spheres of production and exhibition. As Baker points out, the “post-productive” moment is characterised by the dissociation of finance capital from “the concrete context of its productive geography”.<sup>23</sup> But this very dissociation can contribute to a powerful economic, political (and cultural) investment in the specificity of place, and context. The emergence of post-productive capitalism, charted by Jameson, has been paralleled by an

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20 Baker, “The Storyteller...”, 68

21 Baker, “The Storyteller...”, 75

22 Baker, “The Storyteller...”, 78. The shift from productive to post-productive capitalism are then enumerated, including the increased importance of the stock market and land speculation, the rise of monetarism and the World Bank, the radical alteration of urban formations, systematic unemployment, capital flight and disinvestment, and the necessity of the market ‘crash’.

23 Baker, “The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne”, 78.

increased investment in the rhetoric - and experience - of place and context, on the part of artists and institutions. These developments are highly complex and have been theorised both in relation to institutional strategies of audience development<sup>24</sup> and critical activist practice.<sup>25</sup>

The ongoing transformation of “post-industrial” urban environments into cultural capitals, through public-private finance, also points towards the instrumentalisation of ‘place’ within the globalised art economy. Bilbao’s Guggenheim Museum (designed by Frank Gehry) remains the best known example of this model, and the term ‘Bilbao-Effect’ has even been used as shorthand to describe this type of transformation. In fact, Hal Foster actually references Gehry’s work, specifically his mobilisation of computer technology, in order to illustrate his theory of ‘second-order abstraction’, whereby an image can become an object and yet retain the status of an abstraction.<sup>26</sup> The prevalence of the ‘projected image’ (paralleled by an exploration of narrative and cinematic convention) in blockbuster exhibitions such as Documenta could perhaps be understood in relation to this ‘effect’. The biennale exhibition circuit is, arguably, dependent upon structures of funding that are linked to the reinvention and exploitation of urban spaces as tourist destinations. These strategies have, in turn, become a topic for curatorial, critical and artistic analysis, particularly within more self-conscious biennial projects, such as Manifesta.<sup>27</sup>

An investigation of ‘second-order abstraction’, in terms of its relation to structures of production and exhibition, is also evident within specific artworks, such as Pierre Huyghe’s, *Streamside Day* (2003). Here, Huyghe borrows from the iconography of Japanese anime and Disney fairytale to envision and stage an invented suburban festival within an actual North American suburb. The project explores not simply the (by-now-familiar) artificiality of suburbia, but also its own status as an artwork masquerading as a community project. Artificiality also functions as a key point of reference in Thomas Demand’s contribution to the 2004 Sao Paulo Bienal. In a project that encompassed architectural, photographic and film components, Demand extended his usual practice of simulation to recreate a cinema that apparently exists

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24 See Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, MIT Press, 2004.

25 Gregory Sholette, “News from Nowhere: Activist Art and After, Report from New York City”, *Third Text* 45, Winter 1999: 45-56.

26 Foster, “The ABC’s of Contemporary Design”, 197.

27 See my discussion of Manifesta 5 in “Nomads, Tourists and Territories: Manifesta and the Basque Country”, *Afterimage: Journal of Media and Cultural Criticism*, 32.3, November/December 2004.

elsewhere in the Bienal pavilion, producing a profound sense of disorientation and calling attention to the building's alternative history as an industrial exhibition space.<sup>28</sup> The key issue linking these otherwise disparate projects is that the exploration of abstraction, and virtualisation, is extended into the space of exhibition and reception.

A similar process is, perhaps, evident in Byrne's most recent projects - to which I will now turn. *In Repertory*, a complex installation staged at Project, was marked by an overt process of transformation, whereby the 'white cube' gallery became a theatrical 'dark space', painted black and illuminated by stage lights suspended from a rig. A collection of scenic elements, drawn from three specific theatre productions (the 1947 Broadway production of *Oklahoma!*, the 1961 Odeon Theatre (Paris) production of *Waiting for Godot* and the 1963 Martin Beck Theatre production of *Mother Courage*) were then installed in the space. The press release listed these production details, and noted both the parallels and differences between sculpture, attempting to 'downplay its theatricality' and set design, 'pointing away from itself towards an illusory narrative'.<sup>29</sup> Although deliberately oblique, this statement seemed to invoke Michael Fried's famous critique of theatricality in sculpture, implying a possible historical or formal relationship.

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Visitors to the gallery were also informed, by an external notice, that the space was being videoed and that the footage would be edited and screened at a later stage. One month after the initial opening of the show, the video was duly presented as a projection, with the scenic artefacts moved to the other end of the gallery. This video, filmed primarily in long or medium shots, follows the various visitors, generally alone or in small groups, as they move around the space. The absence of commentary, combined with the detached framing, suggests a form of ethnographic data-acquisition, yet the video is clearly edited and several visitors actually engage in an overtly 'theatrical' performance (although most are merely painfully self-conscious).

By comparison with Byrne's earlier moving image installations, *In Repertory* seems to resist

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28 For a short discussion of this work see Maeve Connolly, "Emporium of the Senses: Spectatorship and Aesthetics at the 26<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Bienal", *Third Text*, Vol 19, Issue 4, July 2005.

29 Byrne has noted, in an email exchange concerning this work, that he was also interested in specific parallels that might exist between set design during the 1940s-60s and more recent developments in neo-formalist sculpture.

30 Michael Fried's "Art and Objecthood" was originally published in *Artforum* in 1966.

interpretation - particularly when the video is (mis)understood as the 'finished product'. Yet in many ways it can be seen to extend the concern with the 'unrepresentable' that suffuses Byrne's practice. The 'unrepresentable' in this context, might perhaps be the very experience of art, which the camera seems to investigate, and the temporal and spatial factors that serve to structure this experience. The video cannot capture how these objects are experienced, or resolve the question of whether they resemble sculptural works. In fact, the project is almost exclusively concerned with what is *absent* - in this case, both the sculptural works and the actual theatrical artefacts. This is because the physical objects on display in the gallery are facsimiles, recreated from historical records of the original productions.

This use of recreation suggests an extension of the strategies noted by Baker - the "inhabiting" of 'cast-off' or obsolete genres, and a rejection of the notions of 'craft', figuration and narrative mobilised by theorists of post-modern art and culture.<sup>31</sup> But, unlike earlier works, the process of recreation is not foregrounded and the installation does not encompass 'evidential' photographic stills, which might alert the audience to the status of these objects as facsimiles. In fact, by staging *In Repertory* in two distinct phases, Byrne very directly shifts attention towards the superficially 'relational' work of the video and away from the hidden labour involved in the production of the sculptural fabrication. Ultimately the project seems to resist reading because the site of presentation is itself subjected to a kind of abstraction and dislocation.

By comparison with *In Repertory*, *Homme à Femmes (Michel Debrane)*, also shown in Dublin in autumn of 2004, employs a relatively familiar mode of production.<sup>32</sup> It is a filmed re-enactment of an interview between Jean-Paul Sartre and journalist Catherine Chaine, originally published in *Le Nouvel Observateur* in January 1977.<sup>33</sup> The exchange focuses explicitly on Sartre's complex relationships with women, feminism and femininity, rather than engaging directly with his literary or philosophical work. The real object of analysis, however, is of course *masculinity* - and in particular Sartre's own romantic chauvinism. Through the use of surround sound technology, the off-screen voice of the interviewer (who is never shown) is dispersed within the gallery

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31 Baker, "The Storyteller: Notes on the Work of Gerard Byrne", 87 -88.

32 The relationship between sound and image, and the exploration of 'masculine' and 'feminine' spheres, recalls certain aspects of *A Crime Dramatically Reconstructed, Again*.

33 The interview was published in two sections, and seems to have reprinted (at least in part), in English, in *Playboy* in 1978.

space while Debrane/Sartre's responses emanate from the screen. The interview is performed in French, and there are frequent pauses in the subtitles, in addition to parentheses, suggesting that elements of the text have been excised.

A further layer of artifice is suggested by the casting of the handsome (albeit elderly) Debrane as Sartre - a man whose famed 'ugliness' only added to his status as a celebrated 'homme à femmes' or 'ladies' man'. The exploration of celebrity and masculinity clearly links this project with the earlier dramatizations<sup>4</sup> but here greater emphasis is placed upon the mechanisms through which images come to 'stand for' social relations. Initially, 'Chaine' seems to be the more sympathetic figure - her voice circulates within the gallery and so spatially she is aligned with the present. But it is Sartre/Debrane that emerges as a living presence, through a performance that must negotiate the boundaries between public and private - repeatedly transgressed by Sartre. In this way, the use of surround sound and video projection actually extends the absences and dislocations inherent in the text, and its recreation.

Like *In Repertory*, *Homme à Femmes* differs from the earlier works in certain ways - it is the first to be produced in a language other than English. An exploration of translation is perhaps anticipated and implied by the other processes of transposition employed in Byrne's practice, but it also directs attention towards the future circulation of these works. Just as *A Crime Dramatically Reconstructed*, *Again* investigated the notion of continual reconstruction, *In Repertory* and *Homme à Femmes* point toward possible processes of adaptation or alteration. These changes, which could perhaps be described as forms of 'localisation', might include a new video of a (different) gallery audience interacting with the repertoire of theatrical artefacts, or a new set of subtitles.

The spectre of endless 'localisation', raised by these works, is openly confronted in *Exercise for Two Actors and One Listener*. Enacted for the first time at the launch of 'EV+A' in March 2004, this project is effectively a live sound work, performed by two actors wearing radio microphones and experienced by one audience member at time, via headphones. The actors are first directed by Byrne to consider various well known film texts, such as *The Conversation* and *The Usual Suspects*, and are subsequently required to improvise a live dialogue in response to cues in their immediate environment, at an exhibition launch. During the event, an assistant distributes the

set of headphones around the gallery so that audience members can listen, one at a time. In this way the audience is suspended between the actual space of the gallery, where they and the performers are physically present, and the imagined space of the imagined - and remembered - cinema text(s).

*Exercise for Two Actors and One Listener* clearly represents a further exploration of the processes of virtualisation theorised by Baker in relation to contemporary art practice. But it also seems to test, and perhaps circumscribe, the critical limits of Byrne's project - through its status as a 'model' for other forms of recreation and reconstruction. The EV+A version was recorded, edited together with video footage of the launch, and then presented on a monitor with headphones as a part of the exhibition. But the video is remarkable because, like much of Byrne's work, it struggles with the 'unrepresentable'. Unlike the typical video document that attempts, and generally fails, to capture the 'reality' of a live experience, this work instead aspires to transcend its 'all-too-real' location (the City gallery, the EV+A audience) - moving beyond the 'real' in the hope of evoking a state of abstraction.