



HOW ARE YOU?

Being in the World (an Introduction)

Elly Clarke

by Erin Manns, 2010

Each day, we experience ourselves in the world. Our understanding of 'being' is, for the most part, never distinguished as separate from the world we inhabit – we are not isolated subjects.

In his landmark philosophical text, BEING AND TIME, Martin Heidegger explores the meaning of being as defined by temporality and examines time as the position from which being is understood. He proposes the notion of DASEIN – literally translated as 'Being-there' – and expands it to 'Being-in-the-world', which specifically reflects our state of existence as human entities. Free of a split between subject and object, encompassing all consciousness and characterized by an openness to the world, DASEIN interprets and understands the world in terms of possibilities – access to which is always via a history and a tradition.

Elly Clarke's practice can be considered a visual mapping of her navigation through her own 'being in the world': her own existence, her own histories and traditions, her own aesthetic response to her environment. Born in the UK and now based in Berlin, her body of work is developed from numerous global and local encounters. Her biography includes a BA in History of Art, dot com start ups, freelance curating, audio tour production and travel. Through film, photography, drawing, performative and participatory projects, (and the use of internet sites such as eBay, Flickr and Facebook), Clarke investigates the nuanced relationships that are forged between individuals and communities, cultures, social classes, photographer/subject and technology. Taking aspects from the documentary tradition, her work incorporates fictional narrative, autobiography, interviews, documentary evidence and images taken by others.

To address Clarke's diverse formal and conceptual approaches and their respective outcomes, this text is structured to provide a series of points of entry into thinking about her processes in order to reflect the open quality of Clarke's practice, always engaged with and participating in the world.

The titles in caps in this catalogue are taken from the piece *Mysterious at First Sight/Impressive Connections*, 2003; all are slogans from advertisements for mobile phone companies and manufacturers 2002–3. Dictionary definitions are from Merriam-Webster Online.

front (and back) cover image:
I02_LHR – TXL / GEMALDEGALERIE, BERLIN /
MALDON, ESSEX, 2008 / 2009 / 2008 (DETAIL)
6"x4" single edition composite in passpartout
from "Time & Place" series, 2009



SHARE THE MOMENT / GET GOING SOONER

Observation

2 a : an act of recognizing and noting a fact or occurrence

At the core of Elly Clarke's work lies observation: whether of spaces she inhabits, locations she travels to, personal archives she mines or individuals or social groups she interacts with. Her videos and photographs present observations of the external world and her inner self, while her projects involving participants are documentary-like in how they present others.

A modest fixed-frame video 5 MINUTES ON THE A23 (BERLIN-HEIDE) presents an unexpected moment of stillness, when normally high-speed traffic on the German Autobahn has been brought to a halt for no clear reason. The work records a modern landscape made strange: queues of stationary cars stretch into the distance, drivers and passengers leave their vehicles to pace around or mingle in groups. Clouds gather on the horizon. In the background, cars and trucks thunder by, unaffected by the deadlock on the other side. The sound, unedited from how it was recorded on site (a characteristic of Clarke's video work) forms what could be interpreted as a prepared musical score – techno music playing from one car fades in and out, the sound of chatter when people unexpectedly meet and a guitar being played live inside the car Clarke was travelling in. The strangeness of this vista

reinforces the fact that this landscape would typically be viewed as though in motion itself, seen at a glance.

Stillness and motion are the two states from where we encounter the world; we are always in either one or the other. Clarke is fascinated by the differences in potential for understanding the world we inhabit from these two positions, particularly as, in the West, demands for ever-faster speeds (travel, internet connection, convenience food, within-the-hour film processing, amongst countless other things) seem to be one of the primary defining characteristics of modern life. In many of her works, she provides a contemplative aesthetic space in which to consider the 'here' and 'now', or the 'there' and 'then'.



P07 _ KATHERINE AND JONATHAN VAN DER WERFF
P09 _ BACK OF PORTRAIT OF ELIZABETH GUERNEY
from "The George Richmond Portrait Project", 2010



P05 _ CONWAY SEYMOUR AND IVOR AT HOME
from "The George Richmond Portrait Project", 2010

MAKE A BIGGER BREAKTHROUGH

Translation

1 a: a rendering from one language into another

Clarke calls into question how we understand what we see, exposing truth and meaning as shifting, travelling, borderless. Translation in her practice – from one language or medium to another – serves to redefine our reading of information.

In 2005 Clarke participated in a mobile conference that took place on the Trans Siberian train.² The video work MOSCOW TO BEIJING consists of three parts: CONVERSATIONS, TRANS SIBERIA and TRANSLATIONS. CONVERSATIONS shows interviews with passengers Clarke met on train; TRANS SIBERIA shows the changing landscape; TRANSLATIONS, filmed back in Clarke's studio in London, shows the interpretation process of the original footage.

In order to facilitate communication, Clarke devised a set of simple questions. Written in Russian and Chinese these include 'Where did you get on the train?' 'Where are you going?' 'What is the reason for your journey?' 'Do you have anything of particular interest to sell or to show me?'

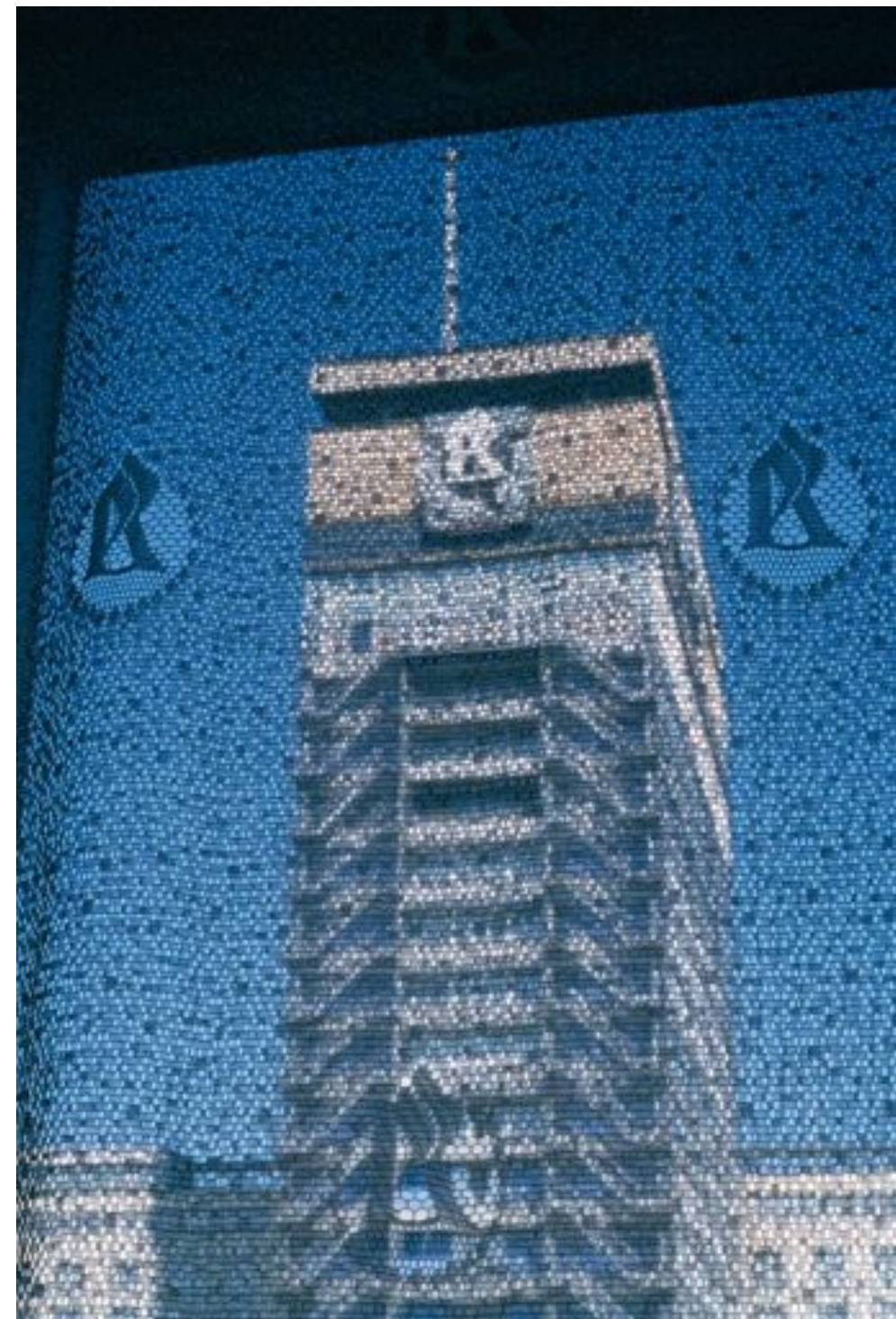
The responses are delivered primarily in Russian or Chinese, occasionally in fragmented English. Subtitles appear intermittently below; translations provided by contacts Clarke sourced upon her return to London. In TRANSLATIONS we witness the translators watching and interpreting the footage of the on-board conversations, giving their immediate response as to the meaning of what is being said. This is

occasionally word-for-word, at other times subjective cultural commentary, thus becoming part of the mediated stories of the participants' lives.

The work offers a compelling argument that language is inadequate, that it cannot accurately convey truth of experience. In understanding one another, an aspect of narrative is always involved. Communication is underscored as an exchange of subjective perspectives in an attempt to find common ground in the face of no shared language.

In a series of unique 6x4 inch photographs that Clarke presented via Flickr in 2010 entitled LEICA REPLACEMENT STRATEGY: SELLING THE OLD TO MAKE POSSIBLE THE NEW as a means of raising funds to replace her stolen camera, she again explores the idea of translation – this time by hand-drawing each image sold before it was sent to the buyer. While the digital image remains online, the drawing becomes the only hard-copy of the image in Clarke's archive. The idea of the 'original' – not normally applied to photographic processes – is questioned: which is the 'authentic' image: the drawing because it is hand-made? Or the photograph, which is unique only because the artist has decided it should be? This transfer across formats explores the relationship of meaning and medium and opens the possibility for authenticity to remain unfixed.

2 "Capturing the Moving Mind/Management and Movement in the Age of Permanently Temporary War" was organized and supported by the online journal *ephemera: theory and politics in organization*.



G01 _ NET CURTAIN (HOTEL ROSSIA)
hand-printed colour photograph, 30"x40", edition of 5
from "Moscow to Beijing", 2005–2006



G08 _ PHOTO 8 BY CONDUCTOR 119
6"x4", colour photograph from disposable camera
from "Moscow to Beijing", 2005-2006



START A NEW RELATIONSHIP

Structure

4 b: organization of parts as dominated by the general character of the whole

A recurring process in Clarke's work involves the development of a structure within which a simple set of rules generates a number of variables. In these cases, the 'product', or resultant object for display is unpredictable. By inviting participants to work within her parameters, Clarke relinquishes control over the final aesthetic of the result.

An early example is the BROADWAY HOUSE PHOTO PROJECT, 2002–2003. Realising how little interaction there was between residents of this populous housing estate in East London, Clarke developed the project as a counter to the characteristics of modern life, which allow for instant access to virtually anyone, anywhere, yet often isolate us from our next door neighbours.

By sending a letter to every resident in the building, Clarke invited her neighbours to take three photographs with a disposable camera from and within their flats – one looking north from their kitchen window, another looking south from the living room and a third picture of anything they wanted and to title the images. With support from Hackney Community Empowerment Network, the resulting photographs were hand-printed and exhibited at a gallery five minutes' walk away. At the opening, many of the participants met one another for the first time, despite some having lived in Broadway House for more than two decades.

Similarly, in the photographic series developed as part of MOSCOW TO BEIJING, Clarke exhibited photographs taken by

the participants she engaged with on the Trans-Siberian train. After interviewing them, she provided them with a disposable camera and her postal address, requesting they 'record their own perspectives of the journey' and return the camera to her for processing, printing and display.

And finally, in the ongoing GEORGE RICHMOND PORTRAIT PROJECT, which involves the tracing of portraits by (Clarke's great-great-great grandfather) George Richmond (1809–96) to private homes in order to photograph them and the portraits in situ (and to audio-record them talking about their portraits), Clarke invites her sitters to choose where in their home they would like to be photographed and involves them even in the final image-selection process.

The works therefore feel collectively constructed, rather than defined by a single dominant voice. Crucial to this way of working is the establishment of trust between Clarke and her participants. She enlists their participation to follow set guidelines, but within these, innumerable possibilities exist for exploring perceptions and perspectives – Clarke's own and those of others.

MYSTERIOUS AT FIRST SIGHT / IMPRESSIVE CONNECTIONS

Subjective

2 : of or relating to the essential being of that which has substance, qualities, attributes, or relations

4 c: arising out of or identified by means of one's perception of one's own states and processes

Truth

3 a: the property (as of a statement) of being in accord with fact or reality

Clarke not only creates and explores her own new experiences and interactions with people and places, but puts forward her past as an ever-changing narrative to be re-written, or re-told. In A SLIDE SHOW BY ..., 51 images taken by Clarke over several years in many different locations are 'performed' by a changing cast of volunteers in each venue the work is presented. The slides, selected from hundreds, are effectively travel snapshots, the kinds of personal images taken with spontaneity to annotate memories for future reference. The performance involves a (re)telling of the meaning and context of the images, a narration of the imagined journeys presented by the volunteer as though they were their own, to an audience that is not informed it is being delivered a fiction. The work raises questions about authenticity: which is more real? The artist's own memories of her experiences, or the 'performers' performances?

The shift of meaning, from one telling to the next, relocates the subjectivity within the images. The 'I' (the subject) is no longer the 'eye' (or, the camera lens and the 'fact' that this represents). Truth is unmoored, the original significance of the images obscured by layer upon layer of fantasy. The work exposes the fragility of memory and questions photographic images as bearers of truth – always open for re-reading.

A SLIDE SHOW BY ... was developed in part response to an earlier work, SOME PLACES I HAVE NEVER BEEN TO, 2003. Consisting of 81 slides taken by Clarke's

father on trips made to countries that include Greece, Afghanistan, Switzerland, Pakistan, Egypt, Italy and Turkey during the 1950s–80s, the images were discovered in a box only after he died.

Like the work of Turkish filmmaker and artist Kutlug Ataman, Clarke positions her works on the borderlands of documentary and fiction. The storytelling pervasive in Ataman's practice likewise appears in Clarke's work. While Ataman uses the medium to explore the vulnerability of personal identity, Clarke uses storytelling to question the very possibility of understanding another's identity.

Ataman once described a motivation of his work as taking on the 'whole '60s discussion of objectivity in documentary and to make the point that it's impossible to make an objective film'.³ Clarke's films, like Ataman's, reveal that all documentary is narrative, and that narrative, in turn, is constructed.

³ Anton, Saul. 1000 Words: Kutlug Ataman talks about 1+1=1, Artforum 41, no.6 (February 2003), p. 116–117



N02 _ MULTIPLE DIRECTIONAL GAZES, VENICE, NOVEMBER 2009, 6"x4" single edition colour photograph from "Selling the old to make room for the new (Leica Replacement Strategy)", 2010

N03 _ MULTIPLE DIRECTIONAL GAZES, DRAWING 13 04 2010, pen drawing, 6"x4" from "Selling the old to make room for the new (Leica Replacement Strategy)", 2010



GO ANYWHERE

Transmission

a : to send or convey from one person or place to
2 a (1) : to cause (as light or force) to pass or be conveyed
through space or a medium

The mode and method of transmission and distribution of art-objects and ideas is important throughout Clarke's practice. In 2008, two months after she relocated from London to Berlin, a week after moving into her new apartment, Clarke opened Clarke Gallery. With its high ceilings and clean white walls, she immediately recognized the apartment's potential as an intimate space to present art. As with the earlier BROADWAY HOUSE PROJECT, Clarke initiated the gallery in part to integrate herself within and contribute to her new community. The situation of exposing her private life and possessions alongside a public presentation of others' art creates an open, personal atmosphere, not unlike the conceptual space she is accustomed to creating to develop many of her own works.

The latest exhibition, WUNDERKAMMER, is an internationally travelling show that is transported in hand luggage. Initially presenting the work of eleven Clarke Gallery/Berlin-based artists, the exhibition transforms in each location it is shown, as works are sold and the collection of objects added to by new local invitees. An extension-in-miniature of Clarke's work with Clarke Gallery, WUNDERKAMMER is almost ambassadorial as it goes out into the

world, foregrounding Clarke's interest in supporting and promoting work by others, allowing room for external contribution and in bringing a community together, regardless of how large or small.

Expanding her artistic and personal concerns into this curatorial practice allows for another position from which Clarke can navigate and represent the world and her encounter with it. The works she creates expose a reality constructed entirely by human interaction, communication and emotion. Her use of technology is a way not only of producing distributing and presenting her practice, but is also an attempt to personalise its impact on modern society. By consistently opening up her life to the camera and creating space through her projects for others to do the same, Clarke allows for a multitude of readings of contemporary human experience on a global and local scale, and encourages the viewers' subjective participation in its interpretation.

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A06 _ MYSTERIOUS AT FIRST SIGHT/IMPRESSIVE CONNECTIONS
Double slide projection, 2002–2003

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