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## **Scripting Artworks: Studying the Socialization of Edited Video and Film Installations**

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## Chapter 3

### Making/Displaying Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time*

### **3.0 Introduction**

To explain how *Play Dead; Real Time* came into being, Douglas Gordon recounts that it began when he woke up one morning thinking of an elephant. He called his representing gallery in New York – the Gagosian Gallery – and asked the staff to find him an elephant for the following week.<sup>1</sup> The elephant, called Minnie, was brought into New York in a truck in the middle of the night. Once in the gallery, Gordon asked Minnie’s trainer to have her play dead and lie down. The actions of the elephant were shot on 16 mm film and later on, transferred to video. Since the artist has told the story of the making of this piece a few times, slightly different versions exist, but in most cases, he specifies that it occurred to him that he had never seen an elephant lying down.<sup>2</sup> A few months after the shooting, the three-channel video installation *Play Dead; Real Time* (Fig. 3.1) was presented in the same space where it had been shot.<sup>3</sup>

Between 2003 and 2006, *Play Dead; Real Time* was exhibited five times, similarly to how it was shown at the Gagosian Gallery, with the exception that the *mise en abyme* effect was lost. Indeed, since the work was presented in different spaces than the one in which it had been filmed, the connection between the space seen in the three videos making up *Play Dead; Real Time* and the exhibition space of the Gagosian Gallery could no longer be noticed. In 2006, for the occasion of his mid-career retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, Douglas Gordon decided to add a second monitor to *Play Dead; Real Time* in order to encourage the visitors to move about in the room. The artist made that decision because the exhibition space was bigger than the previous ones in which the artwork had been displayed. It was the same video that could be seen on both monitors, but they were not played in synchronicity. By adding this second monitor, the artist had modified the work. This altered version of *Play Dead; Real Time* was a four-channel video installation. Considering this modification, would *Play Dead; Real Time* be described as a three- or a four-channel video

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<sup>1</sup> “Douglas Gordon on working with elephants,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art video interview, last modified November 2, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR07wSggs7k>.

<sup>2</sup> For other artist’s statements on *Play Dead; Real Time*, see: “Meet the artist: Douglas Gordon” (part 2), Smithsonian Videos (2004), accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjYb6EN0v8w>; “Le anime morte, le anime vive. Douglas Gordon e Mirta d’Argenzio,” in *Douglas Gordon: prettymucheverywordwritten, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989...*, ed. Mirta d’Argenzio and Giorgio Verzotti (Milan: Skira, 2006), 35; Aidan Smith, “Confessions of a justified eccentric,” *Scotland on Sunday*, September 3, 2006, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://scotlandonsunday.scotsman.com/review.cfm?id=1298952006>; “Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light,” Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg video (2007), accessed July 4, 2011, [http://www.kunstmuseum-wolfsburg.de/exhibition\\_archiv/16/Douglas\\_Gordon:\\_Between\\_Darkness\\_and\\_Light](http://www.kunstmuseum-wolfsburg.de/exhibition_archiv/16/Douglas_Gordon:_Between_Darkness_and_Light); and Livia Bloom, “On Elephants, Violins and Tattoos: An Interview with Douglas Gordon,” *Filmmaker*, September 14, 2010, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/news/2010/09/toronto-on-elephants-violins-and-tattoos-an-interview-with-douglas-gordon>.

<sup>3</sup> Exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Play Dead; Real Time*, Gagosian Gallery, New York (24<sup>th</sup> Street), 22 February – 29 March 2003.

installation? Or both? Moreover, since the artwork had been sold as an edition of three, one could also have wondered if the other editions would also encounter such variations when re-exhibited. And would the artist always be the one behind the decisions on how to display *Play Dead; Real Time*, or would other mediators also be involved? Which components could potentially be modified?

In this first case study chapter, I reconstruct the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time*. Using the method of *de-description*, I unfold the script of this artwork at different moments in time in order to analyze how the identity of *Play Dead; Real Time* has evolved and which mediators have contributed to shaping it. This first case study demonstrates how the inaugural exhibition is crucial for the identity formation of a work, or even its coming into existence. It also shows what happens when the artist is greatly involved in the re-exhibitions of his works. In the case of Gordon, displaying his works is a crucial step in his artistic production. Each time a work is exhibited, it reaches a temporary stage of completion, and remains at this stage until the following exhibition. Because of this artist's exhibition practice, the exhibition and the exhibition space become very important mediators and greatly influence how Gordon's artworks are displayed. Since the artist is significantly involved in the installation of his works, this raises questions for their posterity, which makes registering the different variations taking place even more necessary.

Since its inaugural exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, the artwork has been re-exhibited eighteen times (Appendix 1). The study of the re-exhibitions of this video installation reveals that the artwork has encountered variations in its presentation as well as in its components. This chapter studies the socialization of *Play Dead; Real Time* mainly from the exhibition perspective. The distribution and preservation of this artwork will also be discussed, but these phases have not been as significant in the life cycle of this work as they have been for the other artworks discussed in the following case study chapters.

In the first section of the chapter, I briefly introduce Douglas Gordon's artistic production and then analyze the first phases of the socialization of *Play Dead; Real Time*; mainly its inaugural exhibition and its acquisition by institutions. I also discuss the state of the scripting process of this artwork after its first six public manifestations (3.1). In the second section of the chapter, I study at length the display of *Play Dead; Real Time* in the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Timeline* held at the MoMA in 2006, since it is a presentation that altered the identity of the work. The decision made then by the artist to add a second monitor to the work indicates how setting up an exhibition is an important part of his artistic practice. In fact, Gordon sculpts the spaces in which he shows his work. I will support this argument by

discussing a few other examples of Gordon's exhibition practice (3.2). In the third section of the chapter, I consider another work of Douglas Gordon entitled *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work from 1992 Until Now. To be seen on monitors, some with headphones, others run silently, and all simultaneously* (1992 – ongoing) in which the three videos making *Play Dead; Real Time* have been included. I argue that with this ongoing work, the artist archives all his moving image-based works and at the same time provides an alternative preservation solution for a large part of his artistic production in the form of an artwork (3.3).

### **3.1 Bringing an Elephant in the “White Cube”**

In this first section of the chapter, I describe the phases of the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time* that are linked to its creation, its first public presentation and its distribution. More precisely, I analyze what was announced in the press release, the actual manifestation of the artwork in the space of the Gagosian Gallery, and the reception of the exhibition. I also situate this artwork within Douglas Gordon's artistic production. The *de-description* taking place in the first section of the chapter helps identify mediators that contributed to defining the identity of this artwork.

#### **Douglas Gordon and the Making of *Play Dead; Real Time***

Douglas Gordon studied at the Glasgow School of Art from 1984 to 1988 and at the Slade School of Art in London from 1988 to 1990. In the late 1980s, he exhibited mostly in Scotland and was very involved in the Glasgow art scene, but from the early 1990s, he started showing his work in several venues in Europe. In 1996 he was awarded the Turner Prize, in 1997 the Venice Biennial Premio 2000, and in 1998 the Hugo Boss Award.<sup>4</sup> In 1999, Larry Gagosian, one of the most powerful art dealers in the world, began to represent him and became his primary art dealer.<sup>5</sup> Larry Gagosian opened his first gallery in 1980 and now

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<sup>4</sup> The Turner Prize is an award granted every year to a British Artist aged under 50 to celebrate new developments in contemporary art. See Tate website, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/turnerprize>. For information on the Premio 2000 prize, see the Venice Biennial website, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.labiennale.org>. Founded in 1996, the Hugo Boss Prize (an award of \$ 100,000) is granted to an artist every two years in order to recognize his/her achievement in contemporary art. The prize is the fruit of cooperation between Hugo Boss and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York. See the Hugo Boss Prize website, accessed July 4, <http://www.hugoboss-prize.com/Main.html?cid=zz&lan=en&from=hbprizeOpener>.

<sup>5</sup> In 2004, Larry Gagosian was declared the most influential person in the art world. In 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 he was graded second. In 2009 he dropped into fifth position before getting awarded the first again in 2010. See the *Art Review* website for the *Power 100* lists, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.artreview100.com/power-100-lists-from-2002-through-2008/> (for 2002 to 2009) and [http://www.artreview100.com/2010-artreview-power-](http://www.artreview100.com/2010-artreview-power-100-lists-from-2002-through-2008/)

operates what art historian and expert of the international art market Noah Horowitz calls “an empire of contemporary art galleries.”<sup>6</sup> Larry Gagosian now has galleries in three different locations in New York, one in Los Angeles, two in London, one in Paris, one in Rome, one in Geneva, one in Hong Kong and one in Athens.<sup>7</sup> The Gagosian Gallery therefore has the power and the financial means to support the artists it represents in the creation of their works. Consequently, when Gordon asked the staff of the gallery to find him an elephant, his request was fulfilled immediately.

Prior to the making of *Play Dead; Real Time*, Gordon was mainly known for his appropriation of Hollywood films and found footage. It was with *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) (Fig. 3.2) that he caught the attention of many, in Scotland and abroad. In this work, the artist used a VHS copy of Alfred Hitchcock’s 109-minute horror-thriller *Psycho*, and slowed it down to make its projection last 24 hours.<sup>8</sup> One of the results of this intervention is that he made it impossible for the film to be seen from beginning to end. First, on a practical level, since exhibition centers and museums are not open 24 hours a day. Second, the deceleration of the projection of the film is done to such a degree that one cannot keep track of the plot. As curator Philip Monk contends, “For many, Hitchcock’s film is symbolized by the iconic footage of its lurid shower scene. The temporal dilation of *24 Hour Psycho* works against such symbolic condensation to deny the pleasure of this sight: it takes too long to reach this ‘climax’.”<sup>9</sup>

Gordon has appropriated others’ film material in several of his works.<sup>10</sup> In fact, a part of his artistic production can be read through the scope of what art historian Hal Foster calls the “archival impulse.”<sup>11</sup> As Foster contends,

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[100/](#) (for 2010). See also: Don Thompson, *The \$12 Million Stuffed Shark: The Curious Economics of Contemporary Art* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 15.

<sup>7</sup> See the Gagosian Gallery website for the complete list, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.gagosian.com>.

<sup>8</sup> In its early manifestations, *24 Hour Psycho* was in fact not lasting 24 hours. During its first years, the exhibition support of the work was a VHS tape. As Gordon explains, “The gear system that would pass the tape through the rollers was preset. So, in reality, it was 16 hours, 25 minutes *Psycho* or it could be 28 and a half *Psycho*. But usually people had fallen asleep by that time, so nobody noticed.” Therefore, the artist came with the idea of stretching the film to 24 hour, as states the title, but this concept could not be completely met until Hitchcock film was release on DVD. Then, the format allowed the projection of the work over 24 hours. See: “Meet the artist: Douglas Gordon” (part 2), Smithsonian Videos (2004), accessed July 4, 2011,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjYb6EN0v8w>. In Chapter Five, using the example of John Massey’s *As the Hammer Strikes (A Partial Illustration)*, I will discuss in more detail what happens when the technology or support of a video or film installation used in its creation is unable, at first, to meet the concept of the work.

<sup>9</sup> Philip Monk, “The Split of the Unconscious: *24 Hour Psycho*,” in *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon* (Toronto: The Power Plant & Art Gallery of York University, 2003), 59.

<sup>10</sup> On this topic, see the exhibition catalogue *Douglas Gordon: Kidnapping* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, 1998) and Philip Monk’s book *Double-Cross: The Hollywood Films of Douglas Gordon* (Toronto: The Power Plant & Art Gallery of York University, 2003).

Some practitioners, such as Douglas Gordon, gravitate toward “time readymades,” that is, visual narratives that are sampled in image-projections, as in his extreme versions of films by Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Scorsese, and others. These sources are familiar, drawn from the archives of mass culture, to ensure a legibility that can then be disturbed or *detourné*; but they can also be obscure, retrieved in a gesture of alternative knowledge or counter-memory.<sup>12</sup>

Gordon has used footage of motion pictures such as *Psycho*, *Taxi Driver* and *The Searchers*.<sup>13</sup> He has also worked with found footage, as for instance in *10 ms<sup>-1</sup>* (1994), where he uses footage dating from the First World War (Fig. 3.3). Gordon selected a fragment showing a man dressed only in underwear trying to stand up, but unable to do so. The sequence chosen by the artist is projected on a large screen, lasts 10:37 minutes and is looped. The repetition of the loop reinforces the incapacity of the man, no matter how hard he tries, to stand up. The hopeless situation is also emphasized in the title of the artwork: *10 ms<sup>-1</sup>*, which evokes the formula used to calculate the speed at which an object is falling to the ground under the influence of gravity at a certain point in its trajectory.

Gordon has also produced his own footage. Some of these works have been made directly on video and others have been shot on film and then transferred to a video format for exhibition purposes. This is the case of *Feature Film* (1999), and also of *Play Dead; Real Time*. For *Feature Film*, he filmed James Conlon conducting the playing of Bernard Herrmann’s score composed for Alfred Hitchcock’s film *Vertigo*.<sup>14</sup> The playing of the score lasts 75 minutes. During the shooting, the camera filmed uniquely the conductor. Zooms were done on his hands and his facial expressions. At no point in time is the orchestra seen. With *Feature Film*, Gordon created a singular portrait of the conductor by focusing only on him rather than filming the entire context in which the playing of Herrmann’s score took place.

It is on this very aspect of isolation of the subject that I wish to base my introduction of *Play Dead; Real Time*. In this work, Gordon portrays an elephant in an art gallery. For the shooting, Minnie was brought in the Gagosian Gallery on 24<sup>th</sup> Street in New York in between two exhibitions. Therefore, the space was completely empty; no artworks were hanging on the walls or standing in the room. Minnie was removed from her usual habitat – a reserve – and brought into this immaculate exhibition space with its white walls and shiny floor, a “white

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<sup>11</sup> Hal Foster, “An Archival Impulse,” *October*, no. 110 (fall 2004): 3-22.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 4. Foster borrows the term “time-readymades” from Hans Ulrich Obrist. See: Hans Ulrich Obrist, “Gordon, Douglas,” in *Interviews, volume 1* (Milan: Edizioni Charta & Florence: Fondazione Pitti Immagine Discovery, 2003), 322.

<sup>13</sup> *Psycho*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock. Shamley Productions, 1960; *Taxi Driver*, dir. Martin Scorsese. Columbia Pictures, 1976; *The Searchers*, dir. John Ford. C.V. Whitney Pictures, 1956.

<sup>14</sup> *Vertigo*, dir. Alfred Hitchcock, Alfred J. Hitchcock Productions & Paramount Pictures, 1958.

cube,” where nothing in the space could detract our attention from the pachyderm.<sup>15</sup> In that space, she executed the orders of her trainer who made her do what Gordon requested: to have the elephant play dead and eventually, get back up. The elephant obeyed, but did not enjoy her time in the gallery, as close-ups of her eyes seen in one of the three videos making up the work – *Other Way* – indicate that she cried during the shooting. Contrary to other tricks accomplished by Minnie during the shooting, the crying was not staged. It occurred because elephants do not like to lie down.

Cameraman Michael McDonough shot the actions performed by Minnie on 16 mm film.<sup>16</sup> The footage was later transferred to a video format and edited. The preservation copies are kept on Betacam tapes and DVDs are used as exhibition copies. *Play Dead; Real Time* is comprised of three different videos: *This Way* and *That Way* are presented on the two large double-sided screens, and *Other Way* is played on a video monitor. During the shooting, the camera was placed on a dolly. *This Way* was shot clockwise, and *That Way* counter-clockwise. *Other Way* presents details of the elephant made with zooms in and zooms out.<sup>17</sup> All three videos are silent.

### **The Inaugural Exhibition of *Play Dead; Real Time***

From February 22<sup>nd</sup> to March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2003, Gordon exhibited in the very space where the actions of Minnie the elephant were filmed, the three-channel video installation *Play Dead; Real Time*. The socialization of this artwork began a little before the opening of the exhibition with the distribution of the press release on February 3<sup>rd</sup>. In the press release, it was announced that the exhibition was going to comprise three new large-scale video projection works.<sup>18</sup> This official statement therefore contributed to creating the expectations that the visitors would be seeing three new artworks by Douglas Gordon. Although the press release announced three different artworks, the exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery featured only one large-scale installation: *Play Dead; Real Time*, which comprised the three videos mentioned above: *This Way*, *That Way*, and *Other Way*. The first two videos were projected on two large

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<sup>15</sup> Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1999 [1976]).

<sup>16</sup> Michael McDonough is a professional cameraman and has worked, for example, on the film set of Michael Moore’s movie *Bowling for Columbine* (2002).

<sup>17</sup> The video *This Way* lasts 19:16 minutes, *That Way* 14:44 minutes and *Other Way* 21:58 minutes. When on display, all videos are looped.

<sup>18</sup> Press release of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Play Dead; Real Time*, Gagosian Gallery (24th Street), New York, 22 February – 29 March 2003, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://i1.exhibit-e.com/gagosian/131254d2.pdf>.



freestanding translucent screens and *Other Way* was run on a monitor placed directly on the gallery floor.<sup>19</sup>

For the duration of the exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, the walls were left white; the same color that they had been at the time of the shooting. This helped the visitors to make the connection, to notice the *mise en abyme*: the inclusion of the exhibition space in the videos projected on the translucent screens and the video monitor.<sup>20</sup> Since projection-based works require darkened space in order to maximize the quality of the projections, the space could not be kept as luminous as it had been during the shooting. Throughout the exhibition, the large space was darkened; the only light provided was by the projections, the monitor and the emergency lights. Nevertheless, since the screens and the monitor were placed directly on the shiny gallery floor, the reflection of the projected images on the floor also made it noticeable that the floor on which the elephant had been standing was the same as the one on which the visitors were standing. Art historian Michael Fried has argued that it was never made explicit that the videos were filmed in the same gallery where the show took place, but the reading of the exhibition reviews shows that this aspect was generally noticed.<sup>21</sup> For instance, in the *Village Voice*, Jerry Saltz wrote: “Without prompting, you realize the space in the film is Gagosian’s.”<sup>22</sup>

Since *Play Dead; Real Time* was created in the same space where it was exhibited, it can be qualified as site-specific work. The approach favored by Gordon here is in line with “site-specific practices of the late 1960s and early 1970s, which incorporated the physical conditions of a particular location as integral to the production, presentation, and reception of art.”<sup>23</sup> What distinguished Gordon’s *Play Dead; Real Time* from site-specific artworks created in earlier decades is that these earlier works were mainly anti-commercial. They were

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<sup>19</sup> The screens used for the display of *Play Dead; Real Time* are 3,47 m high and 6 m long. The size of the screen of the television monitor is of 25 inches (63,5 cm). [The size of the monitors has encountered variations between 25 to 29 inches depending on where the artwork was exhibited.] Source: Bert Ross, assistant to Douglas Gordon. Documentation provided in June 2007.

<sup>20</sup> In a conversation, the artist recalled that during the opening, not only did people recognize the exhibition space, but one person even stated that she could still smell the elephant! Conversation with Douglas Gordon, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, 9 May 2007. In his exhibition review, Jerry Saltz also wrote in his exhibition review: “perhaps it’s psychosomatic, but a couple of people I know swear they can also smell the elephant.” See: Jerry Saltz, “Elephant Man. Douglas Gordon Lands on *Animal Planet*,” *Village Voice*, March 24, 2003, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2003-03-25/art/elephant-man>.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Fried. “Douglas Gordon,” *Cornerstones* lecture series, Witte de With, Rotterdam, May 8, 2008, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.wdw.nl/webprojecten/Cornerstones/MichaelFried-part1.mp3>.

<sup>22</sup> See: Jerry Saltz, “Elephant Man.”

<sup>23</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge & London: The MIT Press, 2002), 1. Whereas Kwon seeks “to reframe site specificity as the cultural mediation of broader social, economic, and political processes to organize urban life and urban space” in her book (Kwon, 2002, 3), in my dissertation, I stick to one of the possible definitions of site-specificity she enunciates at the beginning of her book as it is the one that is closest to Douglas Gordon’s approach.

created in a specific venue and context and their “material” existence would last only for the duration of the exhibition. In most cases, the site-specific interventions were dismantled or even destroyed at the end of the exhibition. However, as I indicated in Chapter One, art historian Susan Hapgood has argued that the definition of the term site-specific has broadened and can also mean “movable under the right circumstances.”<sup>24</sup> The fact that *Play Dead; Real Time* could eventually be exhibited somewhere else made it possible for the work to be sold and continue to circulate.

In terms of the theme of the work, the press release also stated that:

For these monumental works Gordon uses a giant Indian elephant as the subject being filmed. The elephant has classically symbolized memory, and here functions as a trope for our own remembrances of circuses, zoos, and nature documentaries, various situations where the chaotic power of the wild is held safely at a distance and is controlled. As the title suggests, the elephant appears to conform to command and lie on its side before attempting to return to its feet. The impossibility of the idea, and the incapability to occupy both states simultaneously are reminiscent of the artist’s continuing investigations of the polarities between control and free will, life and death.<sup>25</sup>

The press release invites the visitors of the exhibition and the reviewers to make connections between Gordon’s artwork and circuses, zoos and nature documentaries. The framing is oriented in that direction. I would argue however, that another reading of the work is possible, and the interpretation I propose is shared by most of the reviewers of the exhibition. I contend that Gordon’s *Play Dead; Real Time* can be interpreted as a metaphor of the current state of the art market and more broadly of the art world. The making of this work and its result tells us that nowadays, an artist can call up his/her gallery, ask them for almost anything, and his/her request will be fulfilled. The *mise en abyme* is an important feature of the inaugural exhibition of *Play Dead; Real Time*; Gordon did not shoot the videos just anywhere, he brought the elephant into the white cube, and even more precisely into his representing gallery. There is institutional critique at stake in this work. I use the term institutional critique not in the most common sense given to it nowadays – as attacks of the institution, of the museum – but in the sense given to it by artist Andrea Fraser who states that institutional critique refers to working critically within the institution.<sup>26</sup> Whereas a large part of the artistic production of artists such as Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Hans Haacke, Michael Asher, and Andrea Fraser can be referred to as institutional critiques, this is not the case for Douglas

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<sup>24</sup> Susan Hapgood, “Remaking Art History,” *Art in America* 78, no. 7 (July 1990): 120.

<sup>25</sup> Press release of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Play Dead; Real Time*, Gagosian Gallery (24th Street), New York, 22 February – 29 March 2003, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://i1.exhibit-e.com/gagosian/131254d2.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Andrea Fraser, “From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique” (2005), in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006), 123-135.

Gordon's work. I propose, nonetheless, to interpret *Play Dead; Real Time* from the perspective of institutional critique on the account of the fact that Gordon uses irony to reflect on his position in the art world. The interpretation of *Play Dead; Real Time* makes one realize that the artist not only engaged with the physical and architectural aspects of the Gagolian Gallery, but also with what it means for an artist to be represented by one of New York's biggest art dealers. Therefore, the definition of site-specificity enunciated above can be broadened and is in line with how Andrea Fraser defines the methodology of institutional critique, as a "*critically reflexive site-specificity*."<sup>27</sup> By bringing an elephant into a gallery – the elephant being one of the major attractions in a circus – Gordon reflects on the state of what the art world is: it is all a big circus in which he – the artist – gets to be the clown. There is self-reflection involved; he is aware of being part of this spectacle, but at the same time, he enjoys being part of it. The artwork he has produced in this context, *Play Dead; Real Time*, is impressively beautiful. Gordon is aware of his position in the art world, but viewers should also notice that he reminds them, through this work, that they are also part of it: the configuration of the piece is done in such a way that visitors are invited to perambulate. Moreover, when visitors walk in the beam of light between a projector and one of the screens, their shadows are seen on the screens; they are part of the spectacle.

The reviews of the inaugural exhibition of *Play Dead; Real Time* were very positive. For instance, Jerry Saltz wrote in the *Village Voice* that *Play Dead; Real Time* "is hypnotic, multi-leveled, and much more moving than it has any right to be."<sup>28</sup> And even though *Play Dead; Real Time* was not Gordon's first solo exhibition in New York, it is nevertheless considered his breakthrough in the United States.<sup>29</sup> The reviews of the exhibition play several roles in the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time*. First, they contribute to the interpretation of the work, as becomes evident from the discrepancies between the press release and the general interpretation of the work. Second, the reviews are sources of information for the identification of other mediators.

The exhibition encountered broad media coverage: reviews were published in newspapers such as *The New York Times* and also in magazines like *The New Yorker*, *Artforum*, *Flash Art* and *ARTnews*.<sup>30</sup> The critic of *The New York Times*, Roberta Smith, began

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<sup>27</sup> Andrea Fraser, "What is Institutional Critique?" in *Institutional Critique and After*, ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich: JRP|Ringier, 2006), 305. [Fraser's emphasis.]

<sup>28</sup> Jerry Saltz, "Elephant Man."

<sup>29</sup> Aidan Smith, "Confessions."

<sup>30</sup> See: Roberta Smith, "Douglas Gordon; Franz West," *The New York Times*, 7 March 2003, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/07/arts/art-in-review-douglas-gordon-franz-west.html>; Peter Schjeldahl, "Europeanism. Two transatlantic stars," *New Yorker*, March 24, 2003, 86-87; Jerry Saltz, "Elephant Man."

her review by stating that the two shows at the Gagosian Gallery “prove that institutional critique can be fun.”<sup>31</sup> She continued by writing: “What began by mocking the spectacle of art evolves into a celebration of the private, almost dumb pleasure of visual experience.”<sup>32</sup> Reviewers appreciated the different levels of representation visible within the work: the portrait of an elephant, and also the underlying institutional critique. As Margaret Sundell reviewed in *Artforum*, “In the context of this gallery’s spotless converted-warehouse space, it’s hard not to see the poor beast as a quasi-comic cipher for the contemporary artist, burdened to the point of collapse by the demands of over-production.”<sup>33</sup>

Another element that was greatly appreciated by the critics was the atmosphere created for the spectator. Indeed, *Play Dead; Real Time* offers the viewers the experience of proximity with an elephant, an experience that is neither possible in a zoo nor if the elephant is not accompanied by its trainer. Of course, there is a barrier – the screen – which makes it safe for the viewers to get as close as they want to the elephant. It is a virtual way of engaging with it, and their presence in the space will not affect the behavior of the elephant at all. It is possible to get as close as desired without being scared of being stepped on by one of those heavy legs or being attacked. There is also a tension between what is seen and what is evoked. At no point in time does Minnie’s trainer appear in any of the videos making up the work, but it is clear that the pachyderm is following instructions. Considering the fact that elephants do not like to lie down – and that is made obvious by how difficult it looks for her to rock to and fro to eventually get back on her feet – she would not have played dead on her own.

The analysis of the reviews of the inaugural exhibition of *Play Dead; Real Time* leads to the acknowledgment that this video installation had a very strong connection to the site where it was shown. This is evident not only on account of his use of *mise en abyme* – the space of the Gagosian Gallery was seen in the three videos making *Play Dead; Real Time* – but also because Gordon had critically reflected on what it means to show an artwork at the Gagosian Gallery, one of the biggest commercial galleries in the world. The institutional critique done by Gordon in *Play Dead; Real Time* worked because of where it was initially shown. But how

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Douglas Gordon Lands on *Animal Planet*,” *Village Voice*, March 24, 2003, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.villagevoice.com/2003-03-25/art/elephant-man>; Margaret Sundell, “Douglas Gordon. Gagosian Gallery,” *Artforum* 41, no. 9 (May 2003): 167; Melissa Dunn, “Douglas Gordon at Gagosian, New York,” *Flash Art* 36, no. 230 (May-June 2003): 147; Linda Yablonsky, “Douglas Gordon, Gagosian,” *ARTnews* 142, no. 6 (June 2003): 115; and Alan Cumming, “The New Rock and Roll,” *Modern Painters* 16, no. 3 (autumn 2003): 34-36.

<sup>31</sup> Roberta Smith, “Douglas Gordon; Franz West.” The second exhibition that took place at the Gagosian Gallery at the same time was of Austrian artist Franz West. See Gagosian Gallery website, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.gagosian.com/exhibitions/24th-street-2003-02-franz-west>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Margaret Sundell, “Douglas Gordon,” 167.

would it work when it would be exhibited elsewhere? I will get back to this point later, when discussing the re-exhibitions of *Play Dead; Real Time*. Before continuing to follow the path of the exhibitions of the work, I need to explain how the work began to circulate in the art world after its inaugural showing.

### **Distributing and Collecting *Play Dead; Real Time***

After the exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery, *Play Dead; Real Time* was sold in a limited edition of three. The first edition (1/3) was acquired by private collector Richard J. Massey and then donated to the Museum of Modern Art in New York in the spring of 2006. The second edition (2/3) was acquired in 2005 through the collaboration of two institutions: the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, part of the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. and the Museum für Moderne Kunst (MMK) in Frankfurt.<sup>34</sup> The National Gallery of Canada acquired the third edition (3/3) in the spring of 2003. The artist also owns an *Hors Commerce Proof*, which is a proof that cannot be sold on the market, also meaning that it cannot be exhibited in public.<sup>35</sup>

Once acquired by the institutions stated above, *Play Dead; Real Time* was re-installed in new contexts. The National Gallery of Canada (owner of edition 3/3) was the first to install it within the rooms where its permanent collection is shown. In fact, before acquiring an artwork, it is the policy of the National Gallery of Canada to install the artwork in its galleries in order for the acquisition committee to base its decision on the viewing of the artwork, not on a photograph and a description of it. It was installed in May 2003 and officially acquired soon after.<sup>36</sup> In February 2004, the edition that would eventually be co-owned by the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C. and the MMK in Frankfurt (2/3) was integrated into the last venue of the touring exhibition *Douglas Gordon* which took place at the Hirshhorn in Washington. It was the first time that *Play Dead; Real Time* was presented within the context of other works by the artist. The MMK, co-owner (which means that when the artwork is

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<sup>34</sup> The coacquisition of a work by different institutions is a phenomenon that began in the years 2000, but in a very small scale. This enables institutions to share the acquisition and high preservation costs of time-based artworks. On this matter, see Noah Horowitz, *Art of the Deal: Contemporary Art in a Global Financial Market* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 67.

<sup>35</sup> The status of that *Hors Commerce Proof* remains to be clarified, as it seems that since 2009, it has been exhibited publicly. The *Hors Commerce Proof* would then be recognized as an *artist's proof*. When *Play Dead; Real Time* was shown in Avignon as part of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Où se trouvent les clés?* (Collection Lambert en Avignon, 6 July – 23 November 2008) and in Prague in the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: blood, sweat, tears* (DOX: Center for Contemporary Art, 4 June – 27 September 2009) the credits for the loan of the work were given to the artist and the Gagosian Gallery.

<sup>36</sup> See curatorial files of *Play Dead; Real Time*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [Consulted July 25, 2007 and January 7, 2010.]

presented in Washington, it cannot be exhibited in Frankfurt) of edition 2/3, featured *Play Dead; Real Time* for the first time in 2005 for the occasion of *What is New, Pussycat?*, an exhibition presenting the recent acquisitions of the institution. Edition 1/3, acquired by private collector Richard J. Massey, was not exhibited publicly until it was donated to the MoMA in 2006 for the artist's mid-career retrospective. The artist modified this edition when it was first presented, and this variation is the subject of the section 3.2.

### **The State of the Script After the First Six Exhibitions of *Play Dead; Real Time***

At this point in time (in 2005), the *de-description* of *Play Dead; Real Time* reveals that it is a three-channel video installation and has always been exhibited as such. It was initially a site-specific work that was eventually exhibited in other venues. The *mise en abyme* was unique to the inaugural exhibition of the work, but other features were recurrent in the re-exhibitions of the artwork. For instance, the two freestanding translucent screens were always placed at an angle of approximately 90 degrees, but never touching; a few meters always separated them. The monitor would always be placed in a position that would make it impossible for the visitors to see all three videos at the same time. The position of the monitor was guided by the idea of inviting the visitors to walk about in the exhibition space.

In terms of written instantiations of the script, the collections that acquired the work created documentation in order to re-exhibit *Play Dead; Real Time* according to the instructions provided by the artist. For instance, at the National Gallery of Canada, a specific floor layout was drawn by a conservator of the institution under the supervision of Bert Ross, assistant to Douglas Gordon. It was decided then that the work would be shown in a specific room of the museum, B-106 (Fig. 3.4).<sup>37</sup> By producing such documentation, the National Gallery of Canada made sure that it would always be displaying the work according to the artist's will.

In the end, however, this specific floor plan was only used once; a few years after the work was first shown at the National Gallery of Canada, some of the rooms on the first floor of the institution were redesigned, walls were moved and room B-106 no longer has the same measurements as when *Play Dead; Real Time* was installed there. The original plan and set of instructions therefore had to be updated. This example demonstrates that even the installation instructions and floor plans that are part of the script of an artwork evolve and need to be updated constantly. The scripting evolved between 2003 and 2009.

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<sup>37</sup> See conservation files of *Play Dead; Real Time*, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa. [Consulted 25 July 25, 2007.]

Another element that was peculiar regarding the installation of the work produced at the National Gallery of Canada was that the artist required that the walls of the room in which *Play Dead; Real Time* was presented be painted grey. The size of the room, which was smaller than the one at the Gagosian Gallery, led the artist to that decision. The relationship between the work and the exhibition space was different than at the Gagosian Gallery where it entered in dialogue with it. In Ottawa, the approach – guided by the idea of inviting the visitors to walk about – was to make the walls as invisible as possible, to create the illusion that the space was actually bigger than it was in reality.<sup>38</sup>

The *de-description* of the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time* that was done in this first part of the chapter had the purpose of putting into words how the identity of this artwork has been shaped between its inaugural exhibition and its sixth exhibition. The analysis has shown how crucial the inaugural exhibition of this work has been on account of unique features: the *mise en abyme* and the critically reflective site-specificity. Seeing *Play Dead; Real Time* at the Gagosian Gallery led to an interpretation of the work as a self-criticism on the part of the artist and framed the reception of the work within the area of institutional critique. The analysis of the reviews of the work has shown that despite the framing of *Play Dead; Real Time* attempted in the press release, the interpretation of the work mainly addressed the topic of institutional critique, and thus showed the role of reviews as mediators shaping the work's identity.

This first section of the chapter also explained how the work began to circulate after the exhibition at the Gagosian Gallery: as an edition of three. The institutions that acquired the work played an important role, as they ensured that *Play Dead; Real Time* could continue to circulate in the art world. The *de-description* of the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time* that is done in the next section of the chapter will show that other mediators contributed to shaping the identity of this work and challenged the understanding that we had of it after its first six presentations.

### **3.2 The Plural Immanences of *Play Dead; Real Time***

In this second section of the chapter, I continue the scripting of the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time* by means of *de-description*. I discuss a phase where the identity of the work shifted greatly; when the artist modified edition 1/3 of *Play Dead; Real Time*, the edition that had just

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

been donated to the Museum of Modern Art in New York by collector Richard J. Massey.<sup>39</sup> I study the socialization of the work from that point on and scrutinize the re-exhibitions of the other editions of the work to verify if such variation in the display and number of components occurred only once, or consistently. The analysis of the different “versions” of the work – a three-channel video installation and a four-channel video installation – presented in different exhibitions shows that this artwork has *plural immanences* and that it is all the versions that, together, make up *Play Dead; Real Time*.

### ***Play Dead; Real Time: A Three- or Four-Channel Video Installation?***

In 2006, Klaus Biesenbach, the curator of the Department of Film and Media at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, organized *Douglas Gordon: Timeline*, the artist’s mid-career retrospective.<sup>40</sup> The show mainly focused on the artist’s moving image and textual works. *Play Dead; Real Time* was presented in the third room of the exhibition, which was very spacious. In order to encourage the visitors to walk about the room, the artist decided to add a second monitor to the installation.<sup>41</sup> The positioning of the monitors was such that from any standpoint, the visitors could not see all videos at once. In order to watch *This Way, That Way* and *Other Way*, they had to move about. The video *Other Way*, the one displayed on the monitor, was duplicated and presented on two monitors for this occasion, but the two monitors were not synchronized. The exhibition space turned out to be a mediator of importance in the life cycle of this artwork, as it triggered a significant variation in the display of the work. From a three-channel video installation, it thus became a four-channel video installation.

In the installation instructions provided to the MoMA by the artist’s studio, it was written that the addition of a monitor was for this exhibition only and that “The work in its true form has only one monitor.”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, the artist made it clear that this variation was *his* decision and that he still considered *Play Dead; Real Time* as a three-channel video installation. With this statement, he also asserted his authority and did not grant permission to the Museum of Modern Art to decide, in the future, if the work would be displayed with either one or two monitors depending on the exhibition space.

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<sup>39</sup> See page on *Play Dead; Real Time* on the website of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, accessed July 4, 2011, [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=100620](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=100620).

<sup>40</sup> *Douglas Gordon: Timeline*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 11 June – 4 September 2006. Curator: Klaus Biesenbach. Accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/exhibitions/76>.

<sup>41</sup> Conversation with Douglas Gordon, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, May 9, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Instruction leaflet produced by Douglas Gordon’s studio for the Museum of Modern Art in 2006.



The set of instructions provided to the Museum of Modern Art also informed the institution that the modified position of the two freestanding screens similarly was a decision made by the artist. Indeed, the document stated:

There is no fixed permutation for showing *Play Dead: This Way* and *Play Dead: That Way* on retro or front screen. Each work can be shown on either screen, depending on the positioning of the screens and how this works with the entrance onto the work. This is a decision taken installation by installation by Douglas Gordon.<sup>43</sup>

This document produced by Douglas Gordon's studio is another mediator in the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time* and has the purpose of making explicit that it is the decision of the artist on how *Play Dead; Real Time* is going to be displayed in the exhibition space.

In the specific case of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Timeline*, the artist not only added a monitor to *Play Dead; Real Time*, but also added mirrors in the frames of the passages connecting the different rooms. When the visitors stood in the frame between the first and second room of the exhibition, they could see the reflection of an elephant in the mirror placed in the frame leading to the space where *Play Dead; Real Time* was presented. The artist used the mirrors to connect the different spaces, but as stated in the document given to the Museum of Modern Art concerning *Play Dead; Real Time*, "The mirrors used in *Douglas Gordon: Timeline* are not part of the work, they are included as a feature of the architecture of this exhibition."<sup>44</sup> They were elements used by Gordon to sculpt the exhibition space and to create continuity from one exhibition room to another.

According to these documents, the use of mirrors and the addition of a second monitor were isolated occurrences, specific to the exhibition space of the MoMA. The reading of these statements would lead one to conclude that these variations would never happen anywhere else, that they were exceptions and therefore could be noted in the script of the work, but would not influence or should not be considered when decisions were to be made in future re-installations of *Play Dead; Real Time*. However, the study of later re-exhibitions of the other editions of *Play Dead; Real Time* shows that the editions 2/3 and 3/3 have also been modified in the context of Douglas Gordon's solo exhibitions.

For the *Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light* exhibition presented at the Kunstmuseum in Wolfsburg in 2007, the artist had planned to install edition 2/3 (co-owned by the Museum für Moderne Kunst and the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden) with two

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<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

monitors, but at the moment of installation, decided to use only one (Fig. 3.5).<sup>45</sup> Despite the fact that *Play Dead; Real Time* was shown there as a three-channel video installation, in the brochure distributed to the visitors the artwork was described as a four-channel video installation.<sup>46</sup> This situation shows that working with a single source of information can be problematic when scripting an artwork. Indeed, the exhibition brochure acts here as a mediator that provides erroneous information. It did so for the visitors of the exhibition, but it also does for researchers who use it as a reference. The consultation of the exhibition catalogue is not helpful here for finding out if the work was exhibited as a three- or a four-channel video installation, as the work is simply listed as a video installation; the number of components is not indicated.<sup>47</sup> This example illustrates that my museum visit acts as a mediator of reliable information, in contrast to the exhibition brochure that acts as a mediator in which some details are misleading.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, for the scripting of this particular manifestation of *Play Dead; Real Time*, my museum visit and my observations played a crucial role. To this day, edition 2/3 of *Play Dead; Real Time* has not been exhibited as a four-channel video installation, but since the artist had planned on doing so in Wolfsburg, this confirms the fact it is really the size of the exhibition space, and not the number of components used for the inaugural manifestation of *Play Dead; Real Time*, that influences how it is displayed.

In September 2007, *Play Dead; Real Time* (edition 3/3, owned by the National Gallery of Canada) was installed in Montreal at the Galerie de l'UQAM.<sup>49</sup> For this venue, the artist decided that a second monitor would be used. Once again, the decision to add a second monitor stemmed from the intention to extend the visitors' walk.<sup>50</sup> In the press release, the artwork was described as consisting of two large screens and a monitor.<sup>51</sup> Once again, the press release contained inaccurate information, as the work was exhibited in its four-channel video installation form. As I had not seen the display of the work in Montreal, I did not know

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<sup>45</sup> Conversation with Bert Ross, assistant to Douglas Gordon, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, May 10, 2007.

<sup>46</sup> See the exhibition brochure *Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light*, Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 21 April – 12 August 2007. The visitors could read, in German, the following entry on *Play Dead; Real Time*: "Videoinstallation; 2 Video-Player, 2 semitransparente Projektionsfolien, 2 Projektoren, 2 Monitore, Maße variabel."

<sup>47</sup> *Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light* (Wolfsburg: Kunstmuseum Wolfsburg, 2007), 126.

<sup>48</sup> My visits of the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light* took place on August 11 and 12, 2007.

<sup>49</sup> *Douglas Gordon. Faire le mort. En Temps réel*, Galerie de l'UQAM, Montreal, 7 September – 6 October 2007.

<sup>50</sup> Conversation with Bert Ross, assistant to Douglas Gordon, Glasgow, September 12, 2007.

<sup>51</sup> See the press release of exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Faire le mort: en temps réel*, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.uqam.ca/nouvelles/2007/07-264.htm>.

about how it had really been displayed until I talked to Douglas Gordon's assistant, Bert Ross, who also provided me with some installation shots (Fig. 3.6 and 3.7). These mediators – the artist's assistant and the photographs – overruled the press release as mediator in my reconstruction of the life cycle of the artwork.

*Play Dead; Real Time* has been shown as a four-channel video installation in the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Où se trouvent les clefs?* at the Collection Lambert in Avignon,<sup>52</sup> and in the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: blood, sweat, tears* presented at DOX, Center for Contemporary Art in Prague.<sup>53</sup> The repetition of the use of a second monitor when *Play Dead; Real Time* was presented corroborates the existence of two versions of the artwork: a three-channel video installation and a four-channel video installation. The choice of presenting one version rather than the other depends on the exhibition space. To date, each time a second monitor has been added, it was within the context of a Douglas Gordon solo exhibition, with the artist being present to decide the display of the work. It seems as though the decision of whether or not to add a monitor rests with the artist only, and not with the institution owning *Play Dead; Real Time*. Nevertheless, the institutions could have opposed such a decision, since they all had acquired *Play Dead; Real Time* as a three-channel video installation. In a sense, for Douglas Gordon, it is not a matter of the work being part of an edition that influenced its display; rather, it is a matter of how it can be presented in the exhibition space and how the viewer can interact with it.

In fact, Gordon is very much involved in the installation process of his artworks, especially when it comes time to present solo exhibitions. One can wonder what the role of the curator of the exhibition has been, as it seems like Gordon carefully instructed the layout of the exhibition. Gordon's manner of proceeding is a good example of German philosopher Boris Groys' statement that "contemporary art can be understood primarily as an exhibition practice."<sup>54</sup> By that, Groys means that it is more and more difficult nowadays to differentiate the role of the artist and the role of the curator within the exhibition context. Solo exhibitions give Gordon the opportunity to revisit his works and in most cases, the entire exhibition

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<sup>52</sup> As mentioned above, it is likely the artist's proof of *Play Dead; Real Time* that was exhibited in Avignon as the credits for the loans are given to the artist and the Gagosian Gallery (and not to any of the owning institutions of the work). Also, in the catalogue, the credits for the photographs *Play Dead; Real Time* – installation shots of the work as displayed in Avignon – are given to the National Gallery of Canada, but the Canadian institution had not loaned the work. This information has been verified with the loan officer of the National Gallery of Canada in June 2009.

<sup>53</sup> *Douglas Gordon: blood, sweat, tears*, DOX: Center for Contemporary Art, Prague, 4 June – 27 September 2009. Curator: Jaroslav Anděl.

<sup>54</sup> Boris Groys, "Politics of Installation," *e-flux*, n°2 (January 2009), accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/view/31>.

becomes one large installation. Every work in the exhibition is staged in accordance with the other works in the exhibition.

The study of Gordon's solo exhibitions shows that he constantly revisits his work. In some cases, a reinterpreted piece keeps the same title, but presents variations, as was the case with *Play Dead; Real Time*. In these cases, the works have plural immanences; their identity is defined by all versions. In other cases, he appropriates his own artistic production and creates new works out of concepts, materials, footage and so on, of earlier works. For instance, in the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Timeline*, in the room preceding the inaugural display of *Play Dead; Real Time* as a four-channel video installation, Gordon presented *M: Futile Fear* (2006), a reinterpretation of his work *Feature Film* (1999), briefly discussed earlier in the chapter. Two versions of *Feature Film* already existed: a feature film version and a museum version.<sup>55</sup> The first version, presented in cinemas, has the running time of the score, 75 minutes. The second version, presented in museums, combines a projection showing the conductor James Conlon and a video version of Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* played on a monitor. This version of the work lasts 128 minutes, as the film lasts 128 minutes. When there is no music in *Vertigo*, then the screen on which *Feature Film* is projected goes blank. When there is music in *Vertigo* (Bernard Herrmann's soundtrack), then Conlon's movements are projected on the screen (or the wall, depending on how the work is presented in the exhibition space). Both soundtracks are played in synchronicity. In 2006, at the Museum of Modern Art, *M: Futile Fear* – whose title uses exactly the same letters as *Feature Film*, used the recorded material of *Feature Film*, but organized differently: a triple projection. The monitor presenting Hitchcock's *Vertigo* was removed as well. The central projection presented the footage from *Feature Film*, the side projections were mirrored images of the central one and projected upside down. The triple projection reinforced the circularity of Bernard Herrmann's score and the circularity of the movements of the conductor. Whereas *24-Hour Psycho* has no soundtrack and the emphasis is on the images, in *Feature Film* and *M: Futile Fear*, there is a balance between images and sound.

In terms of scripting, Gordon's interventions described above have different consequences. When he introduces variations in the display of a work, as it has been the case with *Play Dead; Real Time*, it means that the identity of the work is being reshaped, that the work exists in more than one version and that it is all the versions that define it. It means that the artwork's scripting process is rerouted. When he reinterprets a work and gives the result a

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<sup>55</sup> The co-existence of a museum version and a film version of moving-image based work has been discussed in the section 1.2 of Chapter One.

new title, as was the case with *M: Futile Fear*, it means that the scripting process of *Feature Film* was also rerouted; it branched off. *M: Futile Fear* is an offspring of *Feature Film* as it shares the same footage and soundtrack. Even if they are considered two different artworks, *Feature Film* and *M: Futile Fear* share the same scripting process. In Chapter Four, I will come back to this point in my *de-description* of the life cycle of Mike Kelley's *Day Is Done*.

### **Other Variations in the Presentation of *Play Dead; Real Time***

The study of the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time* reveals that the main variation that has occurred is that it can nowadays be presented as a three- or four-channel video installation, depending on the choice of the artist. Nevertheless, even though the artist has established a series of prescriptions on how to display the work and requirements concerning the exhibition space (room areas of a minimum of 24.8 x 13.07 m and ceiling heights of a minimum of 5 m), he has been very accommodating in order to facilitate its presentation in many different locations.<sup>56</sup> When looking at the equipment list, one also notices that, over the period of the first four years, it had already been upgraded and the projectors that are now used allow for a better image with deeper color and contrast.<sup>57</sup> In this section of the chapter, some examples of variations and concessions made by the artist serve to illustrate that even though Douglas Gordon has described the “ideal” space to display *Play Dead; Real Time*, if it is possible to make the work fit into a space that does not meet his criteria, he will modify his own requirements. The main idea being to give visitors the chance to experience *Play Dead; Real Time* whenever possible. Discrepancies aside, these examples are used to point out the roles of other mediators in the life cycle of this work that have not been analyzed until now.

In most cases, *Play Dead; Real Time* has been displayed in large spaces in which nothing stood between the visitors and the work. However, the artist made concessions in Montreal, when the work was exhibited at the Galerie de l'UQAM and at DOX in Prague. In Montreal, concrete columns stood in the exhibition space (Fig. 3.6 and 3.7), and in Prague, the two freestanding screens were placed between steel pillars (Fig. 3.8). The presence of columns or pillars in the space is not ideal, as they partly obstruct the view of the work, especially from a distance. Nevertheless, their presence also results in inciting visitors to move about so that they can see the work from one or more different angles, which is what Gordon wishes in the first place. Also, on at least two occasions, *Play Dead; Real Time* has been presented in rooms whose ceilings were only slightly higher than the screens: at the

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<sup>56</sup> Instruction leaflet produced by Douglas Gordon's studio for the Museum of Modern Art in 2006.

<sup>57</sup> Email from Bert Ross, assistant to Douglas Gordon, May 18, 2007.

Museo di Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Trento e Rovereto (MART) (Fig. 3.9) and at the Saint Mary's University Art Gallery in Halifax, Canada. In Halifax, for instance, the ceiling was only 19 centimeters higher than the screens.<sup>58</sup> In Rovereto, although the artist accepted to have the work presented in the space even though the ceilings were lower than five meters, another aspect of the presentation of the work was not modified consciously. When it came time to order the two large screens required for the presentation of *Play Dead; Real Time*, the institution made a mistake and one of the two screens was not double-sided.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the projected image could only be seen on one side. This anecdote is exemplary of a possible misreading of the installation prescriptions (a part of the script) accompanying *Play Dead; Real Time*. This misreading led to a variation in the presentation of the artwork and resulted in the fact that visitors could not walk from one side of the screen to the other and see the same projection. Even though the artwork was not installed as prescribed by the artist, this presentation turned out to be passable, as the artist allowed it to be displayed as such at MART.

Julia Noordegraaf, inspired by Madeleine Akrich, has written that “the museum script is always the product of its designers *and* its users.”<sup>60</sup> I would adapt this statement to the present study by stating that the artwork's script is always the product of the artists (and their assistants) and its interpreters. Several mediators interact with the artwork's script and its interpretation leads to a manifestation of *Play Dead; Real Time*. Since a number of mediators are involved, misinterpretations of the script can occur, as was the case in Rovereto. In contrast to events that contribute to defining what *Play Dead; Real Time* is, events such as this one contribute to showing what it was not intended to look like; both screens were intended to be translucent so that the actions of Minnie could be seen on both sides. This event is also a good example of how Douglas Gordon can be accommodating in order to see his artworks exhibited.

### **Working With and Through the Artist's Sanctioning Narratives**

While scripting the life cycle of *Play Dead; Real Time*, I have worked with different sources, one of them being the artist's sanctioning narratives, his statements on *Play Dead; Real Time*.

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<sup>58</sup> Email from Heather Anderson, associate curator of contemporary art, National Gallery of Canada, January 8, 2010.

<sup>59</sup> Conversation with Bert Ross, assistant to Douglas Gordon, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa, May 10, 2007.

<sup>60</sup> See Julia Noordegraaf, *Strategies of Display: Museum Presentation in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Visual Culture* (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and NAI Publishers, 2004), 136; and Madeleine Akrich, “Les utilisateurs, acteurs de l'innovation,” *Éducation permanente*, no. 134 (1998): 79-89.

The study of the interviews and public presentations in which Douglas Gordon has spoken about this work shows that his discourse and his manner of speaking about it have evolved. In 2004, when asked to talk about the version *Play Dead; Real Time* that was shown in the retrospective *Douglas Gordon* presented at the Hirshhorn, Gordon stated that it was the only work that he did not have a funny story about. He stated: “I woke up one morning and thought I think I will make a film of an elephant.” He also added that he was still trying to figure out why he had done it. However, when he saw *Play Dead; Real Time* presented in proximity of *10ms<sup>-1</sup>*, where a man is seen constantly falling down, he realized that the former work was more about an elephant falling down than lying down, as he had previously phrased it.<sup>61</sup> It might not be a coincidence that these two works have been shown in proximity to each other, as was the case for instance in the retrospective *Douglas Gordon: Between Darkness and Light* in 2007. Through different interviews that the artist has participated in over the years, he seems to have developed a humorous way to explain how the work came into being. However, his statements on the work have much more to do with the practicalities of how the shooting took place rather than on the possible readings of the work, such as institutional critique. The ironic tone that he uses when he recounts how he made the work and his insistence on bringing the elephant to the Gagosian Gallery invites experts to interpret *Play Dead; Real Time* along the lines of institutional critique.<sup>62</sup>

Working with Gordon’s sanctioning narratives can also be problematic since, as he admits himself, he likes to tell conflicting stories.<sup>63</sup> When scripting the life cycles of the artist’s works, one must take care to identify the discrepancies between what the artist says and what he has done, between what he states his intentions were and what his realizations were. Among the discrepancies, I mentioned earlier in the chapter the instructions provided by the artist to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, in which it was stated that *Play Dead; Real Time* would to be exhibited as a four-channel video installations only in the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Timeline*. The *de-description* of the life cycle of this work done throughout the chapter has shown that the artwork was shown as a four-channel video installation on more than one occasion. It shows how the script of the work has evolved and that the artwork now has two versions: a three-channel and a four-channel version. In Chapter

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<sup>61</sup> “Meet the artist: Douglas Gordon” (part 2), Smithsonian Videos (2004), accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjYb6EN0v8w>.

<sup>62</sup> The ironic tone is, for instance, easily identified in the interview Gordon has given to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: “Douglas Gordon on working with elephants,” San Francisco Museum of Modern Art video interview, last modified November 2, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vR07wSggs7k>.

<sup>63</sup> “Meet the artist: Douglas Gordon” (part 2), Smithsonian Videos (2004), accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjYb6EN0v8w>.

Four, I will compare how Gordon's sanctioning narratives are different from Mike Kelley's, who speaks and writes much more about his intentions and the meaning of his work. It will be shown that Kelley has greater concerns about framing the reception of his artistic production than does Gordon.

The point of departure of this second section of the chapter was the display of *Play Dead; Real Time* in the exhibition *Douglas Gordon: Timeline* presented at the Museum of Modern Art in 2006. In the *de-description* of the re-exhibitions of this work by Gordon, I have shown that what could have been an exception in the display of the work – its presentation as a four-channel video installation – turned out to be a feasible option, which reshaped the identity of the work. Two versions of *Play Dead; Real Time* now coexist: a three-channel and a four-channel video installation. Even if the three editions of the work are integrated into museum collections, it is still the artist who decides if a second monitor will be added to the work or not. The scripting shows that Gordon is still a mediator of great importance in the display phase of his artistic production. This leads to the acknowledgment that displaying *Play Dead; Real Time* is also part of the making of the work.

### **3.3 Archiving *Play Dead; Real Time***

In the previous sections of this chapter, I mentioned a few examples of Douglas Gordon's works that were the results of his reinterpretations of his own works, such as *M: Futile Fear* (2006), which is a reinterpretation of *Feature Film* (1999). In this section of the chapter, I discuss the inclusion of the three videos that make up *Play Dead; Real Time* – *This Way*, *That Way* and *Other Way* – in another work by Gordon that has a self-explanatory title: *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work from 1992 Until Now. To be seen on monitors, some with headphones, others run silently, and all simultaneously* (Fig. 3.10). This work was first presented at the Galeria Foksal in Warsaw in 1999.<sup>64</sup> It can be interpreted as Gordon's video and film archive, as every time the artist makes a new piece including video or film, he integrates it into *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* as well. Therefore, after the making of *Play Dead; Real Time*, the videos *This Way*, *That Way* and *Other Way* were added to that work. *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* is a work in progress, whose end date will correspond to the moment when the artist ceases to make videos or films. When first

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<sup>64</sup> Galeria Foksal, accessed July 4, 2011, [http://www.galeriafoksal.pl/old/hist\\_16p.htm](http://www.galeriafoksal.pl/old/hist_16p.htm).



exhibited in Warsaw, the work counted about thirty monitors. Ten years later, when presented in Prague, it included 71 monitors.<sup>65</sup>

*Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* can also be interpreted as an alternative presentation strategy for Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time*, and also for all his other film- and video-based artworks. From one exhibition to another, the display of the work varies, as the artist has not drawn a specific floor plan for the work. The monitors used for the presentation are owned by the institution presenting it. Based on an exchange with Tanya Zimbardo, Assistant Curator at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, an institution which owns one of the editions of the work, art historian Anne Bénichou reports that the presentation of the work must, in principle, avoid any form of categorization or organization of the videos and films in order to favor the dispersion and the mixing of the themes and periods of production.<sup>66</sup> The dispersion of the videos has been applied to most of the presentations of the work, as for instance in Wolfsburg in 2007 (Fig. 3.11), but in the 2009 display of *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work...* done in Prague, a very clear categorization had been made. The monitors had been placed along three walls. The first section on the left gathered the Hollywood films the artist had manipulated and the works made with found footage; the second section grouped the video works that recorded different actions of the artist's hands (Fig. 3.12), the third section clustered the works in which he had filmed animals and insects (Fig. 3.13), and the last section comprised his other works. The three videos making up *Play Dead; Real Time* were included in the third category.

I pointed out earlier that the inaugural presentation of *Play Dead; Real Time* featured a *mise en abyme*, as the exhibition space was included in the videos of the work and, therefore, a visual conversation took place between the work and the very space in which it was presented. In *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work...*, another kind of *mise en abyme* takes place, as the artist includes all his films and videos in a separate work. This *mise en abyme* is made explicit by the self-descriptive title of the piece, but even more so, in the context of Douglas Gordon's solo exhibitions. On these occasions, the visitors unfamiliar with the artist's oeuvre are given the opportunity to identify some of the works, presented in their original format as installations or single-channel videos in other rooms of the exhibition, in *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work...* This video installation has been included in Gordon's retrospective exhibitions presented in Edinburgh in 2006-2007, in Rovereto in

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas Gordon: *blood, sweat, tears*. Dox: Center for Contemporary Art, Prague, 4 June – 27 September 2009.

<sup>66</sup> Anne Bénichou, "Des espaces monographiques au sein des collections muséales : déléguer ou produire une pensée et une pratique critiques de la production?," *Muséologies* 5, no. 1 (Fall 2010): 59.

2006-2007, in Wolfsburg in 2007, and in Prague in 2009. In Rovereto, *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work...* was displayed in proximity to *Play Dead; Real Time* (Fig. 3.14).

Since *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work...* offers a synthesis of Gordon's work with the moving image, in retrospective exhibitions, it is often placed in the very last room. The display of these moving image works is done democratically in the sense that they are all presented on monitors that have more or less the same size and the soundtracks, if played, are played at the same volume. Even though the title mentions that some monitors are connected to headphones, the headphones have been removed from the installation in recent displays of the work, as for instance in Wolfsburg in 2007 and Prague in 2009. Yet, on account of the fact that scale and time are very important features of Gordon's artistic production, this work does not do justice to Gordon's other works. For instance, in *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work...*, it is not a slowed down version of Hitchcock's *Psycho* over the course of 24 hour that is played, but the film at its normal speed.

One could wonder why *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* is a work of art and not only considered an archive. The answer to this question can be found in the creation process of Douglas Gordon and by discussing two other of his works, *List of Names* (1990-ongoing) and *prettymucheverywordwritten, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989...* (ongoing).<sup>67</sup> I suggest interpreting these works as archives that took the form of artworks. *List of Names* was exhibited for the first time at the Third Eye Centre in Glasgow.<sup>68</sup> As the title suggests, the artist wrote down the list of all the people he remembers meeting in his life. In principle, every time he meets someone new, that person is added to the list. For Gordon, this work represents his idea about memory, "an incredible, complex machine, with an amazing power to recall, and an equally unpredictable possibility of failure."<sup>69</sup> Indeed, it is impossible to remember everyone. As Katrina M. Brown has written, it is the list of "Gordon's own chosen ones."<sup>70</sup> In the exhibition space, the list is printed directly on the wall.<sup>71</sup> Its presentation varies from one exhibition to another as the list expands, but the order of names as well as they can, for instance, be ordered by surnames, chronologically, and so on.

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<sup>67</sup> The title of this second work has been written differently as on the website of the Tate, one can read: *Pretty much every word written, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989...* See Tate's website, accessed July 4, 2011, <http://www.tate.org.uk/britain/exhibitions/douglasgordon/default.shtm>. To avoid confusion for the reader, I will stick to the spelling of 2006, when the work was first presented at MART.

<sup>68</sup> *Self-conscious State*, Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, 1990.

<sup>69</sup> "... in conversation: jan debbaut and douglas gordon," in *Kidnapping. Douglas Gordon* (Eindhoven: Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, 1998), 42.

<sup>70</sup> Katrina M. Brown, *Douglas Gordon* (London : Tate Publishing, 2004), 102.

<sup>71</sup> A glimpse of *List of Names* can be seen on the top right corner of Figure 3.5.

Similarly to *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* and *List of Names*, that are accumulative artworks, *prettymucheverywordwritten, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989...*, is a wall installation gathering text-based works. The work was presented for the first time at MART in 2006 and gathered all the artist's text pieces. Prior to that exhibition, the artist had exhibited his text-based works in different exhibitions, but it was the first time that they were all presented together and assembled under the umbrella title *prettymucheverywordwritten, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989...* The texts the artist posts on the walls come from literature, biblical texts, and popular culture. Their meaning is often multiple, ambiguous and/or obscured. For instance, one, directly halting its reader, states: "I am aware of who you are & what you do" (Fig. 3.15). Another says: "From the moment you hear these words, until you kiss someone with green eyes" (Fig. 3.16). Just as *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* can be seen as an archive of Gordon's video and film-based artworks, and *List of Names* can be seen as an archive of names of persons the artist remembers having met in his life, *prettymucheverywordwritten, spoken, heard, overheard from 1989...* can be seen as an archive of his text-based works. But they are not simply archives as the artist exhibits them; he presents them publicly under varied configurations. Setting them up in the exhibition space is part of the process. Just as I have argued earlier that displaying Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time* is also making it, I assert that updating these works and displaying them is also making them. The creation process goes on.

Just as an archive is a collection of historical documents or records and is a form of heritage, *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* is a collection of all Gordon's film and video-based artworks. Therefore, this artwork can also be interpreted as a form of preservation of the artist's moving image works. It is of course a symbolic preservation, as Gordon does not attempt to maintain the exact appearance of all the works included in *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* in terms of how they look when exhibited on their own. It is only the footage of all his moving image artworks that is included, not the manner through which they are presented in the exhibition space. *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* is a form of preservation done through a *mise en abyme*. In this *mise en abyme*, on account of the fact that *Play Dead; Real Time* has occasionally been shown as a four-channel video installation, one could wonder if *Pretty Much Every Film and Video...* sometimes included four videos featuring an elephant rather than three. The fact that this has never actually been the case contributes to preserving the memory that *Play Dead; Real Time* was conceived as a three-channel video installation.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

The starting point of the analysis done in this chapter was my encounter with Douglas Gordon's *Play Dead; Real Time* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 2006. The presentation of the work there varied from an earlier display that I had seen, which made me wonder what the artwork consisted of. In order to better understand how the identity of *Play Dead; Real Time* had been shaped since its inaugural exhibition in 2003, I used the methodological tool of *de-description*. This manner of proceeding enabled me to conceptualize the socialization of *Play Dead; Real Time*.

In the first section of the chapter, I analyzed the inaugural exhibition of the work, its reception and its distribution. The analysis of this phase of the life cycle of the work revealed that it was very strongly connected to the site where it was made, the Gagosian Gallery. Gordon's work can be qualified as site-specific also because of conceptual implications. The portraits of the elephant that the artist makes can also be interpreted as a trope for his own position in the art world. Just as the elephant is one of the major attractions in a circus, Gordon is an important figure in the contemporary art scene and he is represented by one of the world's most powerful art dealers. Therefore, the re-exhibition of *Play Dead; Real Time* in other locations tends to divert from the institutional critique interpretation of the work that reviewers emphasized when it was first exhibited. These reviews contributed to the interpretation of the work and their analysis showed the discrepancies between the press release and how *Play Dead; Real Time* was generally interpreted. The reviews of the following exhibitions of the work also moved away from the institutional critique interpretation as the work could no longer establish the same dialogue with the exhibition space, since it had been shot at the Gagosian Gallery (and not in all these new exhibition spaces where it was being shown).

In the second section of the chapter, I studied the phase of the life cycle during which the identity of the work was reshaped as the artist decided to introduce a variation in the number of components and added a second monitor. The study done here has shown that two versions of the work co-exist: a three-channel and a four-channel video installation. Therefore, *Play Dead; Real Time* is a work that has plural immanences, it is made of different versions, all of which are instantiations of what it is. The study of the socialization of this work over time has helped identify mediators that have influenced the shaping of its identity. The configuration of the work is determined based upon the size of the exhibition space. To this day, it is almost always the artist who decides on how *Play Dead; Real Time* will be

displayed. The *de-description* of the re-exhibition process has helped identify the artist as a mediator of importance not only in the creation process, but also in the re-exhibition process. To a certain extent the *de-description* revealed that there is not necessarily an ideal space to present the work, aside from the Gagosian Gallery because of all the connotations that come with it. For Gordon, displaying his works is also making them, since he uses them to sculpt the space in which they are exhibited.

In the third section of the chapter, I discussed the inclusion of the videos making up *Play Dead; Real Time* in an ongoing work by Douglas Gordon, *Pretty Much Every Film and Video Work from 1992 Until Now. To be seen on monitors, some with headphones, others run silently, and all simultaneously*, to point out that the artist constantly revisits and reinterprets his works. It makes it impossible to speak of a finished version of a work since they keep evolving and their display in the exhibition space is one of their key features. In a way, the creation process stops in the exhibition space, until the work is presented again.

Throughout this chapter, I have identified mediators that played a role in the socialization of *Play Dead; Real Time*. Some mediators, such as the artist, have been influential in all phases of its life cycle; others have played a role at specific moments in time, as, for instance, the exhibition reviews. I also pointed out the double role played by the exhibition reviews: as mediators of how the work has been received, and as sources for the identification of other mediators. In the next chapter, I will point out how exhibition reviews can also play a third role: that of inciting artists to create new artworks.