

VERSIONS 1,2,3

by

Karilynn Ming Ho
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APPROVAL

Name: Karilynn Ming Ho
Degree: Master of Fine Art
Title of Thesis: Versions 1,2,3

Examining Committee:

Chair:

**Henry Daniel
Associate Professor
School For The Contemporary Arts**

**Jin-me Yoon,
Senior Supervisor
Professor
School For The Contemporary Arts**

**Judy Radul
Supervisor
Associate Professor
School For The Contemporary Arts**

**Jennifer Pappararo
[External] Examiner
Curator
Contemporary Art Gallery,
Vancouver, British Columbia**

Date Defended/Approved: _____ March 26, 2010 _____



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ABSTRACT

Versions 1,2,3 is a video installation that examines the relationship between performativity and the lens, in the staging and re-framing of mediated events. The work begins with improvisations by two people sited in front of a camera. Then, using the documentation obtained from these improvisations as a starting point their singular moments are retraced theatrically, using actors, objects, props and a minimal set. This theatrical production gets remediated back onto video. Taken as a whole, the work examines the unfolding of performatives, the self-consciousness that arises when in view of a camera, and the creative forces that emerge in the face of uncertainty. The project ultimately addresses the possibilities that abound in the reiteration of events, and their potentiation through difference.

Keywords: improvisation; theatricality; camera; failed intentionality; representation; iterability; performativity

Subject Terms: Visual Arts, Performance, Installation, Video, Theatricality

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Approval.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	iv
Table of Contents.....	v
List of Figures	vi
List of Tables.....	vii
Chapter 1: Conceptual Framework: Undoing then Redoing	1
Chapter 2: Performing Oneself For the Camera	9
Chapter 3: Towards the Inauthentic Copy	19
Problematizing Representation	19
Performance and Documentation: To Represent or Not to Represent.....	24
In and Out of Context	30
The Simulacrum	36
Conclusion	44
Appendices	46
Appendix A: Versions 1,2,3 Production Credits.....	47
Bibliography	48

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 1- video still	2
Figure 2. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 2 – video still	3
Figure 3. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 3 – video still	4
Figure 4. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> –Version 1 – installation view	6
Figure 5. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> –Version 2 & 3 – installation view.....	7
Figure 6. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 1: A Pane of Glass: Version 1 – video still	11
Figure 7. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 4: The Sign: Version 1 – video still.....	15
Figure 8. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 7: Dual Duel: Version 2 – video still	20
Figure 9. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 1 – video still	24
Figure 10. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 3 – video still	29
Figure 11. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 1 – video still.....	31
Figure 12. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 2 – video still.....	32
Figure 13. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 5: The Sign: Epilogue: Version 3 – video still	37
Figure 13. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 1 – video still.....	40
Figure 14. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 2 – video still.....	41
Figure 15. <i>Version 1,2,3</i> – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 2 – video still.....	41

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Scene List and Synopses of Vignettes in <i>Versions 1,2,3</i>	5
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CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: UNDOING THEN REDOING

In *Versions 1,2,3* the conditions and rules initiating the performance of the work, shift as they get negotiated between the characters (Olivia and Vikram), the director (myself), the actors that play Olivia and Vikram, and the position of the camera. Not only are there multiple framing mechanisms at work, but their implicit rules shift through different registers, all captured through the lens: improvisational, social-performative, and technical-formal. The negotiations that took place at the level of Version 1 were the result of several subversions against the initial rules and structures that I imposed upon the two players. Ultimately, Olivia and Vikram's attempts to flee the rules become new rules and a new structure themselves; these were re-enacted as Versions 2 and 3.

**VERSION 1: Olivia Dunbar as herself
Vikram Uchida-Khanna as himself**



Figure 1. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 1- video still

The performers in Version 1 were engaged by the artist to perform their “everyday selves” for the camera. What unfolds on screen are a series of banal improvised situations, in which there is always an attempt on the part of the performers to create something meaningful, and yet they are constantly inhibited by their self-consciousness towards the camera.

**VERSION 2: Gina Readman as Olivia
 Derek Chan as Vikram**



Figure 2. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: *Version 2* – video still

What was unrehearsed in Version 1 is rehearsed and restaged by actors in Version 2. Eight short vignettes emerged from Olivia and Vikram’s initial improvisations, and the video documentation collected from these moments act as a script for Version 2. The actors use the video as a visual guide to reconstruct the performances of Vikram and Olivia. They re-perform the scenarios theatrically within a minimal set, and through the use of props and objects. The lens sets the stage as the performance unfolds once again, this time with a greater reflexivity towards the grammar of the lens and the language of editing.

**VERSION 3: Ryan Swanson as Olivia
Caroline Sniatynski as Vikram**



Figure 3. *Version 1,2,3 – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 3 – video still*

All that is true about Version 2 applies to Version 3. Under still greater constraints, another set of actors were directed to retain a consistency of staging with the actors in Version 2. Like Version 2, the actors used the “original” video documentation of the improvisations as the source material from which to build their roles and reactions. They too re-perform the scenes in the set with props and objects, keeping certain formal qualities similar to Version 2 (choreography, placement, interaction of objects in the space), while also remaining open to variances in the performance, and how it is reframed for the lens. Informed by the previous Versions 1 and 2, Version 3 as a result is far more abstracted from the original.

The scene list and synopses of eight of these improvisational moments are listed below:

Table 1. Scene List and Synopses of Vignettes in *Versions 1,2,3*

Scenes:	Synopsis
A Pane of Glass	Olivia and Vikram find a pane of glass, and after much deliberation they decide to smash it on a concrete block.
Stop and Think	Olivia and Vikram ponder on a sign that happens to read: Stop and Think. They then find a shopping cart, and Olivia rides the cart while Vikram pushes her; we move towards the sugar refinery.
Wheelbarrow	While in the cart with Vikram pushing, Olivia spots an object in the grass. She jumps out of the cart to examine the object. It turns out to be a wheelbarrow, sans wheel. Vikram and Olivia turn it into a teeter-totter, and in doing so Vikram falls. They move on.
Breaking and Entering	The characters enter into the train yard, and see an abandoned building; Olivia tries to climb onto the roof. After several attempts to pull herself up, she finds an object to hoist herself up. She is eventually successful, and learns there is a beach nearby. Vikram climbs the roof shortly thereafter. They explore the rooftop together, eventually climbing down.
The Sign	Vikram and Olivia are dumpster diving. In the dumpster they find a sign thrown out by one of the local businesses. They decide to climb on the ledge and hang it.
The Sign: Epilogue	After hanging the sign, a man confronts them about their “intervention”. Olivia is defensive, but resolves the conflict by telling him that they will take it down.
Dual Duel	In the gym, Olivia and Vikram play-fight. Vikram ties Olivia’s shoes together, and proceeds to bully her by tickling her mercilessly.
Bad People	Still set in the gym, Vikram and Olivia walk towards the window that looks on to a “work-out centre”. Both characters mock the exercisers, going so far as to copy a girl’s stretches. They remark how they have been cast in this film because they are “bad people”.

The Installation

Versions 1,2,3 was installed at the W2 Perel Gallery from March 5th – 14th, 2010. Version 1 was displayed on a television monitor placed on a low plinth close to the ground, facing the northeast corner of the space. Accompanying audio could be heard through headphones.



Figure 4. *Version 1,2,3* –Version 1 – installation view

Versions 2 and 3 were displayed as a single projection on the south wall of the space, with each version taking turns playing out the scenes.¹ The audio was transmitted through speakers, with sound filling the space. All the videos were played in order of the scene list (see table 1.1), which was displayed in large print on the east wall.



Figure 5. *Version 1,2,3 –Version 2 & 3 – installation view*

The objects in the gallery space referenced the “ledge” shape (an extruded triangular shelf) from the set of Versions 2 and 3. A bench was constructed in this shape and positioned facing the projection. This form was

¹ For example, Scene 1: A Pane of Glass: Version 2 would play out the scene and then Version 3 would play the same scene. Moving then to Scene 2: Stop and Think: Version 2, then Version 3 etc...

then repeated, modified and flipped on its side to serve as a case for the television monitor that housed Version 1. The objects in the installation therein became different “versions” or variations of the same form, translating from the video into the physical space of the gallery.

Briefly, decisions made around the final installation of the work mostly centred around notions of theatricality and viewership operative within the gallery space. I wanted to draw attention to the audience’s own spectatorship implicit in the work, by emphasizing the phenomenological and proprioceptive relation that takes place between the image, objects and bodies in the space. In the video, objects are used as tools to initiate a performance; they become the placeholder for a set of relations and interactions that emerge between the performers. The inclusion of the sculptural forms meant to reiterate this relationship, increasing an awareness of the set of relations that are both physically and mediately present in the space.

CHAPTER 2: PERFORMING ONESELF FOR THE CAMERA

Over the course of my studies, I have developed a more acute awareness toward the camera, seeing it not merely as a recording mechanism as it is so often used in performance art, but recognizing to a greater extent the performative dimensions implicit whenever people are sited in front of the lens. The camera sets up a stage for a particular set of performatives² to manifest. But at the same time, it is used mundanely as a tool for documenting and witnessing action that emerges from everyday life; in other words, bodies can react actively or passively, exhibiting themselves before the camera. Performance oscillates between poles of hyper-awareness and obliviousness.

In this chapter, I want to address the role of the camera and the staging of Vikram and Olivia's performances in Version 1. Their improvisational performances were evoked by a tension in exhibiting and unfolding themselves before the camera. Their actions were marred by a self-consciousness that is exposed through the apparatus towards which they wish to perform. Factored in the equation is an expository relationship to the camera, and my own agency in potentiating Vikram and Olivia to create something "performative." I want to make the case that uncertainty and self-consciousness were the generative point of

² The working definition of performativity to which I will be referring is "the sustained presentation of one's behaviour in the presence of an observer."

departure for this work of art. Through the negotiations and tensions situated around the camera, Version 1 was constructed and given form from out of uncertainty. It was what made these situations possible, and it is from moments of instability that the project emerged.

In Version 1, the camera acts as a psychological force for the two performers, Vikram and Olivia. They feel compelled to perform because they are being watched and their actions are being recorded by the camera. There is a psychoanalytic vector in the role of the camera and the notion of gaze at work here,³ but more basically the element of being watched combines with the simple social expectation to both perform, and perform well. What comes out of the psychological relationship in Version 1 by way of the improvised performances is far more interesting than what might have been achieved through an acted script. From the potential of the camera to inflict a negative “gaze” on the subject, comes a refiguration of its disciplinary power eliciting a creative response.

Apperceptive energy in Olivia and Vikram is harnessed through the camera’s gaze; it is the source of their improvisations, but they are also trying to satisfy my desire for them to perform something for the camera. Their self-consciousness is what motivates the action, as it becomes a way to deflect the gaze of the camera, stabilizing the performance.⁴ They principally gravitate towards objects in search of a narrative, using their reference to diffuse or satisfy expectations. A common line throughout a number of scenes is: “what is that?” as though every object has the “potential” to be activated, as part of their

³ See Laura Mulvey’s essay: Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema: 1975.

⁴ This self-consciousness is also in part because I withhold directions, leaving Vikram and Olivia to ‘fend for themselves’ in front of the camera.

performance. This potential is also one that I direct towards Vikram and Olivia and their performances, keeping the camera focused on them as though every moment or action could become something.



Figure 6. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 1: A Pane of Glass: Version 1 – video still

Not only do Vikram and Olivia oscillate between deferring and satisfying the presence of the camera by way of objects, they also rely on each other to keep the performance going. They exhibit considerable amounts of awkward dialogue, and a healthy dose of sarcasm yet there is an earnest quality in their actions too, as they try to achieve something meaningful. Their obvious directedness towards eliciting meaning from the environment never seems to fully materialize, and their attempts to cobble together anything substantially meaningful becomes the eventual success of their performance, due in large part to their self-consciousness. The force and weight of the camera combine with my

desire for the performative, such that their performances are anti-climatic, and speak mostly to the sheer friction of the situation. The conditions applied to the participants create a tension out of which they attempt to improvise for the camera. Not stopping at just one attempt, they try again and again to achieve meaning.

Deeper theoretical insight into this aspect of the work can be found in the conceptual thinking of Gilles Deleuze. He accounts for a rough, generative spontaneity through his concept of the *diagram*. The diagram is the marking of a canvas prior to the act of painting; it holds gestures not yet staged, or open movement prior to choreography:

It is like the emergence of another world. For these marks, these traits are irrational, involuntary, accidental, free, random. They are non-representative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative. They are no longer either significant or signifiers: they are a-signifying traits. They are traits of sensation, but of confused sensations.⁵

The marks are not yet given meaning or direction because they are primarily concerned with the singular being-in/of the moment. Such random markings unleash a chaos, if only to release the work (and artist) from falling into figural givens, or that which is already known. These givens are ideas or concepts already materialized in the world; known conventions and structures in place that are used to generate meaning. We operate in a world that is determined by givens and ideas that are already in place, and so it is through these givens that we become susceptible to the dreaded *cliché*: the over-determination or exhaustion of a particular concept.

⁵ Deleuze, Gilles. *Francis Bacon and the Logic of Sensation*. University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota, 2003. 81-82.

Situated in opposition to the diagrammatic is the symbolic or “code”, a rationalized way into the work of art. “This code is “digital” not in the sense of the manual, but in the sense of a finger that counts...From this is derived a conception of binary choice that is opposed to random choice.”⁶ It attempts to minimize chaos into a formal logic, one that is calculated or measured. It moves directly towards the production of meaning through reason and order. The diagram is rather impulse-as-form; its immediacy stems from the body and moves outwards with no necessary destination or logic in mind. It is sensate and tactile *non-representative* form that expresses itself through manual and gestural traits. The other end is expressed through the cerebral, appearing as optical space, a calculated form that is representative in its attempt to produce meaning.

For Deleuze the diagram is not the object itself, but is rather suggestive of *possibilities*.⁷ It provides a loose skeleton through which the work can emerge, disclosing a process rather than an ideal; it is through the uncertainty or “confused sensations”⁸ that the diagram is formed.

Although Deleuze’s analysis gives way to a somewhat dialectical relationship between that which is “free” and those systems which are more “enclosed”, things are never quite so cut and dried, since moments always give way to both impulses and reconstructed rationalizations. What we do not know in a given moment can be a highly productive force against “givens”, those general sets of actions or ideas that we tend to revert back to, like rules, clichés

⁶ Ibid., 84-85.

⁷ Ibid., 83.

⁸ Ibid., 82.

and the like. Impulse always manages to find its way through uncertainty, because in the moment it knows not what shape or form it will take.

Ultimately, my suggestion here is that Vikram and Olivia's actions were diagrammatic, in that they expressed themselves through uncertainty. Their improvisations were impulses that acted out *into* something, such as when Vikram and Olivia decide to turn the wheelbarrow into a teeter-totter. In this improvised moment, the decision is not especially profound, but is rather an impulse actualized or manifested through an existent thing. In this instance, together the impulses establish a particular configuration, which then becomes the starting point for the emergence of other possibilities. This point of potential eventually becomes Versions 2 and 3.

But to return to a prior aspect of the conditions of Vikram and Olivia's improvisations, the camera still very much dictates their behaviour. Despite the moments themselves having little weight or form, the improvisations were not borne solely from the freedom of impulse. To a large extent their behaviour is dictated by pre-determined conventions and structures that existed prior to their performance, which govern how it was that they unfolded or presented themselves before the camera. Part of their desire to perform for the camera is prefigured by the pervasiveness of the apparatus in our everyday lives, from photography to modes of surveillance like webcams and reality television. Their capacity to understand how performance takes place before the camera is structured by these points of reference, which guide their behaviour. The resultant relationship to viewing technologies is constructed through a diversity of

platforms from which to perform oneself, with these trumping the simultaneous exposure of our self-consciousness, vulnerability and uncertainty that is provoked by the camera. This happens with Vikram and Olivia as they are exposed: the scenes reveal their self-consciousness, along with their earnestness and youthful exhibitionism.



Figure 7. Version 1,2,3 – Scene 4: The Sign: Version 1 – video still

What becomes exemplified in Version 1 is the collision of these confused sensations as they are elicited into display. In the intensity of the moment Olivia tries to generate something “amazing” for the camera, but these moments strung together amount to an exposure of failed *intentionality* in experience. Behind the camera also exposed is my *own* failure to bring a commanding structure to the situation, by way of direction for the two performers. Between my role as the director with the camera, and Olivia and Vikram’s deviations from my attempts to

direct, there arose a mistrust of intentions. Actions in Version 1 never materialize into anything substantial, and are at most perhaps singular expressions within that moment, speaking only to the conditions and tensions that brought about their existence. But their earnest desire to create *something* in concert with me at a basic level is what keeps the performance going, possibly marking what Jean-Luc Nancy calls the “il y a” or “there is...”; “...presence that is no longer present to itself but is repetition and supplication of a presence to come.”⁹ Despite their self-consciousness, Vikram and Olivia continue to find their way to the next thing, persistently trying to generate material for the camera, exhibiting generosity and desire in their actions.

These situations act in sum as an “outline” documented by the camera. It was through the recorded dimensions of the performative that the work moved towards its final concrete form. Following the previous analysis, if we relegate Olivia and Vikram’s performances to the realm of the diagram then subsequent re-enactments (Versions 2 and 3) could be said to be a movement towards *code*, an imposed structure or more calculated form placed upon the scenes. For Deleuze, it’s not about two opposite ends of a spectrum: diagram (irrational) versus code (rational). What he argues instead is that both have a place in the creation of the artwork; one begins with the diagram, and continues by imposing *some* instance of code. Deleuze states this in reference to painting:

The diagram must not eat away at the entire painting, it must remain limited in space and time. It must remain operative and controlled. The violent methods must not be given free rein, and the necessary catastrophe must not submerge the whole. The diagram is the possibility

⁹ Nancy, JL. Sparks, Simon. *A Finite Thinking*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003. 98.

of fact – It is not fact itself. Not all the figural givens have to disappear; and above all, a new figuration, that of the Figure, should emerge from the diagram and make the sensation clear and precise.¹⁰

For Deleuze, the diagram is not necessarily the work of art in and of itself; it must rather be controlled lest it lose itself within its own chaos and incoherence. The improvisational gestures are *possibilities* of what the artwork could be, and then when those *possibilities or sensations* are identified they must be honed or given a more cohesive form.

Versions 2 and 3 were attempts to rationalize these diagrammatic situations performatively. Although the action of Vikram and Olivia were diagrammatic, their actions given form and documented in this way were not enough for me to warrant them as a singular work - I wanted to make sense out of these moments by turning them into something more coherent. Setting up these moments again, I sought to re-visit the site of my own failure, my confusion around the role of the camera, and my inability to direct or control my performers. I decided to try it again, but make it better.

The video documentation of Version 1 became a script from which the actors in Versions 2 and 3 would derive their performances. The documentation serves as a framework from which the actors tried to visually reconstruct Vikram and Olivia's performances from the original footage, to translate the formlessness of the original into something much more concrete – imposing codes and conventions onto the diagram. What is carried through in the subsequent

¹⁰ Deleuze, 89.

versions is a contour: an outline given by the diagram that is captured, honed and reshaped through bodies, and played out once again for the camera.

CHAPTER 3: TOWARDS THE INAUTHENTIC COPY

Problematizing Representation

In this chapter, I want to address the internal relationship between the versions as they all carry similarities and differences between them. Having established that Versions 2 and 3 are derivative of Version 1, the simplest way to conceive of their relationship is that 2 and 3 are copies of 1, which is the original or the "model". On the surface, this is more or less the case. However, what I am seeking in this chapter is a better way to speak about repetition amongst the versions; one that doesn't relegate their relations as those of resemblance, at least not in the sense that a typical understanding of "copy" might suggest. It would be more correct to say that while it is the similarities found within all three versions that connect them, it is also the source of their *estrangement* from one another. During the process of re-making Version 1 through Versions 2 and 3, the question became this: in what ways am I beholden to the "original"?

In many ways this became an ethical question, given that Vikram and Olivia are real subjects. In choosing to replicate the moments from Version 1, I was also attempting to portray them. A baseline ethical approach would be to represent them faithfully, but what constitutes a faithful representation? Is there an essence intrinsic to Olivia and Vikram? Could I rely on the physical qualities related to them? How close in proximity can one come to an origin without delimiting the possibilities of subsequent versions, and their autonomous power

to exist? In other words, yes there can be such a thing as a faithful representation, but in every attempt to re-present an idea, person or thing there also always lies in the attempt the risk of destruction.



Figure 8. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 7: Dual Duel: Version 2 – video still

A representational model presupposes a fidelity to the original (Version 1) with Versions 2 and 3 holding it up as exemplary copies. But a reversal of this logic of representation would undermine the notion of a stable model, through the presence of multiple identities. It would see Versions 2 and 3 not as copies beholden to the original but autonomous as each in their own, with different forces and effects. In this chapter I want to parse out a concept of representation, and discuss it alongside the complicated relationship between performance art and documentation. Performance art relies on forms of representation like documentation to substantiate its presence long after it has occurred. In

particular, I want to complicate this representational model as it grounds some notion of “authenticity”, by looking at the ways in which performance itself destabilizes the notion of an ideal through its repetition and re-iteration. In other words, I look to the “inauthentic” copies as a way to open up alternative possibilities of understanding performance.

Such a reconfiguration of the concept of representation would need to start with the philosophy to which the idea of origin is beholden. Gilles Deleuze outlines the Platonic source of the idea of origin in his book the *Logic of Sense*, where the representational model is founded thusly: “...the domain of representation [is] filled by copies-icons, and defined not by an extrinsic relation to an object, but by an intrinsic relation to the model or foundation.”¹¹ The foundation is the basis of the *Idea*, or where the idea stems from, and from this foundation come copies or representations of it. The foundation is the moral that upholds the story through an “internal” essence. The motivation behind this inductive move towards myth is to distinguish the “thing” itself from its various forms of representation. This involves a process of division, and a selection of a lineage that distinguishes pretenders between those that are “...pure and impure, the authentic from the inauthentic.”¹² This process of division selects between those that are true to the essence of the *Idea* and those who appear to be similar in their external form, but actually possess an internal dissimilarity.

Deleuze deems the origin as “*unparticipated*”; it renounces any need for participation because it exists in a primary way, inhabiting the qualities of being

¹¹ Deleuze, Gilles. *Logic of Sense*. Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press, 1984. 259.

¹² *Ibid.*, 254.

“just”, which is the conceptual root of “justice”. Of secondary rank are the “participated” forms; they have to prove their fidelity to the origin, like the suitor who must prove their worthiness to the family in order to inherit the lineage of the foundation. But among every good suitor who meets the moral challenge and obligation to keep the integrity of the lineage, there exist equally as many bad suitors, or rivals that serve to undermine or corrupt the foundation. The copies that exist on this latter, tertiary level are simulacra, or copies of a copy. The opposition that occurs between authentic and inauthentic copies is what Deleuze deems a “dialectic of rivalry (amphisbetesis), a dialectic of rivals and suitors.”¹³

Deleuze interprets this model of amphisbetesis through the dialectic of foundation / copy and model / simulacrum. Within this Platonic structure, there are two kinds of images which follow the logic: the good representation that possesses the worthiness of the copy, and the ability to express fidelity to the foundation or the essence, and the bad copy - the one that models itself after the foundation, expressing an appearance of similarity, but possessing an ulterior motive. In the Platonic model, representation is the copy *par excellence*, as it is grounded in a moral obligation to the origin. Although it doesn't necessarily always express external similarity, it *continues the lineage of the Idea*. But a simulacrum is distinguished by external similarity with *internal difference*; it aims to subvert the foundation through its false appearances of sameness.

¹³ Ibid., 254.

Deleuze's philosophy is grounded in immanence rather than in a traditional understanding of transcendence. So his motives for outlining representation are key to destabilizing this latter model, upon which the groundwork for much of western philosophical thought is laid. He points rather toward the false pretender - the simulacra - in destabilizing this model, as the "rival" to representation.

I will return to the notion of the simulacrum, and how it interrogates the lineage of the Idea of representation later in the chapter, as it is crucial to my own understanding of how to reformulate the "copy". But first I need to unfold this concept of the foundation, and how it finds itself situated within the more specific realm of the performative and re-enactment.¹⁴

The Platonic model supposes that there is a moral relation to the origin, one that maintains an internal semblance towards the essence of a foundation, putting less emphasis on the external, formal qualities of the copy. This ideal operates on the supposition that the foundation is truly just and that there is a consensus or a truth to the foundation. For example, every re-enactment of Romeo and Juliet becomes a representation of the text and the author, as it reiterates the same foundation. Each re-production of the play reinstates its moral lessons: revenge begets tragedy, star-crossed love is doomed, or other themes to that effect. Within a representational dialectic, there can be external difference, say between the classic Russian ballet version directed by Lev Arnshtam and Leonid Lavrovsky, and the tale set in "modern" times directed by

¹⁴ I am choosing to use the term 're-enactment' as opposed to 'reenactment', the former suggests a return (re) to what was previously enacted (performatively); the latter alludes to more historical forms of re-playings or re-doings.

Baz Luhrman. Despite their external difference in appearance they still maintain "internal" similarities that remain true to the narrative text, making this example serve a conservative function of representation: the re-circulation of the Same. With performance art, the conservation of the performative moment becomes the very lifeline of the performance itself. Performance is constantly tied to forms of representation in order to maintain a more than fleeting existence. In light of the Platonic model just outlined, are forms of documentation just a re-circulation of a same foundation, or do they have a different relationship to the performative?



Figure 9. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 1 – video still

Performance and Documentation: To Represent or Not to Represent

Performance art has had a longstanding and complicated relationship to representation. Since performance's ontology is predicated on its disappearance,

a performance must be documented, reproduced, replicated or represented in order for it to survive, or to maintain a presence beyond its fleeting temporal existence. But there is a general lack of consensus when it comes to documenting a performance, with a schism between those who believe that performance must remain strictly a singular, non-duplicable event and others who believe in the possible reproduction of its form. Performance theorist Peggy Phelan, for example, advocates for a strict obligation towards the former, theorizing the disappearance of the performance:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of its own reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through its disappearance.¹⁵

Phelan is arguing here for the uniqueness and singularity of the performance event. For her, as a one-of-a-kind moment the performance carries an aura of originality and existential authenticity. Anything other than the singularity of the event becomes something entirely different. Phelan argues for "representation without reproduction" in proposing by way of J.L. Austin that performative writing become the document or trace to the origin, rather than reproduction through technologies such as photograph, video or film. Her argument is constructed in light of the technologically mediated 1980s, when there were a large number of artists gravitating towards media recording technologies like video in lieu of live

¹⁵ Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. 146.

performance. Their interest had much to do with the new accessibility of such technologies during the period.

Phelan's notion of a performance resistant to its own reproduction proposes a paradox of sorts, with a performance always coming face-to-face with its own disappearance and demise. Without its reproducibility through forms of reproduction – re-enactment, documentation, witness accounts or otherwise – its existence may become obsolete. Other theorists such as Amelia Jones argue that there is a “mutual supplementary” that goes on between the event and the document. For the event cannot ultimately be accounted for without a document, or by taking on some other form.

Consider Marina Abramovic's piece *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) for example, where she re-enacts five seminal performances by other artists, and two of her own from the 1960s and 70s. Through various forms of writing, documents and witness accounts, the work confronts the problematic reconstruction of previous performances, based on their scant documentation. She extends the duration of each of the performances to seven hours, and has them re-documented by the renowned filmmaker Babette Mangold. What Abramovic's piece alludes to here are the complicated ways by which we not only “trace” and record, but also re-appropriate and reinvigorate the past into the present. The documentation and the writings associated with that singular event become central in how we re-present the idea and the experience of the performance again. Moreover, the re-performances done by Abramovic in 2005 significantly shift in context from that of the originals; they inhabit a different body

and adopt far more polished documentation as their final representation. This time around Abromovic seems more invested in the work's final representation, aware of its life after the performance. Since many of the pieces she chose to perform were so poorly documented in their original articulations, their preservation depends on her to re-perform and re-document these pieces so as to make them more concrete as historical documents.¹⁶ Alongside Phelan's writing, *Seven Easy Pieces* speaks to the vexed, reciprocal relationship between documentation and performance, and the reconstruction of the latter's event by way of traces. Abromovic succeeds in complicating the relationship between origin and copy in performance and representation through this work. Nevertheless, the work still points back to an origin marked by memory and absence.

Phelan is not wrong to adopt her strict stance against the involvement of documentation in the work itself. Her criticism of reproducibility implicitly relies on a central and important point: every attempt to repeat the performance will inevitably mark it as different.¹⁷ On this point I cannot but agree, though perhaps not for the same reasons: repetition does bring about difference! Phelan is preserving an ethic of the performative ontology; to re-write and to re-present the event suggests only its change of life and form. Her concept of representation is premised not only on an ethic of the singularity of performative events, but also on the idea that representation is performed by way of language. The work

¹⁶ Abromovic, Marina. "Introduction" *Seven Easy Pieces*. Milan: Charta, 2007. 11

¹⁷ Phelan, 146.

develops a “mythology” based around its absence and transforms based on the multiple interpretations and subjectivities that take on that text afterwards.

What is at stake here is not so much the ontology of the performative in its disappearance - a moment’s reflection reveals that the temporal quality of the live will *always* disappear as a singular moment; but rather becomes suggestive of the possibilities: the precise *forms* of representations that come after a singular event. What materializes are proliferations and divergences of representations of a particular event, taken up after its disappearance through text, photographs, video and re-performance.

Let me rejoin my own work with this theoretical material. Both Olivia and Vikram serve as the base for the performances of Gina and Derek, and Ryan and Caroline respectively. Certain remnants of the original live on through the subsequent versions, but they have shifted, changed bodies, and taken on different visual forms. There are certain moments within the videos where Versions 2 and 3 do not do Olivia or Vikram “justice”, in that they do not represent them kindly. This is particularly the case with Ryan and Caroline, whose performances become most unlike the original. It is clear for example, that Ryan had a difficult time in portraying Olivia. If representation is a reflection of a foundation or a “point-of-view”, then this faithfulness is already betrayed because it assumes an implicit belief that her point of view could be replicated; the result is a partial inability to identify with her character. No one could fully represent Olivia, as she is un-representable as a subject. And so Ryan exaggerates her,

turning her into someone *other* than Olivia, by using her as a frame, or an outline into which he can crudely insert himself into her place.



Figure 10. Version 1,2,3 – Scene 3: Wheelbarrow: Version 3 – video still

The characters are not only subject to difference by way of productive possibilities, but also through destruction. In representation there always exists the possibility of differing degrees of accuracy and misrepresentation, speaks ultimately to the performative nature of the “copy”. Going back to Deleuze’s term for representation as “the participated”, it is perhaps the act of *participation* that counts.

But what about the camera? It could be suggested that Olivia and Vikram’s performances in Version 1 are held as the foundation, and the video documentation becomes a secondary form or copy of the first. But in the case of Version 1 their performances had been complicated by the presence of the

camera from the start. It was the camera's gaze that served as a force driving Vikram and Olivia's performance, while it doubled as documentation. In this case, the performance and documentation are interconnected. What Vikram, Olivia and I were trying to achieve was not just about the performance, it was as much about the creation of documentation. The same could be said about Versions 2 and 3, as their performances were constructed for the camera, staged as intentionally aware that what was being acting out was to become documentation.

In and Out of Context

In order for the actors to portray Vikram and Olivia as characters, they use the performance and documentation of Version 1 as a guide for re-enacting these scenes. Version 1 becomes a script that is visually retraced by the actors in Versions 2 and 3. Documentation in this case becomes a visual tool, a reference for actors to reconstitute Vikram and Olivia as characters; abstracted from their original context.

Sociologist Erving Goffman's concept of "keying" and the "strip of experience" is relevant here. Although conceived for sociological purposes, it translates usefully into the broader spectrum of performative practices. The strip of experience is a sequence or series of happenings found within the stream of human behaviour that is taken out of its original context in order to be studied. The strip is not necessarily exceptional behaviour per se, somehow segregated apart from that of "normal behaviour"; it is rather used as a starting point for analysis. Keying is more directly related to performance; it takes the strip of

experience - those actions considered to be meaningful within a cultural frame - and transforms them through re-contextualization¹⁸ into something that becomes performable within a different context.

Performance theorist Richard Schechner takes up the concept of the strip of experience, shifting it even further towards a performative context by calling it “restored behaviour.” Restored behaviour “...emphasizes the process of repetition and the continued awareness of some “original” behaviour, however distant or corrupted by myth or memory, which serves as a kind of grounding for the restoration.”¹⁹ The strip is moved outside of its normal context of operation into a different framework, giving way to an entirely new performance with only some semblance to the first.



Figure 11. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 1 – video still

¹⁸ Carlson, Marvin. *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Routledge. 2004. 46.

¹⁹ Carlson, 47.



Figure 12. *Version 1,2,3 – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 2 – video still*

Recalling the discussion of diagram and code from chapter two, keying then becomes then the process of taking a strip of experience from the “diagram” and re-constituting it into something that can be repeated or reiterated, thus moving it towards code. Version 1 is keyed from improvisation with Versions 2 and 3 exhibiting a restored and refined behaviour of the first. The actors from Versions 2 and 3 use the video documentation to try and replicate the actions, gestures, and dialogue of Version 1. Not only were Vikram and Olivia’s actions improvisational diagrams they were also performing their “selves” for the camera. The source of their intentions is drawn from the conditions of the situation.

It is precisely the ability to slip easily in and out of contexts that constitutes something as performative. Derrida’s concept of iterability, in his essay *Signature Event Context* is helpful to make this point. His critique relies on J.L. Austin’s

work concerning performative speech acts: between performatives and constative utterances. Performative speech acts are utterances that “do” something, i.e., in the acceptance of a marriage vow, one replies: “I do”, which thus seals the vow. Constantives are utterances that allude to fact: “There is a dog on the porch.” Whereas constative utterances can be either true or false, performative utterances are neither.²⁰ Performatives are rather subject to conditions of both *success* and *failure*, which Austin claims is always contingent to context. For a speech act to be successful, Austin argues that it relies properly on its context. Unlike constantives, performative utterances are subject to “ills which infect all utterances... they will, for example, be *in a peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem or spoken in soliloquy.”²¹ Because performatives can be used or reiterated outside their proper context, they are subject to failure. Language used this way is considered to be “parasitical”, in that it latches onto the origin and changes its use.

This readily applies to the notion of the performative wholesale. In order to recognize the performance as “performative,” it must be repeatable as form, yet always subject to difference: “Would a performative statement be possible if a citational doubling did not eventually split, dissociate from itself the pure singularity of the event?”²² Iterability destabilizes the context of the performative in this way, in that it can be taken out of one particular moment, inserted or repeated elsewhere, without thereby delimiting the possibilities of its being

²⁰ Austin, J.L. “How To Do Things With Words” *Performance Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Bial. New York: Routledge, 2007. 177-178.

²¹ *ibid.*, 181.

²² Derrida, Jacques. “Signature Event Context” in *The Performance Studies Reader*. Ed. Henry Bial. New York: Routledge, 2004. 184.

understood by any number of different audiences. For Derrida, the repeatability of the event speaks to possibilities of failure (as in acting), but also a capacity to perform that enables possibility. Although iterability suggests we can take something out of its original context and repeat it elsewhere, it does not mean that context and intention disappear. It is simply that one cannot control them quite as such; it is the presence behind that act that substantiates its authority in meaning or intention. Within a performative context, the repeatability of the singular event can again take on the form of documentation, as writes Jennifer Steetskamp: “Every repetition of a performance – whether in documentation or as a reenactment – is a re-iteration of that very sentence “this is a performance.” In that way documentation becomes part of the performance, as it is a performative process in itself.”²³ Re-enactment is the iteration of a previous event, taken out of its context and replayed again. Not only does the performative get reiterated as “this is performance” but so too does the camera re-enforce the statement.

The iterability, Derrida suggests, is accorded by *différance*: “The irreducible absence of intention or assistance from the performative statement, from the most “event-like” statement possible, taking into account the predicates mentioned just now, to posit the general graphematic structure of every “communication.”²⁴ Our communicability is based on our ability to re-use words in different contexts. Derrida in no way delimits the context and intentionality of the

²³ Steetskamp, Jennifer. On the Performativity of Documentation and the Preservation of Video Installations. Netherlands Media Art Institute, 2007 <http://nimk.nl/eng/archive/on-the-performativity-of-documentation-and-the-preservation-of-video-installations/>

²⁴ Derrida, 184.

subject making the performative statement, but their differences are nevertheless what makes language possible.

Acting is a process of iteration, whereby the actor parasitically latches on to the origin (the character or role) and reiterates it in a number of different nights within a run. There is a kind of perversity implicated in the possibility that a multitude of bodies can take up the same character while constantly altering its structure in embodiment. With iterability there is always the possibility of difference, an alterity as that which is not the thing itself. Every time a performance is re-iterated, it suggests a simultaneous absence; a trace, taken up by other bodies, situated in different contexts.

The performances of Andrea Fraser are instructive here, as they often take on the concept of iteration. In her piece *Official Welcome* (2001), Fraser appropriates a number of different speeches from art award ceremonies, oscillating between playing the role of the recipient-artist and presenter. She compacts the lines into one long monologue that eventually has her stripping down to a Gucci thong and declaring: "I am not a person today, I'm an object in an artwork." The line is two-fold in its declaration, as she is not only alluding to another person, and other work in the art-world (perhaps Vanessa Beecroft?), she is also pointing out her role as an object within the work itself. This work is commissioned by an institution and participating in the same economy that she is trying to subvert. Fraser uses the language that officiates these ceremonial events against itself by re-iterating the patterns in speeches, revealing the

emptiness of their words, which in most instances are used to substantiate an authority equal or relevant to the scene of their delivery.

What iterability also suggests is that we cannot fully control the intentions or context of the person who chooses to re-iterate the performative, or re-present an idea. This is the necessary condition of re-iteration as it is subject to impure authenticity, the ability to take on performative statements and utterances that have false-intentions. Because any one of the actors in the video can take up the “I” of the subject, it becomes a question of who is that “I” behind that line: is it Olivia? Gina? Ryan? Any one of them can re-iterate the statement, but also change its use within the context of replaying the scene, implicating their own subjectivity behind the line, subjecting the “I” to impure authenticity. Because the line: “You’d think it was real, I am pretty sure...” can be iterated by different actors - whether in a minimal set or a fast-food restaurant – it simultaneously also repeats the statement: “this is a performance.” The fact that a performative statement or gesture could be iterated in any number of ways, by any number of people makes it infinite.

The Simulacrum

Let me return now to the concept of the simulacrum. The simulacrum in many ways acts like Derrida’s notion of iterability, with its capacity to indefinitely will difference. The simulacrum expresses sameness in “form” but with a different intention - external similarities but with internal difference.

Just as iterability is subject to impure authenticity, in its ability to be taken out of context and repeated by somebody else, the simulacrum too takes its

position as the “inauthentic” copy. It destabilizes the foundation-copy relationship because it is a false pretender acting as a model. For Deleuze, to reverse the representational model is to celebrate the power of the false copy, to see the simulacrum as a phantasm. Simulation designates the power of producing an *effect* in that it no longer exhibits the properties of a “copy”, but rather harbours a power in its own right.²⁵



Figure 13. Version 1,2,3 – Scene 5: The Sign: Epilogue: Version 3 – video still

What Deleuze advocates in the power of the simulacrum is difference. It doesn't rely on the foundation as the idea upholding the copy, instead the simulacra “can produce identities from within the world, and without reference to a model, by entering into concrete relations – in this case, the philosopher is not the one searching for the Good, but the one who is able to create new concepts

²⁵ Massumi, Brian. “Realer than Real: The Simulacrum According to Deleuze and Guattari” *Copyright No.1*, 1987. 90-97.

from the material available in the world; concepts which will do something.”²⁶ The power of the simulacrum is aligned with the process of “becoming”, as it is always willing different identities. For Deleuze, to break from the representational binary is to “make the simulacra rise and to affirm their rights among icons and copies.”²⁷ It is to allow the copies to overthrow the “model” in order to produce new forms.

An example of this power is Jeremy Deller’s project: *The Battle of Orgreave* (2000) produced in conjunction with the public art agency Artangel. The work re-enacted the epic confrontation between police and miners during the 1984 British miner strike in Orgreave, South Yorkshire. Using historical re-enactment as a point of re-creation, Deller reconstructed the event based on the memories and accounts of those who were directly involved in the conflict: the miners and police.²⁸ Shying away from existing historical material and documentation as a foundation, he cast a number of the former miner workers and police officers who were directly involved in the original incident in the re-enactment, and in some cases inverts players on both sides, casting former miners as policeman and vice-versa. The final product of this restaging is a documentary of the re-enactment, which gives a different account of the conflict; one that is based on the lived experience of those directly implicated and

²⁶ Roffe, J. "Simulacrum" *The Deleuze Dictionary*. Ed. Adrian Parr. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press: 2005. 250-251.

²⁷ Deleuze, Gilles. *Logic of Sense*. Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press. 1984. 262.

²⁸ According to the documentary produced by Artangel and other news sources, the BBC reversed the order in which the conflict played out, showing the miners first attacking with stones and the police charging at them in response. It was the opposite that happened, the police charged first. In 1991 the BBC admitted to the ‘error’ by calling it an editing mistake done in haste. However, it is a well-known fact that much of the media coverage projected a bias against the miners, coining them as ‘the enemies within.’

affected by the standoff. Re-enacted with twenty years of hindsight, the lapse in time provides greater insight into the incident on both sides. It serves as a chance for redemption, an opportunity for miners to have their side of the story documented and retold.

The work acts as a simulation in that the external qualities of the re-enactment makes it “appear” like the actual events that unfolded in 1984; it replicates to great accuracy the specific details of the event, including the original miners, costumes, props and choreography. But despite its surface, it expresses an ulterior motive, an internal difference: a restaging based on another account of the story. The performance and subsequent documentary acted by “effectively righting old wrongs”²⁹ resituating the event from a different point of view. The re-enactment and subsequent documentary produced provides an alternative account of the event, and though this project does not change the course of history, Deller’s work nevertheless serves to make up for other perspectives that were not accounted for.

Although my installation doesn’t carry with it the same historical weight as Deller’s *Battle of Orgreave*, the concept of simulacrum still provides valuable insight, particularly as it relates to Versions 2 and 3. While all versions carry certain external and formal similarities, e.g. dialogue, gestures and narrative arcs, each version is played out differently, with different actors, different styles of camera work and editing. Rather than seeing the versions in reference and in harmony with one other through the ideal of representation, each version tends

²⁹ Blackson, Robert. *Once More...With Feeling: Reenactment in Contemporary Art and Culture*. *Art Journal*: Spring 2007; 66,1. 32.

to destabilize the other by having bodies be replicated and replaced by other bodies; replacements take up points of potential and diverge into other forms of expressions and gestures. Within different scenes in each version contains different qualities and effects, each carrying their own identity.



Figure 13. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 1 – video still



Figure 14. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 2 – video still



Figure 15. *Version 1,2,3* – Scene 4: Breaking and Entering: Version 2 – video still

This formation of divergent identities speaks not only to the potentials given in Version 1, but to the different alternative potentials that develop in Versions 2 and 3, following Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the simulacrum:

It is a question of extracting and combining potentials, which they [Deleuze and Guattari] define as abstract relations of movement and rest, abilities to affect and be affected: abstract yet real. The idea is to build our own transporting machine and use it to get a relay going and to keep it going, creating ever greater and more powerful amalgamations and spreading them like a contagion until they infect every identity across the land and the point is reached where a now all-invasive positive simulation can turn back against the grid and replication and overturn it for a new earth.³⁰

When Olivia is taken on by another body, retraced and replayed, it is no longer Olivia, but Olivia-*plus*. She can be made possible in ways we have not yet seen. It is not Olivia any longer, but rather a "force" or a potential that has taken place *through* Olivia, combining with other potentials sited in other bodies to create variations of Olivia, or different streams of identity. Versions 2 and 3 no longer allude to an origin, but instead stand on their own individually without Version 1, suggesting that Olivia has taken on a different form that no longer needs her as a reference; she has become abstracted like Versions 2 and 3. What remains of her in the subsequent versions is a trace or a memory that through the process of articulation has become something else. Moreover, we cannot telescope Gina's Olivia or Ryan's Olivia back to onto the "true" Olivia, because she has already been transformed once by their attempt to simulate her. Given that she has evolved in this way, the possibilities for Olivia become endless as she begins to morph into something beyond Olivia. There are infinite

³⁰ Massumi, 9.

materializations of this character, which will continue to will onward in taking on different forms, combinations and qualities.

CONCLUSION

In venturing a conclusion, to a large extent the project was borne out of uncertainties that emanated not only from the performers I chose to record, but also from myself. The uncertainties emerged out of tensions between what I knew as given processes – codes, conventions, and ideas already realized in the world – and the things that have yet to materialize, which linger as latent possibilities. It is always the unknowns or the uncertainties that destabilize prior assumptions and place into question what I believe I know about the work and the identities contained within it.

What Olivia and Vikram exemplify in the work is a earnestness towards keeping the performance going, through found objects and each other, as if everything had a potentiality to be performed. Although their actions are guided by a self-consciousness towards the camera, it is the immanent possibility and diagrammatic gestures that are thus elicited, which I sought to potentiate in Versions 2 and 3. They too became activated in different ways, seeking potential in different forms and through the configurations of bodies and objects in space. This is what I believe the work produces – a continuous stream of performative possibilities.

What started as a series of awkward moments between myself and two performers carried through and transformed into other performatives in Versions 2 and 3. These three versions are connected, with each version carrying within it

effective qualities of its own. Versions 1,2 and 3 each have a performative potential that, in this sense, could be said to be autonomous: when placed beside one another they create a series of different relations, creating different affects and multiple points of divergence. Each scene wields different qualities, which subsequently alter and affect our perception of the others. Each vignette has different intentions, motivations, and authentic and inauthentic relations to each other, which constitutes them in a process of continual shifting. It is these differences and similarities that keep each version performing, for, with and against each other.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Version 1,2,3 Production Credits..... 47

Appendix A: Versions 1,2,3 Production Credits

Cast:

Version 1	Olivia Dunbar Vikram Uchida-Khanna
Version 2	Gina Readman Derek Chan
Version 3	Ryan Swanson Caroline Sniatyski

Additional Cast:

Exercising man	Adam Basanta
Exercising Woman	Jenny Chaput
Confrontational man	Neal Thomas

Crew:

Camera Operation/ Lighting	Dan Pierce
Boom/ Makeup	Reta Koropatnick
Boom/Catering	Neal Thomas
Boom Operator	Alexis Vanderveen
Set Design/Editing	Karilynn Ming Ho

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