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One or Two Things: Part Two

Claire Fontaine: Get Lost, South London Gallery, Saturday 28 June 7-9 pm

Get Lost, Claire Fontaine, courtesy the artist, Air de Paris & Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris

The main gallery of the SLG is blacked out. Two monitors on opposite sides of the space flash intermittently with stills of tanned and glamorous fashion models with 1980's hairdos - women on one screen and men on another. The two screens emit a dull flickering light by which the audience sees to move around. In the darkness, performers Douglas Park and Diletta Mansella are in no way distinguishable from anyone else. They are dressed casually in dark clothing and move slowly amongst the audience. As they move they repeat the phrase "I did love you once" into handheld microphones. The sounds of these amplified declarations of one-time love mingle closely with the voices of the visitors, who are scattered around the space chatting freely. There is no apparent pattern as to who these two are engaged with or why. At times, they make seemingly sincere and lingering eye contact with the assembled strangers, clearly addressing their 'I did love you once', to individual visitors. At other times, they can be spotted in the darkness, standing in an empty corner at the far side of the gallery pledging their 'I did love you once' to a blank wall. Meanwhile, outside in the foyer, the video 'Where are We' (2004) screens Tommy Lee and Pamela Anderson's infamous 'honeymoon' home-movie that leaked onto the internet in 1998. The video's visuals are blacked out, leaving only a blank screen with graphic subtitles and audio. With this, visitors are left to imagine what is clearly Lee and Anderson filming their own drug fuelled, porn style, nuptials in a moving car.

This is Get Lost by Claire Fontaine. The work is an examination of contemporary desire and liberal love within the context of capitalism; as such it is an exercise in intimacy feigned and at once rejected. The Shakespearean phrase 'I did love you once' is itself a complex rumination on love taken from Hamlet Act 3, Scene 1, who then later in the same act seemingly revokes his declaration of love with 'I loved you not'. But the real clue to the complex negation the work manifests is in its title: Get Lost simultaneously pulls its audience in only to push them away. The immersive environment, direct interactions and love utterings are engaging. But the monotony of the repeated phrase serves to distort meaning, leaving a hollow and insincere aftertaste. The empty gaze of the polished and perfectly re-touched fashion models on the monitor screens, further reinforce that Get Lost is a surface interaction on display. Add to this the apparent arbitrariness of Park and Mansella's interactions - they could equally love you or the wall- and we are left in no doubt as to the intended in/sincerity of Get Lost. In short, what is created is a false intimacy, closeness or love made into public spectacle and amplified out to a paying crowd.

Looking through the lens of capitalism, spectacle and fashion, Claire Fontaine defines contemporary liberal love as commercialised, moreover contrary, fickle and empty. However, the work in *Get Lost* maintains a tantalisingly ambiguous position towards this shallowness. In presenting what is essentially a non-screening of Anderson and Lee's sexual exploits 'Where we Are' leaves space for an alternate narrative to emerge; one that is not a banal critique of Western love in the form of a carnal, plastic Pammy and rock star Tommy Lee. The question that arises from between the blank screen and the subtitles is, bourgeois idealism, hepatitis infection, divorce and abuse allegations aside, who can say that Pammy and Tommy Lee's is not a genuinely contemporary model of true love? Folding such critical questions back into the material of the work – both in the performance and the video - is how *Get Lost* teeters on the brink of critique.

In the same way love in *Get Lost* is performed as both simulated and real, so too Claire Fontaine herself can be seen to be a contradiction. Despite being described as singular and female in literature, Claire Fontaine is not a woman, nor is she a person; she is a Paris based collective founded in 2004 who describes herself as 'a readymade artist born out of the standardisation of identities produced by contemporary capitalism'. Claire Fontaine then, is a brand - an artistic pseudonym; she is the sum of an unknown number of anonymous parts whose collective anonymity is an attempt to embody the crisis of the singular - including singular artistic genius - and to critique sovereignty, production and commercialism in the art world.

Claire's overt sloganeering on capitalism might be off-putting and heavy handed, thus leading to *Get Lost* being considered as banal agit-prop, but underneath the work itself manages to maintain its moral ambiguity and light touch. Conversely, Claire's strategy of collective anonymity, instead of serving as an embodiment of anti-capitalistic endeavour, actually increases the possibility of artistic production, participation and networks. The ongoing commodification of these artistic and cultural elements affords Claire the opportunity to capitalise on the same art world commercialism she purportedly rallies against. Claire's artist biography testifies to her success; it includes a string of shows in private, commercial galleries. Clearly, Claire Fontaine does not feel the need to be a poor artist struggling in her garret. This complicity with capitalism, when added with the subtle complexities of *Get Lost* as a piece of work, makes the artist's bald political rhetoric read as all too knowing - and as such, empty, cynical and deviant on an entirely different level.

It is this inherent contradiction, the push and pull between sincerity and rhetoric, and the interesting grey area in between - that is at the heart of *Get Lost*. The work is contrived and a prick tease; it attracts and repels simultaneously, its intentions are equally in/sincere and not. Nevertheless, the underlying point is that genuineness and authenticity are of no consequence in this liberal model of love, since they can never be distinguished from simulation, appropriation or mere performance, nor should they be. The fun is in the flirtation and the chase, and to embrace *Get Lost* without reservation is to be gloriously cuckolded.

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