

Reverting to Type

Marina Vishmidt

'people, behaviour, emotional stress... lifestyles, blonde hair...'

A computerised voice reads out a string of search-terms as the camera uncertainly pans over a faultless arrangement of folded towels. A young woman with a clouded expression dabs at her face and neck with a white towel under the watermark of Getty Images. Pleasant-looking young adults socialise in an expressionless new-build interior. The substrate of commercial communications is stock footage, an awareness that has been somewhat effaced by the growth of more conceptual or 'viral' modes of advertising which do not rely on sanitised aspirational fantasy for their key to consumer appeal. Yet it is in business-to-business communications that stock footage perhaps looms at its largest, and in the more mundane worlds of catalogue visuals, product advertising and home shopping networks – anywhere the generic is much in demand. There is something obscene about entering this innocuous world, a voyeurism of emptiness that feels salacious almost. The intensity of nothing to see here is such that it feels like something that shouldn't be seen. It's a feeling akin to the one experienced on hearing the statistic that the internet consists mostly of pornography (though there exist statistics making the counter-claim that the internet mostly consists of traffic in pictures of cute animals). Stock footage also deflects any interpretation not carried out in its own idiom. All the great analyses of commodity fetishism must submit to the deflationary force of stock footage – it's here that the social relations between objects and the objectified relations between people are demystified, if not cleanly executed. Human interaction is either at the behest of or a pretext for the celebration of a product, and as such gains a shimmer that comes from what we can term a frank depiction of the best of all possible worlds. The stock footage may be used internally or it might be customer-facing, but the point remains that an ironed-out and slightly improved reality is available in association with a product – which is not to distract from the status of this reality as a lifestyle product in its own right. The variety of search-terms

notwithstanding, human specificity is neither captured nor manufactured by the world of commercial communications, that tint of product choice that warms up a grey conformist status quo; if anything, the world of commercial communications breathes the indigence of its notion of human specificity under the rule of the commodity in every typical scenario and sub-niche it produces (for). However, if the stock footage industry can be divided into two genres – still and moving – these two genres create a welter of appropriative possibilities. The possibilities, however, pivot on a constraint: that the appropriation must keep its inspiration close, so close that the fold or cut of this extra mediation can be felt.

What kind of appropriation can happen to the genre of the generic? The imprimatur of authorship is redundant in the genre of stock footage; it is as vestigial, but socially effective, as the Getty Images watermark over a stock footage sequence. Yet when an artist engages in the artisanal production of the generic, as Rachel Reupke does, it is a perverse gesture – artistic crafting of a material that should be free of any sign of individuality, quite like the watermark of auteurship hunted down in B-movie westerns by intrepid French critics. In *10 Seconds or Greater*, the electro-R&B soundtrack, which comes in every so often in a wholly aleatory fashion, is also a study in this perversity; it was especially composed for the film, but sounds like it was mined from the Windows Vista sound effects menu. But when we go from genre to mode of production, the outlines blur: Reupke joins the ranks of many small entrepreneurs and hobby photographers who supply material to the trade.

Besides the tension between the authorial and industrial, cross-genre contamination also seems important here. It permeates *10 Seconds or Greater* from the start, a title which itself seems to hail from the image-bank search lexicon. The cross-genre counterpart to stock footage is the horror movie, as evoked by the lady with the troubled expression who appears as the only live-action element in the earlier *Containing Matters of no very peaceable Colour* (2009) and by the scene in this film where the three friends stop their playful banter that we cannot hear and gaze anxiously offscreen in the same direction before resuming their (ritualistic?) vegetable cutting. Given the anodyne spectra of what we see, it is hard to resist horror as a patient undertone.

Reupke has changed gears from processing ersatz-stock images she collaged from shopping sites, where

digital camera effects supplied the illusion of motion, to a live-action reconstruction of stock footage scripts. The tableaus (sitting on the couch looking at photographs with friends, exercising, using a laptop, sharing a drink) retain the illustrational quality of still stock footage. The free, indecisive pans in *10 Seconds or Greater* (also a convention of the genre) and loose editing, contrasted with the camera moving within the still image of before, are both contriving a movement where none exists: the footage consists entirely of pre-scripted micro-narratives, the barest pretext for live-action. Though the scenarios are scripted, the dialogue is improvised, and unheard – like a 'Big Brother' house without incident or characters. It is unclear what the scenarios are promoting, except an ideal merging of commodities and daily activity – the object here is beside the point. They are working hard at being themselves, and they make it look so easy. In fact, if we look upon stock footage as a typology of contemporary labour – and life – *10 Seconds or Greater* might be the training film.

Marina Vishmidt is a London-based writer who deals mainly with art, value, and the politics of work and abstraction. A Research Fellow at the Jan van Eyck Academie (2007–9), she has an MA in Modern European Philosophy and is currently doing a PhD at Queen Mary, University of London on speculation as a mode of production in art and capital. She is the co-editor of *Uncorporate Identity: Emblem and Void* (Lars Müller, 2010). She is a regular contributor to artists' publications, critical readers and journals such as *Mute*, *Texte zur Kunst*, and *Afterall*.



PREVIEW
FRIDAY 22 JANUARY
6-9PM

10 Seconds or Greater is a new video work by Rachel Reupke commissioned by Picture This and Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN) as part of the Bristol Mean Time Residency.

EVENT
THURSDAY 11 FEBRUARY
6.30-8.30PM

Rachel Reupke in conversation with writer Marina Vishmidt, including a screening of works that have influenced the making of *10 Seconds or Greater*. Drinks and refreshments provided.

Visit us

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Opening Times
Thursday - Saturday
12-5.30pm
Admission Free

Rachel Reupke

Rachel Reupke is a London-based artist with recent exhibitions including *Swing Gang*, Moot, Nottingham; *The Politics in the Room*, www.thepoliticsintheroom.org; *Cinema Sim*, Instituto Itaú Cultural, Sao Paulo and *Come and Go: Fiction and Reality*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, Lisbon. Her work has been screened at Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Tate Modern, London and film festivals including International Film Festival Rotterdam and International Short Film Festival Oberhausen.

Credits

Actors

Caroline Garland
Oliver Langdon
Joshua Sasse
Nadia Williams

Director of Photography

Nick Gordon-Smith

Camera Assistant

Ed Tucker

Set Design

Madeleine Rogers

Set Construction

Chris Barr

Hair And Make-Up

Tara O'Hare

Hair And Make-Up Assistant

Maxx Anderson

Production Assistant

Dulcilene Urbainski

Music

Matt and Simon Ward

10 Seconds or Greater is a Picture This production.

Picture This

Picture This works to develop artists' film and video through commissions and exhibitions. Our events, exhibitions and publications aim to contextualise current developments in contemporary art. The atelier, a 120m² space, is used as part studio, part gallery - in order to make interconnections between process, production, participation and audience.

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FLAMIN

The Film London Artists' Moving Image Network (FLAMIN) supports London-based artists working in moving image in all its forms - whether film, video, digital or new technologies and for installation, animation, cinema, gallery exhibition, the public realm or broadcast. FLAMIN helps artists engage with and benefit from the wide range of services, resources and opportunities that the capital has to offer.
www.flamin.filmlondon.org.uk

Bristol Mean Time

10 Seconds or Greater was produced as part of the Bristol Mean Time residency. This three month residency offers a London-based artist film-maker the chance to develop new moving image work in a unique supportive and creative environment. The selected artist is provided with access to full production, post-production and exhibition technology, a studio and office space at Picture This.

Designed by Fraser Mugeridge studio

10 Seconds or Greater Rachel Reupke

23 January - 6 March 2010

Picture This, Bristol
www.picture-this.org.uk

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