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TEMPLATE
—
Karolin Meunier

A MASK
A STENCIL
A MODEL
A TEMPLATE CAN BE AN OBJECT, A FUNCTION AND A TOOL. IT SHIFTS FROM THE
ANALOGUE TO THE DIGITAL, FROM ORIGINAL TO COPY AND BACK AGAIN. A TEMPLATE
IS MAINLY USABLE. IT'S A STRUCTURE AND A SIMPLIFICATION. IT IS MADE FOR REPETI-
TION, IT CALLS ON US TO APPLY IT. IT PROVIDES A FRAME AND PROMISES CONVERT-
IBILITY. IT IS READY TO BE USED BY EVERYONE ACCORDING TO THEIR PURPOSES.
SHAPED BY RESPONDING TO CERTAIN NEEDS, IT GENERALIZES AND ANTICIPATES THEM,
TRANSFORMING THEM INTO A STANDARD.

A REQUIREMENT
A TASK

CAN YOU SEE THE PATTERN?
(INVISIBLE)

CHOOSE ONE
USE IT
TO REPLICATE

REPLICATE
PICK A PATTERN

IT'S EASY
USE IT

NOT BEING IN USE,
THE TEMPLATE IS A DIAGRAM

A COLD POTENTIAL
A SAD VOID

The word template, originally describing a shaped piece of metal, wood, or other material used
as a pattern for processes such as painting, cutting out, or shaping, has recently gained a certain
popularity, and certainly gotten another twist in the context of software applications and social
media interfaces. It can be understood as a frame, a graphical mask, or a matrix, to be filled with
content and information, but also as something that serves as a model for others to apply. When I
now blend this term with the concept of persona, what springs to mind is their congruence in one
particular aspect. In ancient theatre persona is the name for typified masks used by actors. The
term does not only describe the distinction between a person and a character or their more or less
predetermined social role. Following the translation of the Latin *personare*, "to sound through",
the mask in the widest sense of being a second face — or skin — is also a tool to act with or
speak through. It is made in order to be repeatedly used and recognized, no matter how complex
its features are supposed to be or whether it would be activated by one particular person or by
an infinite number of users. It is made to establish a figure, a type, which can be identified as
holding a particular position in a larger structure, a story. One could say it's a form of abstraction
for the sake of reproduction.

In contrast to the idea of the originality of each person's performance, the character as template emphasizes a technical understanding of acting and the use of a persona on stage: the training, the labour of learning a pattern until it turns into a habit, the actual effort as much as the boredom to repeat the tricks and techniques for slipping into a role for an audience at a specific time and place. And yet, it is exactly this moment of constructedness that allows us to acknowledge the asymmetry of person and persona, of a mask and a body, of a technique and its actual effect. When a movement pattern is choreographed to trigger a certain emotion, the audience may realize the stereotyped quality of such movement or the artificiality of a character as such, and it would affect them nevertheless.

What's interesting here is not to measure the extent to which a character is set. It is rather a matter of observing and recognizing the different stages of preformation one encounters and traverses. I can think of the template — or the persona performed through the template — as a concrete, yet codified object, put into action for (and being in flux between) performer and spectator. It can be mixed up, reformatted, decomposed, it can be applied anonymously, it can grow into the skin. I can gradually or partially replace myself, rearrange the image of another self, and rely on the template as an agent to display whatever asymmetrical subjectivity it performs.

Karolin Meunier is an artist and writer living in Berlin. She currently teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Munich. Her videos, texts and performances focus on standardized and mediatized conditions of communication. Recent publications are the artist books *Return to Inquiry* (2012) and *Audition Sample* (2013) as well as several articles on the writer Chris Kraus.

Karolin Meunier is kunstenaar en schrijver en woont in Berlijn. Momenteel onderwijst zij aan de Akademie der Bildenden Künste in München. Haar films, teksten en performances zijn gericht op de gestandaardiseerde en gemediatiseerde aard van communicatie. Recent publiceerde Meunier de kunstenaarsboeken *Return to Inquiry* (2012) en *Audition Sample* (2013), en diverse artikelen over de schrijfster Chris Kraus.
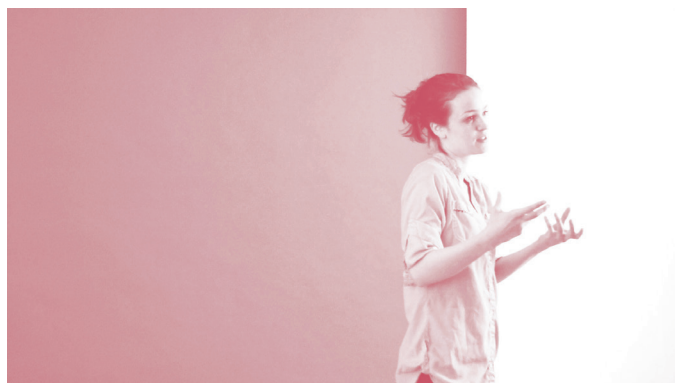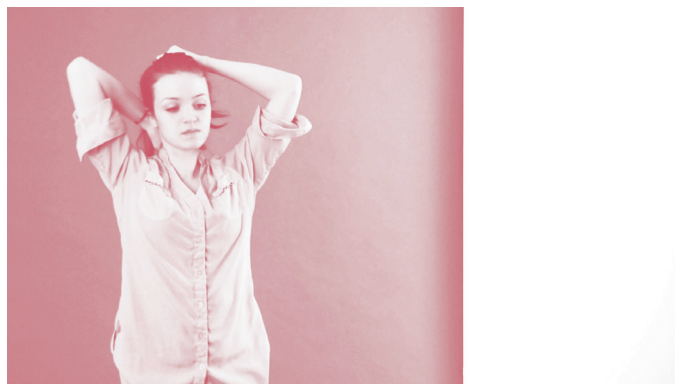
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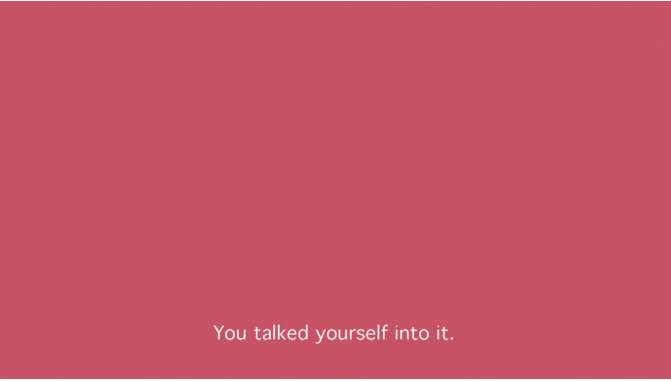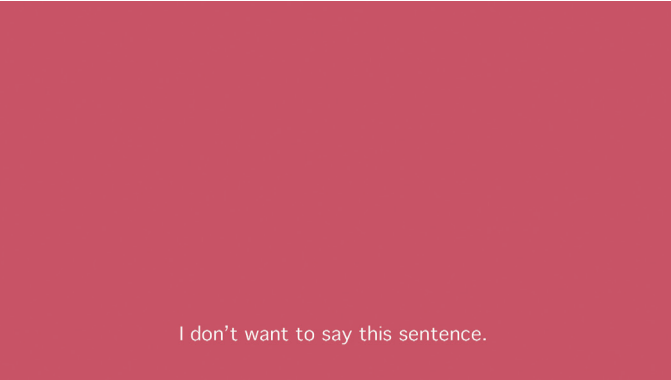
ANFANGSSZENE
—
Karolin Meunier
HD video, 7:45 min., 2015

ACTRESS / ACTRICE Ceci Chuh
CAMERA Sebastian Bodirsky, Janine Jembere
AUDIO RECORDING / GELUIDSOPNAME Manja Ebert
SOUND MASTERING / GELUIDSBEWERKING Jochen Jezussek

Opening Scene is part of a series of works in which I explore how access to individual experience is accomplished through cultural techniques, e.g. in interviews or confessional speech. The protagonist is young actress Ceci Chuh. I developed the interview during several sessions and used simple strategies such as repeating the same story twice and employing the artificial studio set-up to help her slip into charactter. In the last scene we practice an acting exercise together that entails quickly echoing the sentence of the other but changing the pronoun — a technique invented by Sanford Meisner intended to make the participants forget they are acting and appear more natural. Through the editing of the film the spoken text follows another rhythm, taking the space before and behind the camera into account when portraying a person or developing a character.

Openingsszène is onderdeel van een serie werken waarin ik onderzoek hoe toegang tot individuele ervaring wordt bewerkstelligd middels culturele technieken, bijvoorbeeld in interviews of bekentenissen. De hoofdrolspeler is een jonge actrice, Ceci Chuh. Ik werkte het interview uit in verscheidene sessies en gebruikte simpele strategieën, zoals het herhalen van hetzelfde verhaal en het benutten van de kunstmatige opzet van de studio, om haar te helpen een personage aan te nemen. In de laatste scène doen we samen een acteeroefening waarbij we snel elkaars zin herhalen maar daarbij het voornaamwoord veranderen — een techniek die is uitgevonden door Sanford Meisner met de bedoeling om de deelnemers te laten vergeten dat ze aan het acteren zijn en zo natuurlijker over te komen. Door de manier waarop de film gemonteerd is volgt de gesproken tekst een ander ritme en wordt de ruimte voor en achter de camera betrokken bij het uitbeelden en ontwikkelen van een personage

I don't want to say this sentence.

You talked me into it.

You talked me into it.

You talked yourself into it.

—Could you now tie back your hair? That's also something one has to do at castings.
Yes, but just for the photos, or if they want to see it.

—Did you learn a special technique for this?
Yes.
—And can you describe it?
Well, we had to write a story at home first, which fits the script. If it's a sad script, we have to write a sad story about something that happened in the past. Or a made-up story that is also sad. Or a story about someone you're not over yet. Before a casting, for example, I would tell you something sad and then of course something happens in me. And then I go in, and of course I'm already in the emotion. Later on we were given a text and we were told to go outside and practice speaking it on our own. And then we had to come in and read the text to our partner, using the feeling that we had built up outside. So, going back inside and reading it out loud.
—And did it work?
Yes.

And then, for example, when I want to convince a person, or get this person's attention, she said, I should imagine pulling this person towards me and to always play with this feeling.

Yes, maybe. Yes… I don't know.

Apparently I talk like this!

But I still have to… I have to intensify this feeling of… I really don't know yet, how I should do it

right. Because it would be like this: during the opening scene everything is dark behind me and I look directly into the camera and speak into the camera: "I had the wrong gender, the wrong background, the wrong age, and then…"

I mean, kissing someone, that's ok. Seducing… I've never seduced anyone in a film. I have done a kissing scene. I've even done a sex scene. I didn't want to do it at first, but I really liked the director and she really wanted me to do it. And then I thought, whatever, shut your eyes and get it over with, you can do it. It only takes a few minutes, then it's over. It was so embarrassing.

—But this is not all of the text that you've learned?
Well, I think so, almost. Perhaps not everything, I don't know which parts, but I think so…
But I can't remember I said this.

When I improvise…
What was it called again?
Which sentence?

The text, ok.

You're laughing.
You're laughing.
You're laughing.
You're laughing.
You're laughing.

You're laughing.
You're not laughing anymore.
You're not laughing anymore.
You're not laughing anymore.
There's nothing to laugh about.
There's nothing to laugh about.
You've made a mistake.
Now you've made a mistake.
You've made a mistake.
You've made a mistake.
You've made a mistake.
Yes, you've made a mistake.
Yes, you've made a mistake.
Yes, you've made a mistake.
You're pondering.
You're pondering.
You're pondering.
You're pondering.
You're pondering.
You're asking.
You're asking.
You're asking.
You're asking me.
You're asking me.
You're asking me.
You're asking me.
You're asking me.
You're asking me.
You're asking me.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
I am concentrating.
You're misspeaking.
You're misspeaking.
You're misspeaking.
I look at you.
I look at you.
You're insecure.
You're insecure.
You're also confused.
You are confused.
You're thinking.
You're thinking.
You're thinking.
You're thinking about the words.
You're thinking about the words.
You're thinking about the words.

You're thinking about the words.
You're thinking about the words.
You're still thinking about the words.
You are not thinking at all anymore?
You are not thinking at all anymore?
I don't believe you.
I don't believe you.
I don't believe you.
I don't believe you.
I don't believe you.
No, I don't believe you.
I do not want this role.
I do not want this role
I don't want to say this sentence.
I don't want to say this sentence.
I don't want to say this sentence.
I don't want to say this sentence.
I don't want to say this sentence.
You talked me into it.
You talked me into it.
You talked me into it.
You talked me into it.
You talked yourself into it?
You talked yourself into it.
You talked yourself into it.
You imagined something.

Well, I could also try another version now.