

'Introduction'

by Reynir Hutber

My memory is that the idea for 'And I' began sometime in 2013, but as 'And I' often suggests, memory can be a deceitful and illusive thing. I suggested to Marcia that she should write an autobiography as a container for her many humorous, irreverent and sometimes sad stories. I don't recall her liking this idea at all - maybe because the form of the biography, particularly the rock biography, is closely associated with the kind of well maintained myths that Marcia's stories sometimes cleverly unpick. As she says in 'And I', 'the truth is often that around which fiction hovers' and vice versa. Or maybe it was because the meaning of her stories is somehow bound up with the telling of them, shaped by the tense but codependent dynamic between listener and orator.

In my own work I have a recurring interest in playing with the expectations and conventions of performance documentation. Conversations around the notion of a biography had started me thinking about the kind of 'document' that might translate something of the commitment to risk, openness and experimentation that was evident in Marcia's live performances. I was also thinking about the concerns common to our formally very different practices. Among other things, I noticed a sensibility for the absurd and the tragic/comic as well as a recurring interest in endurance and risk taking. We also had a notable shared influence in the playwright, Samuel Beckett, and it is to his seminal play 'Not I' (1972) that 'And I' is transparently indebted. Revisiting Billie Whitelaw's performance in the 1973 film of 'Not I' (an intense monologue spat through harshly lit lips in an otherwise black frame) focused my thinking on the nuances of the incessant voice. I was struck by the way the meaning of Beckett's words were formed in the disintegrating rasp and rhythm of Whitelaw's voice.

I was also aware that Marcia had made long-durational performances: for example, 'The Omnibus' 2010 which was described as a 30-hour rumination on the subject of the last 30 years. It was with this in mind that I conceived the 'conditions of work' that would become 'And I'. My suggestion was to make an eight-hour, one-take film, that lasted the entire length of a gallery's typical opening hours. Marcia would speak without edits or sustained pauses. Her monologue, occasionally interrupted or prompted by me, would be improvised and entirely unrehearsed. The work would be an act of endurance for the performers and, potentially, the audience who would be free to leave and enter the gallery at will. The video, which is the length of a traditional working day, would raise the notion of thinking, speaking and remembering as forms of unacknowledged labour. In addition to the challenging time frame, there would be a number of rules for the production of the film. The first was that there would be no props and no notes; this was a deviation from Marcia's other long-durational works and seemed to heighten the sense of vulnerability even further. The second was that the film, when finished, could be played only once in any one location. Despite being a document, it would have the one-time-only quality of a performance and because of this, it would never be made available on DVD or online. The third was that the film would be shown publicly regardless of what either of us thought about it...It would be a cross-disciplinary collaboration undertaken without a safety net. It was a huge challenge to ask somebody to do and Marcia is the only artist I can think of capable of, let alone open to, accepting such an undertaking.

There was a great deal riding for us on a single day's work. The eventual shoot would be the culmination of months of discussion and research. If a light bulb blew or there was some other kind of technical failure, we would just keep rolling. There would be no second takes and no rehearsals. We finally arranged to film 'And I' in Matt's Gallery in London. It was the hottest day of the summer

and, as the sun beat down on East London, we prepared to enter a small sound-proof studio provided to us by 'X Marks the Bökship'. It would be another eight hours before the wooden doors would slide open again and we would stumble out into the gallery like astronauts returning from space. The sound-proof studio was a glittering black foam lined capsule with one small window behind which a yellow table lamp was placed on a ladder. The light dispersed warmly on the perspex and glowed like a distant planet. You can see this light reflected in Marcia's eyes throughout the film and it takes on rather a poetic dimension during the segments about death and passing-over. I thought about the 'non-place' of Beckett's desolate stage sets as well as the bleak notion of 'undisclosed locations' in relation to interrogations and imprisonment.

The film was shot with a very short focus range and in extreme close-up. It felt both intense and detached as the camera makes no effort to follow Marcia as her head drifts both out of frame and out of focus. This means that I occasionally interrupt Marcia to ask her to move back into position, breaking the spell of the rhapsodic speech and reminding the audience that they are watching an unedited film. In a way, the frame became like a cinematic head-brace – a less severe version of the contraption that notoriously held Billie Whitelaw's head in place during Beckett's theatrical production of 'Not I'. Similarly, Marcia's animated mouth slipping below the bottom screen seemed to allude to Winnie disappearing into the sand in 'Happy days' (1961). The title 'And I' was Marcia's suggestion. It seemed to refer to Beckett but also punningly to our shared influences (Andy) Kaufman and Warhol, but also brought to mind that many of Marcia's stories considered her in relation to some iconic other (Lang, Reed, Warhol). As I rewatched the film, it was only then that it occurred to me that I was the 'I' in this situation.

I was often told as a younger man that I was a good listener. Perhaps this is because I often feel there's nothing to be said, that many aspects of life are 'unspeakable'. During 'And I' I say 'precious little' but I try to say it kindly and attentively. In the film's brief credits Marcia is listed as 'Orator', and I, as 'Auditor'. The title Auditor suggested a sinisterly formal purpose to my presence. I was both a hidden listener and an 'official' witness to Marcia's testimony. The character of the Auditor was also borrowed from the stage directions of 'Not I' where he is described as 'a character of indeterminate sex', an 'intense listener' who was intended to stand silently at the corner of the stage. It is said that when Beckett came to be involved in staging the play, he found that he was unable to place the Auditor in a stage position that pleased him, and consequently allowed the character to be omitted. The notion of the 'Auditor' as both present and absent seemed to reverberate with an aspect of my own practice where I manipulate digital video to overlay images of myself into camera relays. In these works I am a digital ghost, both present and removed from my apparent environment. In the case of 'And I', I disappear behind the camera and can only be located through my voice. In this instance I seem to acquire power through my presence outside of the frame, an author who has granted himself the privilege of invisibility.

Another formative influence on this project was Barbet Shroader's the 'Bukowski Tapes' (1987), a series of fifty-two filmed interviews with the notorious author and poet, Charles Bukowski. I was interested by the idea of persona as performance and also by Shroader's sharp strange prompts from behind the lens: 'You don't like nature?'. A less pronounced influence were Andy Warhol's infamous screen tests. These intrusive films of often motionless subjects blurred the distinction between a film and a photograph and were generally harshly lit, closely framed and extended over an uncomfortable period of time. Marcia's observations and anecdotes about the film's influences are threaded through her

monologue and in this way 'And I' continually reflects of it's own history and development.

Eight hours may be a long time for a film but it is a very short time to narrate the many stories of a life. And although the content of the film was never intended to be a literal substitute for a biography, as Marcia recalls events and observations from different eras of her life it may start to feel like one. At times, particularly in the opening hour, Marcia appears to be channelling a confident performance persona skilfully weaving together well-rehearsed stories and teasing my dissonant interventions. As the film progresses, the monologue turns darker and more fragmented and it's interesting how the memories emerge, linked blurringly to each other like images in a crystal ball. By the middle of the film we are discussing topics such as madness, death 'Not long now...and I don't mean the film' and social alienation. And it is on this last topic where she begins to sound like the tutor I remember from many years ago. She speaks passionately about the potential of performance art to create a temporary break (a wisecrack) in the ubiquitous drone of anxiety, irony and cynicism that often feels like a regulating theme in contemporary culture. It is in these moments where her long-term interest in the strategies of punk and DIY are most evident.

I expect we both have mixed feelings about the film and I don't think either of us find it easy to watch and relive. I do like the curious idea that we may still be the only two people who have witnessed every moment of the film in a single sitting; even it's most ardent fans have had to leave for lunch and bathroom breaks. In the aftermath of filming, Marcia was frustrated that she hadn't said all the things she would have ideally liked to...perhaps she might need to write that biography after all.