

of the gallery. As the woman and man in the video take turns rehearsing their parts, gallery visitors assume the critical role of the spectating audience for the actors on screen. However, rather than fostering “passive reception and unqualified malleability,” the installation activates spectatorship by destabilizing the traditional relationship between viewer and viewed within the gallery setting. The simulation of the material conditions of the rehearsal room within the gallery offers the opportunity for the audience to assume the bodily position of the actors on the screen, and thereby opens the possibility for simultaneous first-hand and second-hand experience of the rehearsal. The conception of the audience as actor, repeated and rehearsed in the video, is further underscored in the spatial dynamics of the gallery, where the spectators on the benches are viewed as an integral part of the installation itself and therefore an object to be scrutinized. The triangulation of rehearsal, performance, and gallery display in Pahapill’s installation prompts a reflection on the co-dependence of art and viewers and calls into question the structures that shape and sustain contemporary art discourse and practice.

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A Working Script in Shorthand

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A Working Script in Shorthand

Leigh-Ann Pahapill

¹“Situation,” in Pahapill’s work, refers both to the state or condition (i.e. set of circumstances) constructed for viewers and to the emplacement of the viewer within the space of the gallery (i.e. Late Middle English sense of the word *situare*, “to place”).

² Martin Meisel, *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance* (2007).

³ Meisel, *How Plays Work*, 97

The Role of the Audience in Leigh-Ann Pahapill's *A Working Script in Shorthand*

A Working Script in Shorthand (2013) stages an immersive situation to consider the role of the audience in the completion of the work of art within the gallery.¹ Two found benches, placed parallel to one another, invite spectators to sit and watch the single-channel video projected on the white wall before them. The video features a white-walled room very similar to the one in which the gallery visitors find themselves. Two benches, placed in alignment with the real benches in the gallery, are centered within the frame of the camera and the space of the room. A microphone is placed on a stand before the benches and a power cord snakes off to the viewer's left. A woman and man walk into the room, pick up a pile of loose sheets of paper, and sit down facing the audience. The woman announces, "The role of the audience," and then begins to read from the script.

Taken from Martin Meisel's critical analysis of the role of the spectator in theater, the script articulates in both academic prose and dramatic re-enactment the essential collaboration that must take place between authors/directors and their audiences in any performance.² As Meisel argues, and the female actor in the video rehearses,

Co-opting his audience in some fashion is the job of the actor, director, and in the first instance the author, even if that means no more than taking quick advantage of what the audience brings to the play: readiness to pay attention and a set of latent expectations. Attention can be ripened into engagement with what is going forward on the stage. And expectations can be refashioned from what is brought to the occasion as the action unfolds. The script may be understood as a programme for creating and managing such expectations, and for managing sympathy, antipathy, curiosity... all that goes into response. Its working premise, acknowledged or not, must be that every play aimed at performance is a transaction between stage and audience. 'Transaction,' however, implies a two-way street, rather than passive reception and unqualified malleability. It means that in every performance the audience has a role to play.³

Pahapill's installation presupposes a live, spectating audience as a literal presence within the gallery and enfolds this audience into its design. The careful framing of the camera presents the rehearsal space within the video as an extension of the real space

