

Monologues:

Julia Scher: *No, I Never Lip-Sync'd* (2004)

Moyra Davey: *Fifty Minutes* (2006)

Early on from its emergence in the mid-1960s, video became an exemplary do-it-yourself enterprise, with the producer routinely also serving as the on-camera subject – video as the perfect medium for autobiographical expression. That's led some critics to note the medium's inherent 'narcissism,' particularly as one of the genres to emerge fully-born within the early video canon (as it did not, with anywhere near the same breadth or force, within experimental film), and to persist to this day, was the monologue.

An exclusionary form of linguistic spectacle, the video monologue can function, depending on the will of its producer, variously as a letter, or a confession, or a personal essay, or simply as visual index, a kind of mirror, for the speaker/producer to verify her or his own existence in the face of those who would fail to acknowledge that existence. The two first-person commentaries brought together for this program represent forcefully different strategies and tones deployed toward the shared goal of producing self-portraiture through a confession of words.

In Julia Scher's *No, I Never Lip-Sync'd*, those words are set to music – specifically, the lyrics from a cluster of more or less cloying power ballads from roughly 1986 to 1993, the years during which we see the artist videotaping her own routine of performing for herself and for her tripod-mounted camera. Harnessing the awesome emotional power of popular music (then as now a guilty pleasure, the dross of AM radio never anything but the subject of critical contempt from its brainless goal of mere global domination), Scher surrenders herself to its sentiments of longing, passion, romantic hope and despair, cutting out the middlemen (the performers actually singing the songs) to become one as emphatically and ecstatically as she can with the words she's miming and with the emotional range they chart. As a performance, it's at once heart-felt and contrived in its self-regard, functioning when played back for and by her as an episode of therapeutic expression, her performing body being drafted to give voice to sentiments she'd otherwise find inexpressible, and the aspired state of emotional authenticity being paradoxically won only by forceful abduction of someone else's rendition of that as dredged from the deep shallows of popular song.

No less performed despite the conversational tone, Moyra Davey's *Fifty Minutes* is a fully scripted narrative chronicling, with many discursive detours, her six-plus years in psychoanalysis, a regimen during which she moved from Brooklyn to Hoboken to Manhattan, had her first child, experienced the events of September 11, 2001, and continued her artistic practice as a still photographer. Though consistently mindful that she's performing her own words for the camera, Davey emulates no persona but her own, framed within her domestic enclaves, ones in which such overlooked objects as the refrigerator and dust-gathering books preside as ethically declarative decor (not to mention how that domestic mix is amplified by the cohabiting

presences of husband, son, and dog, glimpsed or reflected in peripheral zones). Resolutely unshowy, Davey's confessions are grounded within the detritus of urban confinement (the rare excursion beyond those walls is tellingly set in a junk shop), just as the pull of her recollected narrative defaults to the site of her psychoanalyst's dubiously decorated office, no space ultimately, it seems, for retrieval of the buried secrets of the inner life. As she recounts it, Davey's engagement with psychoanalysis seemed from the go a wary alternation between duty and dread – but duty to whom? dread of what?: those targets would shift as time itself would. If nothing else, her practicum in the examined life, apportioned in countless fifty minute sessions spent in the company of a stranger looming stranger every week (as though the natural processes by which habit and familiarity are formed had been running in reverse, perpetually renewed estrangement annihilating in advance any future solace of nostalgia or any hope that self-discovery had to be a forward-seeming journey) was able to find a resolution – temporary, provisional, subject to massive revision, and conditionally incomplete – in the form to which she's compressed it in **Fifty Minutes**.

Julia Scher is well-known for her video and surveillance-based installations; her **Occupational Placement** (1989) was the first media installation commissioned by the Wexner Center. She currently lives and teaches in Cologne, Germany. **No, I Never Lip-Sync'd** was post-produced in the Wexner's Art and Technology studio.

Moyra Davey is a visual artist and writer based in New York. She edited **Mother Reader**, an anthology of texts on motherhood that appeared in 2001, and curated the group show, **Reality/Play**, at Orchard Gallery in New York earlier this year. She teaches at the International Center of Photography, and elsewhere, and will have an exhibition of her photographs at Harvard University's Fogg Art Museum in 2008.