

[00:00:04] **ANN BUTLER**

Good evening, everyone. Welcome to our next Speaker Series event. I'm Ann Butler, director of the Library and the Archives here at the Center for Curatorial Studies. It's nice to see such a good crowd. We're very fortunate tonight to have Mike Sperlinger here as guest speaker. Mike is a writer and a curator, and currently professor of writing at the Oslo Academy of Fine Art. A full bio is available through the announcement for this event. What I'd like to do is to give you a condensed bio, and then some comments to introduce tonight's talk. Mike Sperlinger has written numerous catalog texts for artists, and has contributed to many art publications, including *Afterall* and *Texte Zur Kunst*. He's the editor of *Afterthought: New Writing on Conceptual Art*, published in 2005, and *Here is Information. Mobilise: Selected Writings by Ian White*, published in 2016. Recent curatorial projects include the exhibition *Counterimaginaries* from Tromsø Center for Contemporary Art 2023, the screening series "The Deviant Product," presented in various cities in Norway in 2022, and a series of exhibitions with the late German artist Marianne Wex, who we were speaking about during lunch. Very interesting work. He's founder and director of Prisms, a new organization for fostering alternative film cultures in Scandinavia and beyond.

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Previously, he worked for more than a decade as assistant director of Lux, a London-based organization for artists working with the moving image, which he co-founded, and has subsequently been the producer on several films by visual artists. Mike Sperlinger is also the current chair and one of the co-founders of the artistic estate of Ian White, a small nonprofit association based in Norway. Founded in 2019 and run by a volunteer board, the estate aims to make Ian White's artistic legacy available to new audiences. And it is thanks to the estate, and to Lauren Cornell and Matt Wolfe, that the Ian White Papers were generously donated to CCS Bard in 2019. So, the Ian White Papers are part of the CCS Bard Archives, a collecting repository that acquires, preserves, and provides access to primary materials documenting the history of the contemporary arts, and the institutions and practices of exhibition making from the

1960s to the present. Together, the CCS Bard Library and Archives support research by a wide range of constituencies on the Bard College campus, as well as researchers, curators and international scholars whose work relies on access to unique primary materials. The Ian White Papers not only reflect White's expansive artistic and curatorial legacy, but also his ambivalent relationship with documentation as a stand-in for performance based works.

[00:03:31] **ANN BUTLER**

This archival collection makes a unique contribution to our research holdings through its critical engagement with the moving image and performance within a curatorial frame. On a personal note, I regret not having had the chance to meet Ian White in person, as I distinctly remember the first time I encountered his work. In 1998, I was working as an archivist, processing the film and video elements in the David Wojnarowicz papers at the Fales Library and Special Collections at NYU, and Ian was one of the early scholars and curators given access to these materials after I processed them. And in 2002, he wrote an exceptional piece, titled "Film Art Life (Death, Sex, Social History): David Wojnarowicz." I remember being struck by the sheer lucidity of his observations about this archival material I had grown to deeply appreciate through my work with it. And so, it's an honor and a great privilege to have Mike Sperlinger here to talk about the artistic legacy of Ian White. So please join me in welcoming Mike.

[00:04:55] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Thank you so much, Ann. And I really have to start by saying a huge, very heartfelt thank you, which you've heard already today, but it's really very sincere. It means so much to me, and not just to me, but to a lot of other people who worked very closely with Ian. To see the papers here is incredible. The care, and the kind of sensitivity, that you, and also Hannah Mandel, who can't be here tonight, have put into the accessioning of Ian into this incredible collection is just amazingly meaningful to me. So I want to say that, and I also want to say a big thank you to Lauren, who also can't be here, Lauren Cornell. We all know Lauren. I met Lauren at the same time as I met Ian.

We were all working together at the Lux Cinema, as it was then, around 1999 in London. And I know Ian meant and means a lot to Lauren and she was also very instrumental in the materials coming here and it means a lot to her. And I know she would like to kind of invite engagement with those materials and she'd love to talk to people about it, so she send her apologies.

[00:05:58] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

But, yeah, again, a big thank you to Lauren. What I'm going to try to do is... It's kind of difficult. I want to kind of introduce Ian in this material. Ian is/was quite complicated as a figure and it's going to be quite difficult to do that. So, what I'd like to try and do is introduce him as a set of problems or questions. And I think, in a way, for me, there's a kind of paradoxical quality which Ann touched on to the materials in the archive, which is, their value I think is not self evident. If anything, to treat them as being self-evidently interesting would be to miss what's interesting about them. I'm going to try and kind of explain, hopefully a little bit what I mean by that and what might be their potential, what I think does make them valuable. And I want to do that, like I say, honoring a little bit the kind of difficult spirit of Ian. When I was kind of going through his materials quite shortly after he died in 2013, I found this notebook with this amazing phrase: "anything made is a lie. I want to be a problem, a generous snare." I think we should kind of hold on to that sense of him as a kind of trap into which we might willingly or unwillingly fall.

[00:07:24] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

And I want to try and think about his work, both artistic and curatorial, through this concept of liveness, which is a concept which has a kind of face value we might think we understand, but actually, in terms of especially the way it develops in his later writing, I think it's quite complex and paradoxical, and it might help us to think about the status of the archive too. Again, it was really nice that you mentioned, Ann, this kind of wonderful text he wrote—which is in the collection of his writings, which is in the library—about David Wojnarowicz, because Ian was very sensitive to the problem of artist biographies, and I'm not going to sort of dwell so much on his biography now. I

can sort of say that he was an artist, a curator, a writer and a teacher and those things tended to kind of bleed into each other. He was very active in London from the late 90s onwards, and then increasingly from 2009, he was partly based in Berlin and was and was very active there. But he also did quite a lot in New York and he worked very collaboratively.

[00:08:35] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So, I collaborated with him on different things, mostly curatorial, from around 1999. But he worked very intensely, particularly with an artist some of you will know called Jimmy Robert, who's done quite a lot in in the States, but also with N. Hedditch, who is also currently based in New York, and Every Ocean Hughes, who again, might be more familiar to many of you. And he worked also kind of intensely, and ambivalently, with a number of institutions, particularly the Horse Hospital, which is a kind of alternative venue in London; Lux, also in London; and the Kino Arsenal in Berlin, as well as the Oberhausen Short Film Festival. And all of those sort of produced different curatorial artistic projects, like I say, often with some element of kind of antagonistic negotiation on his part. So what I'm going to try and do is to kind of briefly introduce you to his work through looking at one artwork in a bit more detail, a piece called *Black Flags*, and touch on some of his writings, and also touch on a couple of curatorial projects. And I'll very, very briefly talk also about an exhibition that I co-curated at Camden Art Centre, a kind of retrospective of Ian's own art practice in 2018, and some of the problems that that sort of generated.

[00:09:53] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

The title of the talk was "I Am Not an Archive: Ian White and Liveness." This idea of "I Am Not an Archive," comes from the title of an essay that Ian wrote. I think as a starting point, I think that for me is maybe the most interesting question in relation to the materials here. So, Ian would declaim something like, "I am not an archive," and yet he was a meticulous archivist of his own practice. Right from even in his school days. So after he died, going through his materials, he'd really kept printed out emails from

Dennis Cooper in the '90s, that kind of thing, really. So what I'd like to think about is, what is the status of those and what does this concept of liveness do to this idea of being or not being an archive?

[00:10:40] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

And I think, I just thought I could mention I had a really interesting conversation with Marina today about the Bettina show—I think I got that the right way around. And, we were talking about Bettina's work as this series of unstable objects. We had a really fascinating conversation about all of the, sort of, decisions and questions of license and authorship involved in putting on a show like this. It really resonated for me, I think I think there'll be a lot of connections in terms of some of the other shows here also, and Ian's work.

[00:11:13] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So, *Black Flags*. *Black Flags* was a performance that... Ian was primarily a performer as an artist. And I would say his kind of most iconic works—if any of them are iconic—is a trilogy called *IBIZA: A reading for 'The Flicker,' Black Flags, and Democracy*, which he did in the 2000s, late 2000s. *Black Flags* was first performed at Tate Modern. And, I thought maybe to start, I could just read you this epigraph to the script for *Black Flags*. So, this doesn't appear in the performance itself, but this is in the printed version, which, again, you can see in the archive. I'll just read it.

[00:12:00] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

"He uncapped a black marker, and, rings clacking, made a quick sketch on a pad in front of him. Lagerfeld ripped the drawing from the pad, crushed it in his hands, and tossed it into a large wicker hamper. I throw everything away, he declared. I keep no archives of my own. No sketches, no photos, no clothes, nothing I'm supposed to do, I'm not supposed to remember." So this was a quotation from the notorious fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld from, like, a newspaper article that Ian had obviously got very preoccupied with. He never sort of spoke explicitly about why this was the epigraph to

the performance, but I'd like to come back and sort of touch on what it might be doing there.

[00:12:42] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Ian's work is very dense. It's quite hard to, kind of, *précis*. So I thought, maybe I can just show you the first three minutes of the Tate Modern documentation of *Black Flags*, and that's going to give you maybe a little bit of a flavor of him and what the work is all about.

[VIDEO PLAYS]

[00:16:12] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Okay, I'm going to stop it there. I should say that the whole of this documentation is actually available on the Ian White estate website. So if you're interested, the whole thing is about half an hour. What I want to do is, I'd like to kind of just try and give you a bit of a sense of what the rest of this performance is about, and then kind of unfold this question a bit about liveness. So, like all of Ian's work, it involves basically, a kind of bringing together of different elements, often kind of ready-made. So as he talks about, it's based on this interview that he actually did with the Curator of Interpretation at Tate. You saw a little clip, in the background of the slideshow which is playing, which I can actually play, I think, a bit of for you now.

[00:17:07] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So basically, the slideshow that's playing behind him for most of the performance are these kind of images from his own notebooks, a couple of which you can find in the archive here, of blacked out pages. There's also the fanfares, which you could hear, which are these kind of recorded trumpet fanfares. And, as the script progresses, there's a sense that he's just kind of repeating things that this curator said to him. But obviously, sometimes it's in the spirit of just sort of giving us literal information. So he tells us, for example, about the font size that you're supposed to have for wall text, that kind of

thing. But it also becomes increasingly skeptical, I think. And there's a really extraordinary passage that I can maybe... yeah, so there's this moment kind of towards the end, where, I'll just read it. "Reading is access and inscription, indivisibly point of entry and imposition. Reading is a trap. Reading is awaiting zero. Access is granted as the unique imposition of authority. The being allowed in is being inscribed upon. Authority, access. A door is opened as a law is written, and our attraction to it is nothing less than the desire for an experience which we cannot feel, and it is overwhelming." What happens at this point in the performance is kind of even stranger, which is that the PowerPoint disappears, and this other video materializes, which I'm just going to play you, like, 20 seconds off, just to give you a sense of it.

[VIDEO PLAYS].

[00:19:40] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Okay, it sort of carries on in this vein. I mean, what we're looking at is a guy, essentially in Ian's apartment, who had a pickpocket fetish. So his sexual kick was to go to people's houses and have them pickpocket him. And at this point, the performance sort of becomes increasingly strange, and the script starts to fracture. And again, it's kind of impossible to précis everything that happens, but it's something about the narrative, and the kind of narrative of mediation and interpretation becomes very odd. I want to just propose a kind of provisional way to think about some of what might be happening in this piece. Again, it's a little bit difficult, I understand, when you haven't seen it. But, I think we need to understand it as a collage, firstly, in a way---that one of the things that Ian was doing, also in his curatorial work, was trying to create these kinds of montage where a kind of authoritative narration of exactly what the connections were was missing. So, the performance echoes a kind of lecture, but there's no explanation to hold together all the elements. And I think, in terms of this kind of strange pickpocket video, I think there's a kind of potential parallel between what's going on in the video and Ian's sense of what the Curator of Interpretation is arguing for, which is the idea of an experience we cannot feel.

[00:21:12] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So, I think what Ian, in a way, is, you can sense, frustrated with in this kind of Tate Curator of Interpretation idea, is the idea that the wall text should sort of be there to guide you, but it should be very discreet. Like, the viewers should almost not notice that this work is being framed for them. And, I think Ian found that very paradoxical in the same way that he found the idea of wanting to have an experience you can't feel, in this kind of fetishist, kind of interesting, but also very strange. And he was, I think, in a way, trying to draw a parallel, and to ask, in a way, what kinds of fetishism are involved in the museum's presentation of works. But I think maybe it's important just to note at this point in terms of the Lagerfeld quote, that I think the Lagerfeld quote is there because, in a sense, Ian doesn't want to replace one fetish with another. I think he also feels that this Lagerfeld idea of just, "I'm the protein artist. I'm here to make, I'm not here to remember. Nothing needs to be preserved," I think he recognizes that's equally a fantasy and a fetish, in a way, of immediacy.

[00:22:11] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So, in a sense, where does that leave us? It's not so clear. In a way, we're kind of trapped between these two fetishistic visions. And I think what's important maybe, is that liveness, if we're gonna think about this idea of liveness, is not going to be just easily resolved by thinking about the ephemeral or the transitory, the thing that escapes being captured by the archive. That's not what it's about. I want to just sort of point, move it a little more quickly, and just try and bring out maybe some of the other aspects of this idea of liveness, which is important to his artistic practice, but which I think I can hopefully also show will be important to the idea of curation.

[00:22:49] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So, one very important aspect of it is, liveness for him, is not counterintuitively about the kind of presence, the immediate presence of the performer. So, this is from a kind of important late text of his. Very strange, fascinating text, called "Performer, Audience,

Mirror: Cinema, Theater and the Idea of the Live," which again is in the collection of his writings, *Here is Information. Mobilise*. This is the first few sentences. "The body is a false promise. To be lifelike is not to live. Or, live-ness, liveness, is not lifelikeness. Just because somebody is actually there, a body on a stage, is no more of a guarantee that what we are seeing is categorically *live*, than an emotion portrayed by an actor on the screen is an indication that something was actually felt, even though we might think they are these things. Cinema is not live by definition. The same film is played every time. A theater play might require bodies, but the actor is as controlled by the mechanization of rehearsal and repetition as the moving image. Even if it is not seen as such, the same hand moves to the same place at the same angle, through the same axis at every performance."

[00:24:06] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So, this I think is really central to understanding what liveness means to Ian. It's really not that, in a way, what he thinks is that what we look for when we look for live art is this immediacy, this kind of presence of completion. And he thinks, in a way, that's—like he says—a false promise. And it's somehow in this idea that every performance, however seemingly improvised, always has some element, if you like, of scripting and potential repeatability. And in that sense, it's like a film. It's no more live than a film. There was an anecdote that he really loved, which was about how the theater director Robert Wilson went to see the same Marlene Dietrich live stage play 17 times. And, he was so obsessed with her performance, and particularly the way in which apparently at exactly the same moment in the play every night, she would manage to wipe away a single tear. And he thought, I think for Ian, that's precisely this kind of false promise of liveness.

[00:25:05] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

I think he says towards the end of that, or a bit later in the same text, "Performer, Audience, Mirror," that, "liveness could be further described both as, and not only as, the product of an extraordinary kind of negation." And I think, in a way, this is again

really important to understand what liveness meant. Liveness was somehow about the negation, for Ian, of all these false promises. So the false promise of the kind of live presence of the performer, but also, for example, all the promises or assumptions built into a space, like this. The kind of assumptions of an auditorium space, particularly for Ian, or a cinema space. Liveness, for him, was about the negation of our routine, kind of semi-conscious assumptions, of what is it that's actually happening here in this room?

[00:25:54] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

And I think that's connected for him to a certain kind of withdrawal. And it's maybe clear in some of the other examples, but there was a sense in which, sometimes he would literally withdraw. So, in the performance piece, *Democracy*, would end with him actually sort of leaving the space. But I think more generally, there was the sense of a withdrawal of the single reassuring center of authority, either artistic or curatorial, which is supposed to kind of hold everything together. So the audience realizes it's left holding in its hands all these pieces and they're the ones that are going to have to put them together.

[00:26:29] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

I think maybe just one last thought about the documentation which I showed you from Tate, which is kind of important in thinking about this, that Ian actually really hated the documentation that I've shown you of this performance. Because, he didn't want the performance documentation of his works to be edited in the way that they were, where it was cutting between the screen---he wanted it to have the sense of the point of view of the audience. And I think one of the things that's most interesting and difficult for me, as working with the documentation of his work, is that often audibility is a problem, right, because it's the sound quality when you've got like a wind machine, but often also the performances always have these kinds of interference. And when you're in an audience like this, you can actually make choices. You can tune in or out, or there'll be differences in different parts of the audience of what's audible and what's not. Whereas, everything is decided for you in a recording by the editor, in a way, or by

the sound recordist. So that's, in a way, one of the problems, that I think some of the impact of the agency of the audience is lost when it comes to the documentation of these performances. So I end up showing this one where it's at least possible to hear what he's saying.

[00:27:38] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

I want to move on. I want to just talk about, kind of briefly, a couple of curatorial projects, to try and give you a little bit of a sense of what this meant, curatorially. The curatorial work, especially, is kind of quite difficult to précis. So I'm going to talk about one to begin with, which is what's called *Kinomuseum*, which is quite complex, but the second one, hopefully, is a bit easier to kind of illustrate.

[00:28:10] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So actually, what I will do, I'm going to point you to the website. So there's a page on the website about this *Kinomuseum* project. So, *Kinomuseum* was a special program for the Oberhausen Short Film Festival in Germany in 2007. Oberhausen is a very important festival that's been going for over 50 years, and every year they ask one curator to do a special program. So, most of the festival is competition for new films, but the special programs are like a carte blanche where people show historical work as well. Ian was invited to the special program; *Kinomuseum* was the result. And I think, of all his curatorial projects, it's had the most impact. It had a huge impact on everyone who was there, which I wasn't actually, but it also has had a very huge impact since. It's a kind of continuing reference point for people. Basically, I'll show you these images very quickly. This is the audience at one of the events in the cinema; this is another audience watching one of the programs; panel discussion; this is Ian with Mark Leckey; into one of the events; and AA Bronson; and this is a kind of extraordinary dinner where you've got Morgan Fisher, AA Bronson, Mary Kelly, Emily Wardill, and a lot of the participants of the program.

[00:29:25] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Basically, Ian curated five programs himself, and he also delegated five programs. So, Mary Kelly, the artist; AA Bronson; Mark Leckey, also an artist; and also two curators, Achim Borchardt-Hume and Emily Pethick, each curated one program. So there were ten in total. There's all the information about all these programs on the website. Like I said, it's sort of too much to go into all of them.

[00:29:47] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

What I thought might be interesting would be just to very briefly talk to you about two of Ian's programs. So "The American Wing" was a program that I know a lot of people sort of talked about after the festival, there were included three films. So the first film was this completely, completely obscure thing that he'd found in the archive of the Metropolitan Museum called *The American Wing*, from 1935. Silent, 45 minutes. Basically, it was a filmed version of the collection designed to be kind of sent out to the provinces. This was the Met's gift to all of the flyover people. Ian had a kind of nice description of it from the catalog, which I can just read. "This is not so much a work of cinema as film affecting museological categorization. It chronologically documents the reconstructed period rooms of the museum's American Wing. And, in a final virtuoso ten minutes, depicts individual silverware objects. The methodical camera shows a fixed view of each room, slowly pans from left to right, and stops. Each object is displayed on a black velvet turntable against the black velvet ground, is stationary, rotates once, and is stationary again. Each shot is introduced by an intertitle, that authorizes—gives an historical account of—each room, its furniture, notable details. The occasional dissonance between what is written and what is photographed, is in itself an unwitting essay on the museum's illusion of authority." So it's like, again, I haven't seen this, but I think we can kind of imagine a little bit of this idea of this film that was really never designed to be shown in the cinema, that's like a document of silverware from the Met's American Collection, in silence, in the cinema.

[00:31:47] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

After that, he showed this piece by Seth Price, called Digital Editions, which some of you might know, which again, you can see online, this you can actually watch, but it's a kind of cut up of his own works. It's like little slices of his different works, put together, as a kind of work in itself, and also a catalog of his other works. And then the last film in the program, there's a little extract online. This is *Skin Film*, by Emma Hart. Basically, what she did was, she applied sellotape to the whole of her body, tore it off, and then put the resulting tape with the skin still attached onto a 60 mill. film strip. So basically, you were looking at the kind of projection of her skin in a kind of slightly stand, brakhage-like way. And the film would last, in a way, as long as a strip of the whole surface area of her body lasted. And, the film would deteriorate each time it was shown. So, it's a very strange combination of things together in the space. And, none of which, in a way, you would expect to encounter, I think, in a cinema situation.

[00:33:01] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

I mean, Seth Price is included, and so it's transplanted somewhat from the art world---it's a kind of self-reflective work about the art market, in a way. And so this whole *Kinomuseum* project was about trying to think speculatively about the kind of reciprocal relationship between the museum as a repository, as an archive, and the cinema space as a space of exhibition for artists, and how they inform each other.

[00:33:36] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

I'll read you this this quotation from the catalog again. So what he proposed, what this idea of the *Kinomuseum* was for him, was a "differentiated cinema, a museum based on the principles of impermanence, immediacy, the temporal, and the temporary, manifested in the minds of an audience who experience it in the space and time of the auditorium that is the museum's permutating exhibition hall, and who are its active, defining agent." So again, that idea that the audience, in a way, was going to have to be the agent of this museum. That the *Kinomuseum* was not going to be this repository, that kind of, presented you things on the platter. The *Kinomuseum* was a space in which

the audience was going to have to kind of be the active agent. Maybe, in a sense, the kind of ultimate *Kinomuseum* work, which was part of another program, was a work called *Screening Room*, by Morgan Fischer, which again, some people might know. *Screening Room*, a film by Morgan Fischer, who's an artist and an experimental filmmaker, it's a very strange film, it's a single film, but it only exists in different states which have to be shown site-specifically. So, it's a film which can only be shown in the cinema where it was made. So, it's kind of a score, basically.

[00:35:01] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So it's a six minute film, in which the camera comes from somewhere outside the cinema, into the cinema space, into the actual screening room, and it then zooms onto the screen. So, the last couple of minutes of the film are just the zoom, until the image of the screen becomes the same size as the screen that you're watching on. So, it's an extremely kind of structuralist, tautological work, in a way. But, in a sense, I think it's been categorized in those terms as a kind of avant-garde, structuralist, formalist work. But I think Ian was really interested in this idea of combining it in a program with other things, where, again, it would turn the audience into this active, self-reflexive collective. Where it would make them acutely aware of the conditions under which they were experiencing all these works. So, in a way, *Screening Room* became a kind of tool by which you could kind of pry open the possibility of looking at works by other artists differently. Does this make sense? It's such a strange work to explain. I've actually had to produce one version of this for Oslo, which is what we're looking at the title card for, and I can tell you it was like a pretty exacting process. We had to shoot it like seven times before Morgan was happy with the zoom on the final the screen at the end.

[00:36:21] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Morgan Fisher was also there, and gave a really interesting talk which is actually, there's a transcript of it in the catalog for *Kinomuseum*, called "Screening Room and Death," which again, I think is sort of pertinent for the project. In one sense, I think *Screening Room* belongs to a tradition of expanded cinema, of the of the 1960s and '70s, and I

want to just give you a brief quote again from the end of this "Performer, Audience, Mirror" text, where Ian talks about expanded cinema in ways which I think, again, help us to understand a bit what's going on here. "Expanded cinema could be considered as a practice that extends or multiplies the frame of the screen, to incorporate what is happening in the screening room itself, to include space, movement, live speaking, to incorporate the corporeality of the spectator, as also constituting the work itself through relative physical positions in space. Regarded as such, as a medium defined by the limit of the auditorium that it functions against, expanded cinema finds its own apotheosis in the work of art as an instruction, where the frame of the work is multiplied and extended not only into the room where the work is viewed, but also disintegrating those physical limits to occupy the world at large, life itself material." So, there's a quite utopian strain to this kind of curatorial project, this idea of really dissolving the institutional boundaries altogether.

[00:38:02] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Maybe I can just very briefly rattle off what I think some of the other kind of curatorial strategies of this liveness are. And then I'll just give you one more very short example of Ian's curatorial practice. So I think complicity is one aspect of this project. The idea that the audience itself is the agent is really crucial, and that means the audience, in a way, taking responsibility for what they see. And I think there's this self-reflexivity, this idea that the audience realizes that the work is in their own active interpretation of the work, produces also a collective aspect. So I think there's something really crucial that Ian's idea of liveness is about an experience, a self awareness of being in a collective situation. So, again, if you think of this just in very intuitive terms, when you go to the cinema, normally the lights go down, you're aware you're an audience, but everything institutionally wants to make you forget that commercial cinema is about this immersion, or what it has been traditionally. And Ian was really working against that convention, the convention of immersion and self-forgetting.

[00:39:15] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

I think the other thing maybe that's important is that for Ian, liveness was mediated. So, if we think of liveness as being something that's about immediacy, right, the presence of the performer, Ian was interested in liveness in the sense of, like, a TV broadcast. I feel like most of you are too young to really remember, possibly, just when the default was that there was a kind of sense of, television is really a live thing, for example, a live broadcast. We're so used to that idea now that it's whenever we want it. But, I think that's the sense in which Ian was interested in liveness, the idea of, precisely a kind of liveness, a collective experience that would be about distance, about an absence, right? Like, you don't see the sort of the transmission, you don't see the other people that you're watching it with, but at some level, your awareness of it—the frisson of watching TV is the frisson of watching something at the same time as millions of other people. So that's, in a way, I think, part of this idea of liveness. And that's why so many of his projects rely on pre-recorded material, like the Morgan Fisher, that in a way, the route to liveness is via something that seems very emphatically not live, something mediated, something pre-recorded.

[00:40:28] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

I think I'm going to skip to this. So this is another curatorial project, which I think has been very iconic, and important for a lot of people. And that would, I think, neatly connect to some of these strategies. I'm kind of assuming that people have seen this work, perhaps. So this is Richard Serra's film, *Hand Catching Lead*. It's part of a series of films that Richard Serra made featuring his hands. This is like a staple of basically every museum collection, I feel like, it's an incredibly iconic film, on 16 millimeter. And, Ian staged this event called "Richard Serra's Hands," which was staged in Berlin, in a gay sex club, called Laboratory in 2009. Each film was in a different part of the space, so the audience moved around through different rooms of the sex club. And as you can see, they watched a film in each of these spaces. I think it doesn't sort of need too much underscoring, maybe, of what's happening. But, Ian was very inspired by a really incredible text by the Danish artist Henrik Oleson, called "Pre-Post Speaking Backwards,"

which is a kind of a queer history of conceptual art, which, in a way, uses techniques, literary techniques of kind of appropriation, collage to kind of queer the conventional history of conceptual art.

[00:42:09] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

It's a really amazing text. I think there was really something he talked about, wanting, in a way, to make use of how manly Richard Serra's hands are, these big hairy arms, which he felt suddenly took on this very different effect in the confines of the sex club. And I think one of the things that we could say, quite obviously, is that there's a relationship to cruising, in Ian's particular interest in site specificity. So the idea, the kind of interest he had in, the potentialities of different kinds of public space really seemed to me to be very directly related to cruising in terms of that idea of sight and desire, for example, or sight and collective experience.

[00:42:53] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

On that note, maybe I can just point also to this work which I saw in Kyle Herrington's show today, this Tom Burr work, which is, I think, a beautiful piece called *Single Partition Platform*. I was very struck by, what I assume is Kyle, has written here, that "if titillation is evoked by this Tom Burr work, it's not from a visible sexual act, but rather due to the mere architectural trappings of the bathroom itself. The site of the bathroom thus becomes a signifier of queerness, a site unoccupied, where queer possibility and potential rule. Liberation is not in what we see happening, but rather in what we know can happen here." I think that to me, that's very, very close in spirit to the way that Ian worked with the auditorium. I think there's that sense of linking desire and potential and evacuation and occupation. I think these are kind of really crucial terms for me.

[00:43:54] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

What I want to do, just to finish, I thought I could just show you some images of the exhibition I curated at Camden in 2018. And just very, very briefly, again, I'm not going to go through all the individual works, but just to try and give you a sense... I want to just

sort of talk about the challenges of thinking in terms of liveness, in a practical sense as a curator with this common body of work.

[00:44:27] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So, I co-curated this with Kirsty Bell, and we had several rooms at Camden Art Centre in London, and we showed several of Ian's works, including a couple of collaborations with Jimmy Robert. And what Kirsty and I tried to do, was to think about trying out different strategies for most of the works. So, most of them were performance works, and we wanted to try different, and maybe even contradictory, methods of representing them. So one of the things that Ian talked about before he died, when he talked about documentation of his own work, was he said he was interested in failure and repetition. That's what he thought was important. So he didn't want, for example, what I did now of giving you one iconic version of *Black Flags*. He was interested in the idea of showing multiple versions of the same work, where they'd almost like, cancel each other out, or you'd see all the differences, or it would start to become unstable.

[00:45:20] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So what we did, for example, this is a piece called *Democracy*. Again, part of this trilogy, it's a kind of strange piece where Ian, with a kind of PowerPoint of like Elizabethan imagery, pulls his trousers down around one ankle, and does a kind of choreographed exit of the space. It's a kind of wonderful piece, very strange. And the BBC World Service is playing, also, in terms of liveness.

[00:45:46] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

But what we did was, we took the four video documentations of this performance from different occasions, painstakingly synced them according to the PowerPoint in the background, and then we had them synced so they played simultaneously along with the PowerPoint, which is being projected there on the wall. So you see three of the screens, and one of the screens was way down on the other end of the space. So, that was a kind of very literal attempt to think about this failure and repetition of

multiplication. This is an early work, called *The Neon Gainsborough*. This was a piece where his performative element was quite minimal. He basically just unfurled a poster at the halfway mark of the performance, and another poster at the end. But the rest of it was basically a tape-slide piece with a video playing and slides being projected at the top. So, we tried to make this into an installation where everything was effectively automated, and instead of the posters unfurling, there were these lights that would come on. So, this was an attempt to really think about the installation format. Could you really just remove the performer entirely?

[00:46:50] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

As an aside, it's one of these works that's also been very transformed by history, I think, because of the center of it, are these posters of the Transsexual Transvestite News, which was like an underground Soho newsletter at the time. And this is way before Trans was a term in common circulation—in the UK, at least.

[00:47:09] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

This is a piece called *Traverspiel 1*, which is an incredibly complex piece he did in 2012, I think, in Berlin on a stage, involving five choreographed movement dance pieces, together with another collaborator, interspersed with five films from the Arsenal collection in Berlin. So, again, we tried to do the kind of classic missionary position performance documentation, but it's just photographs and text, so you can kind of see that there. So, I don't think it's particularly satisfactory, but it's such a complex work and it's so hard to show even as documentation, so we were just trying, again, a different option.

[00:47:49] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

This is a work he made with Jimmy, called *Six Things We Couldn't Do But Can Do Now*. And in this case, Jimmy basically just remade the work. So some of the original materials were there, but he just added new things. There was no sense of trying to present something authentic to the original spirit of the installation they made together.

[00:48:07] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

This was another collaboration with Jimmy called *Lemon Rose*, and in this case, it was a half an hour performance they did together. There's video documentation, but Jimmy decided just to play an extract—a part of the soundtrack—in the space. So, there were no visuals at all.

[00:48:24] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

These are some of the things we found in his archive, most of which are here now. Kind of blacked out materials, blacked out magazines, the status of which is completely unclear to me. I don't know if these were artworks, or what they were.

[00:48:38] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

And we also had several people re-perform the works. So, this is Sharon Hayes, performing *IBIZA*, which is the first in the trilogy, which is incredible. And we also had two people do *Black Flags*. So *Black Flags* wasn't in the show otherwise, but we had two very, very different performances of it. One by Evan Ifekoya, which you can see here, and one by the artist and scholar Adrian Rifkin. What was kind of interesting about, especially Sharon's performance, I would say, it was very faithful to Ian's. Evan and Adrian's were very loose, in many ways. They really took liberties or added new elements, and that was a very interesting negotiation, for me, in terms of figuring out really what was possible, what could be formalized, and what couldn't.

[00:49:29] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

So just to wrap up, I think what I would like to propose is that I think this idea of liveness is important in thinking of Ian's work, but also maybe in terms of thinking of the archived materials here. I think this idea of liveness, for me, implies forms of negation, particularly the negation of the fantasy of immediacy, but also the negation of the prescribed context. So it's kind of site specific: liveness always requires a kind of self-reflexive element of contesting the terms of the space in which you're in. I think it's a collective experience, and it's a collective experience of collectivity, and therefore, of a kind of

complicity in the making of the work. So, you're not a passive audience for it, you are the producers of the work. And I think it does also, and this is maybe too complex to go into, I think it requires a kind of act of performative withdrawal, or absenting, in order to create these things, these other forms of negation. In terms of what's actually in the archive, there's lots of material that I think the status of which is very exciting, and it's very ambiguous.

[00:50:37] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

There are notebooks with extraordinary things in them, including designs for unrealized works. There are very, very detailed scripts which I relied on to recreate some of the works for Camden. There are elements of works, so this is from the original installation for *Six Things* that he did with Jimmy. This is a typewritten kind of diary note of them learning to perform Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*, which is part of that *Six Things* project. So, again, there's lots of these kind of original elements. There's also things like this, which are very strange and ambiguous to me, these kind of collages involving transparent overlays, so it's like a TV listings from the newspaper together with like blacked out, kind of redacting, transparencies that he would overlay on top, apparently. But again, it's not really clear whether they were ever fixed as works. There's scripts, there's drafts for articles, there's talk notes, there's teaching materials. And, like I said, there's things like those *Black Flags* notebooks. I guess maybe what's important to say is that for me, I'm left with a lot of questions and problems. So in a way, I'm coming to you to unburden myself of these problems rather than to offer you solutions.

[00:51:51] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

At one level, I'd say there are practical challenges. So, I've mentioned already, like working with Evan and Adrian on these re-performances, and it's still not clear to me how much license I or they or anyone should have in terms of changing, for example, what's written in the scripts for those works, if they're re-performed. I got another request just this week to do that. So it's kind of interesting to try and figure it out. I'm in the process of negotiating, selling some of these performances to an institution, at the

moment. And again, that for me feels even more complicated, how much this is something that Marina and I spoke about, actually. But, when something goes into the art market, when it goes into an institution, can you also sell the institution the license to make these decisions, to change things? That seems very complicated to me. How much can you delegate? And with the ideas, for example, like Ian's idea of failure and repetition in documentation, it's a great idea, it's a great one liner. But again, I feel I can maybe work with that on a one-to-one basis, but can I delegate that to an institution to really think about meaningfully?

[00:52:52] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

Can institutions really think about failure in a profound way? And I guess, crucially, curatorial projects, like I think there's tons of amazing material in this archive about Ian's curatorial projects, but, as we know, curatorial projects are often the worst documented. And, I think screening series, even more than exhibitions, are often, there's not very much visual material, it's mostly textual. What is the life of those projects now? Are they historical artifacts? Could they be remade? Is that interesting to think about? And I think any attempt to do that would maybe have to involve thinking about the historicity of this idea of liveness. So, I think preparing for this talk, I really thought about the terms on which Ian was thinking about it. And I think, for example, a couple of them, even after ten or 15 years, have changed. So, I think he doesn't talk about it so much, he talks about it a bit, but the early Internet is the conditioning for, partly, this desire to think about the conditions of physical, embodied, collective, site-specific experience. This idea that suddenly videos were available online was the condition for thinking about what it meant to watch them in a room together, and why.

[00:53:57] **MIKE SPERLINGER**

And I think that process has only accelerated, and I think maybe that's changed the stakes a bit. Similarly, I would say the changing nature of cruising, right, that the kind of site-specific aspects of cruising culture are clearly transformed. And, perhaps even the kind of changing nature of the auditorium as a space, in terms of the way auditoriums



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function in museum spaces, for example. Maybe that's my kind of final proposition, is that, liveness, I think, isn't something we can—much as I've tried to extract these principles—it isn't really extractable from Ian. It's a kind of challenge, it's a task. A task, in a way, to think about what is it that can be recovered from archival materials like this, and what is it, in a sense, that we have to just consign to history? What is it that can be made active in the present? Maybe I will finish with that.