

Judy Radul, *Empathy with the Victor*, 2001-03 (detail). Three screen DVD projection.

COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

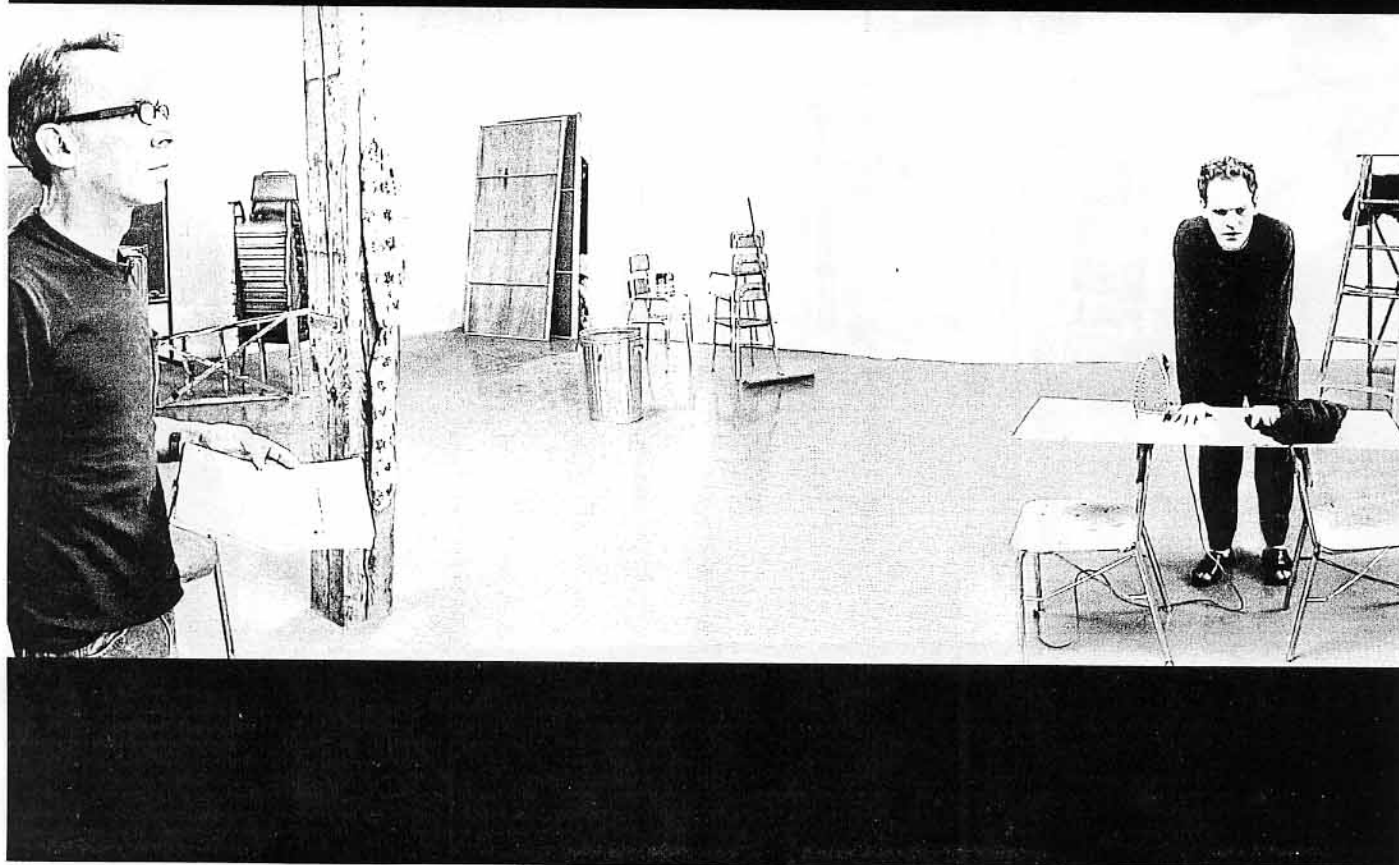
Judy Radul

EMPATHY WITH THE VICTOR

NO ONE MUST KNOW

One of the primary tensions in theatre is simply getting on and off stage. No cutting. We watch the actors in a box. Judy Radul's video work functions similarly, the actors contained in a space, without edits; only the small gaps in the image where the three camera views diverge are reminders of the cinematic. Each camera delineates a particular space: one for the Director, one for the Actor, and one for the Character. The room the actors inhabit is vaguely reminiscent of both backstage and gallery.

The narrative of *Empathy with the Victor* has a basic structure. First the director and actor carry on a scripted interchange concerning the scene they are about to rehearse. In this scene the character Victor Green is himself "rehearsing" a eulogy for his friend Max Herbert's funeral (as he talks he hurriedly irons his shirt). Victor is an intellectual and his eulogy becomes a kind of lecture on the debased state of "personality." (The speech includes text from Adorno's "Gloss on Personality"). After this brief discussion the Actor performs the monologue. This is followed by an improvised interaction where the Director gives the Actor feedback and they work on aspects of the performance. There is no editing between any of these "scenes" that take place in succession in view of three cameras arranged in a 150-degree panorama.



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Both Stanislavsky and Adorno have a modern conception of inner life as a resource or defense. For Stanislavsky, inner life is what the actor can use to inhabit another man, for Adorno it is what he can use to resist being inhabited by other "men"—society, received ideas etc. In this video both these earnest conceptions of personality are framed within the larger context of a video taped rehearsal.

Rehearsal is somewhere between everyday life and performance. In observing the rehearsal an audience member is brought into the performance on the level of decision making. Through this, one enjoys not just the successful aspects of the performance but an engagement with the process, the moments of failure, the struggling toward "character" on the part of the actor. Questions about repetition, reiteration, chance and social inscription naturally come to mind.

Radul's second video installation for the Canadian Tire gallery is titled *No One Must Know*. Produced on-site at Harbourfront Centre in September, 2003, the video documents the actions and short monologue of an actor (Quebecois actor-playwright Marie Brassard). The action takes place in front of a large mirror where the actor traces in china marker an outline of the built environment of the lakeshore reflected in the mirror. While drawing the scene she shares her thoughts with an unwitting Harbourfront centre audience. The scene is inspired and reminiscent of Pier Paolo Passolini's film *Theorem* (1968) in which

an artist is questioning the nature of art and painting on glass. In both installations Radul returns to a key moment in the separation and collusion of fine art and the moving image. Early cinema stemmed less from life drawing and the natural landscape than it did from the music hall cabaret and stage play. Cinema found its voice, so to speak, in theatre. Issues of composition, which Radul pursues, become issues of centering, multiple cameras and angles, idealization and character development a matter of lighting. It is not a question of an isolated reality (as in the rehearsal process, or in the tracing of Nature in the mirror) as in photography's isolated reality but, rather, it is a question of the camera's ordering of the sequence of chosen slices of an exposed reality on stage, always a realistic deflection of pre-existing styles. Both of Radul's installations, in their complex assemblage of voices and devices for depicting the actor and the stage, are idealist in that they aim to eliminate chaos with the aid of the abstract and never a simple representation of the individual.

Radul has had solo exhibitions of her work at the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver and YYZ Artists' Outlet, Toronto. She currently teaches at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver.

WAYNE BAERWALDT

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Judy Radul, *No One Must Know*, 2003. Video stills.

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