



Accessibility

info_santamonica.cultura@gencat.net

Cultura Ar

SantaM

DECEMBER⁰⁷ JANUARY⁰⁸ ↓

BACK ISSUES ↓

CONTANT HISTÒRIES

Contemporary artists are by no means exempt from the need to tell stories, whether it be to explore the relations between the real and the fictive, the public and the private, to embody highly personal feelings or to evidence social archetypes. The influence of film and literature, and even explicit references to these disciplines, are very much a part in these works. The texts that follow profile seven specific, paradigm examples of contemporary artists who have taken on the role of narrator.

MONTSE BADIA

Joseph Beuys

The legend has it that the young Beuys, having enlisted in the Luftwaffe, was stationed in the Crimea, where he flew on a number of bombing missions. In 1944 his plane was shot down, and he was subsequently found and taken to a military hospital, where he was treated for his injuries. Beuys, however, always placed great emphasis on the moment when he was rescued from the wreckage by Tartar tribesmen, who covered his body with animal fat and felt to aid his recovery. This and other events bear witness to his interest in fictionalizing his own life. Stories, ceremonies and rituals play a major role in Joseph Beuys's artistic biography. In his first solo gallery exhibition, in 1965, Beuys staged the now mythic performance *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare*, in which the different materials and actions had a value symbolic. The artist was seen through the window of the gallery, his face covered in honey and gold leaf, with a slab of metal attached to his boot and a dead hare in his lap, murmuring into the animal's ear indistinct sounds and explanations of the drawings hanging on the walls.

Vito Acconci

Vito Acconci started out as a poet, but in 1969 he literally abandoned the page for the street. In *Following Piece*, once a day, wherever he happened to be, Acconci would select at random someone in the street and follow them until they disappeared inside some private place—an office, a house, etc. These outings might last a few minutes or several hours, depending on what the people he followed were doing (eating a meal in a restaurant, watching a film in a cinema, etc). Acconci carefully recorded these events in detailed notes, such as '7:28PM: he enters Italian Kitchen restaurant', or '8:10PM: he enters Academy of Music movie theater, 126, E. 14th Street'. He began to mail the typed notes of his followings to people in the art world. In this way Acconci invaded the 'public' space of the chosen individuals with the same effect as if he had invaded their private space, effectively penetrating the private space while actually moving in the public domain. At the same time, in some of his videoed performances Acconci uses the close-up to establish a relation with the spectator, to whom he speaks directly. In *Theme Song*, for example, he plays tapes of songs by The Doors, Bob Dylan or Van Morrison as a background to his intimate monologues.

Sophie Calle

Sophie Calle photographs and writes, despite being neither a photographer nor a writer. She creates fictional mechanisms, as in *The Detective* (1981), for which she asked her mother to go to a detective agency and hire a detective to follow her and report on where she went and what she did. This was a way of generating a photographic testimony to her existence and at the same time evidencing two different records of the same activity (the artist's and the detective's). In other works, Calle provokes arbitrary situations that take on the form of a ritual. With *The Sleepers* (1979), for example, she asked various people to lie in her bed and allow her to photograph them, and the photographic documents, the interviews and the comments thus constitute the proofs of this trajectory. But without a doubt Sophie Calle's most direct engagement with literature is her collaboration—or more precisely, exchange—with the writer Paul Auster. For his novel *Leviathan*, Auster used Calle, her life, obsessions and rituals, as his inspiration for the character of Maria Turner, a photographer who takes pictures of people she follows, takes jobs as a chambermaid or a waitress in hotels or bars and gets a friend to take photos of her doing a striptease one night in a joint in Times Square. Several years later Calle put on the exhibition *Double Game*, which she articulated in three sections: Maria's life and its influence on Sophie's life, Sophie's life and its influence on Maria's life, and 'one of the many ways of mixing fiction with reality or how to go about turning yourself into a fictional character', for which she suggested to Auster that he create a new fictional character that would guide her life for a year. Auster declined the proposal, but he did offer her a number of ideas for making life in New York City more satisfying (among others, smiling at strangers).

Ignasi Aballí

The work of Ignasi Aballí shares many of its concerns with the world of the writer Georges Perec. Like Perec, Aballí analyses with precision, irony and in exhaustive detail what there is around us, everyday life in all its most mundane and

unremarkable aspects, what we might call the *infra-ordinaire*, which so often goes unnoticed.

The reference to Perec is not merely fortuitous. Aballí's work *Desaparicions* [Disappearances] is based on the films made by the French writer Georges Perec and consists of twenty-five posters, one for each of the film projects in which Perec took part, regardless of whether the film was finished or not. Many of the images that appear in these posters are borrowed from earlier or ongoing works by Ignasi Aballí, and thus constitute a merging of fiction and reality, an intermediate territory mid way between Perec's literary work and Aballí's art work. The video *Desaparició* was based on a reading of the script Perec wrote for a film, to be entitled *Signe Particulier: néant*, which was never completed. Perec imposed on himself as a condition or leitmotif that the actors' faces would never be seen in the film, a device that can be seen as the visual equivalent of the absence of the letter 'e' in his novel *La Disparition* (*A Void*). In Aballí's version the spectator is presented with an extended succession of real images—photographs—taken from various communications media, magazines and so on, in which, for different reasons, the people's faces are not visible. As if in the form of subtitles, the video lists throughout its course the 68 situations in which the person's face is not seen, in keeping with the principle that Perec adopted as the basis for his film project.



Emma Kay

Emma Kay's working process begins with the selection of seminal works of literature or universal knowledge, which she then sets out to reconstruct on the basis of her personal memory of them. She recreates works of history or geography or epic fictions, rewriting them from memory in accordance with a set of personal criteria that do not allow her to consult the original, as in the case of *Shakespeare from Memory* (1998). On other occasions the artist works directly from the source to produce a systematic list of objects itemized in the text, as in *The Bible: 2717 Objects in Order of Appearance* (2000), or *War and Peace: 2117 Objects in Order of Appearance* (1997), to cite two examples. As in her other exercises of remembering, the rules that govern the selection of the objects here are as personal as they are arbitrary.

Jill Magid

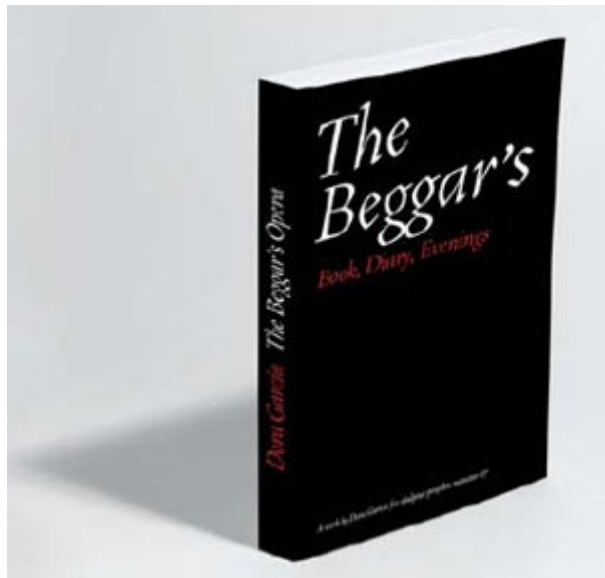
Jill Magid likes to tell stories, and is fascinated by the people who tell stories. 'Let's say that I'm the protagonist of someone else's novel.' In one of her works she quotes from a novel by Jerzy Kosinski, a Polish-born writer and World War II survivor whose life story is like something from one of his fictions. Magid writes novels, such as *Lincoln Ocean Victor Eddy* ('L.O.V.E.' in the phonetic alphabet used by the police). Magid returns home after having lived abroad for five years. A resident of Brooklyn, she often takes the New York subway, and is disconcerted every time she hears the announcement over the PA system that, 'for security reasons', any passenger is liable to be searched. Without hesitating, she approaches a police officer and asks him to search her. The officer's refusal to do so results in an agreement: the possibility that the artist accompany him on his nightly rounds. Two radically opposed worlds—those of an enterprising young independent artist and a Staten Island policeman who has only left New York once in his life, to visit Disneyland—that arouse mutual fascination.

Dora García

Dora García selects stories. She signals, acts like a film director who tells stories, sets up a situation, places us in a scenario or involves us in a game whose rules are very close to reality and as such allow us to question it. In 1991, Dora García created *Contes Choisis*, an installation in which a portrait of Guy de Maupassant confronts two enigmatic sculptures that define the artist's interest in narration and fiction. In 2001 she commenced the work in progress entitled

Todas las historias [All the Stories], the aim of which is to bring together 'all of the stories in the world. The reader who decides to read them out loud becomes the performer of *Todas las historias*, and when they have finished, every man and woman, all times and all the places will have passed through their lips. The difficulty is that almost every day new stories are added to this list.'

García recently presented her version of *The Beggar's Opera* at Skulptur Projekte Munster'07. The project consisted of a series of performances by an actor playing the part of a beggar, Filch, inspired by the apprentice beggar in the opera by John Gay, which was in its turn the inspiration for Bertolt Brecht's *The Threepenny Opera*. The Filch character roams at will through the streets of Munster, and his adventures,



encounters and observations are recorded in the web log www.thebeggarsopera.org, together with a series of monologues originally delivered in the Metropolis Kino in Munster and subsequently collected in a publication.

[Hamsterwheel](#) - [Interview to Franz West](#) - [Telling Stories](#) - [Of the Chain of Knowledge](#) - [Back Issues](#)

