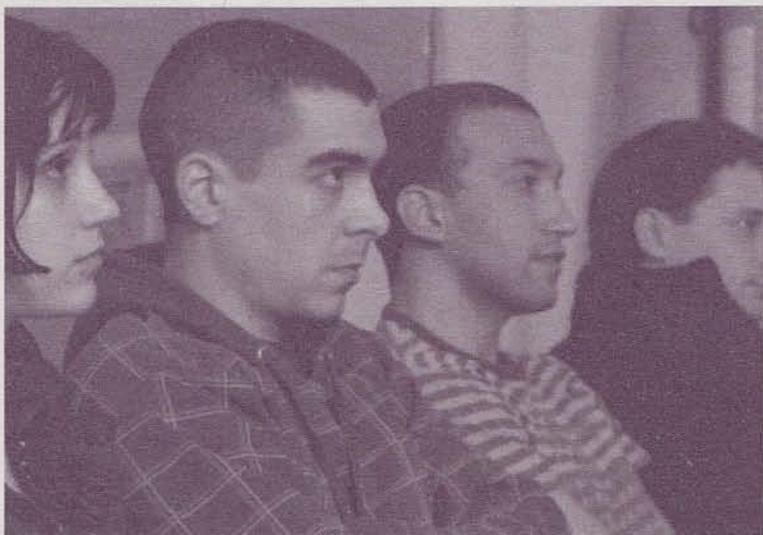


IF I CAN'T DANCE, I DON'T WANT TO BE PART OF YOUR REVOLUTION

CHRONICLE OF A METROPOLITAN COMPLEX OR "ARE YOU HAPPY?"



Chronicle of a Summer

Chronique d'un Été (Chronicle of a Summer, released in 1961) was filmed by anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch and sociologist Edgar Morin. They decide to openly test the possibilities of *cinéma vérité*, or direct cinema, by capturing snapshots of everyday life in Paris during the summer of 1960, inviting their friends, patients and strangers to interact and take part in a sociological experiment. Marceline who works for a company that analyzes psycho-socio studies is initially sent to ask passers-by: "Are you happy"? The question is declined in various forms to a mechanic and his entourage, Renault factory workers, couples,

students. Their natural habitat or environments are recorded. Rouch and Morin appropriate reality in the streets in synchronicity with the statement of intent in the *Nouveau Réalisme* manifesto earlier that year. Debates ensue around tables indoors and outdoors interspersed with references to current affairs such as the war in Algeria or events in Korea following a student revolution in the spring. Everything is filmed in real time with no analytical voice-over which would have been typical of previous ethno-fiction (except for Marceline's off-screen account of being in a concentration camp replayed while she walks alone through the streets of Paris). A group of them even get

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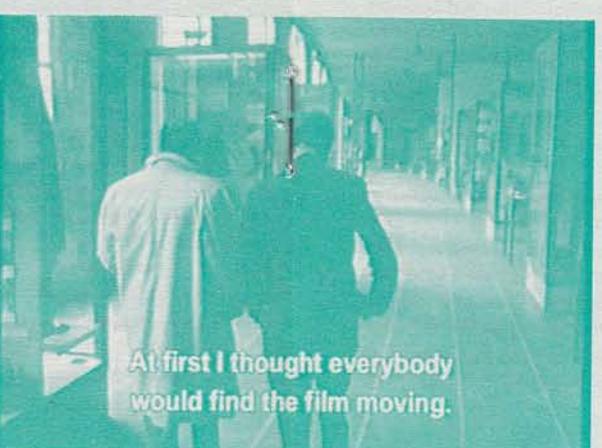
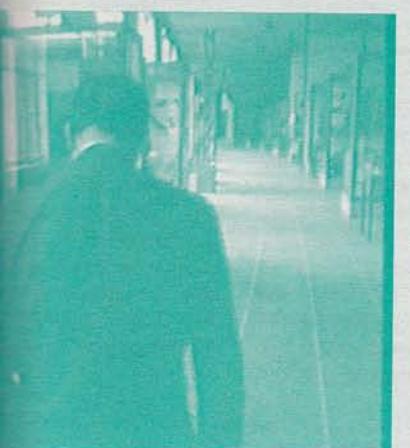
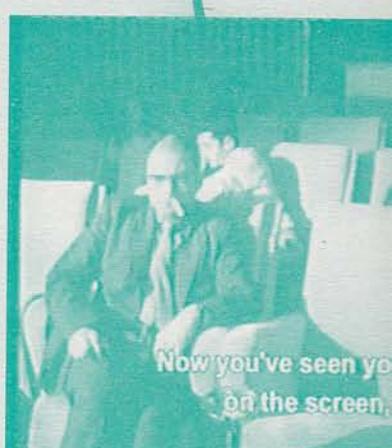
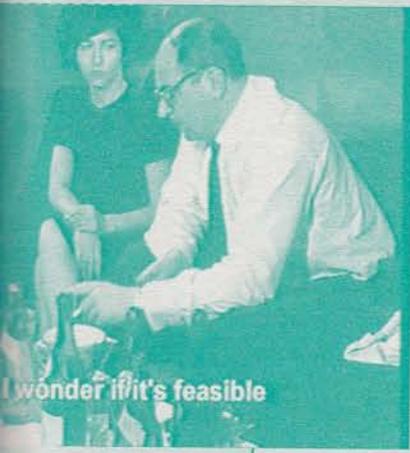
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sent on holiday to St Tropez to continue the conversation – “Vive Les Vacances” say the newspaper covers. On return to Paris, Rouch and Morin analyse the result, question its scientific value or success. They are highly aware of the systemic flaw in the exercise due to the unusual presence of the camera. In the final scene, they even invite their subjects/objects to view and critique the film themselves.

This film contains a host of interests that Sarah Pierce repeatedly engages with in her ongoing project *The Metropolitan Complex* such as archives, creating situations for debate

to occur, and student activism. The choice of the question “Are you happy?” suggests a degree of indulgence arguably specific to a Western context then and still now. Paris at the time was on the verge of losing its identity as the metropole versus the Algerian colony for instance. The war, begun in 1954, led to independence in 1962. Contemporary neuroses, hang-ups or complexes are laid bare from disenchantment with the daily working class routine, with political action, bourgeois comfort or consumerism to personal traumas. Pierce appropriates *Chronicle of a Summer* as a tool to pursue their interrogations today.



CAPTION Sarah Pierce – *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* (2009-ongoing)
2 single channel dvds; 5 min 49 sec and 51 min 46 sec

Previous page: Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin –
Chronique d'un Été (*Chronicle of a Summer*) (1961)

CHRONICLE OF A METROPOLITAN COMPLEX OR "ARE YOU HAPPY?"



The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?

As part of the second episode of *If I Can't Dance's* third Edition devoted to masquerade, staged in one incarnation at the Sala Rekalde in Bilbao, Sarah Pierce invited local students in art, sociology and politics to a screening of the original French version of *Chronique d'un Été* with Spanish subtitles, followed by a roundtable discussion. She filmed both moments for her 2009 and ongoing piece *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* First of all she prompts a process of identification – individually with the characters or with the project as budding sociologists. They debate

the validity of such a question and what today's political correctness would render quasi impossible. Aware of how forced the scenes are due to the laboratory status of the film, by extension they wonder whether they are actors in their current situation.

Pierce creates a convivial platform – around a table with food and drink – to allow for relation and confrontation. She explores the use value and high impact of a conversation, a dialogue. "Why pretend the printed word means more than what is said between people?", she says. The process of socialising, participating and communicating are seen as constructive,

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thought-provoking and therefore creative.

By proposing the viewing and analysis of this film in the Basque country, Pierce encourages parallels between the discussion in 1960 and their present circumstances. Nationalism and a quest for autonomy and self-determination are regularly made manifest by ETA. The students are given the choice to talk in Basque or Spanish but unanimously elect the latter language – even though they identify themselves strongly as Basque. Rouch and Morin's film transcends its own historical moment and carry its concerns into the present or future, enabling self-reflexivity well beyond its context.

Mise en abime¹

During the third episode of Edition III – *Masquerade* at Project Art Centre in Dublin in June 2009, Sarah Pierce screened *Chronique d'un Été* and video footage of the Bilbao roundtable. The subsequent conversation with the Dublin audience dwelled on the subject/audience of Paris 1961 and that of Bilbao 2009 as well as parallels with the Irish socio-political situation. Pierce's installation *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?* will be presented at the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven in the form of a projection of *Chronique d'un Été* and two monitors respectively showing her edits of the Bilbao audience and the Bilbao roundtable.

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An ongoing process, Pierce could repeat this exercise in various metropolises thus activating novel circumstances and adding layers to the debate. The subject is the audience is the subject in a potentially endless *mise en abîme*. Already embedded in the Bilbao recording is the distancing inherent in the simultaneous translation by Ines Zarza from Spanish to English. An interpretation increases subjectivity and lessens the exactitude of equivalence. Different languages imply cultural baggage. The multiple re-enactments or screenings will add new layers of complexity or generations or reality.

Pierce insists on the relativity of the original,

on lending perspective to a situation in order to highlight a question that should constantly be posed: what is the truth? The answer to this question is surely as relative as any notion of what happiness is.

Documents – Vérité or Masquerade?

Fifteen issues of the journal DOCUMENTS were published in Paris between 1929 and 1930 confronting, as stated on the cover, archaeology, fine arts, ethnography, doctrines and varieties (or popular culture). It famously grouped the ideas, interests, editing and writing of Georges Bataille at the Cabinet of Medals in the Bibliothèque Nationale, Georges Henri Rivière,

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Michel Leiris and Marcel Griaule at the Musée de l'Homme, art historians such as Carl Einstein, poet Robert Desnos and so forth. They presented socio-cultural "evidence" through arresting image juxtapositions and explosive texts, famously exploring rituals, base materialism, the formless, civilisation, in the Critical Dictionary. It was a tool inciting informed questioning of truth. Direct exposure, a multi-disciplinary approach and field study were encouraged. Influenced by Marcel Mauss, the French ethnographer Marcel Griaule was Rouch's professor and mentor; he travelled on the Dakar-Djibouti expeditions in the early 1930s and is renowned for his studies of the Dogon people

and the films *Au Pays des Dogons* (1931-8) and *Sous les Masques Noirs* (1938). The colonialist sounding, judgemental voice-over in these films was criticised – the removal of physical distance from the subject had not enabled objectiveness.

Rouch and Morin's on-screen debrief takes place within the displays of the Musée de l'Homme (Museum of Mankind in Paris), supposedly one of the headquarters for the study of humanity and their research base. They pace up and down and discuss the relative failure of their enterprise. They sought to film unvarnished reality, truth or 'vérité' but realise the

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methodology is doomed from the outset due to people's inevitable reaction – performance – in front of the camera.

"More wine?" – this question posed in Bilbao comes after a point of heated debate when the translator could no longer do justice to the argument due to the overlay of voices. A passage of tension is humorously and conveniently dissipated. At the end, one of the students asks another: "If happiness does not exist, why did you not jump off a bridge?" A response is promised, but only off-camera. Once again the limitations of this documentary form are palpable.

Invitation to Emancipation

Through *The question would be the answer to the question, Are you happy?*, Pierce continues to express her longing for political and aesthetic engagement and critical debate and her openness to the potential of failure. It captures the spirit of her belief in personal liberty and self-expression. It questions any societal obligation to appear happy and fustigates pressures, prescription and any repression of independent voice. Her art calls for action, participation, dialogue and thinking. Here and now.

If I Can't Dance, I Don't Want To Be Part of Your Revolution.

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Footnotes

1. The *mise en abyme* is a tactic that Pierce also puts into practice in a performance at FOUR in Dublin in January 2009, *Kevin Atherton and Sarah Pierce in Dialogue*, revisiting Atherton's earlier work and reviewed solo at Project Art Centre in June.
2. See exhibition catalogue *Undercover Surrealism. Georges Bataille and DOCUMENTS*, ed. by Dawn Ades and Simon Baker, Hayward Gallery Publishing, London, 2006.

Participants

Uxo Anduaga, Koldo D. Bizkarguenaga, Diego Carbajo, Borja De Aramburu, Ander Diez, Sandra González, Daniel Mera, Txema Rodriguez

Interpreter

Inés Zarza

Camera

Sal Kroonenberg