

Mike Cooter

Exhibition, 16–23 June 2008
ICA Upper Galleries

The videos and installations of Mike Cooter (born Epsom, 1978, lives in London) bring together any number of apparent and false correlations, his meticulously researched works often beginning by exploiting some found connection. The film *Strangers (as the raven laughs)* (2006), for example, is a kind of self-portrait in which Cooter interviews an actor playing the role of 'Mike Cooter'. The work was inspired by a security poster that the artist found, stole and exhibited, and which features the slogan 'Are You Questioning Strangers?' Within Cooter's practice, in which each incidental detail is potentially significant, the given world is conceived as a film ripe for analysis.

Drawing on a Conceptualist predilection for following rules and reducing the artist's subjective decision-making, Cooter sets out and follows

strict premises in the material production of his work. Text piece *Redaction* (2006) is a work that was completed according to the artist's injunctions, and demanded that his gallerist print out the document in full and then, using a black marker, remove all the sources. The instructions concern both the content of the work, as well as its production ('black out... print... fax...'). The document evokes, in its unmoored sketches of cinematic scenarios ('I threw my clothes off and got into the shower. Nothing was strange at all'), the tropes of American film noir. So too does *Redaction's* form: a declassified testimony, or a letter sent to someone it was not intended for.

This idea of the mismatched recipient or the mistaken identity is key to Cooter's practice. In the video *Diagnosis Murder* (2003) twelve actors (eleven amateurs and one professional) re-enact an implausible resolution from a crime show of the same name, a denouement which circles around the whereabouts of a character called René, and a discussion concerning his likelihood to commit blackmail or murder. Meanwhile, the previously mentioned *Strangers* poses and refuses to answer the question of Mike Cooter's identity, lending the flavour of noir sub-plotting and untrustworthy appearance to an otherwise straightforward interview.

The question of transferred and displaced identity was also present in Cooter's contribution to *Nought to Sixty*, a network of objects, texts and references entitled *Original Intent*. In one element, the typically noirish image of a glass door, represented on the cover of a paperback of Dashiell Hammett's novel *The Maltese Falcon*, was reconstructed in the ICA's exhibition space, as Cooter replaced the gallery windows with panes of reeded glass. This reference was expanded in other elements of the installation, including a series of letters that the artist wrote to the American legal scholar Robert Bork.

Bork was nominated to the US Supreme Court by President Reagan, but was rejected as a result of uproar in the liberal media over his right-wing views. The viciousness of the attack on Bork's politics reached such a level that his name has since become a verb: 'to bork' someone being a usage that found its way into the OED in 2002. Cooter noticed a statue of the Maltese Falcon, from the 1941 film of the same name, in a television interview with Bork, and used this connection to begin a correspondence with the political lawyer, deftly mirroring this man – whose name became a symbol – with the fictional prop that has now become a real objet d'art.

Melissa Gronlund

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