YOU ARE CHATTING AWAY TO SOMEONE AND THEY START TO LOOK OVER YOUR SHOULDER IN SEARCH OF SOMEBODY MORE INTERESTING. YOU ARE AT A PARTY AND SOMEONE FORCEFULLY AND PUBLICLY CORRECTS YOUR POINT OF VIEW. A stranger brushes up against you at the bar. These might be three ordinary moments.

But they are also three carefully worked out and previously microperformed (as microperformances organized by the duo French Mottershead (Rebecca French and Andrew Mottershead), artists who make performance art without performing, who appropriate the system of self-development and audience involvement to quietly disruptive effect). The 'People Series' (2002–ongoing) consists of a simple set of instructions circulated for the course of each manifestation. You are invited to pick an action to be performed at any point during the time-span of the event, anything from calling someone by the wrong name to spilling your drink. The performance unfold almost totally invisibly. But reality is made slightly different: certain situations are constructed as the microperformances play out.

Working together on a series of projects since 1999, they have explored ways of framing the micro in order to deconstruct the languages and dialects of performing the self. This kind of almost-subliminal behaviour in their stock-in-trade. What they differ from other artists investigating similar terrain is that for most important part of the work tends to happen internally to the conscious awareness of the audience, and it is often very hard to see their performances taking place unless you are aware of and know exactly what to look out for. Indeed, it is perhaps better to talk of participants rather than audiences because it is the act of work that really demands active viewer investment and involvement to be understood.

Their current project CLUB CLASS, 2006, has taken place at Tate Modern and Tate Liverpool as part of the Liverpool Biennial, and will also tour to London’s ICA in February 2007. It involves recruiting anything up to 60 self-selecting volunteers as performers who each start the day with one of a choice of workshops (clothing, body language, bad behaviour and surveillance, for instance) designed to get them thinking about their own relationships with the social. Expert stylists or choreographers work on the performative aspects of dressing and using the body to lead each participant in a personal understanding of their previously unformulated personas. These personal stances are then challenged. Or rather, by nominating each participant as performer, everyone is effectively given licence to challenge him or herself by trying out some previously unthinkable behaviour. Walking out into the public arena wearing someone else’s clothes, for example, or adopting a notably different array of body language is especially empowering because it is an experience rooted in our everyday interaction with the public, and we are all equally expert at the essential rituals of these kinds of daily expectations. At the first performance of CLUB CLASS at Tate

French Mottershead
Mark Wilsher

PROFILE >

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Modern in October, people casually posed in clothes that were, frankly, too young for them, and rode down the escalators like naughty children. I came across one woman making slow head movements to the lack-lustre soundtrack of an installation in a gallery, and watched a projected audience gather to watch for a few minutes before her friend came to lead her away. This particular event, although programmed by the gallery like everything that happened that afternoon, was almost entirely unannounced and uninvited. The public might have read it as performance art, a prank, or the reaction of a psychiatric patient. Like the majority of these slight moments it invisibly, yet unremarkably, passed. Although the artists might go all out to document their projects, a large part of the work ultimately ends up existing only like this — as a verbal account reported second-hand.

The posed photographic work titled Shops, 2003-06, exhibits 24 documents of the customers of particular shops at particular points in time and in such unconcern, unite and display some very different social groupings that previously would not have warranted such definition. For a few days staff are instructed to invite anyone making a purchase to return for the group portrait at a specified date and time. Standing in the street outside a pet shop, record shop, or butcher's, they are revealed as a real and fragmentary community. The personal experience of taking part in such an event, however, is more of that solidarity and common purpose. These people are now able literally to see themselves as a community just as we see them. A point of each piece is permanently on display at all of the participating outlets and they reveal morphological anomalies that absorb the comical yet serious印尼 of prices that the community accepted signifiers of rebellion. Customers of the passing public show off the tokens of their individuality together, and the images of people dressed in the community approved signifiers. The best of the French/Mediterranean work empowerment and combines in different audiences in equal measure. The social is distilled and discovered to be just a set of artistry practices, techniques of the body adopted because they were convenient quickly became conventional with repetitive use. An observer who knows that something is going on but is not sure exactly who is meant to be taking part, ever little detail of every interaction during one of their projects assumes an undistinguishable significance as a potential performance. This is the person that knows that this is the activity that actually achieves the popular idea of making our awareness of daily life.

For the participants, arguably the only real audience for the work, it is empowering to be given permission to be someone else for a while. Simpkins are contracted that allow a stronger experience of being present, and in a sense the work endures for as long as those people carry that feeling with them. 

Club Class at the ICA, London on February 24, 2007.

Mr Wedekin is an artist and curator.

Mark Hutchinson + Paul O'Neill (tape runs out)

n Your microperformance is
[When talking to someone]
Look over their shoulder
and scan the room for
someone more interesting

...then peel off slowly
use this to mark the location
in your microperformance

3 5 11

+ 9 7

French/Italian.
Club Class 2007
by body-language
micro-performance

Audience Agency
from People Sense 2003
performance interactive

Mark Hutchinson + Paul O'Neill
(tape runs out)

David Broutine, as the writer
1000/2000, 2003-07]
Exhibition opening
20th January 2007
Event: Thursday 25th January 2007

text + work
The Gilbert, 3-5 Arts, Institute at Brunel's
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