

ELEPHANT JUICE

JASON FILE IN CONVERSATION WITH KASIA FUDAKOWSKI

Anybody invited to realize a project in 1646 is asked to engage in conversation with a previously unknown correspondent.

This conversation takes place via e-mail and stretches through the whole period during which the artists develop their initial idea into final results. 1646 invites the correspondent at the other end of this contact to figure his/her way through this actual process. In trying to picture what result the artists' work is getting to, such exchange can become a reflection on the amount of otherwise untraceable choices of the moment which make up to the artists' practice.

This issue is part of the exhibition by Kasia Fudakowski, *Elephant Juice*, December 14 2018, in 1646.

This artist
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17 OCTOBER: Jason File [JF] - Kasia Fudakowski [KF]

Dear Kasia,

I'm pleased to meet you via e-mail!

Since we're starting from zero, more or less, perhaps a good place to start would be a brief introduction to your plans for the 1646 presentation you are developing. Could you explain a bit about what you have in mind, and how it relates to your art practice in general?

Looking forward to corresponding with you over the next two months as you develop your project.

Kind regards,
Jason

21 OCT: KF - JF

Hi Jason,

Thanks for getting in touch, I'm very happy to be connected with you for this project. I was excited when Johan suggested the conversation with you because of your work with the different aspects of the law which is something I'm also very interested in, and I'm looking to bring more and more into this project, though it may not manifest itself 'this time'...

So just to give you a quick introduction: The exhibition at 1646 will be a presentation of the next 'episode' or instalment of my ongoing film project Word Count. It's based on the futuristic and fictional premise that in the near future scientists confirm a direct correlation between the dramatically rising sea-levels and the amount of words that we speak. A new law is passed which restricts each citizen on the planet to 433 words per day. This comes to be known as Cage Law, after John Cage's famous 4'33".

The ever-expanding accumulating footage of Word Count investigates the consequences of the first year of this new law's implementation, with some citizens being more able and willing to adapt than others. I see it basically as a kind of filter through which to see the absurdity of our current reality.

I'm not working with a feature length script, but rather, each time I have the opportunity to shoot, finding a micro scene or scenes that makes the most sense given the implicit limits of each opportunity, and slowly making my way through and around four central character's narratives:

Bridget, a stand up comedian, Jennifer, a lawyer specialising in Cage Law, her husband David, an out of work radio DJ and Professor Sanchez, a radical intellectual who rejects the philosophy behind Cage Law. Each character represents a different position. Jennifer's

character works with the system and only strictly within the legal limits, her husband represents someone who has given in and given up, the professor symbolises a kind of martyr to an idea while Bridget, the stand up comedian, is the only character that has the mental agility to really positively adapt her behaviour to create a new way to communicate and indeed self-actualise.

For The Hague I am concentrating on the husband's character, who, having recently been made unemployed (as a victim of Cage Law), tries to find purpose in his life by diving for flooded debris in the sea. He repairs and resells various things, 'recycling' them for word credits. I want to use The Hague's location on the coast as a kind of fifth character in this film, asking how might life be different in The Hague under this new law.

Maybe that's enough to start us off? Looking forward to hearing from you soon.

best
Kasia

23 OCT: JF - KF

Thanks very much for this introduction to your project. It is a thought-provoking scenario you have proposed, and I am excited to see how it evolves.

If it sounds good to you, I'll try to restrict my questions and comments to the improvisational comedy rule of "yes, and?" that takes a scenario as given and goes in pursuit of further development. This is because your "Cage Law" idea prompts a lot of questions from the law and politics side of my brain (Who passed this law? How did it overcome resistance from interested parties? How is it enforced internationally?) that I think are not really necessary for you to answer given the micro-local approach you seem to be pursuing in your filmed scenes.

One set of questions, though, I think come from a similar place, and are perhaps more relevant to the scenes you are producing - I'll go ahead and put them out there given that you mentioned your interest in the legal aspects of things. One interesting feature of the criminal trials I have worked on for the United Nations in The Hague has been seeing how the trial transcripts differ physically across different languages. I have attached a page of the English language transcript from one trial as an example. There is an effort to ensure that the page numbers for the English- and French- language versions of the transcript correspond, but French is a less "efficient" language in terms of the number of concepts expressed on average per syllable and word; the result is that the English transcripts periodically contain blank pages to allow the French transcripts to catch up.

You may have come across this phenomenon - it turns out that there is actually a wide range of language efficiency across different languages, ranging from Mandarin and English at a high information density per word, to Spanish and Japanese at a low information density per word. In this study (http://ohll.ish-lyon.cnrs.fr/fulltext/pellegrino/Pellegrino_to%20appear_Language.pdf, see also <http://content.time.com/time/health/article/0,8599,2091477,00.html>), researchers at the University of Lyon found that low information density corresponded to a higher rate of speech so that the total amount of information conveyed across time was relatively similar no matter what language was spoken.

It seems that in The Martyrdom of Professor Sanchez, his words are counted the same in Spanish (one of the less efficient languages) as in English (one of the more efficient languages). So this got me thinking, the Cage Law must be unfairly discriminatory against some countries and languages, while a competitive advantage to others.

Especially in the legal realm, German is famous for its openness to packing complex concepts into a single word that looks to outsiders like a verbal car crash (for example, the famous *rechtsschutzversicherungsgesellschaften*, which describes insurance companies that provide legal protection). Would languages start evolving like this, with people also using conjunctions, eliminating articles, using active instead of passive sentence structures, et cetera? It seems that as a lawyer, Jennifer might be the kind of character who would take advantage of this for her clients, or her family, or herself. Indeed, maybe her law firm, or a cabal of government workers, might seek additional advantages through codes or even new languages. What if they did this to seek power, like in the (dated) 1949 Robert Heinlein sci-fi novella "Gulf", or if they tried to use Ithkuil, a language constructed for efficiency and accuracy, as documented in this New Yorker article (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/24/utopian-for-beginners>) from a few years back? Does the Cage Law include using written words, or clear body language? Would hearing-impaired people and others with a good command of sign language suddenly have a huge competitive advantage in communication? Would there be other noticeable changes in the physical surroundings or environment that your characters inhabit?

These are all speculative questions that relate to the way such a rule could alter individual behaviour and societal structures, so I guess it raises the more general question of how far do you want to go in your elaboration of the "rule-making" component of this collection of performed scenes? And likewise, how much do you want to allow audiences to figure out from clues in the scenes themselves versus the text that accompanies any presentation of this work?

I have other questions I wanted to ask, but I think this is plenty for our next exchange - I hope all is well with you! (Where are you based at the moment?)

29 OCT: KF - JF

Thanks so much for your engaged and concentrated response. I'm now on the train on my way from Berlin (where I live) to The Hague to shoot the next 'instalment' with a heavy bag filled with green rubber suits and what feels like a cold coming on. I'm super excited though to be shooting at the Pier which will be the first time we really see the water more present on the screen.

Your response technique of 'Yes and...' is apt as it's exactly how I'm also working with this idea as the premise simply functions as a filter through which to see the world and our, at times, absurd social behaviour.

So, although so far I have been, as you say, pursuing the theme on a more micro-local level, this is more of a capability/budget issue than a particular choice at this point. I see this project as an ever-growing series of shorts which will slowly, drip by drip, begin to illustrate the potential consequences of the implementation of this law, and that picture is always changing and hopefully getting

bigger and richer. The point is that Cage Law would affect every level of life from the micro to the global social political sphere and so it's a joy to jump around and see where the chips fall in each situation.

To answer your first question, of who [I imagine] passed this law, I see it as a mirroring of The Rome Statute, The Dublin Convention, or The Paris Agreement where certain nations got together to agree on a level of co-operation on a specific issue. The idea with this is that of course some nations were/are either not represented or boycotted the decision, which has consequences for the whole. I'm interested in using stereotypes as dangerously 'useful' or 'efficient' short cuts to start to play the game of 'what if...'

So along those lines, I imagine for example, the brooding Nordic nations realise they don't use all their word credit quota each day due to their lower population-to-land-mass ratio, i.e. they don't bump into each other much, and begin to sell off their credits to nations in far greater apparent 'need' like Italy and Spain where, by breakfast, most citizens are already struggling to stay within their quota.

Monarchic England is the first nation to reveal a two-tiered class system in which the wealthy, educated 'upper-class', inexplicably has a higher word count access than the underprivileged 'lower classes'. The sudden criminalisation of 'over-speaking' results in over-crowded prisons, and with austerity measures introduced resulting in cuts to legal aid, the poor are progressively misrepresented, their voices, literally, taken away.

The proud Poles, feel unreasonably and personally victimised by Cage Law because they are the only nation with over six grammatical cases. As a credit saving policy, they decide to radically do away with the past tense, resulting in a 35% decrease in national speech requirements...

The Germans are laughing with their compound nouns and thus retain their position as the strongest economic power in what is left of the crumbling European Union. Through acts of apparent charity they buy up huge swathes of, ironically German subsidised credits from the indebted Greeks before selling them back to them at a higher interest rate.

The Americans might use their global and financial influence to 'buy' up credits from poorer struggling nations, which might sell their entire gross national credits without even asking it's citizens, rendering them forcibly silent for extended periods of time... while 'rogue nations' which did not sign in Cage Law might refuse to co-operate throwing any delicate adaptive efforts of the undersigned out of the window.

I imagine the western-centric nature of Cage Law would also encounter difficulties when assessing tonal languages. Being unable to decipher the difference between syllables and words, a syllabic half-credit system might be imposed in Asian countries which results in them being at a bureaucratic disadvantage at the global table. I was very interested to read about the relative efficiencies of language that you mentioned, and LOVE the visualisation of the blank English pages existing to allow the French to catch up.

There would also be unexpected shifts under Cage Law like for example Mexico's regrettable history of indigenous illiteracy ironically works in its favour with its populous being much more accustomed to working with images and signs than words. Many impoverished locals, particularly

the female population, also find that their words suddenly have a value that they did not have before.

You asked about the written aspect of this scenario, and although I revel in this ever evolving thought experiment, I am aware that in the film I don't want it to be a check list of all the 'clever' things I have thought of for this rule. Do you know what I mean? These shorts should exist as sketches that just suggest various scenarios. But, yes, the written question is an important aspect, and the narrative conceit I have invented is that a written word is equal to half a spoken word credit. The idea being that somehow the production of new information is not infinite or at least that there is a cost involved. This means however, that everything that was already spoken and recorded or written down can be recycled. And that's exactly what the character of David, the unemployed husband, is up to. This week we will film him as he dives for analogue recorded speech, mostly in the form of records, and dries them, straightens them out and then re-sells them for credits.

I think it's important to repeat that the Word Count project takes place in the first year of the implementation of this new law, so it's really as much about our relative ability to adapt as how we might do it. I imagine long-term, people would indeed develop much more sophisticated means of communicating non-verbally, be that sign language or recorded speech, but yes, initially there would be a hierarchical flip which might see the hearing or speech impaired at an advantage. There might be people who consider donating, or abstaining...

I'm aware that this email is swelling, and I haven't answered all your questions, and while I would love to write on, I think it would be wise to practice a little self-restraint, and finish here!

15 NOV: JF - KF

I very much enjoyed reading your extensive response, as it suggests so many avenues this project could take! It also built out the world or worlds that might be inhabited by these characters in numerous ways.

One major aspect of your response imagined the use of national stereotypes as a way of teasing out the implications of the Cage Law, which for me highlighted the importance, or at least the potential importance, of a humorous or satirical element in this project. I noticed that in the series of shorts to which you referred me in your initial message, the structure and content seemed to work together to operate almost like a set-up with a punch line. Do you see humour as playing an important role in this project, or in your art practice more generally? Has it contributed to this particular instalment as you develop the David's character and world as he goes diving for speech? How much of the action is scripted as opposed to improvised? (... and how did the shoot go? What's next?)

Best of luck as the project begins to take form!

5 DEC: KF - JF

Sorry for the long pause. The shoot went well and the edit was pretty smooth, now just on my way back through the mist to The Hague for the install.

Yes! Humour is THE most important element to me, though I'm happy for it to get momentarily or even often submerged

in the horror. This instalment of the film or in fact three little films are a good mix of tragic, comic and the mix of that in the very every day.

What I'm most nervous about for the install is to get this sound piece working which involves a sound regulated magnetic valve. The idea is that when people speak in the first room, the tap will release water. The hope is in the end there will be many buckets of water, representing how much was spoken in the room... let's see if it works!

Are you in The Hague at the moment? Will you make it for the opening? Or London? What are you working on right now? Would be nice to meet some day.

10 DEC: JF - KF

Ahh yes, the début of a new technology! I'm familiar with the excitement and anxiety that comes with that particular type of experimentation. I have found that it can sometimes provide incredible opportunities for collaboration across disciplines by seeking out experts with the right kind of background to advise on developing technical solutions to out-of-the-ordinary artistic problems - but then there is always that pesky problem of whether it will actually work on time! How have you approached this particular issue? Is it something where you already have special knowledge and can make something like this on your own, or have you worked with specialists to design and build this valve? If the latter, how did you find them and how has it gone?

I would love to hear your more of your thoughts on how humour is the most important element for you, especially in terms of whether (and how) you think it might be capable of affecting the audience in ways that are otherwise not accessible in contemporary art. Is it connected to an exploration of the notion of the absurd?

I hope you can find a moment during your installation period to send one last response on or before our 11 December deadline for printing, although I know that the few days before opening can be intense. Also, if you feel that there are important aspects of this project that I have not asked about, and that you would like to convey to your audience, please feel free to include them. (Which sort of raises that perennial question of how much you want the audience to receive directly though the work versus through accompanying exhibition text...)

As for me, I regret that I will not be able to attend in person to celebrate the opening of your exhibition with you on the 14th. I am currently in the United States for some project development - just finished an installation that is on show at a museum in Sarajevo, and wrapping up the edit of a new video that will be screened in London on the 17th. However, I look forward very much to meeting you sometime soon, and will be there in spirit. I will keep my fingers crossed that all elements, including your sound-activated valve, work the way you want them to!

In the meantime, best of luck this week, and have a great opening!

12 DEC: KF - JF

Thanks for this last email. Such beautifully leading questions! I don't know if that's the lawyer in you or this

specific slightly artificial assignment, either way, it's been very interesting to exchange with you. Shame that you won't make it to see the show, but I'll send you some links to the new films asap. I meant to write back sooner, to get one more exchange in before we finish, but I've been a bit exhausted in the evenings after installing and suddenly things like being horizontal and watching a Metallica documentary seemed very important... Anyway, we have till tomorrow morning, so here is me squeezing one in.

The show is now installed, and it's a strange feeling. I've never done a show like this. Can't help thinking it's a bit of a 90's exhibition! Installation art, immersive, 'multi-sensory'. It sounds and smells like an exhibition anyway. Interestingly there is this really nice sound bleeding between the videos in the space, so while you watch one specific person or couple trying to deal with the world under Cage Law, you catch glimpses of other little worlds happening at the same time from the corner of your eye. The project as a whole is still very fragmented, but I feel like slowly I am getting a bit more of the picture together, and snippets of narratives will start to make more sense. The short we shot with David (the diver and husband character) fleshes out his character a little now, but I guess you don't have to know that it's 'David', it could just be a guy pulling records out of the ocean.

I'd say the humour is pretty undercover in this exhibition, because the atmosphere is a little oppressive (I've built this temporary tunnel construction which is made from timber and grey-green plastic sheeting with water weighing down from above so that when you walk under you have to hunch over to avoid it's dull weight) and it's therefore not a 'comfortable experience', but I'd say humour is still the motivation behind the project (not that humour has to be comfortable, far from it). And yes, it's very much linked to an exploration of the absurd (if the absurd is an exaggeration of the truth). For me, humour or the comic, when it works is like a short circuit to the truth and it only works when it connects to the truth. I also believe it's the most economic form of communication, in the sense that if it works, it connects to something already in the mind of the beholder. I am so in love with Kierkegaard right now, and in his 'Repetition and Philosophical Crumbs' he argues that the Socratic way is 'the most positive' (as opposed to negative) relation you can have with another, i.e. the continual questioning to allow the subject to discover what they already 'know'. That's vastly over simplified, but what I mean is that the comic element is like a super conductor and it can connect on such an intuitive level, bi-passing the critical cerebral level that much of contemporary art discourse exists on.

The water feature works! Many people helped along the way with it including my engineer brother, my electrician friend back in Berlin and finally Floris here in the Hague who seemingly very enthusiastically took over the installation while I worked on the plastic with Johan and Clara. So, I'm very lucky. Fingers crossed it holds out for the show.

So, thanks again for your time and thoughts on this, and all my very best

Kasia