



Rebecca Geldard, London 2008

As it is, as it could be:  
on recent work by Vittorio Santoro

If there was one message you needed to convey above all others, could you rely on your hand to craft it in the way you intended it to be meant, not for the permutations of motor execution to reveal more about you than the actual words themselves? Vittorio Santoro's spare, time-based text works appear to have been prompted by a similar sense of urgency and enquiry. Recent process-based drawings such as *Dependent Participation, March–September 2007* (2007), *Vergeht Vergangenheit, August 2005–May 2007* (2005–2007) or *To Believe that More of the Same ... , April–September 2007* (2007) bring together the separate strands of Santoro's practice, linked by his unwavering performative enquiry into the construction of meaning.

Part poetic expression, part semantic experiment, Santoro's text drawings are imbued with a sense of time passing: the mental and physical effort required in retracing the same sentence every day for between six months to two years,

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Lives and works in Paris and Zurich

Solo exhibitions

2008 *Three Attempts to Avoid the Inevitable, Les Complices\**, Espace libre & Edition, Zurich  
2007 *The Truth About Your Own Tolerance for Cruelty*, Gallery Cortex Athletico, Bordeaux  
2006 *NB, New York / Berlin (with Anna Amadio)*, Kunstmuseum Thun  
2003 *It's All In Your Mind / C'est tout dans ma tête*, Gallery Yvon Lambert, Project Room, Paris

Group exhibitions

2007 *Collection, CAPC – Musée d'Art contemporain, Bordeaux*  
*Learn To Read*, Tate Modern, London  
2006 *Was macht die Kunst—Ankäufe der Stadt Zürich 2001–2006*, Helmhaus Zürich, Zurich  
*Le Mépris or (Contempt)*, Mediamatic Groundfloor, Amsterdam  
2005 *Inherent Discrepancy*, Public, Espace d'Art contemporain, Paris  
*Temporary Import*, Art Forum Berlin  
*Ticker 9*, Gallery carlier|gebauer, Berlin  
2004 *Geschiebe—Landschaft als Denkmal*, Haus für Kunst Uri, Altdorf

Bibliography

2007–08 Magali Nachtergaele, "Vittorio Santoro. The Truth About Your Own Tolerance for Cruelty," *Art21*, no. 15, Paris, Dec. 2007 / Jan. 2008, p. 59.  
2007 Didier Arnaudet, "Vittorio Santoro Galerie Cortex Athletico Bordeaux," *art press*, Nr. 330, Paris, January, pp. 85–86.  
2006 Kathleen Bühler, "Divided Consciousness," *Vittorio Santoro, Everything's Not Lost*, Revolver (ed.), Frankfurt a.M., pp. 17–21.  
Paul Groot, "The Ambiguity of the Radio in 'The Radio,'" *Vittorio Santoro, Everything's Not Lost*, Revolver (ed.), Frankfurt a.M., pp. 31–34.  
Jan Linders, "Two or Three Things I Know About Them," *Vittorio Santoro, Everything's Not Lost*, Revolver (ed.), Frankfurt a.M., pp. 42–49.  
Ulrike Gross, "Between 'Merely' Seeing and 'Already' Reading," *Vittorio Santoro, Everything's Not Lost*, Revolver (ed.), Frankfurt a.M., pp. 61–65.  
2003 Daniel Kurjakovic, "Eine E-Mail Korrespondenz mit Vittorio Santoro," *Vittorio Santoro, It's all in your mind / C'est tout da ma tête*, Memory Cage Editions, Zurich, pp. 1–10.

and a curious feeling that remnants of the neural processes driving the human ritual might remain trapped within the largely indistinguishable layers of lead or ink. The textual blueprint beneath appears to have been curated rather than simply printed within the boundaries of the paper, as if, perhaps, to convey the complexity of linguistic interpretation. While certain works immediately resonate with a sense of the profound, others take form slowly in the mind as if they have been previously marinated in that of the artist's.

*F. Dostoyevsky: C. and P., page 67 (Penguin Popular Classics), divided vertically* (2007), is a two-part piece based on the novel of the Russian author, a meticulous transcription of a particular page, cut vertically in two. Both parts hang back to back on a single wall, in a mutually exclusive manner, with one part burnt and the other left untouched. The text describes the moment before an imminent encounter between two people located

on either side of a door. Framed by the notion of suspension—whether fictional device or physical action—invisible symmetry and actual visual dissymmetry enter into a strange and meaningful relationship.

*Il fait jour? (Il ne fait pas nuit)*, assisted version (2007), a viewer-reactive video sculpture, makes difficult philosophical propositions a physical reality. The work, comprising a video and sculptural element, questions accepted means of extracting sense from verbal or physical interactions. Drawn to inspect the headless male figure on the screen (in an attempt to contextualize the incorporeal voice proclaiming four sentences and repeating them throughout the duration of the video), the viewer unwittingly trips a sensor, resulting in the violent slamming of a metal gate attached to the wall.

Another, this time truly disembodied, male voice plays an equally vital role in the recent installation *Untitled (Mask)* (2007). The work consists of a whitewashed generic booth fitted with a two-way mirror and housing a table and vintage radio—the staged source of a monologue (compiled from a wealth of historical descriptions) on a particular African mask. Fluorescent tubes determine the view from both sides of the portal, resulting in a postmodern game of peek-a-boo that queries the validity of the cultural processes through which one learns to “see.” As they fade in and out of illumination, the viewers are by turn granted visual access through the structure and presented with their own reflections. This combination of elements—the sterile art setting, evocative vocal and “World Service” implications of the device—pitch one along the ethnographic path between mystical notions of “other”—and their (mis)appropriation in Western art practices—to the politics of authority and scientific protocol.

While Santoro pays open homage to the systematized performative practices of On Kawara or Vito Acconci, there is something very literary, at times borderline Dada, about his brief musings. The historical legacies of the conceptual strategies he uses locate philosophical concerns within the realm of art practice, while inducing a sense of being able to halt time and physically negotiate discrepant realities made palpable within temporary spaces, or words recently released into the ether.

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