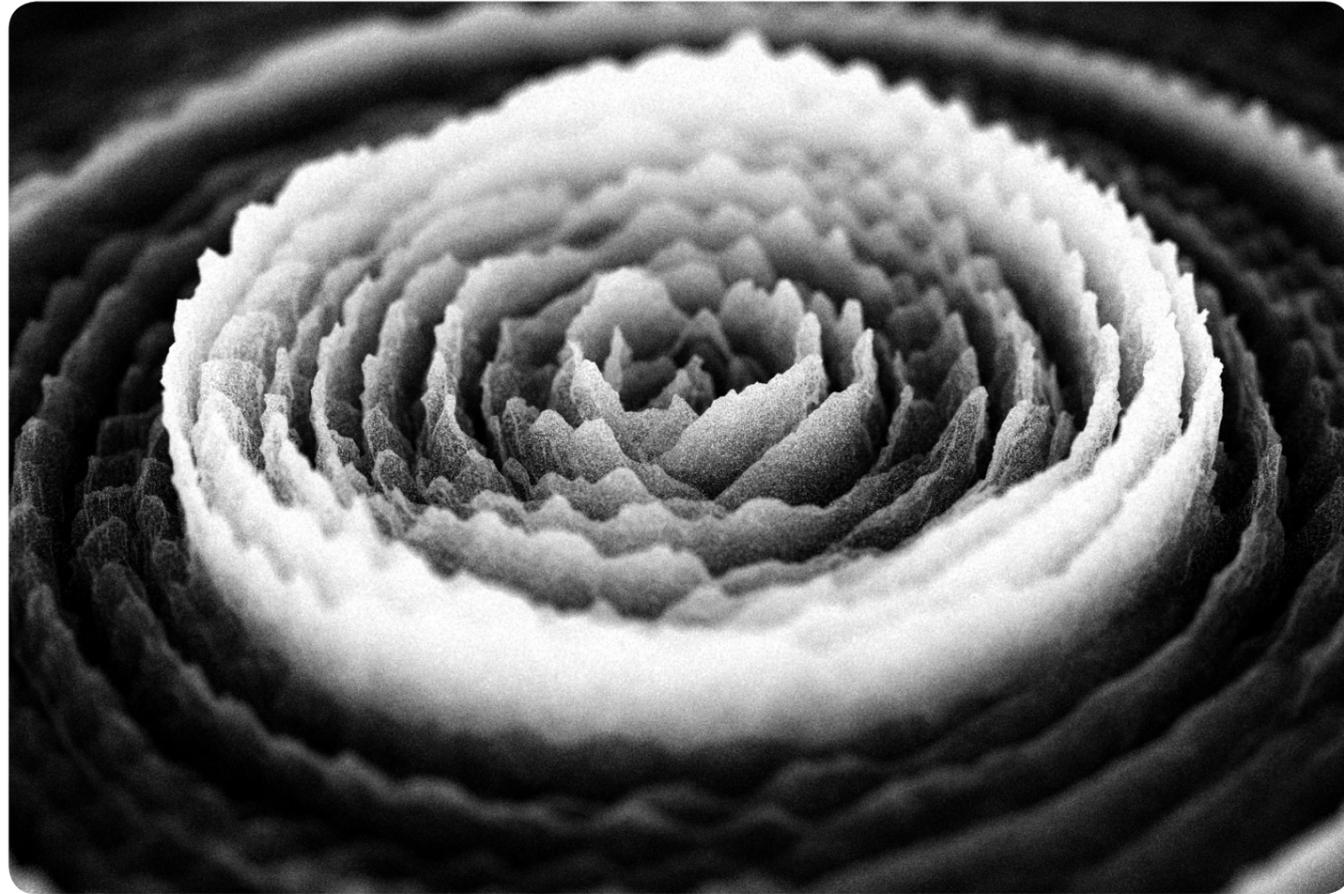


ARTIST FILM & VIDEO AT TATE BRITAIN  
UPCOMING SCREENINGS:

BEYOND THE SINGLE SCREEN:  
SEMICONDUCTOR AND LYNN LOO/GUY SHERWIN WITH  
PROF. CATHERINE ELWES  
Monday 15 June 2015, 18.30–20.00

REVERENCE AND REPROACH:  
MODERNIST LEGACIES IN CONTEMPORARY FILM & VIDEO  
Monday 6 July, 18.30–20.30

MOVING PICTURES:  
ARTISTS' FILMS FROM THE FILM LONDON JARMAN AWARD  
Monday 13 July 2015, 19.00–21.00



Semiconductor, 20Hz 2011, HD + HD 3D single channel © the artists

# TATE FILM

LUCY BEECH & EDWARD THOMASSON

Artist Film & Video at Tate Britain  
Clare Auditorium, Tate Britain  
Monday 18 May 2015  
19.00–21.00



Lucy Beech and Edward Thomasson *Passive Aggressive 2* 2014, performance documentation, Camden Arts Centre, London. Photograph: Hugo Glendinning

Contemporary artists Lucy Beech and Edward Thomasson have composed a unique programme of their most recent video works. They will discuss their practices and explore what constitutes performance outside conventional theatrical environments with writer and critic Jonathan P. Watts.

Artist Film & Video at Tate Britain is curated by Zoe Whitley, Curator and Jenny Lund, Assistant Curator, Contemporary British Art at Tate Britain. With thanks to the artists.

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## BETWEEN ME AND YOU: LUCY BEECH AND EDWARD THOMASSON

By Jonathan P. Watts

*In the City we change our identities at will, as Dickens triumphantly proved over and over again in his fiction; its discontinuity favours both instant heroes and instant villains impartially. The gaudy, theatrical nature of city life tends constantly to melodrama.* – Jonathan Raban, *Soft City* (1974)

Over the past eight years, Lucy Beech and Edward Thomasson have regularly collaborated on live performances and video works, including *Holding it Together* (2011), *Left Behind Together* (2013) and, screened tonight, *7 Year Itch* (2011), *Open House* (2012) and *Passive Aggressive 2* (2014). This collaborative work is made under the combined aegis of the artists' individual names – names associated with their own individual practices.

For the past three years, Beech's video works have developed out of embedded research into franchised wellbeing workshops and, recently, contemporary funerary service. Her works often isolate and re-enact real life occurrences to explore the labour and economies of emotion. Unlike Beech's works, Thomasson's, which draw upon musical theatre – a synthesis of acting, composition and choreography – are often fictional narratives, which nonetheless explore familiar themes and situations, such as anti-social behaviour, sexual intimacy or consumer focus groups.

While Thomasson's characters often share a plaintive sense of separation, Beech's

characters, all women, come together in self-organised groups around notions of care or empathy. These groups are subject to their own internal hierarchies: there is always a leader and an underlying competitiveness. The structure for Beech's *Results that Move You* (2015) is based on the training programme for an existing 'Rent a Mourner' service in Essex. The protagonist is an undercover benefit fraud investigator who pursues a 'single mother' accused of child support fraud. The 'single mother' joins her team of women deemed skilled in the art of deception in a slick high-rise apartment. They time one another changing into mourning outfits and one by one rehearse their condolences. 'I'm sorry for your loss,' one participant, the last in a line, offers to the role-playing bereaved. 'That was very good!' she bleats, *genuinely* moved. Between chatty informality, didacticism and affected mournfulness, the group evokes workshop, hen party and wake. In this uncertain space, the leader warns, portentously, with a heavy dose of dramatic irony, against embodying someone else, of the risk of being 'alienated from your true sense of self.' In these entangled performances and masquerades, it is never clear who or what is being mourned. And where performance begins and ends.

Both Beech and Thomasson are fascinated by the split between people's interior emotional and psychological being and their presentation in day-to-day life. These different group structures, institutional or organic, in prisons, private homes, or in hireable 'flexible use' business spaces, enable the artists to explore the relationship of the individual to the collective. Their works encourage us to

ask how, why and for whom these groups facilitate being together. How do these groups influence the behaviour of those present? What conscious and unconscious anxieties, hidden from view and so difficult to define, swirl beneath the surface? The works reflect on how such dynamics play out between the performers and the viewing audience – on how the moving image or stage acts as a screen between two distinct social groups.

In Thomasson's *Open Your Mouth* (2014) we see a woman observing a focus group through a semi-silvered window. She gazes directly at the camera and we hear her interior voice, a voiceover, as if speaking through the screen, demystify the purpose of this gathering: 'the trick is to have people who have never met and will never meet again'. This separation, she continues, is essential to the openness of the perceptions, opinions, beliefs and attitudes expressed about the object being surveyed. Effective consensus is formed around an object by necessary separation. On the other side of the glass, among the group, another woman sings, 'Blah, blah, blah, blah,' performing only for the viewer, achieving harmony over the miasmic din of the group expressing freely. Elsewhere, perhaps in the same city, a man is kept waiting long enough in a call queue that he can find a guy on a hookup website and joylessly fuck before the call is answered by an operator. Competing paradoxes of communication are staged: vocal distance and bodily proximity, proximity finally unfulfilled by the separation of latex-sheathed penetration, which finds an equivalent in the screen and window. The men will probably never meet again and it's none the better for this. Beech's and Thomasson's collaborative



Edward Thomasson, *Open Your Mouth*, HD video with sound, 9 minutes, 2014 © the artist

work builds upon shared concerns through choreography and disruption of narrative structure and form. Casting a wry eye over the neoliberal prerogative to 'be who you are', in mind, body and spirit, their individual and collaborative work evokes the incorporation of alternative and counter-cultural ways of being together into corporate management styles and institutional mental health and wellbeing. For Thomasson the moment he and Beech meet to work together is an emotional experience that punctuates his own working practice:

'Working with Lucy is an antidote to the loneliness you often feel working on projects alone, when all the decisions are being made in your head. We bring all the stuff we problematize in our own work into the projects we make together, talk about it and work with it.'

Working together enables each to take different kinds of risks. 'I think,' Beech explains, 'we egg each other on to be more direct with humour or critique so things are somehow less oblique.' She continues:

'Working collaboratively, the idea, however bad it might be, has to be expressed in order to be worked through. This means you have to stay in constant contact, which is one of the benefits, but could also be why Ed and I are known to argue so much.'

It's difficult not to read the dynamics of this artistic collaboration, in all its difficulty and awkwardness, into those of the very groups that form the subject matter of their work.

Beech and Thomasson's most recent work, *Passive Aggressive 2*, is a disquietingly funny reveal of the discrepancy between thought and action (a dilemma bawdily teased out in *7 Year Itch*). Devised during a Performance Residency at Camden Arts Centre, and later

presented to an audience in the gallery, the work features four office workers surrounded by props such as tables, a bouquet of white flowers, plastic cups and a small PA system hooked up to microphones attached to the bodies of (four) performers. Grinning maniacally, each member of the ensemble performs a sequence of movements. These are repeated simultaneously as a group. Finally, the tables are tipped up to form a screen between the audience and the performers. Together, the performers repeat choreographed movements out of sight; the amplified bodily sounds cohere to imply a non-verbal story of abject violence: scrunched cups are crushed bones; a flapping necktie is a thudding heart; slapped arms a punched face. Microphones strapped to the body express the indirect expression of hostility implied by the title.

This division between action and sound is explored much more benignly, sweetly, in *Open House*, a performance work in which an estate agent leads a group around a flat to a soundtrack of 'chill out' music piped in, it is revealed, by an all-dancing group of estate agents concealed in the living room. These estate agents, we might imagine, have broadened their skillset to become the 'new artisans' of our capitalist economy, which places a premium on interpersonal interaction, flexibility and adaptability to offer services that are uniquely human. It's an economy, social psychologist Philip Boxer writes, 'liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free marketers and free trade'. In Beech and Thomasson's work, both individual and collaborative, we see, perhaps, what this artisanal economy has learnt from contemporary art, and in turn what they have learnt about how it separates and brings us together.

## ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS:

**Lucy Beech** (born 1985)  
Lives and works in London

Recent solo exhibitions include *Me and Mine*, Harris Museum and Art Gallery, Preston, which travels to Tetley, Leeds in July 2015. Her work has been included in group exhibitions and screenings at ICA, London, Chisenhale Gallery, London, GAK, Bremen and V22, London. Beech will be part of the *Selected V*, touring screening, throughout 2015 including CCA, Glasgow, CIRCA, Newcastle, Fabrica, Brighton, Whitechapel Gallery, London and Nottingham Contemporary.

**Edward Thomasson** (born 1985)  
Lives and works in London

Recent solo exhibitions include *The Present Tense*, Chisenhale Gallery, London, *Just About Managing*, Southard Reid, London, and *Inside*, South London Gallery. His work has also been included in group exhibitions and screenings at GAK, Bremen and Pilar Corrias, London. In 2013 he presented his first play *Between You And Me* at The Glass House Community Centre, London. His new play *Escape Routes* will be presented at The Assembly Hall, Indian YMCA, London in May 2015.

Alongside their independent practices, Lucy Beech and Edward Thomasson have collaborated on performance and video projects since 2007 after leaving Chelsea College of Art and Design, London. Recent presentations include *Passive Aggressive 2* at Camden Arts Centre, London, *Passive Aggressive* at Kepi Kredi Culture Centre, Istanbul, *Left Behind Together* at OUTPOST, Norwich, 2nd Biennale de Belleville, Paris; South London Gallery; Frieze Projects at Frieze London; Barbican Theatre, London; Bloomsbury Theatre, London and Modern Art Oxford.

**Jonathan P. Watts**  
Lives and works in London

Jonathan P Watts is a regular contributor to *frieze* magazine. As well as being arts editor of *Noon* magazine, he is a founding editor – one of seven – of *Aorist*, a new magazine of critical writing on contemporary art and culture.



Lucy Beech, *Results that Move You*, HD video with sound, 15 minutes 47 seconds, 2014 © the artist