



Les attentes—The Waiting
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Work-in-Progress Seminar
University of Rochester
Humanities Center
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My art practice focuses on the relationship between people and the ways they occupy space. Using lens-based media as a means of reflecting upon and re-interpreting everyday frames, I deconstruct domestic and institutional spaces and the frames within—doors, windows and walls. The sites and objects I work with become my medium and framing device for site-specific installations. I incorporate *trompe l'oeil* and camouflage techniques, double-takes and shifting point of views as a method for destabilizing vision and making viewers conscious of vision as an activity in which the whole body is involved. My aim is to confound the viewers' expectations by creating manipulated scenes composed of still and moving imagery where narratives are compressed, compromised or suspended.

For the project *Les attentes—The Waiting*, I portray places of unexpected encounters and discoveries where tension and boredom cohabit: waiting rooms. I investigate their potential to unfold in places of both the everyday and the extraordinary through series of videos and installations. From doctor offices to airports, I am documenting and examining the architecture of various waiting rooms and using these spaces—real and/or restaged—as sets for fictional stories and actions. How do we wait, and what exactly is the experience of waiting like? I look at the subtle movements of a person waiting, the anxious state of being in between two moments, and what we remember from these moments.

The first stage of the project was produced in art residencies in Paris and Marnay-sur-Seine, France (*La Cité internationale des Arts* and *Camac*), in Tokyo, Japan (*3331 Arts Chiyoda*), and in Gagliano de Capo, Italy (*Lastation*). During these residencies, I invited 32 participants in my temporary studio spaces to produce a series of video and recordings. The participants were asked to wait for several minutes in an imaginary waiting room (my studio) and then to share their observations and waiting stories. I have also photographed various waiting spaces and related objects for the construction of large format composite images. These images and recordings are meant to distort an exhibition space into a strange room where the viewers are asked to stop, wait and rediscover the room they are in. Photographs of the architectural elements of the actual exhibition room are mixed with elements of the waiting rooms I documented. I create “fake” environments inspired by “real” waiting situations and play with typical waiting room elements such as seating arrangements, screens (TVs, mobile devices), magazines, posters and green plants.

I used a portion of my time as a fellow at the Humanities Center this semester to develop the final stages of the project: editing the material I have gathered during these residencies, designing scenarios for multimedia exhibitions, and developing a script for a film I plan to start the production in 2018. For this work-in-progress seminar, I will present documentation of this ongoing work to generate a conversation about these ambiguous spaces. I also would love to hear some of your waiting room stories and anecdotes.

<http://lesattentes.space>

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TINJA

What are you waiting for?

Well I guess nothing.

Can you describe a memorable waiting situation that you've experienced recently or a long time ago?

I can try. I think recently there was one that was very memorable. It was sad as well. My mother passed away and I was waiting to see her body at the hospital. I think that's the most memorable situation I can think of but I don't remember so much about it.

Do you remember the room you were in?

Yeah. I remember. There was a huge plant. I think it was an exotic plant, perhaps a money tree. And then there were some ugly paintings. There were some birds on them and different colors. I think one was a painting of a rock.

How long were you in the room before you were able to go see your mother?

Maybe fifteen minutes.

Did it felt longer than fifteen minutes, or shorter than fifteen minutes?

I think the same, not longer, not shorter.

Between the room you were in and the length of time you waited, which one of the two was the most memorable, or comes first to your mind when you think about that moment?

Well maybe the state of mind I was in and then the space. Yes. Because well I don't remember so much about the space but I remember the plant and the painting.

Do you remember if you were sitting on a chair?

Yes. I think it was actually a similar chair than the one I am sitting on right now.

Would you say that you needed that moment?

Maybe yes somehow.

Were you by yourself?

No I was with my partner and with my aunt. I think that the fact that they were there and that we were together waiting in the same room was important and it makes me remember this moment a certain way.

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INA

Can you describe a memorable waiting situation?

My first love. Whom I met online when I was living in Montreal. He lived in Paris. I was waiting to meet him for the first time at the airport. I had resolved to sit somewhere and wait for him to pass by instead of watching for him to arrive near the arrival doors. I remember there were a lot of people. It was like waiting in a crowd for someone you had never seen before. I had sat on one of the public seating area, I think the seats were black and white made of plastic and metal. I was trying to sit graciously and was very conscious of my pose. My plan was that he would find me first, that he would be the one looking for me.

Do you remember how long you waited for him to find you?

Forty-five minutes I think.

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Do you listen to the conversations in waiting rooms?

Most of the waiting rooms I find myself in are more or less quiet. I listen to the receptionist. I am very sensitive to the ambient noises like the ventilation or phones ringing. I am sensitive to the personality of the receptionist.

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ELIZABETH

Excuse me, how long have been waiting for?

About fifteen minutes I believe.

Can you share a memorable waiting situation you have experienced in the past?

Yes. I remember waiting. I was quite anxious actually. One of my children was flying from an airport somewhere or other and she didn't know where she was going and I didn't know where I was to collect her and we were waiting at the airport very anxious wondering if she'd ever get off the plane. Eventually she did land and got off the plane and I was there at the right place. It

was pretty memorable. It was quite isolating. We were in a foreign country and didn't speak the language.

Do you remember the space where you were waiting?

It was an airport. Pretty standard but it's difficult when you don't speak the language and you're not sure a person is going to be on that plane or even if you're in the right place. It was memorable because I was anxious but at the same time I was very happy to see her when she arrived.

Do you remember how long you waited?

Well it wasn't just the waiting, I had to hire a car and I had to drive there so I was quite anxious. I suppose the actual waiting period was no longer than twenty minutes perhaps. But the anticipation of the waiting went on for maybe forty-eight hours.

Would you say that it is the space where you waited that was more impactful in remembering that moment or that it is the length of time you waited for?

Well it's interesting because the space and the time is filled with an anxiety so it's difficult to say which one is the most important. But the space was more impactful I suppose. Yes. Where I was, the situation.

Do you remember the seating arrangement or other details from the waiting room or waiting area?

Well I didn't sit, I stood because you know I was anxious. And you know you don't sit in a space if you feel that you might not be in the right place. I mean I knew I was in the right place here so I sat down but I wouldn't sit down if I wasn't sure I was in the right place, if that makes sense. When I was waiting for my daughter to arrive at that airport, the stress of the moment made me don't want to sit, it made me not want to relax because you know you have to be reasonably relaxed to sit down in any situation, would you say?

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SAMUEL

How long have you been waiting?

I am not sure.

What are you waiting for?

I don't know.

Can you share a memorable waiting situation?

Yeah. I wait a lot in my studio, kind of waiting for ideas. But that is more something I do every day in the background. I guess I am trying to engage, to relax, and to follow intuitive feelings. I always feel like I am waiting for an idea to come up. That's something I do most days.

Is there a specific space attached to this process?

Yeah, the space is my studio.

When you enter that space, do you automatically switch to a waiting mode?

Usually when I enter I first just do daily things like answering emails and whatnot but after that's done then I start to wait.

Would you say that the wait ends at some point or it is always in the background when you work?

I think it ends when something comes to me but I never know in advance what that thing is going to be. Some days nothing happens and I am just waiting. It really varies.

Can you talk about your perception of time during that process? Is time important when you enter that space?

Time tends to feel like a constraint because I have deadlines but at the same time I try to ignore that because it would be counterproductive to the level of relaxation that I want to work in. It is always a conflict between these two things: trying to not feel constrained about time whilst at the same time trying to be pragmatic about time.

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JOEL

How long have you been waiting for?

Maybe five minutes.

What are you waiting for?

I was waiting for you to show up.

Would you like to share a memorable waiting situation with me?

Yes. That's actually why I came here because some years ago I had a period in my life when I had to wait many times a week in the same place. This experiment somehow reminded of that situation. When you asked me to come here and wait I thought of that period immediately.

Can you elaborate on the space you were waiting in?

Yeah. It wasn't any typical waiting room. It was a staircase. Because there wasn't any room to wait in. I was usually a bit early because I wanted to be prepared and preferred to be there earlier than to be late.

Were there other people around you?

No I was alone. Many times I felt stupid to get there so early standing alone quietly in the staircase but I didn't want to be rude or late for my appointments.

Which element is the most memorable: the length of time you were waiting for, or the space you were in?

Maybe the time just because it was always only a few minutes and I was a bit nervous constantly checking the clock to see if it was already time to enter yet. The space wasn't so important. I don't remember it so well.

Would you say that time was going slower or faster than usual when you were waiting in the staircases?

It was both slower and faster at the same time. I felt unprepared and wish I had more time before my appointment and at the same time I wanted it to be over quickly. My notion of time during these moments was derailing.

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LANA

How long have been waiting for?

A little more than eight minutes.

What are you waiting for?

I am waiting to get back to work. I have to work after this.

You have work in your mind, were you thinking about work while waiting?

Well, I was actually trying to get it off my mind so I was doing some meditation.

Would you like to share a memorable waiting situation that happened either a long time ago or more recently?

Maybe like five months ago, my mom and I were heading to Vietnam and we were waiting to get our visas at the airport after we had landed. My mom is not Vietnamese but my dad is. He hasn't been back yet since he immigrated to Canada. He had told us all these stories about the country, mostly scary stories, and we were really nervous waiting for our visas at the airport.

Can you elaborate on this state of nervousness?

I have heard stories from my dad. My dad's family was involved in politics and he thinks it's actually dangerous for him to go back. Even today he still has that fear. I think my mother took a lot of it to heart so she would look at every guard with fear and rage almost. If I had even said one word to her she would go like 'shhh, no, not now.' It was a confusing situation because we were about to go on some sort of vacation or pilgrimage to visit relatives and sites we had heard of from my dad but the wait at the airport was so tense. Every little thing the guards did my mom would add some deep meaning to it. She would be attuned to even just that little phrase 'please have a seat,' which made the whole waiting situation more intense.

Do you remember the space?

Yeah, I remember it pretty well actually. If I try to remember something I first have to build the space in my head. It was some sort of a huge hallway. Awkwardly placed in the middle of this big room there were rows of three or four chairs. There were people from America and people from other countries as well and we were all just sort of waiting. You could just tell by people's attitude what they were there for, whether they were just on a family vacation or if they were immigrating, or if they were like me and my mom sort of that next generation of people visiting after the war. The counter was really far from the rows of chairs so you would sit very far back and you could barely see them shuffling between desks, pulling up papers and making copies.

Did you notice interactions between the people waiting?

No. There was a screen above the counter, a television screen. When they called you up, it wasn't a number, they would show your passport on the screen and called you by your full name. The pronunciation wasn't always right so you would have to check the picture to make sure it was or wasn't you being called. It was hard to tell otherwise. This breach of privacy while you were waiting added to the intensity of it. It was just so surreal. Now I know there would be many more fond memories coming after that specific moment during our trip. That was the culmination of years of just hearing things and stories about something and then finally arriving to the place. This last moment before we entered the country was very intense.

Do you remember how long you waited for?

Yeah, I remember. Maybe not more than half an hour.

Which element is the most memorable: the length of time you were waiting for, or the space you were in?

Definitely the space, or more so the situation which led to the space to remain very vivid in my memory.

Would you say that once the wait ended you immediately moved on to the next step of your journey or it stayed with you for a while?

My mom has always been this way, she has to smile until it's over. She smiled this really fake smile and grabbed the bags and shuffled out the door, well there was no door, but shuffled out to the next line and it took us probably until dinner time to really shed that intensity.

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THEOPHILO

How long have you been waiting for?

I don't know.

What are you waiting for?

You.

Would you be inclined to share a memorable waiting situation you have experienced in the past?

In my life?

Yes. Any type of waiting.

I like waiting. Because I can think when I wait. And draw. I can draw also when I wait. But a memorable wait, in my life. Yes, I know where. I joined the navy when I was very young. I was seventeen and the tour of duty was eighteen months, a year and a half. Those eighteen months went by very very fast. But once you leave you are removed from the formation. This was a battalion made of three companies, I am saying this because it explains the formation. So after eighteen months, those who are leaving are removed from the formation, from the line. And they formed separately. Generally, because there's different people of different times of the year, there might be two, three, four people who are ready to leave. But there's paperwork to be done so you wait. What I wanted to say is that those eighteen months went by very very quickly. I could hardly recall the eighteen months. Once you are out of the formation you have to wait maybe three four days. Those days were an eternity. They lasted forever. It was like being in prison.

Was it because you didn't know when the wait would be ending?

I think so and also because up to that point everything had been dictated for me and it was a very strict routine and there was no wait. Everything is organized for you, to the minutes you know. But once you're out of that system, immediately after that system, it felt like an eternity. It was despair. You know. It felt like prison. When people describe to me what prison is like, this is what I imagine. Those three four days. I don't remember how long it was maybe it was five days. And it lasted longer than the eighteen months. I suffered.

Can you elaborate on the spaces you were waiting in?

Yes. We still had to follow the sort of general routine. We formed with the battalion when the battalion formed etcetera, but for hours we did nothing. Maybe it wasn't waiting because I've always liked waiting even when I was a child. But we were in fact waiting. We had to wait to be released from the military. But between formations, because the battalions formed four times a day, maybe five times, between these times you couldn't do anything, you couldn't think either, you couldn't wait properly. I had never talked about this before. It was such a void, you know. You didn't know what you were going to do, who you were. You didn't really know what was ahead, you wanted to, but you couldn't. It's not that you had regrets rather you were leaving because you had to. I remember that time as a memorable time of waiting. I'm sorry it wasn't a happy memory. But it wasn't terrible, just boredom you know.

Which element is the most memorable: the length of time you were waiting for, or the spaces you were in?

I think it is both. In fact, I often choose where to wait. If I have a meeting, I will choose to wait in a place where I know I will enjoy the wait. And I don't know if it is because the places that I choose or the time that I have to myself but it's always pleasant and I make a point of choosing the right place to wait.

You carefully plan your waiting.

Definitely. Whether it's a coffee or rather a coffee shop, or sitting, or standing on a corner.

Would you say it is somewhat a contemplative or a meditative moment?

Most definitely. I am also a professor and I can't be late to class so I often wait for class to start. That's very important to me actually because, I mean, I am waiting, but it is also very productive. Those five ten minutes. I can redefine a whole lecture and go to the lecture having re-thought about it. I think it's good for me. It's always different because of those five ten minutes that I had to wait. If I would get to class immediately before class starts I'd be giving the same class every time. In those five minutes, I can doubt, I can revise, I can understand what is good or bad about the lecture. It is a beautiful idea the notion of waiting. Like Penelope. She waited twenty years for Odysseus to return, but not without sufferings.

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SARAH

How long have you been waiting for?

No idea.

What are you waiting for?

I don't know. I'm watching.

Outside?

Yeah, no. I was thinking. I watched a man die outside my window yesterday.

Really?

Yeah. He died of a heart attack. And there was a biker that came and the guy was already down and somebody was administrating CPR. I was just watching, I could see it from my window. It was a strange feeling of limbo. I knew he was gone but they were working on him for like forty-five minutes. He looked older. Like 50s or 60s I think. I couldn't see his face but I noticed he was wearing a watch. So that would indicate age to me. And then when they stopped. They wrapped him up in this silver foil. And the body was just sitting there just waiting on the ground until they could come and get it. And that took another half an hour. It was a very surreal, sad, singular thing. It was traumatic but at the same time it was like there was an absence of everything because people were just walking by and moving forward with their lives and yet this man was gone. It was a strange juxtaposition. It was very strange. I remember watching and feeling relief when they stopped... he was gone, you know. It was more traumatic watching him leave I think.

Did being in an enclosed space watching from your window made you feel removed from the situation?

Yeah. You know it was very strange. It was a very strange situation. I wasn't expecting to see that when I looked out my window.

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Would you like to share a memorable waiting situation that happened either a long time ago or more recently?

I think one of the biggest ones that I had most recently, I guess last year, was waiting for my cousin Chris' blood transfusion to go through. I wasn't allowed in the room but I was allowed to sit outside the room and we were just waiting. I waited for two hours. I was sitting in this cold hospital at Stanford. And there were people around. And there was a ballet going on underneath me. It was Christmas, it was the Nutcracker. And my cousin Katie was in one room getting a whole bunch of blood drawn to use for Chris' blood transfusion and then Chris was in the other room and we were just waiting to see if it would work

Do you remember the room you were in?

I wasn't really in a room. It was a hallway. It was like a nook that was carved out of a hallway where there was a coffee station set up. A waiting area where people were getting their names called and patients moving forward. And then there was another little area where we could just sit and wait.

Were there a lot people around you?

Yeah there were a lot of strangers and some of them were very very quiet. I remember there was a girl who obviously was very sick sitting next to her mom and they were waiting just talking about prom.

Which element would you say is the most memorable: the length of time you waited for, or the room you were in?

It was the length of time and also the feeling I got because I couldn't get comfortable. My body hurt after a few minutes, my back was hurting and my knees were hurting and my feet were hurting and I was tired. I remember thinking how that just didn't matter because I felt like it was such a superficial pain comparatively. Like I shouldn't complain that I was a little cold or that I was a little uncomfortable, you know, that didn't matter. I was writing. I remember writing a whole bunch of letters and trying to catch up by sending notes out to my family and friends to past time and to procrastinate a little bit, reading, and a little bit of everything.

Do you remember how the wait ended?

Yeah. I went and I checked on my cousin Chris and he was joking around and like shrugging his shoulders and smiling.

Would you say that these two hours of waiting just evaporated then?

Yeah. I forgot about it. It didn't matter. I just remember feeling tired I felt tired that entire trip.

