S.A.P.
by Andrew James Paterson
featuring writing by Lee Henderson

serious abstract painting

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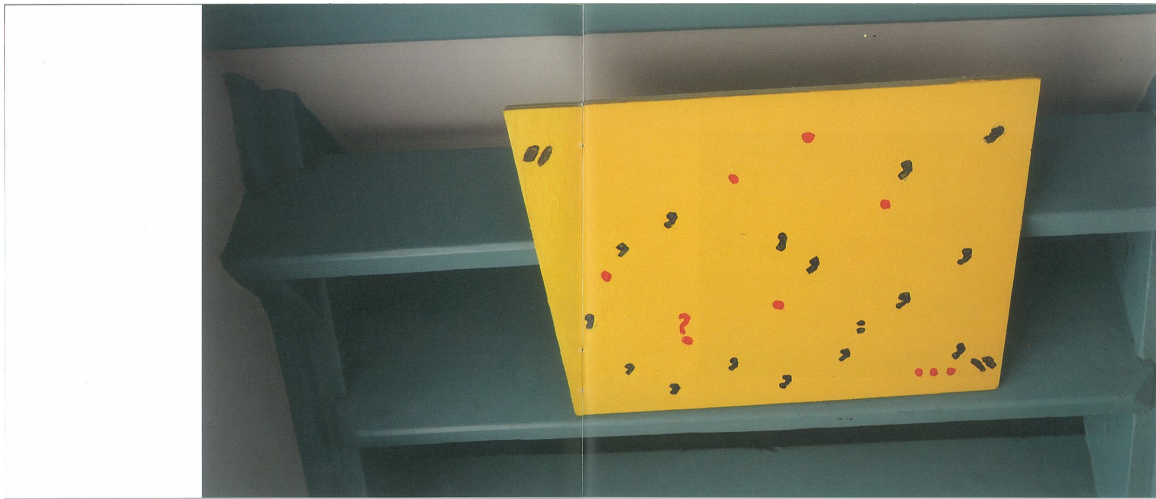artartartartartartartartartartartartartartartartart
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ON BEING REDUCED
TO THE IDENTITY OF
ONE'S MAKER

Full disclosure: when wearing an art writer's hat, I usually don't care much about what the artist has to say about his or her own work. The best thing an art writer can do—"best" being defined as the most useful thing for the artist whose work is under scrutiny—is give an uncluttered but probing response to the work at hand, such that the artist, upon reading it, thinks either, "yes, that's exactly what I meant!" or, conversely, "I can't believe I didn't see that in the work before…"

This is inconvenient when one must discuss work one has not seen, in that it poses the obvious logical problem of there being nothing there (yet) for the art writer to respond *to*. Such is the case here; *S.A.P.* is, after all, a performance, and (to paraphrase *The Enigma of S.A.P.*'s H. and G.) is therefore too messily excessive to fit into any standard art-criticism mathematics.

S.A.P. proposes a consideration of the packaging of art, of its performative recipe—an expression, so to speak, of a nonexistent Fluxus score instructing us how to *be* in an art gallery.

By an odd coincidence, I happened to discover an old note in my phone the other day. It reads, "FAUX /

and French authenticity." I forget writing it—perhaps I'd had too many hors d'oeuvres at an opening just before—and yet I can't help but find it relevant.

"Faux," adopted into English from French in the 1600s, means false, fake, or fraudulent… or it *almost* means those things. Such a translation seems simple enough in everyday use; one might be described as wearing a bit of costume jewellery in the form of a *faux* pearl necklace… but we would never say that an accused white-collar criminal is guilty of *faux* accounting.

Where is the difference? It lies entirely in the nature of the performative gesture, and in the logical problem of authenticity.

Why would we use the French "faux" instead of its English synonyms? In short, precisely *because* it's French. We attach many things to French-ness, but the synthetically virtual does not seem to be one; even the language itself, thanks to L'Academie Française, is bound up in authenticity, being prescribed officially such that—more than any other language—one can know exactly which words or phrases (and therefore which thoughts)

are really, truly, genuinely French.[1] To other Western cultures, France represents materialism[2], its denizens luxuriating in the sheer sensuous pleasure of actual wine, actual cheese, actual clothing and actual kissing. French-ness is real-ness.

So it's not much of a leap to realize that the word "faux" offers a delicious compromise between the literal and the figurative; literally, it exposes a falsehood or a fakery… but figuratively, it colours its subject *avec une Française actuelle*,[3] and with all of the vicarious authenticity that suggests. *Faux*—that transformative performative[4], that fusion of pretense and embodiment—lets one both get away with a fraud and confess to it, at the same time.[5]

Such a paradox, too, is found in the exhibition-as-performance of *S.A.P.* The paintings are bluntly, obviously paintings—real paint, probably applied with real brushes—but they're also fake paintings by a non-painter; they're not quite satirical, but neither are they earnest. The paintings represented in the video *The Enigma of S.A.P.* are the opposite. They contain no paint, and as digital representations of hypothetical

paintings they are not real, either. But they feel real-ly digital, inasmuch as they employ 8-bit colour and low resolution and a kind of napalm-kitsch colour scheme. It might be most useful to think of them as actors; embodied as they are, they perform the roles of fictional paintings. *S.A.P.*, on the whole, a Faustian endeavour; with an earnest nod to Artifice (or fakeness, or theatricality, or mockery) and a playful wink at Authenticity (or honesty, or pragmatism, or sincerity), it pits both its masters against each other in the hopes of showing us a way out ∎

Lee Henderson 2013

[1] Much to the chagrin of the Post-Structuralists

[2] To elaborate on this term, I point to Alan Watts, who has claimed, rightly, that if America were a materialist culture, it wouldn't care as much as it does about virtual/ideological things such as money, status, and broadcast entertainment.

[3] I am aware that this is probably not actual French.

[4] I owe this turn of phrase to Eve Sedgwick, though I suspect I may be bastardizing it utterly.

[5] … while authenticity usually operates in the opposite direction—"genuine leather," for instance, is always suspect.

Lee Henderson is a media-based artist from Saskatchewan, Canada. He has studied art in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Germany, and with talented professionals including Maria Vedder, Brian Eno, and Ellen Bromberg. Since completing his MFA in 2005, he has been furthering his time- and lens-based artistic practice while teaching Intermedia, Computer Science, Photography and Contemporary Media at the postsecondary level (currently at OCAD University and Ryerson University). He continues to show in Canada and abroad–recent and upcoming exhibitions and screenings include the Zero Film Festival (Los Angeles), The Dunlop Art Gallery (Regina), The Rooms (St. John's), SAW Video (Ottawa), Trinity Square Video and gallerywest (Toronto). His photographs, installations, videos and performances revolve around philosophies of impermanence and mortality, focusing on the persistence of collective histories and the brevity of individual lives.

SAP Artist Statement   *Andrew James Paterson*

Although I can indeed be classified as a senior media artist—working in video, small-gauge film, music, writing, and performance—my exhibiting history has been primarily in media art and performance festivals. I have shown in galleries, but in either time-based programmes or group gallery shows. Therefore, when I was invited to exhibit in what is not an artist-run or "public" gallery, I realized I had to perform. Not in any particular theatrical sense of that loaded verb, but rather in the sense of ensuring a gallery presence.

I realized, while basing my exhibition on the videotape *The Enigma of S.A.P.*, that I was obliged to make art objects which would be on display throughout the remainder of the gallery. Are my videos art objects? Well, they are indeed multiple and they are also digital. But I did not respond to the gallery's invitation by making a large new projection to install in the front space. I challenged myself to fill the gallery with objects. The gracious gallerywest is neither artist-run (whatever that might mean today) nor "public", so therefore it is private. Private as in for sale, or as in an art economy.

And what might S.A.P. stand for? Well, numerous possibilities are on the gallery walls.

Are the still images from *The Enigma of S.A.P.* analogue? Well, they do exist as stand-alone images, possibly of interest to people who couldn't care less about some lugubrious source video work. But of course these still images are frame grabs or captures of initial Photoshop "paintings" which over the course of the video become processed on top of being processed and so forth. As the numbers progress, the source image becomes both irrelevant and forgotten. But then these still images are counter pointed by evidence of an analogue dinner. *Simple Analogue Potluck* is exactly as its title—obsolete VHS noodles. Are old technologies recyclable? No, but they are probably digestible.

There are also words. Is language analogue or digital? Or just something somewhere else? What about numbers? Digits are not necessarily digital ∎

Andrew James Paterson is an interdisciplinary artist working with performance, video and film, musical composition, and both critical and fiction writing. His performances and videotapes have been presented and exhibited locally, nationally, and internationally. Paterson was formerly the lead singer and principal writer for a band called The Government, between 1977 and 1982, which made several recordings and one "music video" How Many Fingers?. Paterson has served as a board member for Trinity Square Video, A Space, and YYZ Artists' Outlet, all Toronto-situated artist-run galleries or organizations. He has previously curated media-art programmes for Trinity Square Video, A Space, Mercer Union, Cinematheque Ontario, Pleasure Dome, Available Light (Ottawa) and YYZ Artists' Outlet, and he has written on media-art and cultural politics for FUSE, PUBLIC, IMPULSE, and FILE, as well as contributing to anthologies published by Gallery TPW, Pleasure Dome, and YYZBOOKS. He is the co-editor of Money, Value, Art, published by YYZBOOKS in 2001. In 2003, Paterson debuted an inter-media performance remix of his film and video works in tandem with performative monologues, co-produced by Pleasure Dome and the 7a*11d Performance Art Festival–both of Toronto. Mono Logical has been presented in Calgary, Kingston, and Winnipeg, each performance characterized by a different remix. And, in 2005, he edited Grammar & Not-Grammar, an anthology of scripts and essays by media-artist Gary Kibbins, published by YYZBOOKS. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, Paterson's own media-works have been of two different but parallel strands. Some works are comprised of Super-8 film stocks, shot by the artist walking behind the camera and synthesizing documentary with performance. Several different works are composed of the artists's still graphic images collaged into a Final Cut Pro editing program, and are arguably as much examples of "visual art" as they are film or video. All of his media-works also involve writing and original music. However, Paterson has recently been experimenting with wordless moving images.