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A Flickr of Brilliance

Someone is stalking you. Her name is Nada. She has been following you all day, watching you as you drink your coffee, brush your teeth, squeeze your pimples, decorate your flat or fight with your partner. She takes photos, all over Europe; thousands of them, using a 200x digital zoom and is far away from view. What does she want? She wants your life – if it is sufficiently appealing. Nineteen year old Nada (Nada Gambier) catalogues images of strangers in a fascinating search for personal identity with the aid of an elaborate computerised mind-map displayed on two screens some eighteen feet high and wide. “Each of these are future versions of myself” she says of the common lives in front of us. If you're thinking of a photographic Proust reinvented as a geek forensic sociologist; you're close.

Point Blank is staged as interactive documentary performance. The young, soft spoken woman from Finland approaches the audience, adjusting her radio mike, and presents her quandary; what should she do with her life? She has already rejected university, professional training and typical middle class careers as institutionalized bouffant that mainstreams individuals into society with endless activity but dubious inner purpose. She is left with one thing she is sure of: her intuition. She uses that intuition to examine others to mentally try their lives on. “When I see someone I always imagine what it is like to be that person.” she says as the images flick past on the screen. We see a couple in an apartment decorating, painting together, becoming a single unit as their separate belongings come out of boxes and combine into the indistinct paraphernalia of shared living. But she questions the coupling lifestyle with the cynics eye of eventual breakup. She moves on to other categories; living alone, and then living alone with animals. The photographs are picked and dropped into different folders during the performance eliminating or augmenting a possibility. Titles like Alone, Couple, Age Group, States of Mind, Case Studies move about on the huge screen as she works to create a framework for a possible life.

But there's a problem with Nada's strategy; photographs are not people, they are objects which we project images of ourselves not living, breathing persons whom we can develop relationships with, receive feedback and model; helping us develop an identity. She does involve the audience, but the feedback is limited. She demonstrates her hypothesis of intuition by showing a series of photos of men asking us which one we would hop into a car with. One of them is a serial killer. The test somewhat

undermined her argument of solely trusting intuition when much of the audience happily selected Ted Bundy to take a ride with.

However, the performance is utterly compelling Ms. Gambier seduces us with naiveté, openness, her character's noble struggle and universal questions. She stands there in front of us on a dark and foreboding stage like a little girl with her wellies stuck in the mucky world of our creation.

The experience is somewhat clinical. A computer operator (Edit Kaldor), dressed in black, silently executes Nada's operational commands. We follow. We become part of Nada's spying, adopting a voyeuristic role, negating the individuals we judge by a snapshot, just as she does. In a word, she has us. But she also leaves little verbal Post-its ; “I don't want to reach a point where I feel like I have no more options...I've seen it happen; my mother” so at times the feeling is one of a psychotherapist. She pops the photo of her mother into the folder Worst Case Scenario getting some laughs from the audience. Ironically she becomes stuck just like her mother but for a different reason. Her mother is stuck for lack of options, Nada is stuck by having too many. “I was just struggling to get myself out of my bed. Often I ended up spying on my mother”. But she persists with the objectification of people and her cataloging, reworking the organization of her folders again and again to help better deal with her choices like a waifish Sisyphus. She generates choices, but doesn't take any action for fear of making one wrong decision. The possibilities numb her mind “This blankness is a state connected to choices - having too many”. At this, she shows all the photographs heaped over each other and you see her point and understand the title - 'Point Blank'.

When I saw this show, I naively thought it was genuine documentary performance – it's not. She didn't go on any trip, she didn't take 240,000 photos. Nada Gambier is an actor who studied dance in London, she's 29, not 19. Beyond the Flickr interestingness of the photos (a man beating his wife, another watching TV all day, a woman throwing up), our voyeurism, Ms. Gambier's excellent performance and her character's noble quest for self defined identity, what is there? What is Ms. Kaldor trying to do?

When I said at the beginning that someone is stalking you, I really did mean you, but it's not Nada who is stalking you. It is the artist Edit Kaldor, sitting at the computer desk. While we are the audience to Nada, Ms. Kaldor is an audience to 'our play'. The sociologist Erving Goffman, explores this concept in his seminal book “The presentation of Self in Everyday Life” using the metaphor of stage and audience. As we join Nada , on her journey to self-discovery and begin to project our thoughts and prejudices on the photographs, we are silently, unwittingly, playing with our own identity. This wonderful exploitation of theatre to reverse, then shift the audience/actor dynamic is uniquely Ms. Kaldor's, and her own flicker of brilliance.

by [Colm Byrne](#)
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