



*Body Double 13 (ZAC — Museum Wiesbaden), 1998–2000, video, 06:45:09, after Saturday Night Fever by John Badham, courtesy of Air de Paris*

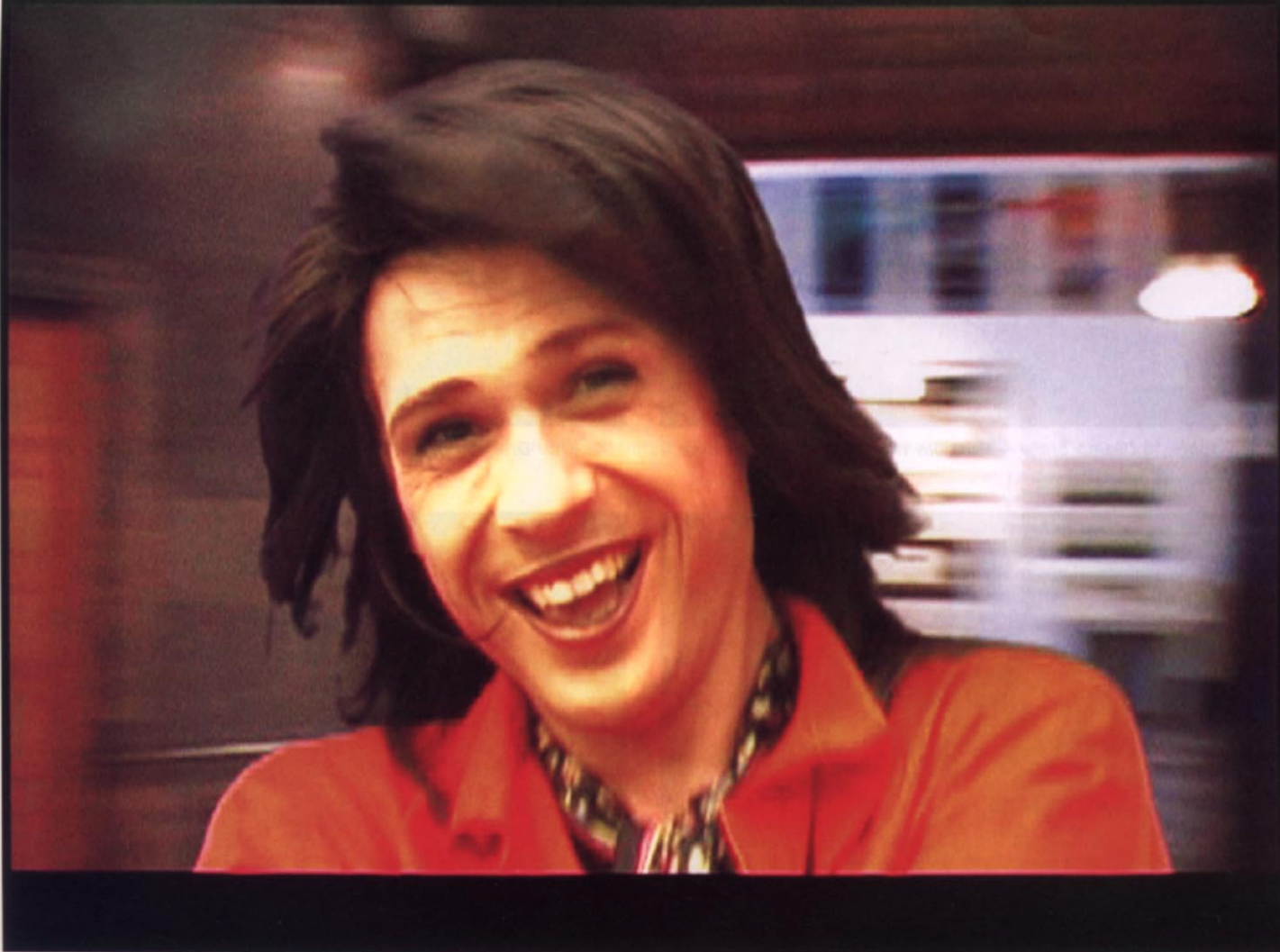
# EVEN STRANGER FICTIONS

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## The video-graphic mirrors of Brice Dellsperger

"A recipe is here given in another language because it would not echo if it were said in only one. The trick, the trap of any kind of translation or duplication is that losses and profits are ambiguous. Take, for instance, a French film from the 70s. Shoot it again almost absolutely alike with only one actor. Paste this onto the previous film, keeping the original soundtrack. Then, while watching this obviously doubled fictional picture, you forget there is a difference, you will

perhaps feel that a kind of definition of reality is now useless. But you may also choose to react to this lack of difference with a global or systematic description of the real. In both cases, however, imagination is lost. Will you go on being human? Will the body, as the matter of dreams, remain the core of desire? Or will you mix up your doubled 'you,' using a shield against the sunlight of truths? Good morning illusion!"  
—Brice Dellsperger



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The project started simply enough. In 1995, French artist Brice Dellsperger set out to film an unknown actor exiting an elevator, intending to imitate as closely as possible a single scene from Brian De Palma's 1980 film *Dressed to Kill*. With neither friends nor associates interested in participating, Dellsperger decided to play the role himself. To shoot the scene the artist dressed as a transvestite, decking himself out as a woman from head to toe. The resulting 30-second piece marked the first in a long series of *Body Double* remakes, named after the notorious Brian De Palma picture.

Using video collage techniques, Dellsperger has since filmed the museum pick-up scene from *Dressed to Kill* twice, setting it once in Euro Disney and once in the Kunstmuseum Wiesbaden. The source of almost all of Dellsperger's work comes directly from De Palma's own constant doubling and voyeurism, which

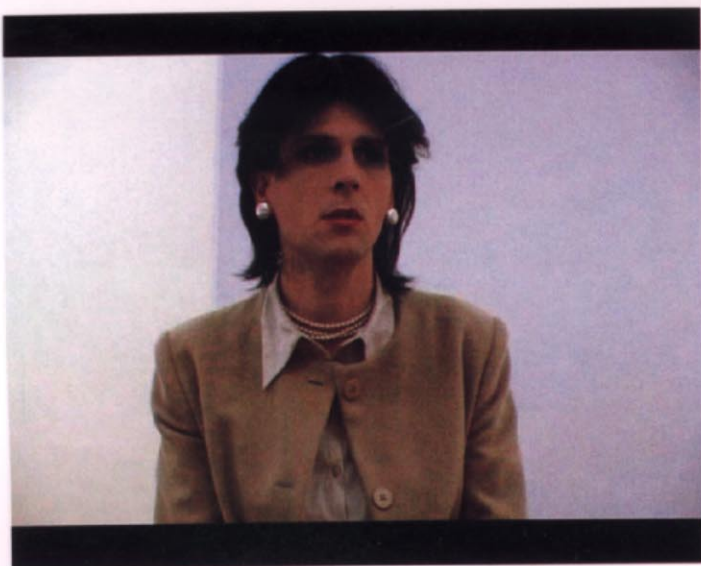
Dellsperger employs to magnify the effects of the work he is appropriating. Each of his films mirrors and distorts a different original. In the ten-minute museum scene, the artist — once again in drag — plays both halves of one smitten couple. His two separate performances sensually blend as he creates an atmosphere of narcissistic abandon within the hallowed halls of the museum, the artist grappling with and lusting after his own image. In his latest piece, *Body Double 17*, two sisters play all of the characters in the roadhouse sequence from David Lynch's *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*. The nearly identical sisters fade into and out of one another until it becomes impossible to tell them apart. In this work, Dellsperger effectively negates the standard big-screen gender rendering, as sexual identity breaks down into nothing more than a snarl of sexual confusion. But it's the *Body Double* nomenclature that places the *Body*



*Body Double (X), 1998–2000, with Jean-Luc Verna, 102:00, after L'important c'est d'aimer by Andrzej Zulawski, courtesy Air de Paris*

*Double* series at the heart of Dellsperger's artistic enterprise, while at the same time situating his work on the critical horizon of the remake. The point is not that the sequences are plundered material, but that they are also able to maintain their autonomy as

films. Dellsperger took a different approach when art of the 1990s was embalming with great fervor the cinematic form. The time frame, sequences, and framing he uses hold to the obvious particularities of the originals, while at the same time he tampers with



*Body Double 15 (Camo Show – Museum Wiesbaden), 2001, video, 08:37:02, after Dressed to Kill by Brian de Palma, courtesy of Air de Paris*



*Body Double 8, 1997, starring Orlando (A), Hiron (B), Denis Darkangelo (C), video, 3 films/3 screens, 03:01:19, after Return of the Jedi by Richard Marquand, courtesy of Air de Paris*



*Body Double 9, 1997, starring Jean-Luc Verna (A), Alexia (B), Stanislas Gorin de Ponsay (C), Dominique (D), Diego Pazazzolo (E), Menebhi Abderrahman (F), video, 6 films/6 screens, 01:19:17, after Blow Out by Brian de Palma, courtesy of Air de Paris*

costumes, identities and models. An unfixated reworking of the original, he redefines the remake as a travesty of the original.

Since 1995 and *Body Double 1*, Dellsperger has raised his distorting mirrors to scenes from *Psycho* (*Body Double 4*),

*Obsession* (*Body Double 11, 12*), *My Own Private Idaho* (*Body Double 14*) and *Return of the Jedi* (*Body Double 8*). But it

was in 1998 that Dellsperger decided to go all the way and make a full-length feature film starring his lover Jean-Luc Verna, an



Body Double 5 (Disneyland), 1996, video stills, 05:40:15, after Dressed to Kill by Brian de Palma, courtesy of Air de Paris



artist and occasional mime. The "feature film" *Body Double X* springs directly from the sultry little lowbrow gem by Andrzej

Zulawsky called *L'important c'est d'aimer (The Main Thing is to Love)*. A genuine one-hour-and-forty-minute film, it was in-

tended to be shown on the big screen, albeit outside the usual distribution circuit. Verna is the only "multipurpose" actor, appearing on screen portraying a number of different characters, all dressed and styled as a transvestite; he becomes "unique and doubled."

And it's Verna who becomes the driving force behind the movie. In a recent, scandalous interview for French *Vogue*, Verna spoke openly about his sexual experiences and youth as a male prostitute:

"When I was 14 I needed money. One morning I skipped school. A man indicated he desired me in a public garden. Finally someone showed they were interested. Bravely I asked for 300 francs. He handed it over."

Verna's initiation into a profitable career became a path that continues to influence him and his work.

"Prostitution was my school of love," continues Verna. "The savings made from the sweat of my bum paid for my trip to London." The movie took three years to make, and Verna's dark miming of all the characters in the film draws the viewer in and allows it to stand on its own. Nevertheless the mingling of mirrors and the distortions of reality are pervasive. In Dellsperger's version the original film soundtrack is employed with Verna approximating a 100 percent lip-syncing performance. The soundtrack was played during filming one second faster than he could speak and then it was synchronously re-recorded live. Bad splices, breaks and strange coincidences are

permanent features of the film, signifying that, as Dellsperger points out, "the same is only the same through the discrepancies that the mind must gauge as one reconstructs the film or views it." It's at this point that the combination of one's recollections of Zulawsky's film and the various nervy displacements created by *Body Double X* (deconstruction, commentary and analysis of the referent's diageitic spaces) create a new level of fiction. It becomes impossible to recall the scenes of Zulawsky's film without referring to Dellsperger's and vice versa. The two separate, but intricately bound fictions have created a third entirely non-existing fiction. The model and its remake overlap, and the remake begins to function as the screen memory of the original, distorted and then completed through projection as a new original.

And it's in this original space that Brice Dellsperger is able to create his new narratives of even stranger fictions. A place where the narcissistic mirroring of other fantasies is allowed to come alive, challenging our recollections of reality and our imaginings of identity, all with the intention of showing us something new.

Brice Dellsperger's website, [www.bodydoublenx.com](http://www.bodydoublenx.com), offers excerpts from his film, as well as "making of" footage and commentary on work by Jean-Luc Verna.