

THE COMMON GUILD

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Photo by Ruth Clark

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COMMENTARIES

Duncan Campbell

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Duncan Campbell

A box of UniBond *Unifilla* is placed upon a polished white table. Its humble red, white and italicised black branding recalls a familiar domestic aesthetic: the language of hardware shops. DIY on a Sunday. The packaging depicts a hand smearing the product into a blue wall that disguises its actual function. A tiny antenna and a crackled French voice, broadcast through a hidden speaker.

The sound on screen exists within the enclosed context of 'film'. And in Campbell's film, *It for Others*, it exists within the context of a cinematic citation quietly replayed by the novelty radio. A reference to *Les Statues meurent aussi* (Statues also Die), an often overlooked film made in 1953 by Chris Marker and Alain Resnais, and what the unseen narrator in *It for Others* broadly states, is a film "about objects". A film that through citation, Campbell uses to catalyse a discussion around the propagation and circulation of cultural objects. To describe the conditions of their eventual commodification.

In *It for Others*, the narrator recounts anecdotally a problematic task during the film's production: the task of re-filming the same statues that Marker and Resnais filmed in the British museum in 1953. It is a task that becomes complicated by enforced copyright restrictions and an assumed extent of ownership: the familiar afterlife of museum collections acquired during colonial rule. African artefacts, unwillingly placed within a supposedly 'universal' history, estranged from the cultures from which they were appropriated. A process whereby statues effectively *die*.

If statues can *die* then we must assume that they were once 'living'. This endowment of African artefacts with a 'human' quality was an important aspect of their prescribed religious function. It is a quality that can be understood through the anthropological concept of 'animism': a collapsed distinction between the 'animate' and the 'inanimate', which underscores Campbell's film. In *It for Others*, commodified objects and constructed brand personalities are treated as *living*. Within the context of contemporary art, it suggests, the market itself is anthropomorphised. In effect, prices themselves become *living* entities.

Importantly, *It for Others* is itself an object, albeit one legitimised by the intended conditions of its display: the 'sanctifying' frame in which it

exists as 'art'. Previously a room in a sixteenth century Venetian palazzo, or now in Glasgow, within this towering Victorian townhouse.

There are sections of reflexivity in *It for Others* which refer to these problematic conditions that make it an object. At one point, its narrator muses sarcastically about the film's inevitable commodification as art object; the propagation and belief in value construed by international art markets, and the position of time-based media within these. Is the 'length in minutes' of a given work really a valuable criteria in the false construction of its value, comparable to the size of a painting in establishing worth?

Whilst questioning these conditions *It for Others* avoids clear answers. Its narrator is indecisive. Perhaps unreliable. Campbell has previously described his use of film through a paraphrased Beckett quote, it is a "form that accommodates the mess". A form that, in the case of *It for Others* consistently undermines any authority. And the mess, is meticulous.

Alex Kuusik participated in the Scotland + Venice 2013 Professional Development scheme as a student at Glasgow School of Art, one of five academic institutional partners.