

The Impractical Interpassive:
Introduction to the Issue
on Robert Pfaller's
Interpassivity

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Can one participate in interpassivity when one does not much enjoy practical work? Let us be clear, one cannot escape practical tasks – even the task of writing, although filled with a certain pleasure in itself, is for the most part, a pragmatic even mundane undertaking. But is it interpassive?

According to Pfaller, one simply needs an object to transfer enjoyment upon. But perhaps we first have to ask, what constitutes an experience of enjoyment? Because to undertake interpassivity, one must first be able to identify and delineate the enjoyment to be transferred. Without the identification of enjoyment and the intention to transfer the enjoyment, is what can be termed interpassivity anything more than good old-fashioned displacement activity? Therefore, it appears that

central to interpassivity is the self-identification of enjoyment, followed by the intentional transfer of enjoyment. Here, do we not find ourselves back in that contested world of agency and the neo-liberal-derived mantra of rational choice?

But is interpassivity actually a conscious decision – rational or otherwise? In our reading, Pfaller would say ‘no’; because interpassivity is an unconscious force that dupes us into thinking we are rational beings, in spite of our irrational behaviour. This of course means interpassivity, if thought through and not just engaged with, acts as a central challenge to the ideology of neo-liberalism. For what seems to be the apparent is that firstly, there needs to be an interpassive environment one is interpellated within, and second, that one is engaged in some sort of transference encounter with an object. And to be clear, this seems a bit strange, for after all, objects don’t speak – Lacan reminds us of this in his *écrit* on science when he reminds us that objects don’t have mouths.

Let us return to the task of writing and a repetitive ‘joke’ our computer plays upon us – whenever we type the word, ‘continental’, our word check changes this to ‘congenital’. We are sure that we do not run a school for congenital philosophy. But we must admit to being quite amused every time this slip of the spell check occurs – as indeed we often are with other forms of ‘autocorrect’ whether typing or texting. That this happens is not interpassive in itself – it is the amusement which emerges that is the best part of being in an interpassive environment. This is even a joke we feel we can share. However, there are many other times when spell check is less amusing, annoying even. During these moments we are prone to muttering frustrated obscenities under our breath (what can be termed technotourettes!) – usually directed to our computer, the apparatus which apparently does not speak back to us. In such cases, the computer that has impeded our desire to communicate has become an interactive site of frustrated aggression: the ‘thing in itself’ that has perhaps even destroyed the enjoyment of writing.

What Pfaller alerts us to in his theory of interpassivity is that we have an inescapable inner monologue which is in part dependent on the object to fill our social bond. That is, there is little manoeuvring needed to bring the internal into the external – and vice versa – just that the unexpected encounter of the object speaking back is an uncanny realisation that we sort of expected it to anyway because it forms a fundamental part of our enjoyment. So the issue just identified, of the autocorrect non-correction is central to our interpassive participation with the object. That is, we expect the engagement to be, in some way, enjoyable – wither in the engagement itself, or more often, what the engagement will allow to occur. That is why the non-correction is so frustrating; it is the object itself denying the enjoyment, the *jouissance* we expect to experience, even in our practical life.

That we have an inner life which is separated from the practical work we undertake is an illusion. The objects we render to delegate our enjoyment – whether they be computers, art, capitalism, video-games and so on – are all part of our own pleasure-seeking and maintenance of *jouissance*. One does not need to be a practical person to enjoy the interpassive environment – perhaps objects even yield more pleasure for the impractical person. Who knows, perhaps objects can speak after all – we just might not like what they have to say...

The contributors of this issue all critically read and consider Pfaller and his interpassivity as a way of rethinking the subject of enjoyment. We are grateful for their close interrogations of our various pleasure objects, as frustrating, perverse or mundane as these objects can be: politics, art, the internet, belief, everyday life, science, religion, capital and so on. Perhaps interpassivity speaks most centrally to the political question of the mundane experience of life for so many. We desire the pleasure object and experience because life is lived for many of us in shades of mediocrity; the question is where and how – and if – interpassivity can integrate or operate with integrity. That which makes us think, of course can still be class-dominated and class-conscious, which means that while these public objects are quite enjoyable and privately pleasurable in their constant frustrations and impasses, they

should never be considered as just object in themselves, outside of the structures and politics that makes them and their interpassive use possible.