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## Shahryar Nashat

Nashat tells the story of how, as a child, he was fascinated by his grandmother. During his visits, she would teach him some lines from the Koran, which had to be repeated fourteen times if the prayer was to be effective. In *Les Négateurs*, a voice can be heard repeating some verses from the chapter of the Koran entitled “The Disbelievers”, and the protagonist is shown in the foreground, trying to repeat them and follow their rhythm. At the beginning, he acts decisively, then gradually loses confidence and conviction. The video depicts an act of strength and courage, but at the same time it is a confession of fragility. Whereas in this work individual freedom is threatened by a form of religious indoctrination, in *Italian studies* the social need for protection is transformed paradoxically into a ‘vulgar’ act of repression on the part of the police force.

“My dearest, I am starving for news, stagnating in terrifying solitude. Jammed in here, awaiting my fate. My neighbours are very silent. I am trying to establish communication to gather some kind of information but I am not sure how accurate their information could be. But they only seem to speak when I’m asleep. I wonder how they could help me and I wonder why they would help me. Until I can understand the conditions more clearly, I won’t dare making any move.”<sup>3</sup> In *Laterally yours*, it is the deconstruction of the narrative which triumphs. We are only in a position to glimpse fleeting fragments of various images (situations): arms embracing a body, superficial caresses, blank looks, people kicking a door. The passage of time is measured by the days the protagonist spends shut in, oppressed, without hope. He is a prisoner in his own home and the only way of escape from this place of submission and constriction is through the imagination. Writing as a form of exorcism. Is this perhaps a distant memory, a nightmare? It is anything but a straightforward account. Here again, we are disorientated, confused. There are many questions we would like definite answers to, but we are also aware that there are no definite answers. The physical and psychological constriction becomes unbearable and insuppressible. The images, frame by frame, of Nashat’s exploration strongly amplify our sense of disorientation, the loss of precise, objective points of reference. They are not the concrete reliving of an event, nor a representation of it. The sets are quite bare and there are never elements which might enable us to impose some order on the continually interrupted plot. A dark room, an industrial area, the interior of an apartment, the sea as the background – these are neutral elements, vehicles of contradiction, of introspective questioning.

For the Anglican bishop George Berkeley “esse est percipi” (to be is to be perceived); for Shahryar Nashat what we perceive is not always what it actually is.

1 Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran*, Éditions Albin Michel, 2001.

2 From the script of *All the way back, the reconstruction*, 2001.

3 From the script of *Laterally yours*, 2002.

## Disorientamenti nell'opera di Shahryar Nashat

«Quando vuoi sapere se il posto dove ti trovi è ricco o povero, guarda la spazzatura. Se non vedi immondizia né pattumiere, vuol dire che è molto ricco. Se vedi pattumiere ma non immondizia, è ricco. Se l'immondizia è accanto alle pattumiere, non è né ricco né povero: è turistico. Se vedi l'immondizia e non le pattumiere, è povero. E se c'è la gente che abita in mezzo ai rifiuti, vuol dire che è molto, molto povero». <sup>1</sup> Si potrebbe supporre che dove c'è consumo (spazzatura) c'è povertà e dove non c'è consumo c'è ricchezza. Ma l'oggetto del consumo ha un prezzo che il miserabile non può pagare; la spazzatura non è lo scarto della ricchezza? È una lezione di saggezza quella che Monsieur Ibrahim dà al giovane Momo durante un viaggio, ma è anche la prova che ciò che percepiamo è solo la pelle della realtà, la superficie che la riveste. Numerose sono le variabili e le condizioni.

Anche Shahryar Nashat rende complicato il percorso percettivo di ciò che ci circonda e ci alimenta, ma soprattutto cela l'evento scatenante, mostrandoci solo le conseguenze che tale evento provoca sull'individuo. «What just happened has no importance. There are the facts, a man running out of a room, leaving a man lying on a bed... He's afraid of what he's just done or maybe he is afraid of what he's just seen... he's trying not to think anymore». <sup>2</sup> Imprescindibile nella comprensione del lavoro di Nashat è l'analisi minuziosa dello script. In *All the way back, the reconstruction* un uomo è fuggito, ha lasciato un altro uomo su un letto: difficile ricostruire i tempi, le condizioni dell'ambiente in cui agisce il protagonista. Ma è veramente l'uomo che appare nel video il protagonista o è l'uomo che, secondo il testo, sta fuggendo lungo i corridoi di un edificio simile a un ospedale o un albergo, o i due uomini sono un'unica entità? È la ripetizione ossessiva del medesimo testo a creare tensione, a dare vita a uno spazio mentale che schiaccia quello fisico. Uno spazio in cui sembra svanire qualsiasi certezza, in cui domina l'instabilità, la paura. Il comportamento del protagonista è alterato da qualcosa che è successo, ma che non verrà mai mostrato. La sua condizione è d'impotenza, di estrema fragilità, d'incertezza. Sembra ossessionato dai fantasmi del suo recente passato oppure dalla paura del futuro.

Nelle opere di Nashat emerge un forte senso di costrizione non solo fisica, ma soprattutto psicologica. Il confine tra dominatore e dominato è sempre molto labile. In *Unreasonably resonant* un uomo con i guanti sembra dominare un altro uomo impassibile, apparentemente indifeso, ma allo stesso tempo sembra proteggerlo, accarezzarlo. Una forma di dominio può simultaneamente trasformarsi in un morboso senso di appartenenza. Nella stessa opera un giovane uomo sembra annegare. È la forza dell'acqua che lo sta per inghiottire o è la voglia di vivere a sovrastare la rassegnazione alla morte?

Nashat racconta che da bambino era affascinato dalla nonna che, durante le sue visite, gli insegnava alcune righe del Corano che andavano ripetute quattordici volte affinché la preghiera avesse successo. In *Les Négateurs* una voce ripete alcuni versetti tratti dal capitolo del Corano «I miscredenti» e il protagonista, ripreso in primo piano, cerca di ripeterli e di seguirne il ritmo. All'inizio agisce con fare deciso, poi gradualmente perde fiducia e convinzione. Il video mostra un atto di forza, di coraggio, ma nello stesso tempo è una dichiarazione di fragilità.

Unreasonably resonant  
Italian studies  
Optimism  
Les Négateurs  
All the way back, the reconstruction  
Laterally yours, 154 days

Se in quest'opera la libertà individuale è minacciata da una forma d'indottrinamento religioso, in *Italian studies* il bisogno sociale di protezione si trasforma paradossalmente in un «volgare» atto di repressione da parte del potere della polizia.

«My dearest, I am starving for news, stagnating in terrifying solitude. Jammed in here, awaiting my fate. My neighbours are very silent. I am trying to establish communication to gather some kind of information but I am not sure how accurate their information could be. But they only seem to speak when I'm asleep. I wonder how they could help me and I wonder why they would help me. Until I can understand the conditions more clearly, I won't dare making any move».<sup>3</sup> In *Laterally yours*, trionfa la decostruzione della narrazione. Siamo nella condizione di intravedere solo frammenti fugaci di alcune immagini (situazioni): braccia che stringono un corpo, carezze superficiali, sguardi inespressivi, persone che tirano calci a una porta. La scansione temporale è data dai giorni che il protagonista trascorre rinchiuso, oppresso, senza speranza. È prigioniero nella propria dimora e l'unica via di fuga da quella condizione di sottomissione e di costrizione è l'immaginario. La scrittura come forma di esorcizzazione. Si tratta forse di un ricordo lontano, di un incubo? Tutto fuorché una cronaca. Anche in questo caso siamo disorientati, confusi. Numerose sono le domande a cui vorremmo avere risposte certe, ma siamo altrettanto coscienti che non vi sono risposte certe. La costrizione fisica e psicologica diventa insopportabile e insopprimibile. Le immagini, fotogramma dopo fotogramma, nella ricerca di Nashat non fanno che amplificare la condizione di disorientamento, di perdita di riferimenti precisi, oggettivi. Non sono la riprova concreta di un evento, né la loro rappresentazione. I set sono spogli e non vi sono mai elementi che possano facilitare il riordino di una trama continuamente interrotta. Una stanza buia, uno spazio industriale, l'interno di un appartamento, il mare da sfondo sono elementi neutri, contenitori di contraddizioni, di indagini introspettive.

Se per il vescovo anglicano George Berkeley «esse est percipi» (essere è essere percepito), per Shahryar Nashat ciò che percepiamo non sempre è ciò che è.

Daniele Perra

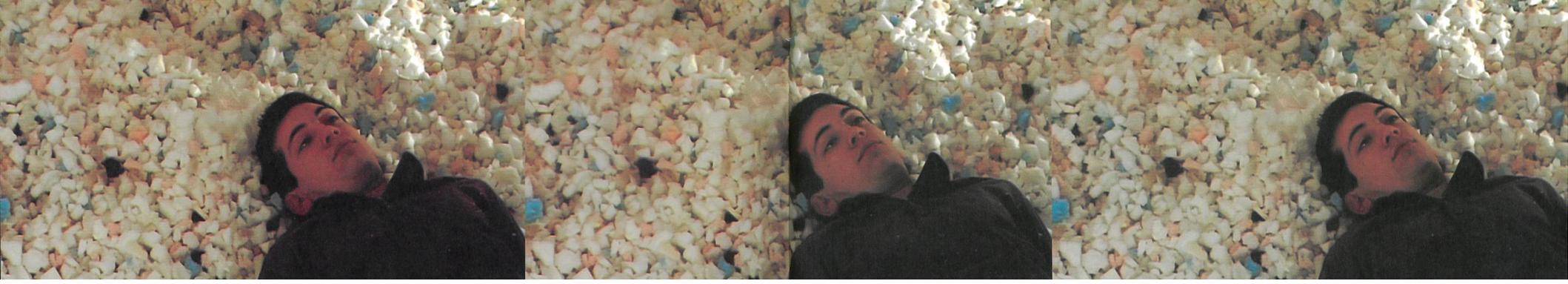
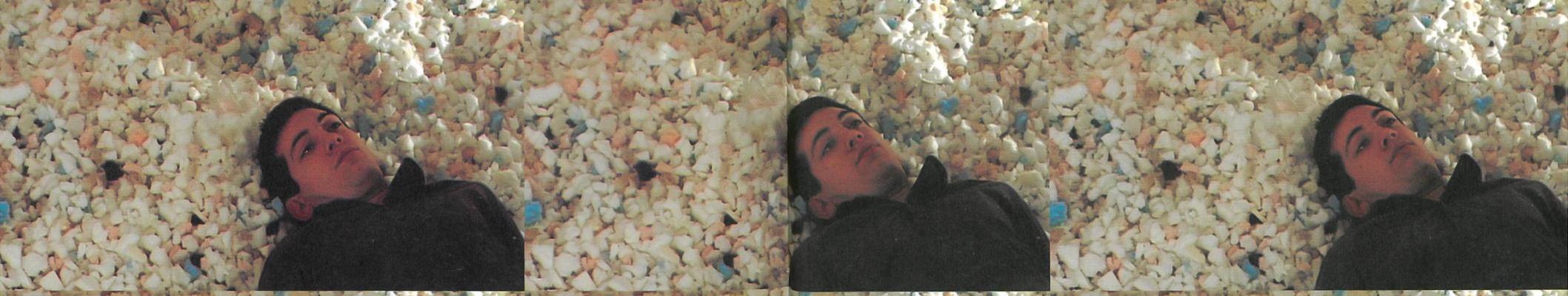
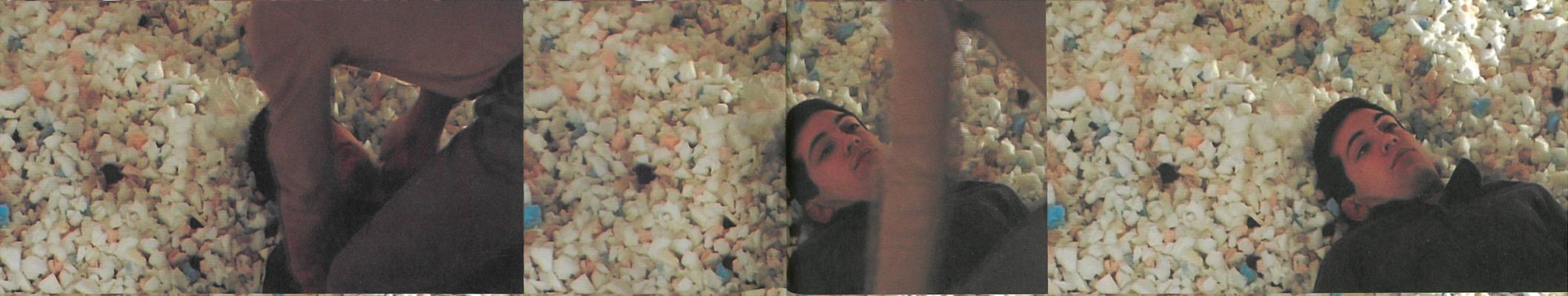
1 Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Monsieur Ibrahim e i fiori del Corano*, Edizioni e/o, 2003. Ed. originale: Eric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *Monsieur Ibrahim et les fleurs du Coran*, Éditions Albin Michel, 2001.

2 Dallo script di *All the way back, the reconstruction*, 2001.

3 Dallo script di *Laterally yours*, 2002.



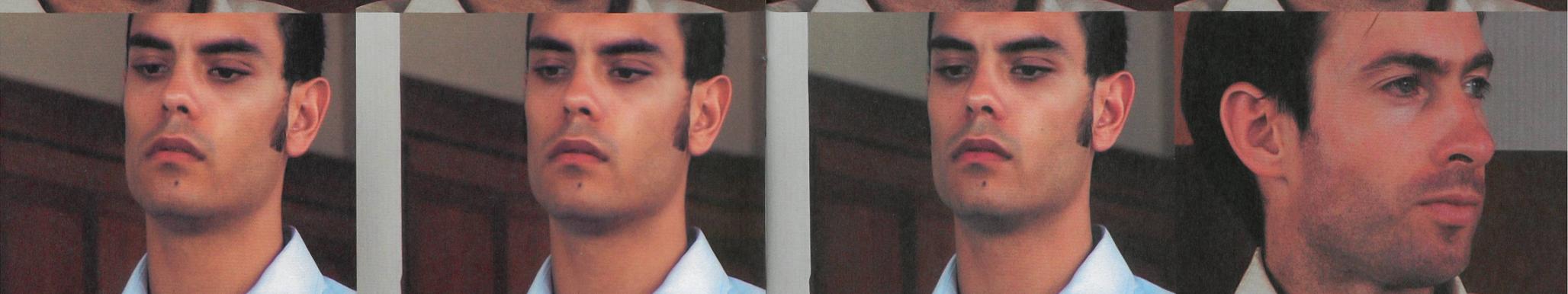
















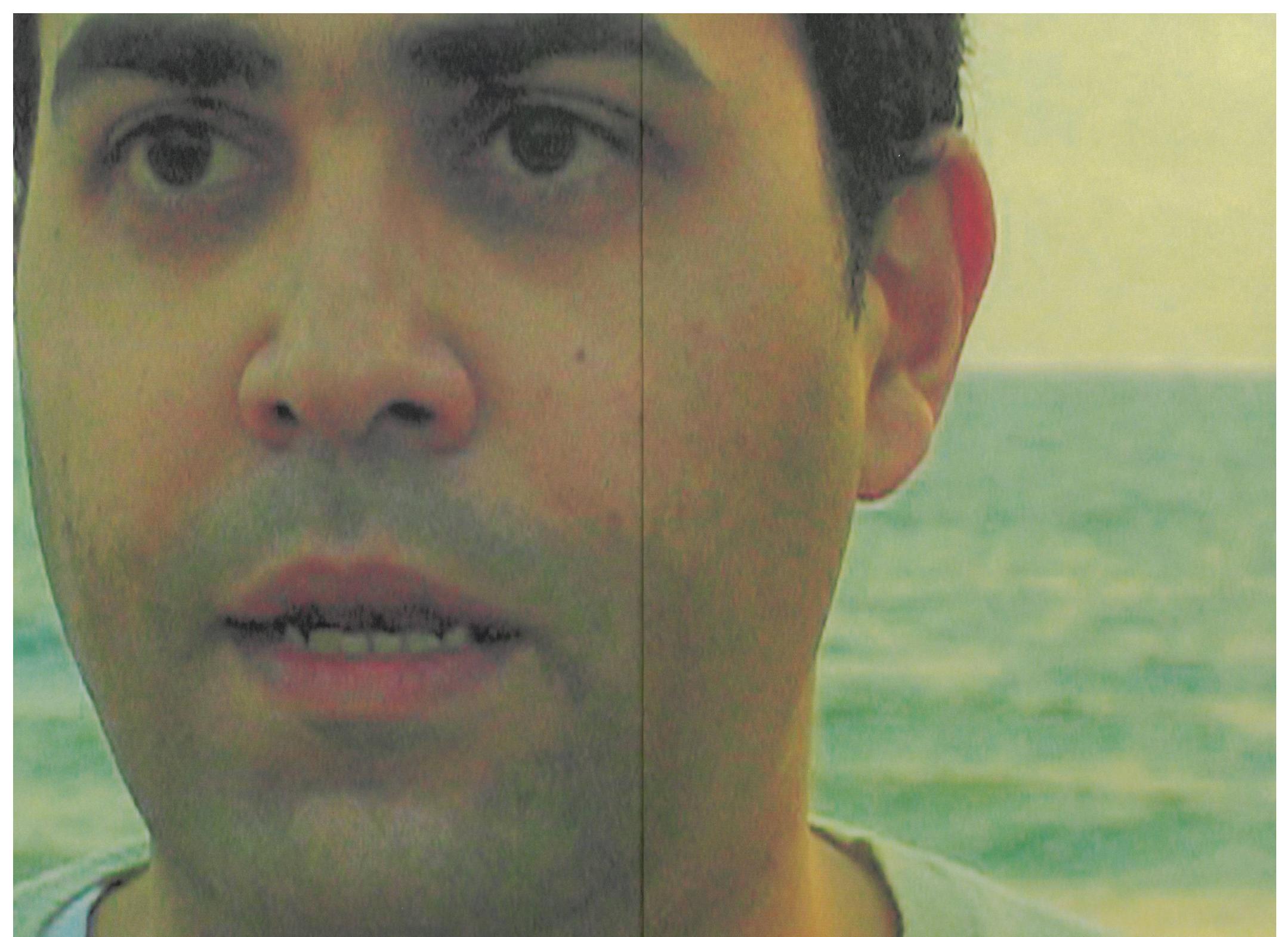




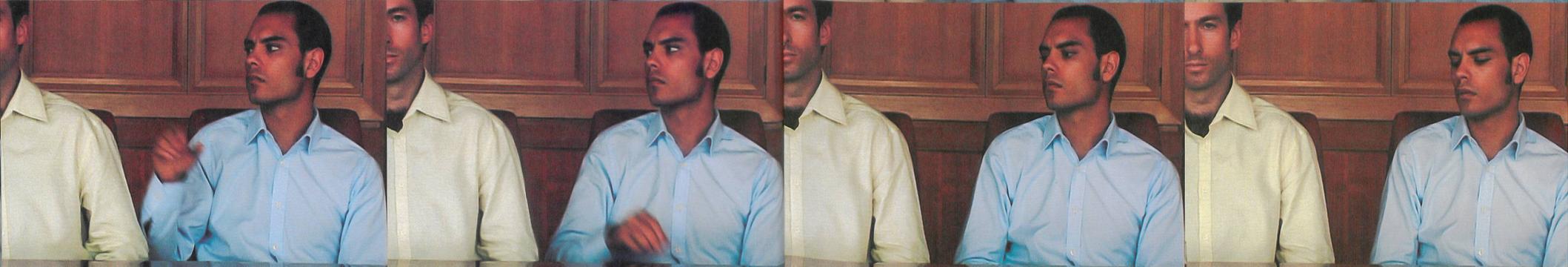
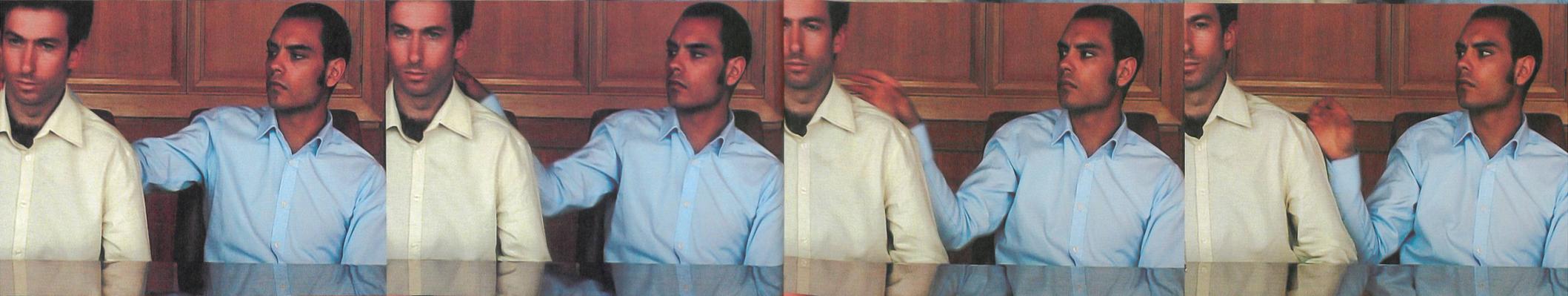
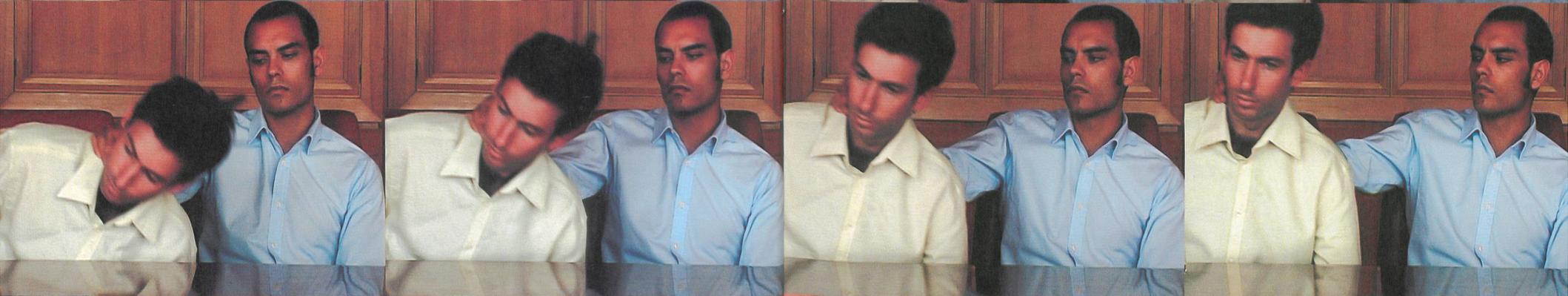


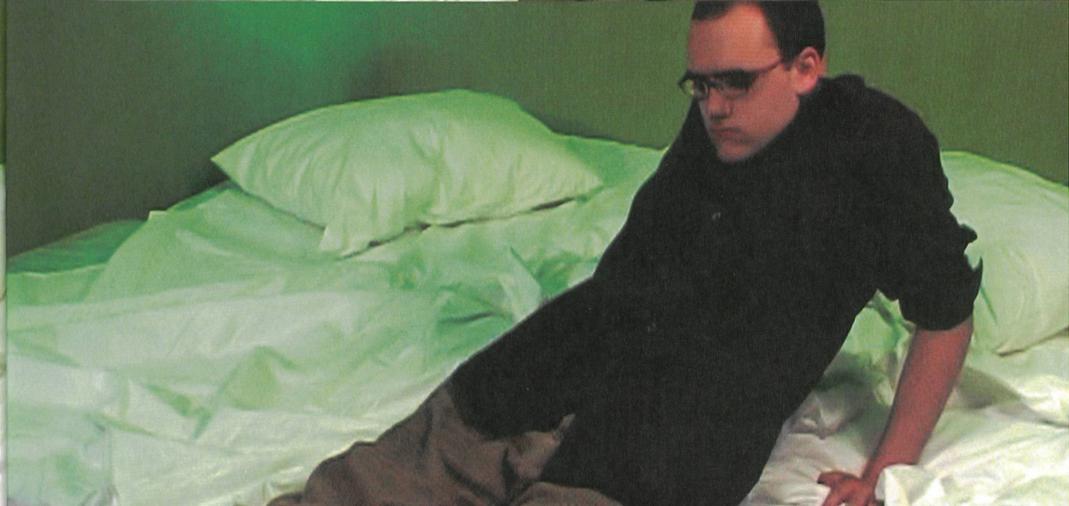
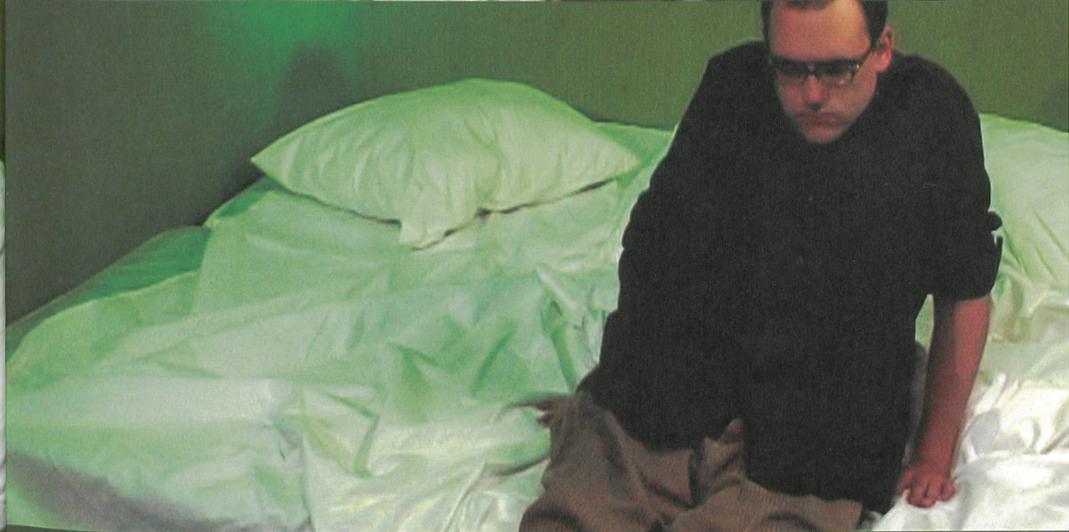
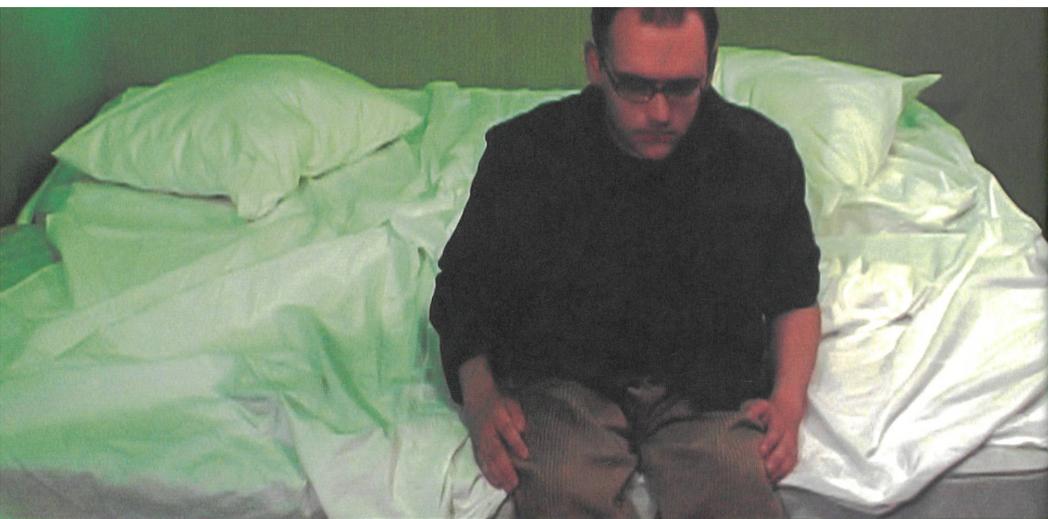


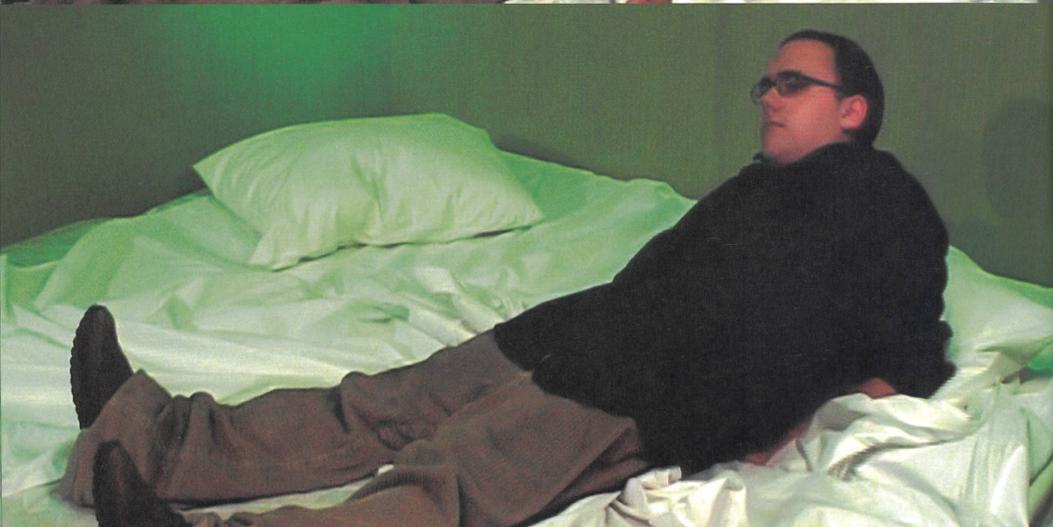
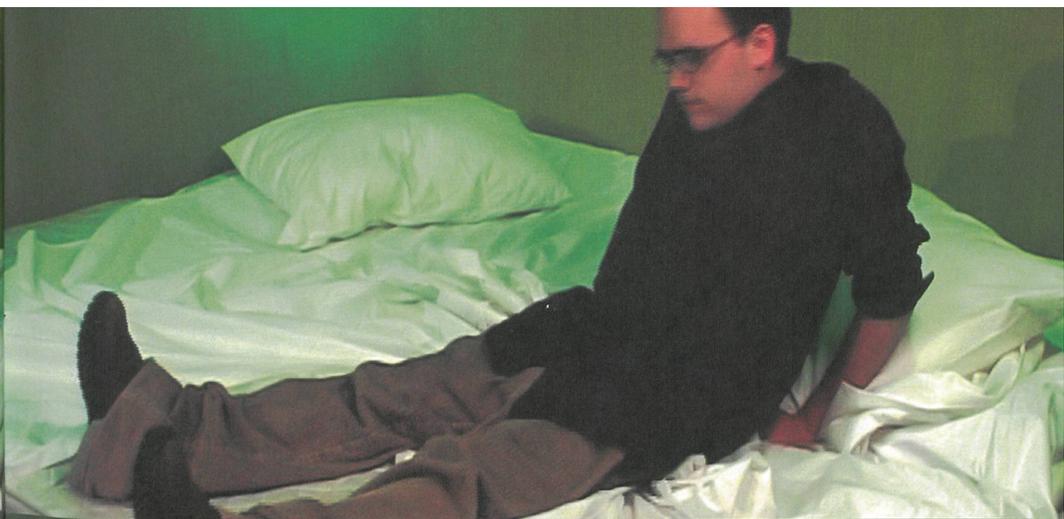
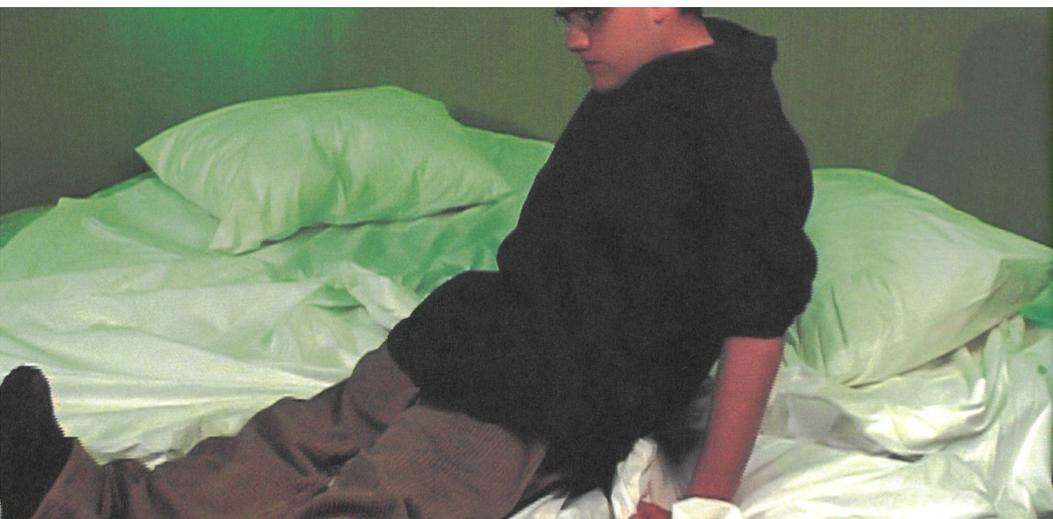


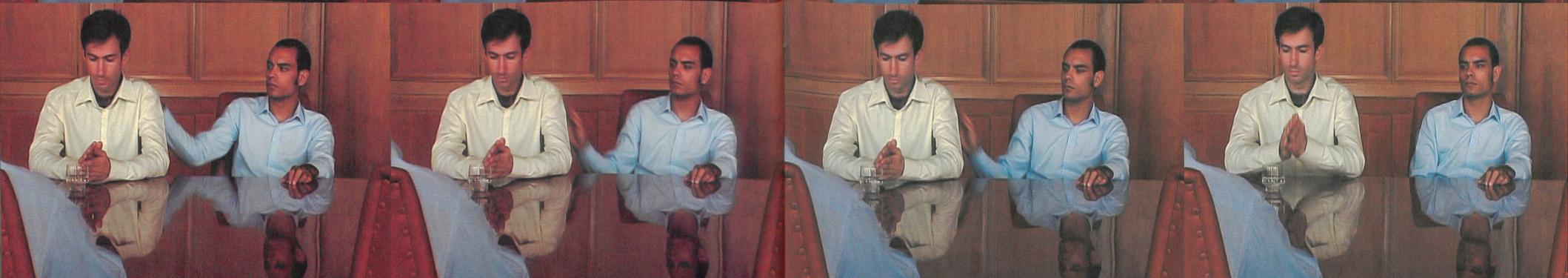
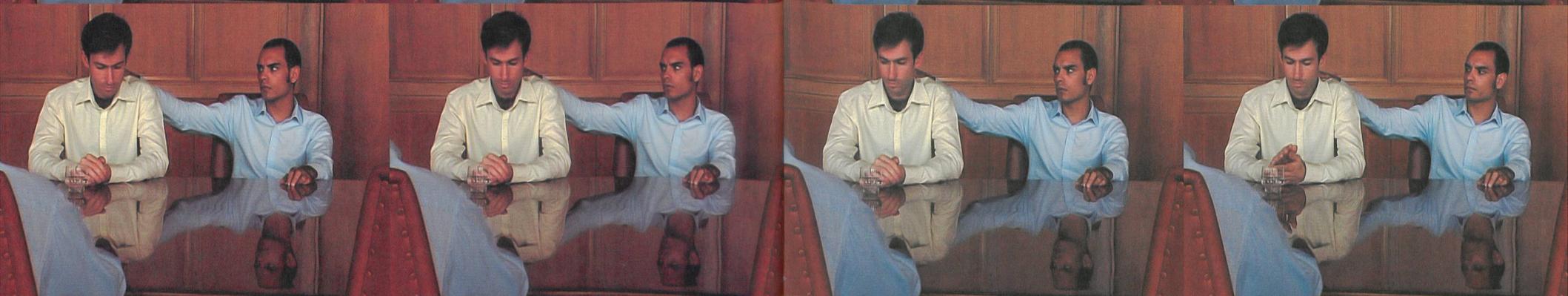
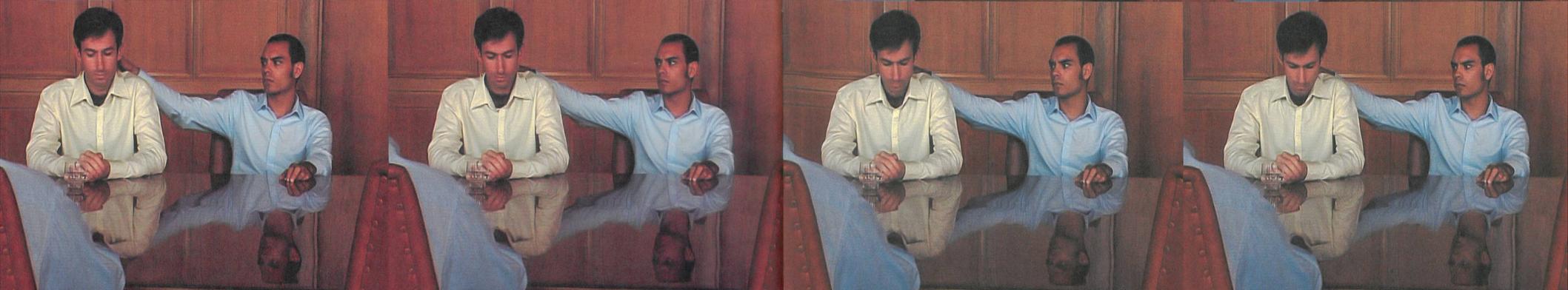
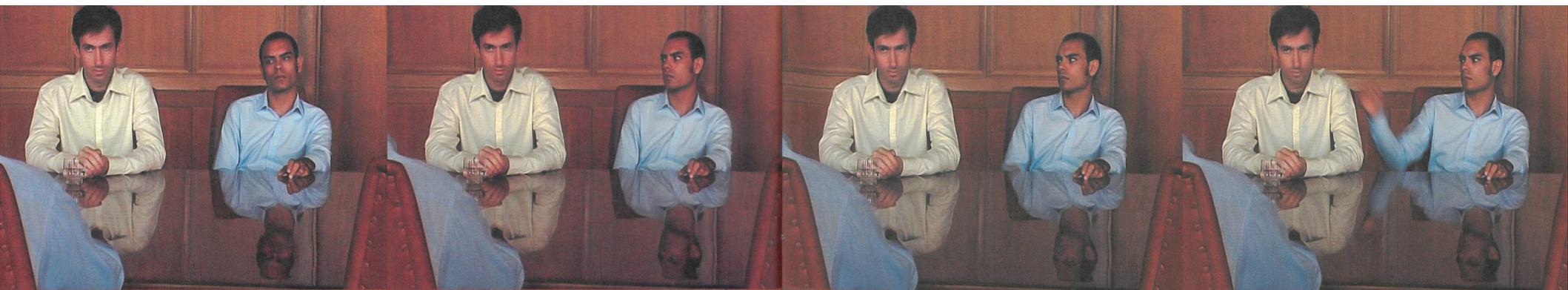


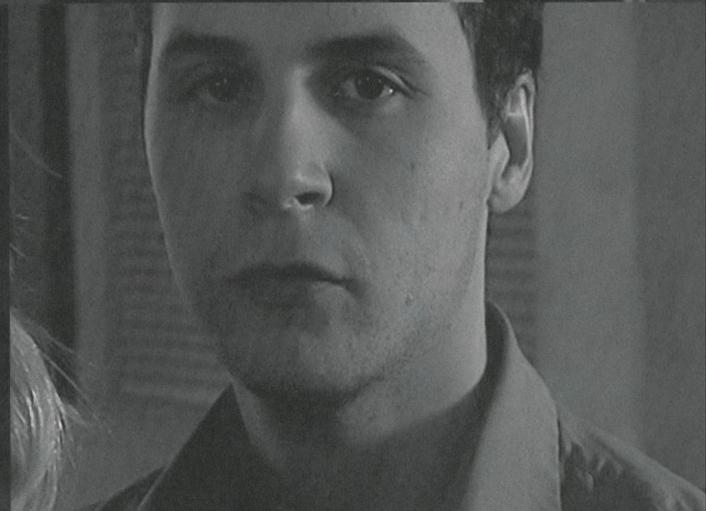
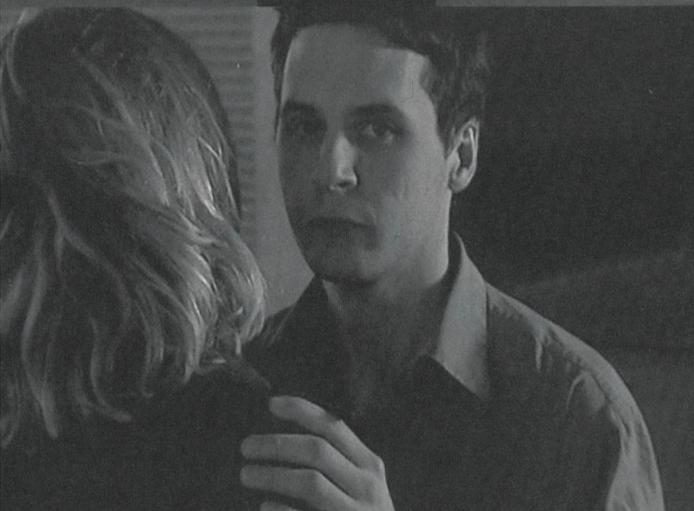
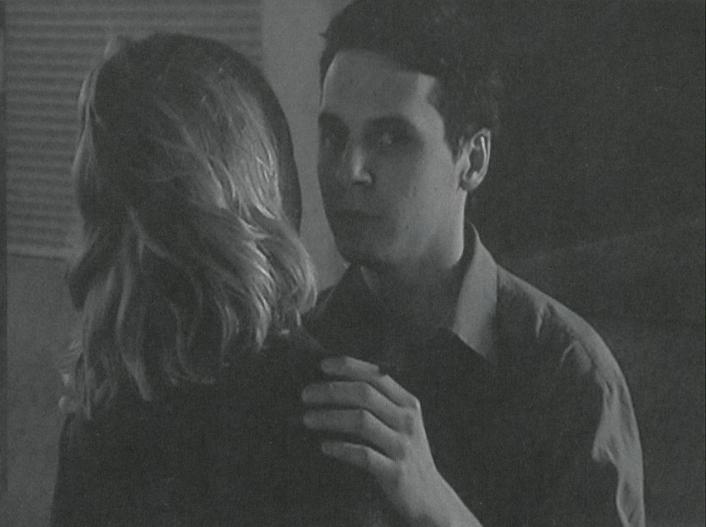
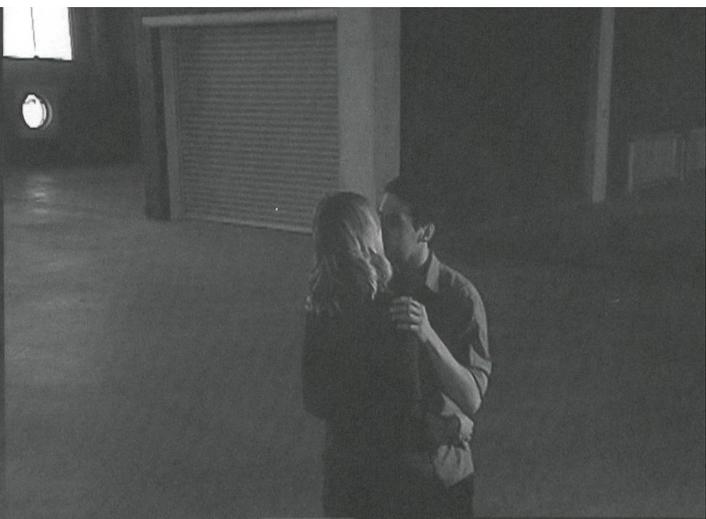


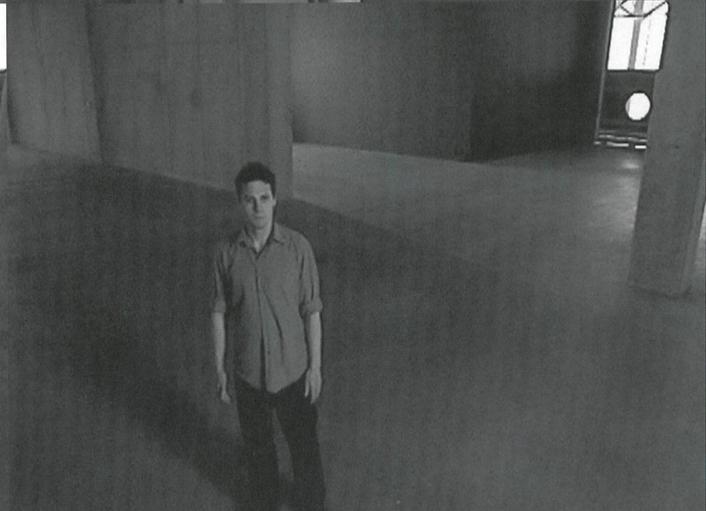
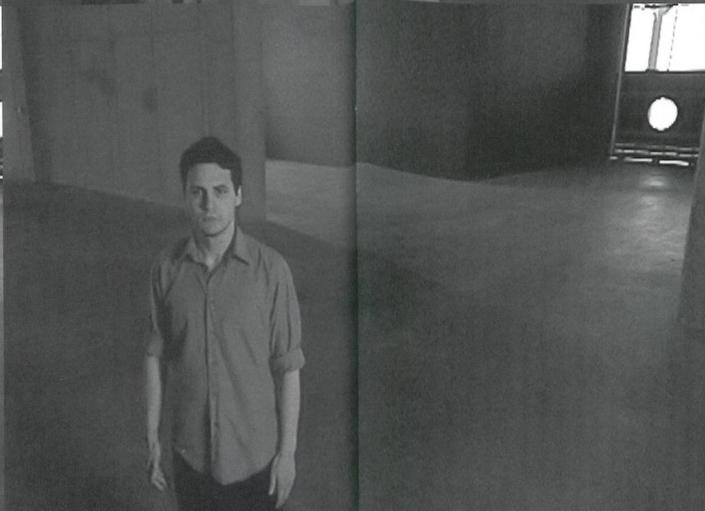
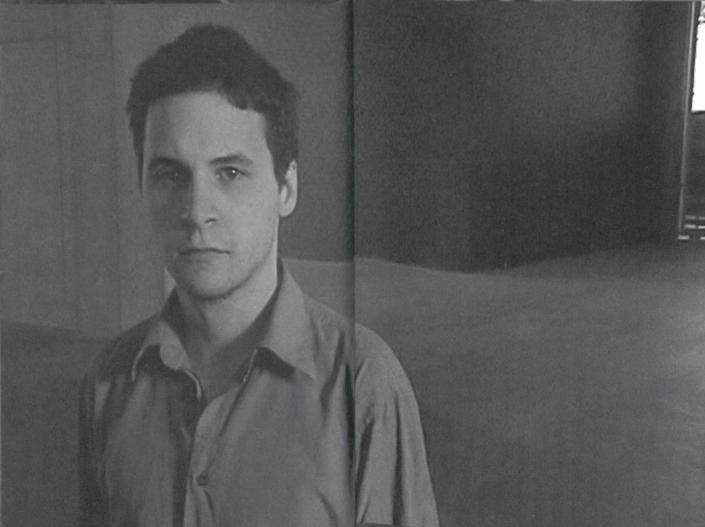
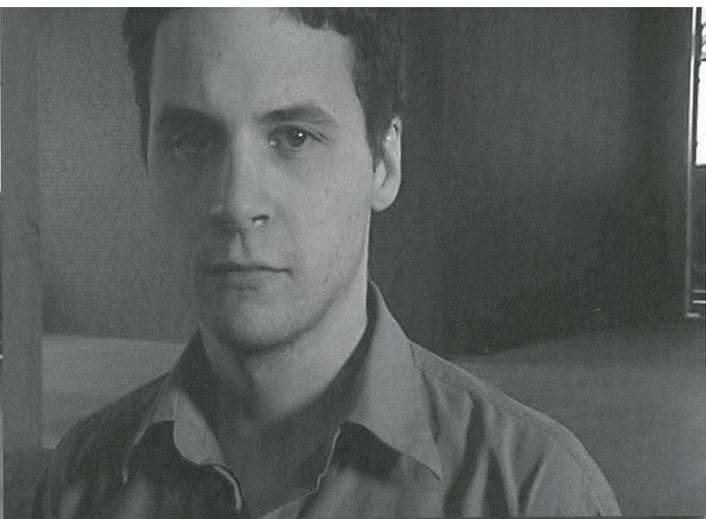
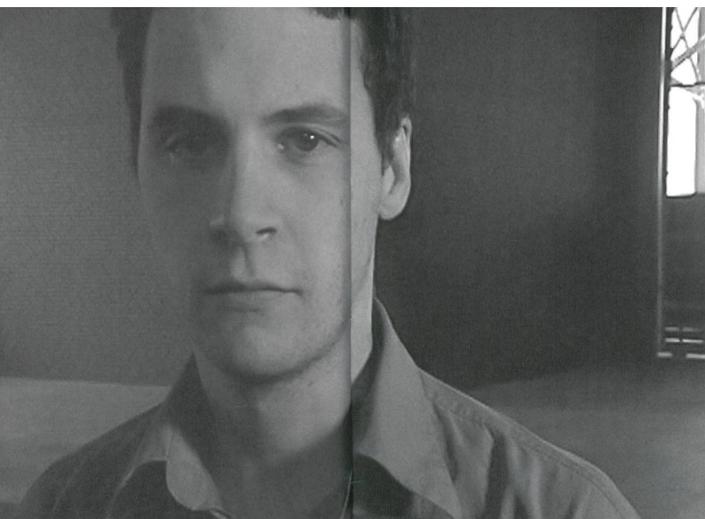
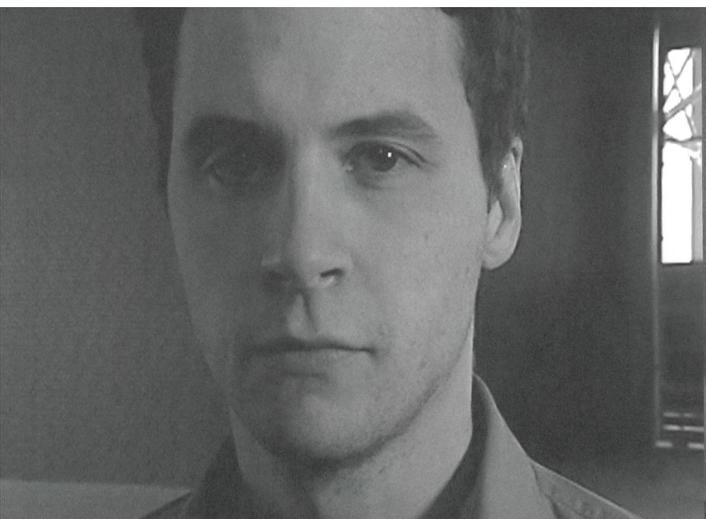














Nato nel 1975 a Teheran, Iran. Dopo aver concluso l'Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts di Ginevra (1999) è stato invitato quale Artist-in-residence alla Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten di Amsterdam (2001–2002). Nel 2003 ha vinto per la terza volta consecutiva il Swiss Award for Visual Arts. Attualmente vive e lavora a Zurigo, dopo aver trascorso un anno all'Istituto Svizzero di Roma (2003).

Per maggiori informazioni biografiche:  
www.shahryarnashat.com.

Born in 1975 in Tehran, Iran. After finishing the Ecole Supérieure des Beaux-Arts de Genève (1999), he was invited to become Artist-in-residence at the Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten in Amsterdam (2001–2002). In 2003 he won the Swiss Award for Visual Arts for the third consecutive time. Having recently completed a one-year residency at the Swiss Institute in Rome (2003), he currently lives and works in Zurich.

For more biographical information please consult:  
www.shahryarnashat.com.

*Unreasonably resonant*, Two-channel digital video installation. Written, directed and edited by Shahryar Nashat. With Marc Bauer and Ramin Guppy. Camera by Shahryar Nashat. Lighting and sound by Shahryar Nashat, 5'10", 2002.

*Italian studies*, Video installation. Found footage from *Valle Giulia 1968* and *Ordine pubblico*. Thanks to the Fondazione Archivio audiovisivo del movimento operaio e democratico Roma, 2003–2004.

*Optimism*, Digital video. Written, directed and edited by Shahryar Nashat. The protagonist is based on a character and scenography developed by Gregg Smith. With Gregg Smith, Simone Battisti, Sergio Faccin, Antonio Pietro. Camera and lighting by Shahryar Nashat and Marcella Anselmetti. Sound by Daniel Cousido. Shot in the Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome. 9'40", 2003.

*Les Négateurs*, Digital video. Written, directed and edited by Shahryar Nashat. With Hossein Eftekhari. Camera by Shahryar Nashat. 5'40", 2003.

*All the way back, the reconstruction*, Video installation. Two-channel digital video installation. Written, directed and edited by Shahryar Nashat. With Ryan Gander. Camera by Shahryar Nashat. Lighting and sound by Shahryar Nashat, 4'30", 2001.

*Laterally yours, 154 days*, Video installation / Digital video. Five-channel digital video installation. Written, directed and edited by Shahryar Nashat. With Stuart Bailey and Marie-José van Schaik. Camera by Marc Bauer, Shahryar Nashat and Matthijs Notten. Lighting by Nicole Bergmans. Sound by Shahryar Nashat. Technical advice by Michiel de Wit. Crane operator: Eric van der Heijde. Thanks to Linda Kint and Jan Willem de Jong, PTA-Passenger Terminal Amsterdam, Singel Film Amsterdam, Anita di Bianco, Kees Reedijk and Michiel de Wit. 9'40", 2002.

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### Disorientations in the work of Shahryar Nashat

“Lorsque tu veux savoir si tu es dans un endroit riche ou pauvre, tu regardes les poubelles. Si tu vois ni ordures ni poubelles, c'est très riche. Si tu vois des poubelles et pas d'ordures, c'est riche. Si tu vois des ordures à côté des poubelles, c'est ni riche ni pauvre: c'est touristique. Si tu vois les ordures sans les poubelles, c'est pauvre. Et si les gens habitent dans les ordures, c'est très très pauvre.” (When you want to know if the place you are visiting is wealthy or poor, look at the rubbish. If you can see neither rubbish nor dustbins, it means the area is very wealthy. If you can see dustbins but no rubbish, it is wealthy. If there is rubbish beside the dustbins, it is neither wealthy nor poor: it is a tourist location. If you can see rubbish but no dustbins, it is poor. And if there are people living among the rubbish, it means it is very, very poor.)<sup>1</sup> You might think that where things are consumed (rubbish), there would be poverty; and where things are not consumed, there would be wealth. But the object of such use has a price which the poor man cannot pay; what is rubbish but the leftovers of wealth? This is a pearl of wisdom which Mister Ibrahim imparts to young Momo while they are on a journey, but it is also proof that what we see is merely the skin of reality, the surface overlaying it. There are many variables and conditions.

Artist Shahryar Nashat investigates the complexity of our perceptions of what surrounds and stimulates us. His peculiarity is that, above all, he conceals the precipitating event, showing us only the repercussions which the event provokes in the individual. “What just happened has no importance. There are the facts, a man running out of a room, leaving a man lying on a bed... He's afraid of what he's just done or maybe he is afraid of what he's just seen... he's trying not to think anymore.”<sup>2</sup> Essential to an understanding of Nashat's work is a painstaking analysis of the script. In *All the way back, the reconstruction*, a man has run away, leaving another man on a bed: it is difficult to reconstruct the time scale, the ambient circumstances in which the protagonist acts. Is the man in the video really the protagonist, or is it the man who, according to the text, is running away along the corridors of a building which resembles a hospital or a hotel, or are the two men one and the same entity? It is the obsessive repetition of the same text that creates tension, animating a mental space that crushes the physical environment – a space in which all certainty seems to disappear, in which instability and fear predominate. The protagonist's behaviour has been affected by something that has happened, but which will never be made clear. His condition is one of impotence, extreme fragility, uncertainty. He seems obsessed by the ghosts of his recent past or by fear of the future.

From Nashat's works there emerges a strong sense of constriction, which, while also physical, is mainly psychological. The borderline between dominator and dominated is always very blurred. In *Unreasonably resonant* a man in gloves seems to dominate another man, who is impassive and apparently defenceless, but at the same time the first man also seems to be protecting and caressing him. A form of domination can at the same time be transformed into a morbid sense of belonging. In the same work, a young man seems to be drowning. Is the force of the water going to swallow him up, or is his will to live going to overcome his resignation in the face of death?