

Carlin, T.J., "Liz Magic Laser: Chase," *Art Review*, September 2010 (in-print).

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Chase, 2009-10 (production still), digital c-print, 30 x 46 cm

Liz Magic Laser *Chase*

Derek Eller Gallery, New York
21 May – 26 June

In Liz Magic Laser's new video *Chase* (2010), an adaptation of Bertolt Brecht's play *Man Equals Man* (1926), she fiddles with the Venn-diagram boundaries of relational aesthetics and theatre to create a new categorical sliver that, though not entirely fleshed out, does feel like novel territory. Laser successfully manages to harness Brechtian ideals in both the concept of the work and in the fortunate accidents that she incorporates as part of her delivery.

The video, which runs slightly longer than two hours, consists of a series of clips of solo actors executing their lines in various Chase ATM lobbies and vestibules across New York City; the clips have been spliced together to recreate *Man Equals Man* as a whole. Laser has enlisted the help of friends, dancers and professional actors to play the parts of four soldiers in British colonial India who, after vandalising a temple, forcibly recruit a naive passerby to replace the comrade among them who has injured himself in the act. What follows is the transformation of a dullard into a killing machine.

One of Brecht's top concerns in this play is the fungibility of human life in contemporary society, and Laser's choice of location perfectly serves this purpose. The actors' reliance on the particularities of their respective sets (many aim their lines directly at the machine consoles), as well as their interactions with strangers passing through, create layers of subtext that buoy the narrative.

The entire video is peppered with brilliant moments of double entendre and comedic punning, as when the character Jesse Mahoney 'wounds' himself in trying to extract his finger from the bank-card slot that grants entry to the ATM vestibule, or when Uriah Shelley is moving through the revolving doors below a giant blue Chase sign and declares, "This is a shocking establishment!" Laser makes full use of her locations to steer the narrative in the direction of agitprop, further sharpening Brecht's original lines into arrows aimed at the international banking industry (the source of so many recent societal ills) or a more general Orwellian 'corporation'.

The execution is not without its drawbacks. The sound is frustratingly problematic, verging more than occasionally on the inaudible or indistinguishable. Jump cuts make not only for a disjointed audio narrative but also, as the frame shifts with every change in speaker, a tiresome one to follow visually. It would have been a good idea to subtitle the piece, a simple and effective way to ever-so-lightly draw a safety net beneath a delivery that falters at times given the experimental nature of the shooting. Nevertheless, it may be that the slight dismantling of the delivery is what allows for the effectiveness of Laser's fortuitously loaded meanings. While flawed, this ambitious piece provides an entertaining, if lengthy, experience over which to consider whether man does really equal man or, here literally, machine – always a topical issue, and never more than today. *T.J. Carlin*