



Slater Bradley/MATRIX 216

The Year of the Doppelganger

April 24 – June 26, 2005

**University of California
Berkeley Art Museum**

MATRIX

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Last summer, before the Cal football team made national headlines by ending the 2004 regular season ranked fourth in the nation, San Francisco-born, Brooklyn-based artist Slater Bradley inadvertently filmed them performing their practice exercises: pulling weighted sleds, running sprints, and kicking their legs in synch. Bradley's videos often incorporate footage collected as observation and encountered casually, with unexpected and poetic results. In a photograph he took of the World Trade Center in 1999, two people are standing at the bottom of the frame. Their bodies mirror the verticality, pairing, proximity, and prophetically the vulnerability of the two structures. It is a coincidence, defined as a sequence of events that although accidental appears to have been planned or arranged.¹ Celebrating the everyday, Bradley connects the dots between seemingly random or unrelated occurrences, gains access to events that soon may be important, and happens upon elegiac moments prior to their being recognized as such. With an uncanny ability to channel events loaded with cultural relevance, equipped with a video camera, he becomes a clairvoyant for collective experience.

On April 26, 2003, exactly two years prior to the eventual date of the opening of his MATRIX exhibition, Bradley sent me a postcard of Brueghel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* (1558)² on which he wrote, "Heidi, don't let me disappear, Slater Bradley." Around the same time, Bradley's first show in the U.K. opened at MW Projects; it was titled "Nobody gives a fuck what you go do with your life." The yearning for visibility and relevance is the link between all of Bradley's artworks.

Bradley has used Holden Caulfield's admonition—don't let me disappear—in a variety of works. In many ways, Bradley, or at least his persona in his own work, is much like Caulfield, the protagonist of J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Each desperately seeks a human connection that will make him feel whole, and each functions as a symbol of sensitivity. Like that of many artists of his generation (he is thirty), much of Bradley's work contains a romantic fascination with death. He has created images of tombstones, body doubles, and cultural icons who have taken their own lives. Classical literature, contemporary music, the tropes of the masculine, and Romantic sentimentality factor prominently in the themes and content of his photographs and videos.

His recent work features the man he has identified as his doppelganger, his friend Benjamin Brock. It has been said that everyone in the world has someone who looks just like him or her, but most people will never encounter the "other." Bradley encountered Brock, who can perhaps be additionally identified as his muse, over a period of a few months in 1999 in the New York nightlife. Shortly thereafter, even Bradley's former roommates were mistaking Brock for Bradley. Bradley, who wants to be seen, or at least to not disappear, inserts someone for whom he is often confused into the artist's rightful place—in the public eye of the art world. However, as Paul Fleming writes of the literary figure of the doppelganger, "Whereas the doppelganger traditionally

Cover: *The Year of the Doppelganger*, 2004 (video still); courtesy of the artist; Team Gallery, New York; and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.



has the upper hand and calls the shots, Bradley seizes the initiative...[to take] possession of his doppelganger, scripting, directing, and producing it." The twist continues as Brock's identity in Bradley's work is conflated with figures that have their own cult identity, others more widely recognized than Bradley. In Bradley's *Doppelganger Trilogy* Brock plays Bradley and Kurt Cobain, Bradley and Ian Curtis, and Bradley and Michael Jackson.

For *The Year of the Doppelganger*, his MATRIX exhibition, Bradley has his doppelganger enact a generic adolescent fantasy of drumming in a massive arena capable of holding thousands of fans. Brock, the star of the work, plays Bradley playing the star of the work. Shirtless to reveal his rock-star thinness, Brock performs what Bradley terms "the most famous drumbeat in the world," Led Zeppelin's "When the Levee Breaks," in Berkeley's empty Memorial Stadium. The work is specific to its locale, rife with Cal iconography—the script lettering, the blue and the gold, and Memorial Stadium itself. The anomaly of seeing this icon of sports replicated in the museum gallery is what intrigues Bradley: "I love the idea of the space in the video becoming a sort of 'doppelganger' of the stadium for the many on campus who already know it," he said.

When the Cal football team unexpectedly enters the stadium to practice, competition emerges as a theme. The eventual and inevitable contests of strength, speed, and will, and the sheer size and sculpted physique of the players, reference historical challenges from Roman jousts to the Trojan wars. Set to the repetitive beat of the drum, the practice of the football players is captured at its most fantastic and mundane. A happenstance celebration of the masculine, *The Year of the Doppelganger* also acknowledges the artist/sport star parallel. It may be a riff on the work of Matthew Barney, whose "vision foregrounds the physical rigors of sport and its erotic undercurrents to explore the limits of the body and sexuality. Reflecting his own past as an athlete, Barney's earliest works were staged at the Yale's athletic complex."³

The Year of the Doppelganger, 2004 (video still); courtesy of the artist; Team Gallery, New York; and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.



In contrast to Barney, who is seen in his own work in a variety of personas, genders, and incarnations, Bradley, by replacing himself with another person, highlights both the fallacy of individuality and his own mortality. As Fleming wrote, "When you see your doppelganger, you can count on one of two things: either a barrel of laughs or your imminent death. In both cases the message is the same: you are replaceable. In response, you can only laugh or die."⁴ During the filming, Brock—rock star, slacker, drug-addict thin—clowned around with the Cal football players, offering to fight any of them and boasting that he "could take them all." His behavior was all Brock.

Bradley, in fact, is working on an idea for another project, titled *The Protector of the Kennel*, in which Brock ostensibly plays himself. Seeing Brock walking dogs through Central Park—his day job—the viewer would be caught wondering whether the affectations of the tilt of his head, the way his longish blond hair gently cascades across his forehead, his gait, are in fact personalized or projected. Would Brock, again the central character in a work by Bradley, be communing Bradley playing Brock?

With *The Protector of the Kennel*, Bradley outlined his goal of making "the happiest work of art ever." The action is set to Beethoven's "Ode to Joy." Coincidentally, Bradley discovered this quote by Nietzsche: "Transform Beethoven's 'Hymn to Joy' into a painting; let your imagination conceive the multitudes bowing to the dust, awestruck....In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing. His very gestures express enchantment. Just as the animals now talk, and the earth yields milk and honey, supernatural sounds emanate from him, too; he feels himself a god, he himself now walks about enchanted, in ecstasy, like the gods he saw walking in his dreams. He is no longer an artist, he has become a work of art." Brock is Brock as Bradley, as artist as well as artwork.

The Year of the Doppelganger, 2004 (video still); courtesy of the artist; Team Gallery, New York; and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles.



Village Voice art critic Jerry Saltz called *Theory and Observation* (2002) Bradley's "love song to the cosmos."⁵ In the video, slow-motion footage of the children's choir of Notre Dame, shot furtively, is layered with a music track and voice-over by Stephen Hawking. Hawking's theory of the wave function of the universe is often cited by atheists to disprove the existence of God as the creator of the universe.⁶ *Theory and Observation* is a poignant marriage of religion and science, theory and faith. Bradley, with godlike omnipotence, creates a complex visual environment filled with possibility and innuendo that, whether real or a hoax, seduces the viewer to continue looking as a way to know. If we cannot tell Brock from Bradley, Cobain, Curtis, or Jackson, he asks, who might be mistaking us for someone else?

As a youth in San Francisco, Bradley attended the Grace Cathedral school and sang along with the choir. The anonymous boys and girls captured in *Theory and Observation*, fidgeting and self-consciously expressing their daily reality, can also be seen as Bradley doubles. With the displacement of one identity onto another, unknown people and even architectural structures become stand-ins for the artist—both as points of commonality and recognition and as means by which to hide in plain sight. French author Marcel Proust wrote, "The true voyage of discovery lies not in finding new landscapes, but in having new eyes." Herein lies the responsibility of the artist. Don't let me disappear, Slater Bradley: an impassioned plea from all who could so easily be replaced, wittingly or not, by another—person, place, or event.

Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson
Phyllis Wattis MATRIX Curator

Study for Protector of the Kennel, 2004; image courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery, New York.

Slater Bradley was born in San Francisco, California, in 1975. He received his B.A. at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 1998. He currently lives and works in Brooklyn, New York.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2005
Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
The Guggenheim Museum, New York, NY
- 2004
The Doppelganger Trilogy, Blum & Poe, Los Angeles, CA
STONED & DETHRONED, Team Gallery, New York, NY
- 2003
Nobody Gives a Fuck What You Go Do With Your Life, MW Projects, London, UK
Center for Curatorial Studies Museum, Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, NY
- 2002
Here Are the Young Men, Team Gallery, New York, NY
Universitätsstadt Kaiserslautern, Kaiserslautern, Germany
Art + Public, Geneva, Switzerland
Keys in the Mailbox, Arndt & Partner, Berlin, Germany
- 2001
Trompe le Monde, Galerie Yvon Lambert, Paris, France
Home Town Hero, Refusalon, San Francisco, CA
- 2000
Special Projects Series, P.S.1, Long Island City, NY
Charlatan, Team Gallery, New York, NY

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2004
The Whitney Biennial, The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, NY
I Feel Mysterious Today, Institute of Contemporary Art, Palm Beach, FL
Premieres, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY
A Very Liquid Heaven, The Tang Museum, Saratoga Springs, NY
Unlightment, Galerie Nationale du Jeu de Paume, Paris, France
The Yugoslav Biennial, Vrsac, Serbia
Playlist, Palais de Tokyo, Paris, France
Will Boys Be Boys?: Questioning Masculinity in Contemporary Art, The Salina Art Center, Salina, KS, traveled to Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN
Harlem Postcards, Studio Museum Harlem, Harlem, NY

The Doppelganger Trilogy: Recorded Yesterday, 2001–2004 (still); three digital video projections; dimensions variable; edition of 3; courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery, New York. Photo: Joshua White.

- 2003
When Darkness Falls, Gallery 400, University of Illinois, Chicago, IL, traveled to Midway, Saint Paul, MN
Study, Taka Ishii Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
The Fourth Sex: The Extreme People of Adolescence, Fondazione Pitti Immagine, Florence, Italy
Someone to Watch Over Me, Smart Project Space, Amsterdam, Netherlands
- 2002
The Passing: Slater Bradley, Matt Collishaw, Christian Marclay, Galeria Helga de Alvear, Madrid, Spain
Nuit Blanche: plus qu'une image, Aux Anciennes Pompes Funebres de la Ville de Paris, Paris, France
Music/Video, Musée d'Art Moderne et Contemporain, Strasbourg, France
International Contemporary and Emerging Art, Sydney, Australia
- 2001
Casino 2001, Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst, Ghent, Belgium
Metropolis Now, Borusan Centre for Culture and Arts, Istanbul, Turkey

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The Doppelganger Trilogy: Phantom Release, 2001–2004 (still); three digital video projections; dimensions variable; edition of 3; courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery, New York. Photo: Joshua White.

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Work in MATRIX

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|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>The Year of the Doppelganger</i> , 2004–2005 | <i>The Year of the Doppelganger</i> , 2004–2005 |
| Digital video | C-print |
| Courtesy of the artist; Team Gallery, New York; and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles | 72 x 96 inches |
| | Edition of three |
| | Courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery, New York and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles |

Notes: ¹ *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 4th ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000), <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=coincidence>. ² Bradley used a quote by W. H. Auden that describes this painting in his Bard catalog, which was titled "don't let me disappear." ³ Biography of Matthew Barney, Guggenheim Collection, http://www.guggenheimcollection.org/site/artist/bio_11A.html. ⁴ Paul Fleming, "Tripleganger: Slater Bradley's 'Doppelganger' Trilogy," Blum & Poe Gallery, www.blumandpoe.com/slaterbradley/fleming.htm. ⁵ Jerry Saltz, "The OK Corral," *The Village Voice*, March 17–23, 2004, 80. ⁶ Patricia Maloney, former MATRIX curatorial assistant, contributed to this thought.

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Theory and Observation, 2002 (video still); digital video projection; dimensions variable; courtesy of the artist and Team Gallery, New York.