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Abstract

The output is a body sculpture. The work is intended to present opposing movements: a rigid forwards-and-backwards-only walk which at the same time creates the freeform movement of the steel ball on the tray between the performer's legs.

Research process: Director was conceived in response to research into Franz West's 'Adaptives' (body sculptures) at the Franz West Foundation, Vienna, 31 May 2024. It was the result of viewing many hours of archive footage of the 'Adaptives' that captured a range of performances with the sculptures over decades of West's career: from studio experiments with the artist's close circle; to invited responses via arts professionals such as Ivo Dimchev; to the open-ended testing of the works by the public in galleries across the world

Research insights: The tacit understanding betrayed by both professionals and laypeople in the archival recordings is that humility, braggadocio, embarrassment, confidence, tenderness and aggression are equally welcomed via the Adaptives. This coalescence of contradictory responses also coalesces opposing worldviews. By exploring whether West's Adaptives can be said to be representative of a phenomenological we-horizon, or whether are they something more prosaic (just another symbol of the alone-together culture upon which contemporary Capitalism insists), the initial insight was that they are neither and both: West's wholesale turn away from didacticism via the Adaptives deliberately courts ambiguity.

The further insight was to visualise ambiguity, to take West's idea that a gesture can only emerge with the help of an object to its ambiguous extreme by enacting the ways in which subject (performer) and object (body sculpture) express and control their agency.

Dissemination: Draft tested as part of Emergency24 exhibition at the Contact Theatre, Manchester September 2024. The finished version was performed at "The Same Deep Water As You", curated by Rowland's Leaving at PINK, Stockport, May 2025.

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