Jack
“You can deny, if you like, nearly all abstractions: justice, beauty, truth, goodness, mind, God. You can deny seriousness, but not play.”

- Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (1938)
Within me, there’s JACK. There are other people in the inner multitude, but this exhibition is about JACK. I get to know him earlier this year in a place called Locus Solus. Inside and around the derelict cinema Apollo on the Italian east coast my friends and I construct a parallel un/reality. Locus Solus lasts for forty-eight hours and is simultaneously a place out of time. A duration where JACK attaches in me.

During the role-play JACK performs acts that I later have difficulty relating to. In encounters with various people JACK’s actions are based on the figure the guidebook of the role-play has described, Jack Torrance in The Shining (1980). A writer who seeks isolation to get over his writer’s block. His son Danny has an imaginary friend called Tony, and Tony has the ability to connect to different beings on a denser plane.

In Locus Solus JACK is me, and I am JACK. He carries an energy with a strong power of attraction that at times turns destructive. Despite or perhaps because of this he manages to connect with his environment on a deeper plane, in a manner of which I am not used to. We are reminiscent of one another but several things separate us. JACK is a loner and I see myself as a collaboration-oriented person. JACK is frank but I am more calculating. JACK is fleeting while I am constant. JACK is emotional but I am aloof.

Jack Torrance and JACK differentiate and the determining cause is probably the isolation. When Jack Torrance believes the solitude will help his writer’s block JACK chooses, eventually, to break the isolation and then to put himself into words. In Locus Solus he produces five abstract manuals. In an attempt to understand them he tries to have them realised, but what remains is an undelivered verse.

After Locus Solus I reflect much on these partial differences and similarities and how they have a lingering effect on me. What suggestions do the shared and sharing ir/responsibility give? JACK and I are in a relational grey zone that I recognise from other situations, such as the contradiction in holding a solo exhibition when I usually work with others. Or the challenge in working within an artistic collective and at the same time pursuing an individual artistic practice.

With JACK as an instrument I see a possibility to explore these issues more in depth and have therefore chosen to invite my colleagues: Amina Szecsödy, Andreas Tang, Aron Skoog, Ernst Skoog and Tora Schultz Larsen. We usually work as a team, but with JACK, everyone is on their own. The roles are displaced and made turbid when the role-play is dissolved into reality. JACK both undermines and adds to our collaboration when he takes a central position. Introducing him to my colleagues is not
without risk and perhaps not ethically defensible. But because I trust them I dare to ask them for help to disarm JACK, investigating the grey zone and to pose new questions to a collective pattern of cooperation.

JACK therefore invites my colleagues to interpret his undelivered manuals. He distributes them randomly and establishes parameters for the collaboration.

JACK wants separate, uninterrupted conversations with each person

JACK only speaks English

JACK can only be reached by phone between midnight and lunch

JACK handles what is thought-related and I any practical issues

After three weeks JACK will not be available again

My essay contains transcribed fragments of the conversations between the five and JACK, with comments added by me. My exhibition is divided in two parts, where the entrance belongs to Johannes Hägglund and me while the main room belongs to JACK, Amina, Andreas, Aron, Ernst, Tora.

JACK is my Tony.

/ Adam Gustafsson
THE MANUAL

In the package:

    manuals, Jack, Amina, Andreas, Aron, Ernst, Tora

STEP I:  deliver the manuals (by Jack)

STEP II:  deliver the manual (to Amina, Andreas, Aron, Ernst, Tora)

STEP III: interpret the manuals (Amina, Andreas, Aron, Ernst, Tora)

STEP IV:  deliver the interpretations (Amina, Andreas, Aron, Ernst, Tora)

STEP V:  arrange the deliverance (Jack?, Adam?)

/Jack
MANUAL (Amina)

In the package:

re(a)d, rouge, knots, omnivore, amnesia

STEP I: untie the knots and let them be influenced by of rouge

STEP II: re(a)d the omnivore

STEP III: weld amnesia

STEP IV: retie the knots on amnesia and let the omnivore go back with it to where it came from

/Jack
Amina and JACK are discussing how the surrounding is affecting you. It sounds like they share a common interest for the present, or to be present. But maybe not as in meditation, when you try to clear your mind. Rather the opposite, to get deeply entangled with your own belongings and other beings. I wonder how one could connect to substances in a more profound way? Donna Haraway writes about “interspecies encounters” and in Hayao Miyazaki’s animated movie Princess Monoke (1997), they seem to be able to make these encounters. The forests, the mountains, the animals are all inhabited by essences that you have to treat with reverence. It is interesting how that approach seems to decrease the distance between humankind and it’s surrounding.

**Jack:** I felt such a presence yesterday to just spend time with all these things you have. It was quite like; it was some kind of generosity towards your own objects and surrounding. To just give them the full attention for a while.

**Amina:** It’s interesting cause this kind of relationship that you somehow get to your habitat is something that I at least feel is almost made or done or, like you get intertwined with all of these things that you have in one way or another. Either like, they are very present; they affect you somehow because you get attached to stuff without doing this, in a way. But it is interesting when you do it, I guess, because then it becomes very visible.
Amina and JACK are discussing how the past is effecting the present through memorys. But then also time as a constructed concept, which then complicate the notion of the past affecting the present. If we would play with the thought that we abolish time as a concept, would we be less influenced by the past? I guess it would be even more blurry to identify the origin of the past then. But even though time would be constructed, I guess it does not make it less real for us.

Jack: You wake up and suspect that the time has changed automatically but you never know, cause you didn’t see it. If your telephone would be offline for example it would not change I guess, so it is nice do that physically, to just change then clock.

Amina: There is something with all these that for me feels a bit like getting in contact with something that is maybe bridging something that is like psychological and supernatural in a way, where I somehow think that there is a lot of indications in the manual, like being influenced by red, welding amnesia, amnesia as a sort of psychological state which maybe somehow gives, I mean, gaps gives space for other stuff somehow. So could be a form of a portal. And then retying the knots, like creating something again on this affect of something. I kind of got into this, I started to think about The Shining, and like the movie in itself. Just were the name comes from. I don’t know but I can see a lot of amnesia in the movie in itself. In relation to both history and how this somehow fragments from the past is awake again and like affecting the present. So I thought about using this little finger Tony as a medium. And also there is a lot of connotation with like having this as a sort of imaginary friend. And also a sort of connection to something that could be named unconscious, if one wants to. But also somebody that performs action for you that you on yourself is not doing at the moment which like connects me to you and to Adam.
MANUAL (Andreas)

In the package:

   almond, rain, tower, guilt, bathrobe

STEP I:   turn the tower on

STEP II:  squeeze the passion in the rain

STEP III: don’t mix almond with guilt

STEP IV:  hide it in the bathrobe

/Jack
Andreas: but you know yesterday i was at a square, smoking with some friends and a stranger wanted to have a cig but then..

Jack: A stranger wanted to take your cigarette?

Andreas: No, it was a woman who wanted to borrow a lighter, so she could smoke a cigarette. And I gave her my lighter but then she tried to give it back to me. But before she tried to give the lighter back to me, she was trying to make it work.... But she couldn't get the fire out of the lighter because of the cold. Frozen fingers or frozen lighter she said. It didn't work out.. So she started to roll the lighter head down off her jacket, down her pants, on my pants, inside her palm, on the concrete and so on, to make the lighter loosen up.. And it worked and then she insisted on me taking the lighter back. But then, in the end I started to sing a song...

Jack: Was she rolling on your pants or on her own?

Andreas: Both.

Jack: So it was with your lighter and you didn’t know her?

Andreas: Yes, it was a stranger... It is actually kind of weird what people do when they have a cig and can’t make it lit, they kind of forget themselves.. or their own presence quickly. But yes she did that with my old lighter, which was now hers in my head at least, and then she tried to give it back to me. So in pure desperation, or not desperation but, what do you say, whatever, I just decided to sing a song. To kind of change the mode, a little bit, you know.. And then she started to sing along with me, and then she forgot about the lighter and just put it in her pocket. And then we talked a bit afterwards. And I walked away.. And now we are back in this conversation.

Jack: But what about Once upon a time in Hollywood?

Andreas: Cause we are still talking on the phone right now. The two of us. But for a short moment you maybe left our conversation. You forgot that we were talking on the phone.

Jack: ..did I?
Andreas: I don’t know, that’s the question. Just try to imagine if you tell a story so good that you kind of forget it meanwhile, you know sometimes that can happen. Like if a story is told and you kind of forget or get swirled in. So you are in another time in another zone and snap suddenly you are back again.

Andreas tells JACK a story as an attempt to make his mind drift. That force makes me think of Fernando Pessoa and his writings:

“Literature is the most agreeable way of ignoring life. Music soothes, the visual arts exhilarates, the performing arts (such as acting and dance) entertain. Literature, however, retreats from life by turning into slumber. The other arts make no such retreat—some because they use visible and hence vital formulas, others because they live from human life itself. This isn’t the case with literature. Literature simulates life. A novel is a story of what never was, a play is a novel without narration. A poem is the expression of ideas or feelings a language no one uses, because no one talks in verse”
Jack: I thought about this French language called argot, there is a French slang or dialect called argot. It is a secret language, traditionally it has been spoken as a way to exclude certain classes in society.

Andreas: I got a manual from JACK, signed JACK, I guess JACK is some kind of argot? Is that true?

Jack: Yes or no, it is some kind of.. but I think argot is more like, like the words are being created through putting them together, it is a game with words that, that you put different words together. Or you change the direction of them. For example there is this French word: Femme. It means woman. But in argot then you say Meuf. Which means that you just change the direction of the word. So you say it backwards. And that is a quite easy way to create new words. Cause then you just, when you here it you probably don’t understand it, but for the ones who know the codes, then you can just dissolve it. You know if you just change the direction.

Andreas: Is there any argot in Sweden?

Jack: Yes I think so, but I don’t know much about it.

Andreas: What about rövarspråket

Jack: No, hahaha, do you know rövarspråket? That is like a child game, then you put the letter o in between all the consonant. So if I would say hi Andreas it would sound like: hohi anondodoreasos. And if I say JACK it would sound like: jojacockok.

Andreas: You say what?

Jack: JACK in rövarspråket it is jojacockok.

Andreas: Why, because you put in a..?

Jack: Because you double the consonants and the you put in an o in between them. So J becomes j-o-j and then a, it stays as it is because it is a vowel, and then c becomes c-o-c and k becomes k-o-k. So then the word is jojacockok. And your name is anondodoreasos. And this is a language we talked as children. We were really good in doing it. We could communicate through that language.

Andreas: Where?
Jack: Like everywhere,
Andreas: Who did this?
Jack: Me and my friends. I did it a lot when I was a kid.
Andreas: Was the language in the church you were brought up in a local language with a local logic, like argot?
Jack: It was not that the language in church has to do with argot. But they did speak in tongues. But that was not a way of communicating with each other, that was a way of communicating with god.
Andreas: But they did it in front of each other?
Jack: Yes. In the same time, simultansely. People stood up, shouting, and also then speaking in tongues.
Andreas: They did that?
Jack: Yes, i did that, or Adam did that.
Andreas: You did that, Adam did that?
Jack: Adam did that.

Andreas and JACK are talking about language and slang. How the spoken word can work as an inclusive act but also as an excluding one. I can see that JACK is accessing my memories a lot, memories and connections I haven’t made, or that I have repressed. I remember the act of speaking in tongues as something quite absurd, confusing but also creative, a kind of play, a serious one. The Dutch historian Johan Huizingas writes about play and seriousness in culture:

“Ritual is seriousness at its highest and holiest. Can it nevertheless be play? We began by saying that all play, both of children and of grown-ups, can be performed in the most perfect seriousness. Does this go so far as to imply that play is still bound up with the sacred emotion of the sacramental act? Our conclusions are to some extent impeded by the rigidity of our accepted ideas. We are accustomed to think of play and seriousness as an absolute antithesis. It would seem, however, that this does not go to the heart of the matter.”
- Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (1938)
MANUAL (Aron)

In the package:

taxi, laterizi, breath, more breath, subtleness

STEP I:  tame the laterizi and exhale breath into it

STEP II:  let the subtleness go for a ride in the taxi, fast ride

STEP III: cut up more breath and stuff it with tamed laterizi and motion sick subtleness

/Jack
Dear Jack,

I hope this email finds you well,

Thanks again for the invitation, I’m grateful to be a part of the interventions within your and Adam’s show (or could one even consider it to be your show - Jack?).

I’ve read through the manual and I’m feeling excited by the content: especially with the “italian-connection” (the laterizi) and now being here in Rome. But, some questions occurs (of course) when reading the manual and it would be interesting to hear more about your approach to the manual(s)? In relation to the show (as a whole), do you have any ideas of presentation or is that also up to me? Is there, by any chance, a possibility to get more information about what the other works will be, except the interpreted manual(s)? I’m excited by the grey zone you’ll explore at Galleri Mejan, the fictional schizo-mood between jack/adam, “reality”/fiction: as we’ve said before - the melange between these different entities.

Anyway I’m interested in producing some-kind-of physical work (here in rome) and send it to you. But it would be great to hear some thoughts from you regarding the manual, what’s your feeling and idea about it?

How do we deal with the suffocation that abstraction has produced in the history of humankind? Is there a wayout from the corpse of financial capitalism?

Jack, I’m looking forward for your response and lets keep this thread on-going.

Best Regards (from a sunny Rome),

Aron
Dear Aron,

Thank you for your mail. I’m very happy to have you onboard.

In a conversation earlier this week the epithet “recipe” came up as an alternative to the “manual”. This, as a way to both broaden the idea of mounting things together but also to bring the texts into a realm that maybe is not as authoritarian. Earlier today I talked with Tora and then we went on even further on the recipe track, I started to talk about the video game Zelda and how you there can collect a lot of various objects, from mushrooms to minerals to dragon scales to monster limbs to flowers to butter. And then you can cook dishes of them, and of course you can cook something tasty if you use mushroom and butter, but you can also cook elixirs if you mixing monster limbs with flowers.

Now, my manuals consist of even more things, like feelings, abilities and memories, but also typing errors, which sometimes makes the content a bit ambiguous. Another thing I was thinking about concerning the manuals is the contradiction between form and content, where the form of a manual is created to as easy as possible understand and mount. But here the content is not that easy to mount and the result is not pre-destined. And somehow that’s also how I think about this collaboration. Adam has his external expectations hanging over him and everything that comes with a graduation show. But you and me don’t have to take that into consideration, we can just keep on digging in the manual and its surrounding.

I have now talked to everyone and there is quite different way to approach the manuals. But one common thread seems to be that everyone tries to develop it from where they are, picking out fragments that somehow relates to their own practice/mind-set/longings. Another thing that I think has come up is the possibility to re-involve me into their processes; throwing back the hot potato I have given you.

Ernst are thinking a lot of the actual space, which he also later will exhibit in, a way of taking advantage of the situation to explore his own show. Amina are dissecting the manual through memories, unconsciousness and the supernatural in relation to Doc and Tony in the shining. Andreas has started to work with Jack on a memory palaces, all during nightly conversations. Tora is exploring double meanings in her manual and are somehow divided between her own developed methods and the possibility to try out other paths, she also tries to figure out if she should address me or Adam.

What concerns Adam and the actual exhibition is that he seems to have started some kind of collaboration with Johannes Hägglund, where they will together build up an enjoyable setting in the entrance space. So right now, it seems like Adam will be present in the entrance, and I (you) in the left room. Until the 4th of November,
when you are supposed to make a proposal, I will consciously keep the arrangement of this room open in order to allow discussions on all levels. And after that I/Adam will try to manifest and visualize the outcome in best possible way. Yesterday I went on a tour in my own living room, exploring the dark nuances in the corners and the periphery of certain objects. It made a huge impression on me to be able to focus on the subtleness in this well-known space; this is maybe something I want to bring into the project.

The quotation you sent seems rather political which I think is quite exciting in this context. I am now thinking back to what I earlier wrote about form and context, where the form of the manual maybe aims on handle the chaos. What are you thoughts about the quotation?

When I read your manual I bounced on the word taxi in relation to Rome and started to think of a movie that maybe could give you some keys, Night On Earth by Jim Jarmush. Among other things it deals with time and distance, which is quite present between us.

All best
Jack
MANUAL (Ernst)

In the package:

foot steps, drops, distant axing, birds,
an imaginary knock on the door, bat wings

STEP I: let the drops be the imaginary knock on the door

STEP II: make the distant axing stop

STEP III: consider tying the bat wings on too the birds

STEP IV: forget about the foot steps

/Jack
I am always so affected by how other people deal with situations but now when I hear this it seems like it is going to be a process, a long process with all of us in a way, these conversations. Maybe Tora is dealing with it in different way, if she actively chooses to not talk to you. We talked about the conversations and I think that is nice and it is a really nice part to get to know you. But somehow I also think about that the conversation should end up in some kind of, it doesn’t need to be physical, but something. And I think that this something, at least I have a tendency to like, think that something. I lose myself a bit in the something when I have to many conversations in a way because then it is too much information. The things I get kind of fall for or get kind of interested in somehow disappear in all the other things I also somehow find interesting.

Yea, I know through Adam that you have these thoughts about conversations. And maybe that is something you should, I mean with Adam and in Coyote I guess there is like a more rigid structures and expectations and so on, and it is maybe hard to change. But maybe this is also an opportunity for you to, to try out the way of communication, as you like. Also I were thinking about the, in relation to that, its like, now your names are on the poster but it is Adams name that is like, it is his show, which also I could imagine it could provide some kind of anonymous situation. To like, I mean, It is Adam that will like, has to stand for whatever you and me ends up with. It that is also like quite irresponsible but that irresponsibility also gives us some liberty I think.

Yes, all these conversations you are having with us are going to end up in something, and that something is something that Adam will deal with.

Ernst and JACK are talking about conversations in relation to processes and collaborations. I wonder how their collaboration will end up since Ernst seems to dislike too much conversations and JACK can’t get enough of them. Maybe Tora gives Ernst some good inspiration to not converse that much with JACK. I think that this “anonymous situation” JACK is talking about, that would provide “liberty” is a hoax since Ernst and the names of the rest will be most present in the exhibition. I would say that this whole task, to interpret the manuals, is just a pretext for something else, and that the actual outcome of the manuals may be secondary.
Ernst: It also sounds a lot like therapy, but in a way that you are creating this space and this room and rules and you need to be able to put yourself into it to make sense out of it. Of course it is very real in itself what you are talking about mostly but it could also be very non real I guess, speaking about dreams or thoughts. But it is just interesting to think about play as somehow. Therapy, play and culture that they are interlaced a lot.

Ernst is talking about how the notion of play is connected to culture and therapy. I think he is right to consider psychoanalysis as a kind of role-play, which I guess extends to the society in general. Johan Huizinga writes:

“Now in myth and ritual the great instinctive forces of civilized life have their origin: law and order, commerce and profit, craft and art, poetry, wisdom and science. All are rooted in the primeval soil of play.”
- Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture (1938)

It is fascinating how you then in psychoanalysis in order to access the inner you, are using (role) play as a tool.
MANUAL (Tora)

In the package:

nails, childhood, church benches, solitude, fame

STEP I: pop the childhood, pore it into fame. shake

STEP II: peal the church benches, ring by ring

STEP III: heat up solitude to body temperature

STEP IV: put everything on the wall using the nails

/Jack
Tora: Something I have thought about the last four years is Adams graduation show, that has been in my mind for four years in a way. What it would look like. I have kind of, you know, like followed the process and his practice, that I am very involved in and also very, as a colleague but also as a good friend. So it, ehh, so, ehh, that I have, without saying too much I guess I had thought and also, ahh.

Jack: You can be honest.

Tora: It’s not that I don’t trust you, but ehh.. hmm, but I am a bit afraid that you are going to tell Adam. Because you are working so closely.

Jack: But we don’t. Actually, I really try to keep Adam out of this. He is really curious but I also think that he has, he has really a lot of strings attached to him that I, that makes me tangled somehow. That makes me bound down so I try to keep him out of this, as much as possible. Cause he has this, I mean I appreciate him cause he has some ability’s to like, I don’t know, see things straight and make things happen or whatever. But then he also, doesn’t have some things that I. Or I mean if I would involve him to much in this then that would take over, because I am in a total different sphere than him where other rules apply. You know how he wants to be in control somehow? That makes me wanting to shake him off.

Tora: Yes, I get that. But it is more a specific thing that may, that may. No I think I will, it is something that I have for Adam, that I thought about, that I thought about in relation to his graduation show. But I don’t think I will reveal it because, because I am not sure whether it will be a part of the manual. So maybe also when you are talking about being in control maybe that is something that I can do for you, not letting you in on everything. So that it doesn’t get to controlled. If you get what I mean

Tora is hiding something from JACK because she thinks he will reveal it to me. I wonder why she wants it to be a surprise? Is it because it is still a sketch and she don’t want to let it go to early. Or does she have a critique that she doesn’t think I can handle? Anyway I appreciate how she is playing the game and keeps me unknowing, just like I am not revealing everything about this project and conversations for her. JACK also tries to keep me on a distance, which is quite unfair since I invited him into all this. I wish there was a way for JACK and I to work more closely.

"At a certain point I realized that the “I” doesn’t exist. So I said to myself: If the “I” doesn’t exist, I have to construct one, or maybe even more than one.”
- Kathy Acker in an interview with Sylvere Lothringer (1991)
Acknowledgements:
Thanks to Amina Szecsödy, Andreas Tang, Aron Skoog, Ernst Skoog och Tora Schultz Larsen for being part of this project, i am so thrilled to get to know you and to have the oppurtunity to have you as my collegues. Thanks to Ming Wong and Emma Kihl who has been my supportive supervisors. Thank you Lisa Tan and Asier Mendizabal for beeing part of the critique panel. Thanks to everyone who were part of creating Locus Solus: John Skoog, Marcello Spada, Kara Hondong, Swan Lee, Tobias Becker, Danijel Sijakovic, Laslo Chenchanna, Sophie Meurer, Yun Heo, Simone Eisele, Emil Wudtke, Alice Glagau and Ella Johansen. Thank you Swan Lee for letting me use your drawing as a poster. I’m grateful for all practical assistans during the produc- tion, thanks to Kenth Gustafsson, Mountpac and Samuel Wernelöf, John Gustafsson, Caroline Joo, Eugene Sundelius von Rosen, Andreas Hammar, Olivia Gaia, Annette Fellesson, Daniel Norrman. Thank you Ernst Skoog for the printing, Johannes Björk for translation and Johannes Hägglund for great collaboration in the exhibition space. And most thanks to Astrid Eriksson who have put up with booth JACK and me and for being an enorous support.