

A PIECE OF THE CAKE

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It is no joke that artists potentially can make a whole lot of money. At the moment Damien Hirst is the highest paid living artist in the world. He has over a hundred people working for him in several of his studios. It is considered to be a determined global brand with a marketing team, a production line, a public relations department, an administration block, an investment specialist, the list goes on and on.

With the arrival of the economic crisis and the sudden change of Hirst's concept on how to make new works, almost half of his employees were fired. Also our "heroine", Laura, found herself on the street. But she decided to take matters into her own hands. And it is because of this abrupt action that she became our heroine, our statement, and our perfect "example" in this particular story.

Now picture this; Damien Hirst's *Spot Paintings*.

It was Laura's last day at work. This meant that for the last time she was painting spots. She had been working here for some years now and the thought of leaving had not entirely registered to her yet.

She took a moment to allow herself to look around. There were many others. Almost all of them were painting spots. She wondered who would stay. One girl in particular grabbed her attention. She was holding a pen in one hand, twirling her hair with the other while looking at the painting in front of her. This increased Laura's curiosity. She leaned towards the right, slightly balancing on one foot. The girl seemed like she was considering something, her head leaning to the right, then coming back to the middle. Repeating this over and over. Before she could investigate further she heard the enormous door of the studio open. Out

of the corner of her eye she saw a few men come in to the studio. She could feel the air tighten up. She didn't dare look up but she knew HE was there. Laura had seen him a few times before. He would come in and check the paintings. The others said he was quite brutal, but that he *had* to be, emphasizing the fact that they really understood this. The fact that they so harshly highlighted this made Laura never take them quite so seriously.

She glimpsed one more time at the painting lying in front of her. Her eyes followed the outer lines of the circles she made. From one spot to the other; orange, pink, light blue. She slowly touched the edges of the canvas, arriving at the corners she pushed her fingers into them. How many had she made? How many hours had gone by? What was all of this worth?

What was all of this worth?

And it is in this very moment that something snapped in Laura. A Kodak moment if you wish. Or a light bulb moment as Oprah would define it. Adrenaline shook her body awake. She felt lifted. She felt energy! She knew what she had to do. Her eyes shone like diamonds.

She turned around and started walking up to Hirst. It looked like she was floating.

"Excuse me. Hi. Could I ask you a question?"

The man in the leather jacket looking at the process of the production line, surrounded by a few other men in suits, turned around and recognized her.

"This is my last day here, and I would like to ask you if I could have one of the Spot paintings?"

As she was reminding herself to breathe, Hirst replied firmly.

"Make one of your own." Not a second had passed. Not a second thought came to his mind.

Laura's tongue felt like it had been dipped in a bowl of sand. Her mouth reminded her of sanding paper and her teeth of perfectly fitted tiny mirrors, never being able to sit on top of each other. Fragile as fragile can be. Waiting to be shattered to be used. Self-destruction becoming some twisted and taciturn self-improvement. But now just reflecting gums and sand, a desert draught.

"No, I want one of yours."

Click! Another Kodak moment there. A frozen moment.

Right at this juncture in time, Laura's brain did something it had never done before. It penetrated a level of her subconscious where she had hidden all her thoughts on whether or not she deserved a piece of this cake.

“The only difference between one painted by you and one of mine is the money.”

It was his. She had been making them, but they were his cakes!

Hirst turned around and walked out of the studio, signing to the rest of his gang to follow him. Laura stood there. She didn't feel lifted...She didn't feel energy....The adrenaline had turned into sadness and embarrassment. She felt eyes resting on her. Whispers echoing.

She noticed the girl with the pen grab her bag and walk out. Before she closed the door behind her she turned around one last time and looked at Laura. Their eyes met across the room. Was that a grin on her face? Before she knew it, the girl was gone.

Later that evening as Laura was walking home, she was going through the events of the day. This man is an artist and not just any artist, she thought to herself. He has become so “big”, he didn't even have to make his own art works. But that was not essentially true, it was the anger talking and she knew it.

Could it be that, his art was the art of selecting? Wasn't it Hirst who had said that, “the best Spot painting you can have by me is one painted by Rachel. She's brilliant. Absolutely fucking brilliant.”

This dilemma had always confused Laura and as she breathed in the cold November air she started thinking about the situation.

The Spot paintings were selling at six digit numbers. Their value was not because Hirst was painting them himself but because they were his “idea”. Hirst had certainly thrown the concept of the poor, lonely and drunk artist slaving away in a studio, out the door for good. However he certainly was not the first. Artists such as Jeff Koons, Takashi Murakami and Anish Kapoor were only a few other examples that were considered to be high paid artists. Hirst believed that an artist was still an artist even though he/she would have no part in the actual “making” of the artwork. Instead would be more significantly known as a businessman (becoming even richer than their collectors), which in turn had brought him fame and recognition as well as a considerable amount of critique from many sections of the art world. Not to mention his enormous paychecks. She knew Hirst believed that “the real creative act is the conception and since I am the progenitor of the idea, I am the artist”.

But what did that make her? An insignificant element in the production line? Insignificant according to what, to authorship?

She had reached her tiny apartment on the East side of London. As she was searching for her keys in her coat pocket, the door suddenly opened. It was Frank. Frank was a painter in his sixties, obsessed by the stroke of the brush on the canvas. Even though he thought she was absolutely mad, he was also the only human being around the block who could have the slightest bit of understanding on what she was doing for a living.

“Coming from the factory, are we?”

He was blowing his nose with an old worn-out handkerchief. What a trumpet! Laura thought.

Although Frank’s eyes and his fury left eyebrow were something of a comfort for Laura, today she would have preferred to avoid them completely.

“Yes I am actually.”

The wind had picked up. It sure has a big mouth that wind, blowing all that air, Laura thought. She imagined how big that mouth would have to be.

“But I’m not going back there. The guy decided he would make his own paintings from now on.”

From the way Frank’s eyebrows moved upwards, she knew he was questioning her answer. He looked passed her towards the sky. As he buttoned up his jacket to top, he seemed like he travelled back in time, to one of his memories. It was as if another layer had covered his eyes. And it was only this layer that he could see. Was he thinking of the wind too?

“Well Laura, you know what Nietzsche said?”

The tragic nature of existence.

The exposure of art.

The meaningless existence of humanity.

Traumas of reality.

The comforting achievements of human creativity.

“Yes Frank, I do.”

Nietzsche was sure not turning around in his grave because of Damien Hirst. But Nietzsche was dead.

Laura knew that Frank had done his master thesis on Nietzsche’s views on art and if it still was applicable on

modern art. Of course that was more than thirty years ago. But since then Frank had always been very attentive in bridging gaps through Nietzsche. And it was as if he could see Laura's mind ticking off lists and connecting the dots that a teasing smirk came across Frank's lips. One could potentially compare it more to a wink. He contently said

"Well I have got to run love."

He knew she would understand.

The next day Laura woke up to see her street covered in a thick white blanket. The blanket was becoming thicker and thicker as small crystals were slowly falling from the sky. Each one seemed to have its own course. For a moment Laura imagined to be one of them. Cruising through the air as the wind guided her, to the left, to the right, swirling around with millions and billions and trillions of others around her. As far as the eye could see, every single one of them looked almost exactly identical but once looked closer they were actually all so very different from one another. It was as if they were a school of fish, every one of them moving according to the rest. Sometimes getting separated in a flash due to the sharp cut of the wind. Frequently reuniting by criss-crossing through the wind. However,

Laura had no idea what would soon cross her path, which was going to change everything.

Laura felt calm. She would use her day to untangle the knot that had formed in her mind as the night had turned in to day. Her action yesterday had opened a few windows to topics she had formerly not thought of. But ajar windows was not enough for her, she needed to open the door and get inside the issue.

When she got downstairs, ready to leave the apartment, she noticed that there was a thick white envelope with no address, sticking out of her mailbox. Laura was standing completely motionless, just staring at it. She didn't move an inch. It was as if somebody had paused the record player. There was only silence and she was waiting for someone to press play again so could move. After a while Laura pulled the white envelope out, took her keys back from her pocket, walked back to her front door, unlocked the door, opened it, got inside, closed it behind her, put the keys in the door, locked the door, turned around, walked straight over to her table, put the envelope on the table, sat down on the nearest chair, dropped her bag on the floor, took her hat off, took her scarf off, took her coat off and sighed.

If it were a movie this would be the moment where the camera would be circling around Laura, zooming in on her face. Dum dum duuum...! Climax!

She reached out, closed her eyes and touched the envelope. After searching for a corner she carefully started ripping the envelope open. She glided her hand inside. Paper. Stacks of paper. A booklet! She took it out and opened her eyes. There was a black and white picture of a man with grey thick hair and a long nose on which his thick glasses rested. He was looking intelligently into the camera. She turned the booklet around to see the front cover. 'Multiple Authorship' by Boris Groys. Laura read the title once more but this time out loud. *Multiple Authorship*.

She flipped through the small booklet. At once her heart started beating faster. There was a part highlighted! She immediately started reading.

The traditional, sovereign authorship of an individual artist has de facto disappeared; hence it really does not make much sense to rebel against such authorship. When confronted with an art exhibition, we are dealing with multiple authorship. And in fact every art exhibition exhibits something that was selected by one or more artists—from their own production and/or from the mass of readymades. These objects selected by the artists are then selected in turn by one or more curators, who thus also share authorial responsibility for the definitive selection. In addition, these curators are selected and financed by a commission, a foundation, or an institution; thus these commissions, foundations, and institutions also bear authorial and artistic responsibility for the end result. The selected objects are presented in a space selected for the purpose; the choice of such a space, which can lie inside or outside the spaces of an institution, often plays a crucial role in the result. The choice of the space thus also belongs to the artistic, creative process; the same is true of

the choice of the architecture of the space by the architect responsible and the choice of the architect by the committees responsible. One could extend at will this list of authorial, artistic decisions that, taken together, result in an exhibition taking one form or another.

If the choice, the selection, and the decision with respect to the exhibition of an object are thus to be acknowledged as acts of artistic creation, then every individual exhibition is the result of many such processes of decision, choice, and selection. From this circumstance result multiple, disparate, heterogeneous authorships that combine, overlap, and intersect, without it being possible to reduce them to an individual, sovereign authorship. This overlapping of multilayered, heterogeneous authorships is characteristic of any larger

Who had sent her this? She looked one more time at the envelope for clues, nothing. She decided she would worry about all of this later because the clock was ticking and she was going to be late. She took the booklet with her and rushed out the door.

As soon as Laura sat down in the tube she started reading the text. She was overwhelmed. Once in a while her eyes would look up to see the station signs. At one of those times, she noticed a poster on the tube wall that showed a seventeenth-century painting of a nude female. Underneath, in large capital letters it said 'Rubens' Women'. It was an advertisement for a major exhibition of female nudes painted by Rubens. What grabbed Laura's attention was the tag next to the poster. "Who wouldn't want to be a Rubenesque woman instead of a stick on the cover of Elle?" She chuckled softly. They had a point. She thought how coincidental it was to see a poster of a Rubens exhibition. Laura had a little secret that she kept to herself because she thought it was pretty ridiculous. She had always compared Hirst to an old master, making her one of his apprentices/students. But disappointingly she knew nobody ever got famous that way. Because Hirst was not raising artists, he was making business.

Despite the fact that in the past it was common for painters to retire from painting to exclusively supervising, today the world just dealt with it in an entirely different way. Some more conventional people felt cheated by the artist, which Laura found extremely hard to comprehend. Some things cannot be done by one person alone, and if it was possible, a whole other concept such as craftsmanship and time would take over the work itself. It was like comparing apples and oranges. This is also why Laura would get into some heated discussions when she mentioned her previous job...She knew she was there partly because of her craftsmanship but most of all because things simply had to get done. Thousands of dots had to be painted, medicine cabinets had to be polished. Thus finally the work would not be concentrated on craftsmanship, neither of the artist nor of his *employees*, but about the concept behind all of that.

After reading the text she started to let it sink in and took out her small black notepad and started writing:

The term autonomous artist means that the creator, the composer or the originator is uncontrolled, free, independent. Basically Mr Groys is saying that for a long time the artist produced the art works and then the curator selected them.

Since Duchamp, selecting an artwork is the same as creating an artwork because the act of selecting is also considered to

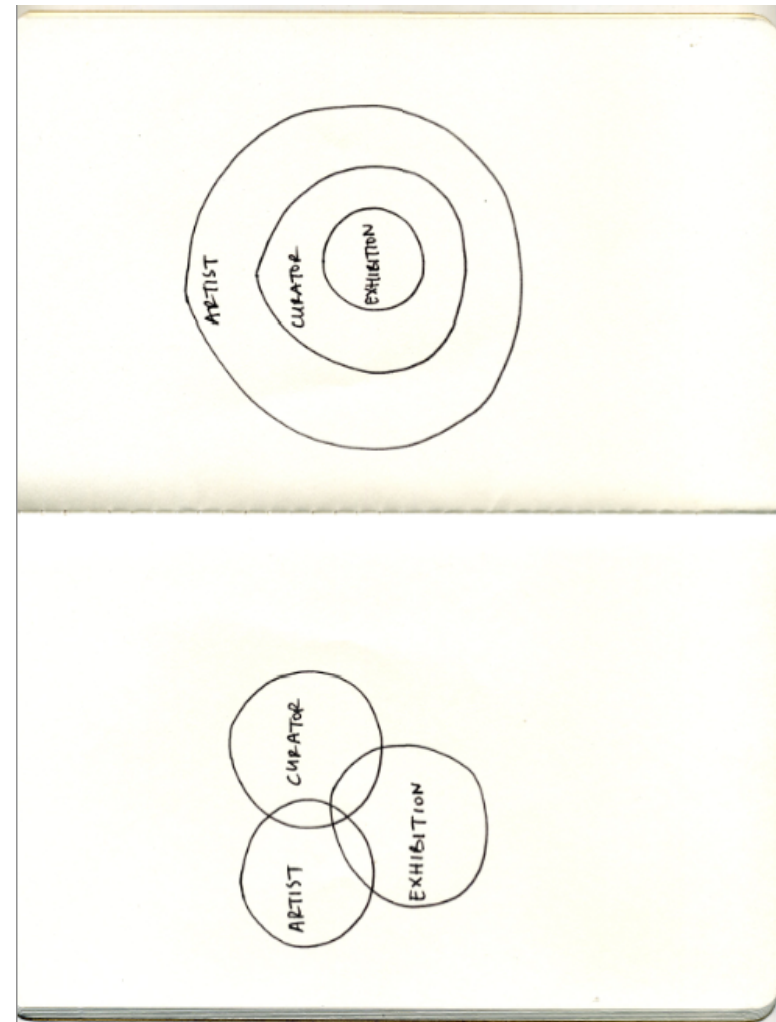
be a creative act. Especially declaring, acknowledging and representing items/objects as artworks have theoretically changed the way we look at the role of the artist. When the difference between a readymade and something produced by one self disappears, all acts of selecting can be considered art. Therefore, an artwork has to be selected otherwise it's not considered to be an artwork. The author (the artist) authorizes the selection (the artwork).

In the 1960's, artists starting selecting their own art by making installations. Installations were created to represent these selections. They were small exhibitions on their own curated by the artist. According to Groys, this is when the roles of the artist and the curator became identical. The artist took the position of curating the artwork.

He says: "An artwork is an exhibited object". Inherently it makes the exhibited object a selected object. Therefore contemporary art is "art that must be *currently* exhibited for it to be considered art".

He continues to argue that the medium of an installation is the space itself. It is this space that creates materialization. It questions the order and relations among things that exist in reality. This strongly points out that it is against the authorial signature.

Here she included a small sketch:



All of a sudden she realized that she was suppose to get out of the tube! She quickly gathered her belongings together and rushed out before the doors jammed her in. As Laura was pacing towards the exit, her mind was still processing the information she was trying to capture in her notebook. The conventional authorship of artworks was simply something of the past now. She got on the never ending escalator. That's why there is no concrete demonstrations against it in art itself. Some one quickly rushed by her, pushing her more to the right. Because art itself represents authorship. Laura had reached the top of the escalator. Just because the artist's hand was less apparent or not there at all, did that mean it also lacked a further sense of authorship? She took a left and went up the stairs. She crossed the street and arrived at the White Chapel Gallery. Laura had come to see a work by Felix Gonzalez-Torres. She read it was a performance and didn't want to miss it.

Inside the gallery there was a monumental crowd, which made a substantial amount of noise even though it seemed as if they all politely floated through the space. Some were taking pictures and others were filming. Laura noticed a journalist who was reporting live to one of the TV channels in America.

"Yes Tom, here we are at the White Chapel Gallery, live, as the *Go Go Dancing Platform* by Felix Gonzales-Torres premieres in London. As you can see behind me, there is an immense amount of curiosity for his work. People have come in enormous numbers. There are international photographers and journalists, as well as many important people from the art world, who came to see this five minute performance."

For a moment the woman fell silent, slowly nodding her head and looking at her notes.

"What we know so far is that the performance is "re-created" by instructions Gonzales-Torres left. He specified that, for five minutes each day, unscheduled and unannounced, a dancer in silver shorts would ascend the lighted platform and dance to music of his or her own choosing, played through earphones so only the dancer could hear it. "She looked in to the camera for the next question. "Well Tom, we expect the performance to start in just a few small moments. I have just been told by the head security that the doors are officially closed and the dancer has arrived." She slowly pushed her earpiece, as the crowd's mumble became louder. "Yes, that is correct. Even though the artist himself is not here with us today, his art works are still being made. As for the question of authorship Tom, it certainly is a hot topic in the art scene at the moment, especially in the UK. This piece has been realized by the curator of the gallery and this

example is said to be followed by quite a number of other curators and collectors in the future. The price of the work, and by that I want to make clear to our viewers, are the instructions to make the work with, has not been verified by the officials. Whether or not it will ever be, is absolutely questionable in this case.” Laura was astonished at how this woman made the words sound as if they were rafting on a delirious river, commas being like rocks, every period a quick turn. “It’s definitely a very high profile exhibition. Ownership, consumption, and dematerialising objects are some of the themes that this Cuban artist has dealt with in the past. With this work, memory will play a critical role as most people who will visit this gallery will not see the dancer. Some have even said he is one of the first artists to re-think minimalism. Back to you Tom.” She kept smiling until the camera was turned off.

Laura struggled through the crowd, but as the crowd noticed the dancer approaching the platform, they all fell silent and stopped moving around. This gave Laura a good chance to move closer to the front. All that she could hear now were footsteps. A relatively muscular man only wearing running shoes and rather small silver shorts, was moving to the music in his ears. His feet, moving up and down on the platform, echoed through the gallery. Once in a while his shoes screeched as they pushed and turned, reacting to the beat. Laura noticed a clear distance between the dancer and the

crowd. An invisible border was apparent with extremely visible regulations.

“An artwork is an exhibited object” she remembered Groys’ words. Thoughtfully she looked at the dancer. In this case the dancer was being exhibited on a platform. But the artist hadn’t chosen him or had made the platform, the curator had. Where was the artist’s hand? He had written the instructions so it could be repeated. Laura’s mind gradually started making sense of the situation. Because the only significance was the instructions, it did not have to be the same dancer and the same platform every time. It was the concept of exhibiting that was the work of art. So that’s why it didn’t matter whose *hand* picks the dancer. However, once the dancer stops and leaves the platform, he is not exhibited, therefore not an “object” on display. He steps out of the position of a chosen/selected *readymade* just as he steps in it when he starts dancing on the platform.

Laura started smiling and nodding to herself, because she remembered Frank telling her about Duchamp’s snow shovel, which suddenly made perfect sense to her. Frank, he knows much more than he leads on Laura thought.

After moving to the States, Duchamp’s first readymade was an American model snow shovel that was in reality absolutely foreign to him. He had painted the title of the work, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, and had added his first

and last name followed by the date, 1915. He hung it from the ceiling using a wire. However years later some one had actually used it for shovelling snow, without ever realizing the consequences, and since then it had been lost.

Laura knew that in both cases the displacement of the object was the link. Whether it being a dancer or a snow shovel, it was taken out of its routine context. This routine context is then replaced by the suggestion of the “routine” while also pointing out that it’s an exhibited phenomenon.

“Realizing art as art means exhibiting it, and the museum can do that.” Another quote from Groys echoed in Laura’s mind. She realized that the space around her, which in this specific occurrence was a gallery, was a part of the work. The space itself enabled the “object” to question the order and relations between other substances that exist with us in our daily lives or not. Consequently as if an *object*, the dancer entered and left the same way Duchamp’s snow shovel did it.

And in some bizarre way, Hirst correlated into this. Just as Gonzalez-Torres, Hirst didn’t actually make his own works either. Why then did it feel so much harder to accept this with Hirst’s works? Was it because Hirst didn’t use ready-mades but instead *used* other people’s talent and profession to actually make something from scratch? On the other hand, he also simply worked with instructions...

The dancer stepped off the platform and left the room. The crowd seemed to be lost. Laura quickly paced out of the gallery. Even though her thoughts rumbled and spun, she felt she was getting a certain grasp on the situation. Gradually the knots would untangle.

Laura spent the next few weeks mostly in her apartment, reading and writing. Once in a while she would draw a circle and stare at it. Her last day at work, in combination with the events that followed, had shaken her up quite a bit. She still hadn’t been able to figure out who had sent her the booklet. Without making it too obvious she tried to question Frank about it, with unfortunately no luck. Either he was an exceptional liar or he genuinely had nothing to do with it. And the rather misfortunate part of it was that Laura didn’t know which one to believe.

Nonetheless Laura had received a personal invitation from Damien Hirst for the grand opening of his exhibition in London. She decided to skip the opening and attend the exhibition at a later time. She felt a strong urge to be as alone as possible with the works that were on display. After all, she knew them by heart. So on a typical rainy London day, she gathered the courage to step into the exhibition.

Here and there were senior couples cautiously walking around, lonesome teenagers with hoodies and headphones were rushing through and mothers with baby carriages were gently moving, analysing deeply. Laura wandered through the large spaces systematically. She recognized almost every piece of work but quickly realized that she wasn't actually *seeing* the works. She was seeing the studio, with its mess and consistent working schedule. She was seeing faces of people she never got to know, but worked side by side with for all those years.

She had been staring at the painting she would have liked first to give to her, thinking: 'I guess I could potentially make one myself...but what is the point in that? It's not my idea. It's not mine. It wouldn't matter if I made a hundred. It would somehow always be a fake. He hadn't chosen it, he hadn't picked it.'

"You must be in deep thought. I called your name twice already." Someone said behind her.

She turned around to see the girl from the studio.

"Hi", she smiled. Laura quickly retrieved from her shock and replied.

"Hi, how are you? Still working at the studio?"

"Oh no, I got fired right after you."

"That's a bummer. What are you doing now?"

"Here and there some freelance work. Do you like the exhibition? Brings up a lot of memories, huh?"

"Yes, it sure does. But it really is splendid."

The girl, Laura never got to know her name, looked at her with big blue eyes. She felt a bit intimidated by her. What was it about her?

"So have you been thinking a lot about what we were doing up there?" the girl said while curiously sizing Laura up.

"Actually I have. Since I have not been working, a lot of things came together, so to speak."

"Oh really? How interesting."

She had a broad smile. Her bright red lipstick was unavoidable.

"I'm really happy you feel that way Laura. I did think you left with quite a BANG... I was proud of you. It gave me the courage to set a few things right. Would love to say and chat, but do really have got to go. Enjoy the show."

She satisfactorily winked at Laura and turned away, quickly walking towards the exit. The sound of her heels on the wooden floor echoed but gradually disappeared.

To set things *right*? Laura's mind was puzzled. Seeing this girl brought her back to her last day at work. She remembered her nervously standing over a painting. She had also deliberately looked her direction before leaving! It was all coming back to her now. What did this girl want from her?

Laura decided to leave the exhibition. She took one last look at some of the paintings. And this is when the desert draught came back. At the lower right corner of a few of the paintings, Laura saw a signature. It was scribbled with a pen and gave the impression that it was done in a hurry. Laura's head moved closer to the signature: Sophie.

Sophie!

Sophie? Her heart started beating faster. It must be her! She had set things right! Hah! That's why she always eyeing her. The girl knew that Laura would put the pieces together and she finally had.

Laura couldn't believe that the girl had dared to act so extravagantly. They both hadn't received a piece of the cake, but this girl went even further by saying that the cake was hers anyway. So what would happen now? Just because her name was on it, didn't officially make anything hers. It just gave her the ultimate satisfaction, which Laura accepted as part of a game she had gotten herself tangled in to.

She knew she had come a long way since that day at the studio. She understood that the issues surrounding this topic were multi-layered and complex. She had seen the tip of the iceberg and had respectfully tried to go against the stream, but was now ready to challenge the rest.

THE END

Inspired by:

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-Documentation Go Go Dancing Platform

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OWZ2ycV-mOE>

-In advance of the broken arm

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