in the most absurdist bracket of consideration is not a fixed issue. It encompasses a full range of emotional experience.

MA: The comic is concerned with language, as is the cliché. The film brought out how in the language is condensed and prefigured, and when the cliché becomes comic that dislocates language. We see language functioning.

SO'R: The cliché becomes comic at the moment of recognition, when the familiar becomes absurd in its familiarity. That’s the classic commentary about laughter, anyway: it erupts through disruption of an apparent veneer.

MA: The provocation lies in movement.

SO'R: It’s like gestalt theory – you have a theory that you don’t give much attention to, but when placed in a context where it makes a sidestep or turns at an angle, you see it for its functioning self rather than its assumed linguistic meaning. The gestalt moment is when you see it as an object as opposed to a camouflaged element of a whole, i.e. the duck/rabbit moment. It’s a classic shift of perception, a perceptual moment, provocative enough in itself, but
when signposting social exchange (which is what a cliché is for) it has many functions beyond language. It has an exchange value, which might be about complicity. Like when someone’s reading through a list and says, ‘last but not least’. It doesn’t mean there is any judgement about the things on the list; it’s a signal that we are at the end. The secondary function makes visible the invisible structures of social interaction, which provokes an ontological shift.

MA: There is the discussion of irony and the difficulties that people have with cliché in the art work, which seems to mirror that polarity.

SO’R: There are three positions: one is that somebody falls into cliché because they don’t have the imagination to come up with an innovative way of expressing the idea; secondly, they may wield it with irony, knowing it’s a cliché; thirdly, maybe somebody has got to this point through their own reasoning from first principles. It might be an authentic use of something they are not aware of as a cliché. That’s particularly interesting about cliché in art – all three are possible. Five years ago we would have defaulted to the ironic reading, but that became tiring – perhaps people want to mean what they say now.

MA: Sincerity is also problematic.

SO’R: In art authenticity is problematic. There are many cadences of utterance between sincerity, authenticity, and irony.

MA: What about making the film?

SO’R: It’s written around a simple premise, which may be traced to Bataille’s Critical Dictionary: anti-academic in its non-desire to know. I don’t mean that learning doesn’t exist – experience does inform behaviour – but knowledge … it’s impossible!

MA: Yet we live in a time that is institutionalised in terms of knowledge and research.

SO’R: When you assess students for learning outcomes, analysis, and interpretative work, there are key words that encapsulate ways the brain interacts with learning and understanding. It is a complex multi-access model placing the mind in relation to information, but it’s a static structure and I cannot believe in that ever!

MA: Artists say they are not anthropologists, being in the business of representation, and they can represent the other however they like. Art doesn’t have the same remit.

SO’R: Anthropologists hand over the means of production to the subject because they struggled with the problems of subjectivity and objectivity. Authors write about the autonomy of the art object seems to have returned.

MA: Authorship is coming back!

KB: We are speaking several weeks after viewing your film. You weren’t at its screening. How did it feel be absent?

SO’R: It felt like writing. In writing you must have confidence in building a world in which the pursuit of your quarry and the logic of that pursuit holds up, and then you can send it out. I am nowhere near as practised in filmmaking as in writing. In writing you start, it’s terrible, you read it back, you hear your voice, and you refine it until it says what you want it to say and your self-conscious voice seems to recede. It was difficult to let go of the film because it hadn’t reached the state of refinement of my writing. I could still hear my voice trying to make sense of what it was saying.

MA: Does your work include performances?

SO’R: Yes. Sometimes it’s scripted, sometimes improvised around a structure. The research and the writing are important, as I hate performing but I can never get anyone else to do it. It’s harrowing. I was doing a performance in Paris recently and I had my voice feeding me my