

# Team spirit

Jessica Bernard's photographs show zones of grey conformity transformed into absurd worlds for team-building activities





**M**y father was bullied in his office job. He later developed schizophrenia and never went back to work. As part of his illness he suffered delusions, and he lived the later part of his working life in a confused reality. He was assigned an employee number beginning “007” and believed himself to be James Bond, working in the office undercover.

When he was sectioned in the 1980s, he thought he was Kenny Everett, the British comedian popular at the time. He believed he was being escorted to the psychiatric hospital to put on a show - until he was held down and sedated.

In 2013, I started documenting team-building activities. Within the corporate workspace, ubiquitous grey conference rooms became arenas for play. Obstacle courses

and oversized board games were installed in office blocks. Pillars were dressed in colourful bunting.

Over time I have drawn the link between these photographs and my father’s experiences. In these images, I see a physical manifestation of his disorientation. People are stretched, changed and forced to encounter multiple versions of themselves.

The workplace thrusts them into an absurd, artificial new world. They suddenly leave a state of greyness and conformity, of rules and procedures, in which they are presentable ambassadors of their organisations. They have to be a different person altogether. To lose their inhibitions, to be expressive and physical, to paint, to dance.

Suited for work, they play bongo drums. They battle to build the tallest spaghetti tower. They wait patiently in *Monopoly* jail. **FT**

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