

# S P E C T R U M

A SURVEY OF ARTISTS' MOVING IMAGE

## SCRIPT

Breese Little, 30b Great Sutton Street, EC1V 0DU.

Tuesday 8<sup>th</sup> September, 7 pm

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# Script

Guest curated by John Bloomfield.

Louise Fitzgerald, Eden Mitsenmacher, John Lawrence, Paul Simon Richards.

Guest artists; Charlie Godet Thomas and John Smith.

**Script** underpins these six works; It is used in various forms to explore language and habitual rhetoric, as an exercise in philosophical and experimental writing, to dismantle barriers between audience and viewer. Borrowing in places from the stage and hypnotism, the films explore performativity, character and the theatrics of identity. Humour is often there in its driest or most muted form acting as an instantaneous connection to the viewer to deal with substantial themes.

**Louise Fitzgerald's** practice explores the potential to expose political stereotypes and rhetoric. Through staging short vignettes that focus on a futile group activity, contemporary working relations and 'issues' are performed and satirised. Through fast paced and absurd narratives the films portray the struggle between individual self-expression and communal belonging against a backdrop of confused dogmas and information overload.

**Eden Mitsenmacher** combines performance, video and installation to take a critical yet engaging view of social, political and cultural issues. Using pop culture as a frame of reference for social and personal critique but also as a way to create familiarity and accessibility. Sharing and connecting experiences between an I' and a You.

Mining a contemporary archive of objects, imagery and footage **John Lawrence** is drawn to reorganising familiar, recognisable elements in order to offer up new readings and open out meaning. John works within this common popular language in order to navigate our contemporary mediated experience and better understand the way we see ourselves.

**Paul Simon Richards'** work is concerned with linguistic constructions of the visionary state. Using spoken word performance and film, his work explores hallucination, ellipsis and time in language. 'Δ HS. FS. ZWN-BS. NC. BS.' consists of fragments of spoken word monologue, animation and music; it is structured loosely on induction methods used in clinical hypnosis, translated into structuralist film technique e.g. repetition, periods of rest and periods of heightened stimulation in image and sound. Performed by Jacky Bahbout and Andy Lacey, music by June Miles-Kingston & Simon Mawby, styling by Claire Hooper.

**Charlie Godet Thomas'** film *Watching for Love Cars* is a work inspired by Robert Lowell's Skunk Hour. The work re-examines that particular moment where Lowell, or an anonymous protagonist depending on how we choose to read the poem, is sitting looking out through the windscreen. Thomas has described it as an attempt to stretch out and probe the moment in more depth, outside of the constraints of verse. In the background of this internal monologue Bessie Smith's 'Careless Love' plays softly, adding weight to the melancholic tone of the work.

**John Smith** initially inspired by conceptual art and the structural materialist ideas that dominated British artists' filmmaking during his formative years, but also fascinated by the immersive power of narrative and the spoken word, he has developed an extensive body of work that subverts the perceived boundaries between documentary and fiction, representation and abstraction. Often rooted in everyday life, Smith's meticulously crafted films rework and transform reality, playfully exploring and exposing the language of cinema. John Smith's *Associations* (1975) sets language against itself by using the ambiguities inherent in the English language. Images from magazines and color supplements accompany a voiceover reading from the book *Word Associations and Linguistic Theory* by academic linguistic Herbert H. Clark. Combining a wry sense of humor with word/visual games and puns, Smith explores the boundaries of cinematic montage by combining elements together and against each other in order to destroy and create multiple meanings at the same time.

Word salad liquidised to make word soup

My meaning is not your meaning. My meaning and your meaning are not meeting. We're talking at cross purposes: our languages, though they sort-of-sound the same, are faulting at the join. I turn to you like a monkey nut, you look down at me like a cigarette butt. We're on the pavement not the gutter, but this seems like a bad place for a good time. Blinking, eyelid-less, all that's passing is people.

Maybe one of us has wisdom, beneath the crust. Maybe one of us can see further, see through. Empath-it to the inside. A route to the root. Do we survive? Do we sustain? What we do is remain. On the sidelines. We're shrinkage — necessary loss. Or anticipated, anyway. We're not dirt, although we're rolling in it. We're everything that you need to know, though what we know is limited. What we transmit goes nowhere.

Speaking isn't connecting. Speaking is correcting. Attempting to adjust for the loss of meaning, or the absence of meaning, that is left when the content is burnt down to the filter and what's left is moist but unfulfilling. When the insides are untainted but the bloom is left to wither. When there was a function and now there is only dead wood.

Your meaning abuts my meaning. There is no overlay. There is no overlap. No over- or under- statement: no hex, no crux. Squelching meat bags make meaning. They make meaning of us, they made mincemeat of us. And now we're just dust. And we will compost down into Earth crust. Organic and less-so, we'll both decompose. Landfill, we'll fill land.

But before that, we'll remain. And our voices, though they are soundless, will sound the same. And we'll stare eye-less into the drain. And we'll talk about the inner-workings of the human brain. We'll attempt and fail to conceive of human pain. But we'll feel it, somewhat, because we're products of it. Byproducts of loss: feckless human dross.

Beth Bramich

I cannot measure how much you would have liked to have shared this space. These worn out gestures. But then this house of memories would become too psychologically complex. Too worn to express the liason of our bodies. Bodies that do not forget, with an unforgettable house. If we are physically inscribed by the houses we were born in – our habits, our gestures, our worn out phrases - then what happens when someone else inhabits us? We perform so that they are neither ours nor theirs. I started to inhabit you so you would like me more.

A strange serenity descends as I realise that soon, my will won't be my own. Then the experiment begins. I am about to be possessed.

A small white house that contains your entire body and mind, and I thought you were absolutely uninhabitable. That says more about you than me.

A small white house containing your entire body and mind. Each part of you resides in different rooms. A knock on the door and I invite out the part of you that corresponds to female.

But who's he, who's she? Do you always develop a project or performance together with other people? Do you get lonely living alone? The desire not to be identified as one or the other makes our positions changeable and there is a gentle shift which begins with a perforation and then an infiltration. Each part of her resides in different rooms - the fantasized original at the hearth. It makes it easier for him that way. Signifying a sign is more powerful than taking it up earnestly and whatever seems to generate continuity is better left behind.

And it wasn't really his clothes that drew me to him initially but now I wear him - the 'play of appearances'. If I could wear your clothes I'd pretend I was you but now I know that you do not want cohabitation. Not the way I would like it, at least. You become aware of your own [in]consistency and you collapse in a puddle on the floor and lose control. Prior to mimicry. Prior to the mask that I put on when I knew that you were becoming more receptive is not unchanging but perhaps uninhabitable. Or at least there isn't space anymore. So that my experience only became legitimate through dialogue with you. And between us. And you were only there as an idea of what I thought I wanted.

There isn't very much space left.

Over picturesqueness in a house can conceal its intimacy. You refract rather than absorb light, your defining property is your inherent symmetry. By which I mean that under certain operations you remain unperforated. To mimic this I must become immune to infiltration. But Light-reflecting is not easy and I keep returning to the point before our cohabitation.

You become aware of your own [in]consistency. Oscillating between voices, you become disembodied. The surface tension becomes unbearable. You bring the Colloseum, a banquet, the romantic ruin of a Welsh cottage.

Hypnotic language focuses the attention. Turns it inwards.

Louisa Lee

*I watched Louis Fitzgerald's "The Shack" without reading the description at first to get some initial personal responses, in doing so I believed they were talking coherently for the first few seconds till I leaned towards my screen and carefully picked out every word and realised this was a satire. I laughed at myself for being so foolish. The fact that the characters used polysyllabic socio-economic terms made me stand up and pay attention, their authority has a presence which seemed more important to me than their cohesion.*

You know what? I am going to be the first to admit that these characters are very close to home for me. I can be that guy who sits in front of the Marquis talking about politics, history or anything using what little knowledge I've learnt from my friends, the internet and the odd protest and event I have actually bothered to attend in person rather than on Facebook. Occasionally I do know what I am talking about, I have read and seen and experienced.

But in those situations where I don't, I deploy the same intonations, terminology, body language and hand gestures to make me sound like I know what I am talking about, I am sure some of you have done the exact same either in your past or maybe at this very event. Is it lying? Acting? Both?

Language in these situations is key, your choice of terminology can make or break you and the reputation you have made behind pint glasses and cigarette smoke amongst strangers. I never use a word of which I couldn't give some sort of definition, in case someone asks as they genuinely do not know or are trying to catch me out. Sometimes I even give the etymology (Ancient Greek: ἔταός + λόγος - true + word/study) to win those intellectual brownie points and gold stars.

The trick is not to blindly learn facts like a spoon fed GCSE sitting robot child that regurgitates knowledge on command. But to gain a little bit of knowledge and make it go a long way.

Even as I write this response I am thinking is this the right word, the best word, the most impressive word so that when you read this you'll think that this person knows what he is talking about since he is using long words with classical origins. A draft sample this response demonstrates this attempt to sound smarter:

*"I find that the sounds of the moving paper being painted and glued together as well as the power tools drown out the dialogues and monologues of the characters. Perhaps this is a commentary on the worth of words, suggesting that indeed actions are louder (both metaphorically and in this case literally) louder than words. Therefore is the artist implying that critiques of capitalism are so many and regurgitated that they are two a penny? Perhaps, however I feel Fitzgerald is rather implying that the way we formulate these criticisms are two a penny, the critique must come in the form of actions. This is arguable a satire of what could be deemed the post-internet activist who reads articles online, signs petitions online and shares and like statuses and tweets so that others know that she, he or they are politically active and awareness. It has become a status. However the futility of these internet actions are mirrored by from what I deem to be a useless shack. It is inside and made of paper and thus doesn't protect anyone."*

Try hard... Look it is in italics and neatly laid out. All this needs is some psychoanalytical (Ancient Greek: ψυχή + ἀνά + λύω - life/soul + throughout + loosen) theory and we are good to go. But I basically feel that I've said nothing substantial nor contributed to anyone's understanding of the film having just stated the obvious with loquacious (Latin: loqui - talk) language. Have I just copied what was written in the description in a panic, realising I have nothing ground breaking to add, nothing to be canonised (Ancient Greek: κανονίζω - rule).

I now most of speak like this when discussing art, masking my insecurities, playing the cliché like the actors, looking the part, to be honest just fitting into London and university (Latin: universes - guild/society). Personally I worry and am at pains (who the fuck says that? *at pains*- who am I trying to impress?) that people only like me for what they deem to be my intelligence, my defining feature. To lose that is to lose, not my identity per se (Latin phrases are also another good tool) but a feature of me- making me unrecognisable. If my friends find out they will not work with me or like me.

If it is written or spoken eloquently I will believe it, aspiring and learning to write and speak like that so others will believe me. Intellectual authority. If it is impenetrable I am knocking at the door asking for more till I learn the codes and decipher the meaning so that I can enter this secret club. The impenetrable academia that requires a password. Is it self improvement or just pretentiousness?

I am still going to speak and write like this? Yes, I probably am. Writing in this manner for me makes me feel more confident about my own writing and thinking, if it looks intelligent, if it sounds intelligent it probably is. It is my safety net.

Or maybe I do actually know what I am talking about and just giving myself a hard time after watching the film.

George Toon

I wake up at 6am. Drink the glass of water sitting on the bedside table and reach for my laptop. I lift the screen, wait, type my password, wait. The browser opens on the tab I need: A youtube video: One image over a 24 minute audio. The Buddha floating in lotus pose, an expression of contentment, a meditative stance, eyes closed. A halo illumines the back of the Buddha's head and shards of light radiate from it. I press play. The image will remain static for the next 24 minutes. This doesn't matter, because I close my eyes. Although it does matter, because I occasionally open them to fix them on the Buddha. The audio: a mantra chanting recording of several voices repeating Nam Myoho Renge Kyo.

The voices weave in and out of each other. There are two distinct voices, a deeper one and a slightly nasal one at a higher pitch, I think of the latter as a female voice. This voice, the nasal female sounding voice, maintains the same pitch, tone and rhythm throughout the whole recording. The deeper voice seems to take a pause every fourth repetition of the mantra.

I am sitting cross legged on top of my pillow. I try to sit straight, to keep my chin up, my neck erect, eyes closed. I repeat: Nam Myoho Renge Kyo, at times I loose the syllables, nam becomes om, myoho becomes ryoho. I can't keep up with the speed of the recording. This irritates me. I decide to synch my repetitions with the deeper voice as I can't seem to synch up with the higher pitched and constant one. But I get confused and shift from synching into one and then into the other.

I stop chanting out loud, I decide to chant silently in my head. It's pretty much the same, although I strain less and I'm not running out of breath, but I'm still mentally fudging the mantra in my arrhythmic inner repetitions. After about 10 minutes, the frustration and irritation dissipates and I relax into it. I really do relax into it. But it doesn't seem to last for too long. I open my eyes and look at the screen, seeking some sort of relief on the image of the Buddha. I seem to find it, close my eyes and add the image of a halo around my head and shards of light radiating from it to my mental chanting. I mentally chant as I imagine the halo of light. Somehow this makes it easier. I again relax into it. A few minutes go by and I then become self-conscious. "I'm imitating the Buddha", that's the thought that crosses my head. I smile, but it's a slightly sardonic smile. I become more self-conscious. I struggle to relax into the mantra once again, and I just about manage it, but then the thought creeps in: I'm imitating the computer, I'm sitting in front of it as if it were a portal and I'm trying to mirror back what it's giving me, the youtube video, it's image, it's audio.

The chanting stops, the audio finishes with three bongs. The image fades to black. My eyes are already open.

\*

Eden Mitsenmacher's video Duration is open on one of the tabs on my browser. I flick back and forth between it and some wikipedia pages on Jean Luc Godard's films, a google search on images of face paint, other artist videos, but also, my morning yoga video, my mantra video, my gmail account, facebook, and ad for a job. The first time I watch Duration I get it in my head that I can recognise the audio from somewhere, from a film, the French voice repeating "duration" over and over seems to be a memory trigger. I can now place the memory: Godard's Breathless (1960), Jean Seberg calling out "New York Herald Tribune" as she walks down Champs Elyssès next to Belmondo. He speaks, she answers in her American French accent and every once a while shouts out "New York Herald Tribune".

This clearly has nothing to do with Eden's video. Duration is not quoting from Godard. I am, in my viewing. I am, almost in automatic mode, searching in my backlog of references. I am watching the video and mentally mapping everything that the act of watching Eden's short and highly evocative video highlights in my inner audiovisual archive. The repetition, the fading in and out of focus of the image of a mouth painted white with tiny black eyes and ears, panda face painted lips, opening and closing. I recognise this image, or rather, I *feel* I recognise this image. I have, in one permutation or other, seen it before. I have experienced

the rhythm of the video as a whole before, I have --I constantly do-- repeated incessantly one word or phrase in a foreign language.

I'm staring at the screen and analysing all the bits of information on it, not just on the text document where I'm typing this, but beyond, on the edges, the titles of the open tabs on my browser, the titles on my bookmarks toolbar, the icons on the quick access bar on the bottom of my screen, the very top bar full of access tabs and icons referring to the current status of my laptop: dropbox is on, time machine is on pause, wifi has full signal, bluetooth is enabled, the keyboard is in Spanish, I have 53% of battery left, the date, the time, my name, the search icon, the bullet point icon that allows me to look at updates, a small floating screen has just popped up to tell there are OS X updates available. This is not all, I can also see the edges of files floating on my desktop, bits of the titles, bits of titles and icons of images that linger on my desktop waiting to be filed. Layers and layers of fragmented information signalling where I need to tap to go into more and more information.

\*

I breathe in and out slowly, *consciously*. Syncing my breath to the movements of the panda face lips on the screen. I fix my vision on the video playing on the screen, I purposely blur my eyes when the image goes out of focus. I repeat mentally *duration duration duration duration duration duration*... I relax into it. It finishes too soon, I loop it and do it again.

Spectrum initiated from a want to research and provide a platform for artists currently working with moving image. Spectrum has formed from an open call, the screening events are curated from the entries received and tailored to the entries rather than prescribing a particular 'theme' beforehand. The guest curator for each event responds to the works entered in the open call and selects the guest artists.

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