

Art

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Installed in a small side-room by Susan Phillipsz, a vinyl record of a solitary woman singing the *Internationale* played endlessly, collecting fluff on the needle. Vinyl Video presented a way of storing and playing low resolution video images on longplay records. Actually it is an alluringly packaged but completely dumb 'fake archaeology of media', retrieving a process used by home movie makers 50 years ago, its only claim to appositeness being that no big corporation will ever want to steal the idea.

A dozen council cast-off items of office ware were the performers of a *Symphony #1 for Dot Matrix Printers*, given in a real office setting by two young Canadians working together as The User. With miniature video cameras mounted on the printheads, the tiny shimmying, chirruping, dot matrix maracas sounds they made as they printed out their precisely choreographed instructions were amplified to percussive proportions, like a bureaucratic prepared piano. It may be worth recalling that in 1964 the Swiss composer Rolf Liebermann wrote a piece for '52 office machines including teletypes, cash registers, staplers and copying devices, timed by an electronic computer'. Well I never, 35 years ago.

A not dissimilar idea, but on a symphonic scale, was embodied in the installation to be found in one of the fine, expansive spaces at the Ferens Art Gallery. Jean Tinguely must turn in his grave with kinetic envy at the combined sophistication and raucous energy of Bosch and Simon's *Krachtgeber*. It has been seen and applauded around Europe, but I doubt that it has looked better than here. Towers of wooden crates, which might have come straight off Hull's dockside, filled with broken objects which cannot be seen, are mounted on springs, and shaken by hidden motors. Continually running, and controlled via a MIDI interface, the crates are programmed to sashay, undulate, ripple, tintinnabulate and to experience pockets of turbulence before heading towards a cathartically cacophonous climax, entirely unamplified. Cunningly orchestrated, not for nothing was it funded by a Dutch contemporary music foundation.

In the adjacent Dutch paintings gallery at the Ferens, Charlemagne Palestine slid into a progression of imperceptibly changing harmonic drones on Yamaha synthesizers, the sort of thing he has been exploring for 30 years. 'I feel like I'm in no rush', as he said in 1976, and he still isn't.

But then the festival did not purport to represent a notion of 'cutting edge/avant garde ... or other such labels offered in retrospect'. And it did indeed encompass text-based pieces by writers Caroline Bergvall and Aaron Williamson (both anthologised by Iain Sinclair in his important *Conductors of Chaos* paperback). Paul Burwell and cohorts, frenetically drumming in an analogue way, floated down the river garlanded with lights and fireworks. The performance duo Lone Twin linedanced all day in complete silence. Ranks of young DJs, concentrating like collectors at a philatelists' fair, improvised their way into musical experiences of a wayward kind. The difference between the stuff heard here and that at an international contemporary music festival

such as Huddersfield is that sound artists and concert composers have arrived at superficially the same point from different directions, while remaining oblivious of each other.

'TOOT is the action and interaction of all those taking part', promised the programme, 'There is to be no distinction between artist, programmer, musician, audience, broadcaster.' And that is genuinely how it felt. Even the hand dryers in the toilet at Time Base joined in, triggering an unexpected sonic riposte when you used them. ■

David Briers is a writer and curator based in Yorkshire.

■ Intimate House

South London Gallery November 1 to 6

These four events of live art provided an alternative intimacy, especially given the perception of South London Gallery's compromisingly intimate relations with White Cube and Cabinet. If we can get more such work instead of shows by Quinn, Emin, Turk et al, it will help restore credibility to this beautiful space, crucially located in an otherwise barren region of London.

I could only make three of the performances, missing Francesca Vilalta Olle's on clothing and sexuality. It's a tough call 'to create an intimate space with the audience' in this imposing hall, as the remit required. Franko B's solution turned the gallery into a bleak antechamber for those waiting until called by a digital counter. Down one end was a freestanding box room inside which, naked and in white makeup with his head shielded by a funnel (the sort you put on dogs to stop them biting themselves), he awaited his visitors, admitted individually for two minutes. Anyone expecting Franko B's ritual of letting his blood flow until fainting would have been disappointed. The only discernible wound to the side of his stomach had congealed, and the emphasis was less on witnessing than encountering abjection. While I had an easygoing conversation with Franko B, eliciting a benign smile from those menacing gold teeth, the artist initiated very different encounters with some of the other visitors, obliging them to push him aside just to get into the room, allowing himself to be caressed or refusing to look up as he hunkered to the floor. The audience I met felt they were encountering a performer at his most helpless yet it was Franko B who established how that vulnerability was scripted. His apocalyptic vision of S&M self-immolation has always evoked Middle-European trauma purveyors like the Viennese Actionists more than the American self-deprecation of, say, Bob Flanagan. At issue for Franko B is the authentic representation of the body's collapse. Unfortunately there is already enough of an audience believing in the authenticity of a literal representation for him to feel vindicated in his approach. Paradoxically though, each piece is called *Aktion* in homage to Rudolf Schwarzkogler, the

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Actionist who never even appeared in his own landmark performance pieces. At least there were indications here that Franko B is starting to question the authority of his own presence which, in the end, no amount of mutilation or blood will guarantee.

Marcia Farquhar's *Acts of Clothing* related more to an American model of performance than anything we'd see in London. The degree to which she was comfortable with her public and her disregard for the partition between performer and audience reminded me of Eric Bogosian and certainly Flanagan. Unmistakably indigenous though was the acute language with which she

delineated nuances of experience that for most of us would remain indescribable.

The set-up was economical: a fashion runway on which Farquhar modelled some 30 outfits from the last 20 years of her life, using them to recall key events. Beginning with a parodic inversion of nationalist appropriations of costume, she danced a hybrid flamenco-fling in a gypsy outfit (of Farquhar tartan) to see if either of her Spanish/Scottish heritages might include a talent for dance. Clearly not, but it nicely introduced her main project of revealing the signifiers generated by a life's clothing. As each article was taken from the rail alongside, was discussed, squeezed into, and then discarded onto the growing pile at her feet, we were drawn into a complex reflection on autobiography.

I feel wearied and patronised by the autobiographic literalness of artists insisting on the virtue of all that happens to them. Here for a change, due to Farquhar's exquisite command of storytelling, I was trusted to weave my own image of the performer's life from the fragmentary narratives. Revealing a deep history she delineated old prejudices, styles of speech, obscure patterns of thought, once used by people who had drifted out of her life or died. This gave an unexpected social dimension to the feminist critique underlying her project. Performatively, Farquhar's piece was a lucid enactment of the processes by which women's clothing can express desires and thereby concede the means of repressing those desires – as with the modest suit worn to appease her father-in-law one lunchtime in New York, to which restraint he added the imposition that she refrain from drinking. This was an extraordinary performance, the more exceptional for its agile language, where Farquhar, with the timing of a stand-up comic, could turn her often hilarious anecdotes into unexpected revelations of vulnerability.

Stuart Brisley reworked two pieces recently seen at the ICA, performing once again with Edie Freeman. I hadn't enjoyed either first time around but *Ydoold Yadnus* (Bloody Sunday backwards) was tighter in its pacing, acquiring unexpected power with the singing

Franko B

Aktion 398 1999



Stuart Brisley

Giving the voice a voice
1999

more driven and venomous. Brisley's opening allusion to Freeman as the unconscious implied a shortcircuited psyche, an audition for madness. Chanting the text, the two circled each other using the whole space, singing the litany as a call and response. A cycle would commence with '... murderously Monday, tyrannically on Tuesday ...' – continuing with the words recited backwards or started on the second syllable, and concluding with superlatives – '... fabulously Friday, sumptuously Saturday ...'. A final confrontation, face to face, had them yelling at each other, the dementia cranked up a notch or two – '... suppurating Saturday, shitting blood on Sunday ...'.

To give the voice a voice no 2 pushed the representation of madness further. By the end you shared the audience's irritated querulousness thinking 'What the hell was that?'. It was hard to know where the piece began, with Brisley segueing from casual asides to his audience, and hard to know if you were ever in it at all, with its absurdist commentary on Louise Bourgeois' legs. Making allusions to mutilation and Alzheimer's disease, the monologue was a nightmarish identification with her characteristic mannequins, depicting Bourgeois as an amputee in a wheelchair or a tramp with 'trousers caked in shit'. Brisley shredded his own trousers and would periodically invite Freeman to show off her legs with him, the two of them spitting on the ground in conclusion. His tone of a concerned headmaster increased the sense that this was an exploration of madness from the inside – Raskolnikov adrift in the art world. Its casualness and apparent insincerity infuriated someone I spoke to, but convinced me. Easy enough to do it in a conventionally literal manner, but as indicated by Brisley's closing reflection – 'Is this an artwork? Am I an artwork? Am I for real?' – how much harder, and interesting, to work from an uninhabitable position of aesthetic instability. ■

Mark Harris is an artist.

■ Rut Blees Luxemburg

Laurent Delaye Gallery London

October 14 to November 20

■ Sophy Rickett

Emily Tsingou Gallery London

November 5 to December 23

■ Blue Suburban Skies

The Photographers' Gallery London

October 1 to November 20

■ Gillian Wearing

Maureen Paley Interim Art London

October 16 to November 21

Happy Christmas, war is over. It isn't but it is if you want it to be – so sang John Lennon, anyway. If you covet peace as much as you covet your hoped-for Christmas presents, he said, then peace would be global, just like TV. War is over if you care. What keeps utopia, world peace and social harmony at bay, as Slavoj Zizek keeps telling us, is not that we don't know what's good for us, it's that we know what we want.

Sometimes the promise of happiness is nothing if not perpetually postponed. Sometimes you can cup your hands or lift your eyes and it is there. Pleasure is not a zero-sum game with the gap between the joys of the here and now, and the rewards of the good life measured in self-restraint. Looking at the photographs of Rut Blees Luxemburg, slabs and streaks of architectural no-nonsense which fill the field of perception like a curtain putting a full stop at the end of the movie, the events of our everyday thrills and spills seem as remote as world peace. Or, rather, that is what they used to be like. She has moved from the glamour of modernity's slick

Rut Blees Luxemburg
Narrow Stage 1998

