

CIRCA Art Magazine -Circa 119 : Review- Felt experience

Circa 119 : Review



Siobhán Mullen: Continuant DVD still; courtesy Angie Halliday

Its curator, talented and conscientious Angie Halliday, rooted this exhibition of eight video projections in her PhD research on how we construct subjectivity. Two videos were made in workshops she had run last August in Manila with CRIBS Philippines INC (Creating Responsive Infants By Sharing): one shows simply animated children drawings, the other children's hands painted with figures. The children, whose faces must not be filmed to protect their identity, invested the figures painted on hands with their desires and aspirations; handfuls of utopias. Yoshiko Shimada based her contribution on the idea of the retribution: the children, dressed in costumes, smashed a papier-mâché monster, a Mexican piñata filled with sweets, while singing a pop song. The aesthetic value has taken on a morality mantle: the video is accessible, portable, tape is recyclable, and it can handle the transformatory force of re-visiting an experience smoothly. While not devaluing its documentary character, this collaborative participatory video work does not quite enter the realm of the best of its kind; yet, it keeps its kindness.

Both videos run continuously, as does *Bucket bark* by Hugh O'Donnell. The lens reads his mouth drowning in water gasping for air and exhaling a 'bark'. In its de-scaling of the world, the large detail fills the screen completely, contributing to the anxiety of the viewing experience. Nothing less and nothing more. Except – it re-heats some of the 1980s models of performance art. Halliday's courtesy to the viewer's needs manifested in synchronised projecting; only one of the other six video works is on at any given time. Two advantages: the attention is not diffused, and the environment for watching is less noisy. The handout the curator prepared is informative, user-friendly and not costly.

Siobhán Mullen made *Constituant*, a misty view of a road with trees, to "allow all elements to function as themselves." In an analogy to John Cage's silent 4'33", the lens contracted a cataract. Wonderful colourful pixels appearing unexpectedly were the unintended input of a particular DVD player. A continuous traffic noise. A shadow of a large vehicle. Severe passivity of the artist. Loss of visual force.

The concept of artist as documentarist, chronicler and recorder guides Miriam de Búrca's *Me taken out Part I and Part II*. Projected simultaneously next to each other is the footage of her walking and videoing a constructed bonfire, and the recording of what she saw. Before and after the fire. Her instinct for colour and form saved the narrative a little from drowning in the obvious.

Anthony Kelly and David Stalling made *Treehouse* – a video of a knee-high view of a person standing in shallow seawater. Pretty colours and a touch of lightness when the legs are upside-down harvest a simple narrative. The authors intended "speculation on the notion that in a time of crisis the body and mind may dissociate to create a temporary alternative reality..." became irrelevant while I was watching the images. Moreover, I prefer the view supported by the recent

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research made possible by MRI, PET and MEG readings, that the subjectivity is grounded in dynamic neural maps, which represent the organism's continuously changing internal state in close relationship to homeostasis. In this reading a person is a "nested triad": mind in brain, brain in body. This is A.R Damasio's wording, the only thing I borrow from him. I do not go along with his idea of mental images of objects and experience and discourse about them somehow hijacking all our attention. If I did, maybe I could accept Kelly and Stalling's theorizing.

Cynthia Greig and Richard H Smith intended *Black box: this is not my father* as "a homage to the emotional power of video as moving portrait," while allowing for the consideration of the "impotency and incompleteness of such visual surrogates to capture the joy and pain experienced..." Magritte's distinction between the pipe and its painted image and Plato's treatment of art as twice removed from the truth are both revisited in those words. Greig and Smith replaced, significantly, idea with experience. This shift completely relies on our understanding of what happens in our brain to make us feel joy or pain. The video in a gentle playful staccato portrays two happy men in a boat. Both the rhythm and mood change when the screen is filled with a man's nose and mouth – as if signalling difficulties in breathing. A small plane and a seagull sequences subvert the Dionysian joy of living with the echo of Thanatos.

Brain science is already the most popular science of this new century; the distinction between "conscious feeling" and "self-generated emotion" is particularly relevant for this exhibition. In the *Emotional brain* (1996), Joseph Le Doux established that emotional responses are hard-wired into the brain, whereas what makes us emotional is learned through experience. The way we learn and remember also involves the malfunctioning of the emotional mechanism of the brain. In his view, the emotions are part of a complex neural system enabling survival.

The only video work, which connects raw emotion to surviving, is Yaron Lapid's *Night meter*; it is made of darkness and screams. Powerful, yet paradoxically incomprehensible as a whole. The details are clear: it is dark, the streets are empty, the man calls for mother, he claims to be a man now, he shouts obscene words, he stands bent down, back to the viewer. However, the narrative is not like a story – from the beginning to the end, the man stays stuck in the terror of being alone, insecure, irrational and in danger; and drags me down into that abyss. Both the visual and sound still haunt me.

The works are personal accounts. Emotions start with an "emotionally competent stimulus," present or remembered. Lapid's work wins hands down. If I looked for a paragon in philosophy, it would not be the mechanical dualism of René Descartes (1596–1650), it would be Baruch Spinoza (1632–1672), who offered an almost biological vision of reason and emotion.



Yaron Lapid: Night meter video still; courtesy Angie Halliday

Slavka Sverakova is a freelance writer on art.
