

# ALL IS FOR THE BEST IN THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

Mining the Horizon—the umbrella title, but perhaps even an opportune verb, for the Collective's 12th New Work Scotland Programme. The first of this three-part event, groups together Gordon Schmidt, Rhianna Turnbull and Amelia Bywater & Christian Newby. As an anthropologist mines for species, Schmidt, Turnbull, Bywater & Newby explore the ordering of relationships between different cultural elements—those that are real, those that represent, those that resemble and those that can be imagined.

The words 'AT ADJACENT' descend towards a female figure navigating the dense rhythmic maze of text and image from below. "What's your memo?", "Background noise at the met discuss alternatives live"<sup>1</sup> (an object-word beside-the-point, beside the figure replies). The figure, along with an adjacent associate, stands within Amelia Bywater & Christian Newby's large-scale screen-print, presented in Collective's Guest Room, signaling a once physical engagement with the collage, now matched by the image's approximate 45° confrontational protrusion from the wall into our viewing space. 'Toilet Group Shift Happening Live and on Fire', captures words as cutouts; sentences as dynamic objects, assembled as adjacents. Their project will span the programme with a second presentation for the third exhibition. This image of suspended movement marks a punctuation of a past event, a static point in a cumulative practice—a practice of formulating and reformulating ideas and forms—a transfer from one work to another involving a change of status, a reflection with a different context, or a further elaboration on an idea. Originally the words of short texts written

by Newby using event flyers—the announcements of certain people or groups performing certain actions at a certain time in a specific place (most are yet to happen)—now hand-drawn, cut-out and fixed to the walls of Studio Voltaire, these composite object-words form a kind of non-linear, or clue-like, linguistic skeleton in their newly severed relationship with one another. As an observer, we are now in a situation in which it is seemingly possible to chase a chain of causal connections whereby the former may be said to influence the latter. The active observer/miner has to contribute to the process of editing and filtering to assign meaning to the reconfigured associations, relations and interconnecting sequential patterns these forms now trace.

'Sterling', a three-channel synched video projection exhibited by Gordon Schmidt, gives voice to witness reminiscences from the summer of 1990 when The Stone Roses played at Glasgow Green. The footage gathered with an old digital video camera, and with Schmidt travelling by bicycle in the spirit of Dziga Vertov's 'Man with a Movie Camera', builds an archive of an unrecorded event. The archive combines experience, observation and the authorial presence in the form of storytelling. Interviewed subjects stream a collective common image of this event, its social impact and psychological significance—bound in sentimentality, a vivid cultural memory in turn relates to a collective self-image. Renewed optimism christened this era the 'Second Summer of Love', a time when British dance culture drew parallels with the hedonism and freedom of the 'Summer of Love' in San Francisco two decades earlier. Testimonies recount a youthful "togetherness of everybody", an excitement of involvement, in spite of a disaffection and despair with the social

economic time they were living in. As the documentary succeeds in what documentary is good at and the event is mythologised by successive first-person accounts (assuming that the very act of ‘telling’ a story is the site where meaning is constructed), simultaneously the three-part moving image juxtaposes adjacent visuals which allegorically comment on the grand narrative—they similarly offer alternative readings. Just as The Stone Roses barked “The past was yours, but the future’s mine”<sup>2</sup>, Schmidt edits silent shots of the green lawns now. Solitary summer trees. Running tracks turn in on themselves. In town, railway arches display their unkempt shrubbery. Chipboard is screened and encases the viewer. Graffiti fills street walls and unaccountable smears cover resident windows. Asking; “Does it feel any better now?”<sup>3</sup>

A memorial to a ruin—evidence perhaps of another failed living alternative? Schmidt returns from Studio Voltaire, where he edited his footage, as first-person witness to youth uprisings, recession and depression, and “every member of parliament tripping on glue”<sup>4</sup>—a revival of circumstances of comparable disaffection and despair with the time (or ruin) we are living in.

Periodically, Adele—an adored pop icon of now—shrilly cries from the center of the gallery where Rhianna Turnbull screens documentation of women driving. Positioned in the passenger seat, with no recognition from the drivers, the camera brings into focus routine behavioural gestures and conduct that when synchronised suggest particular female character tropes. Identity can be understood to be relational—inside their car-theatre, the real-life players demonstrate their individuality in their relations and encounters with others. You are what you announce and here each woman exudes confidence, self-assurance and certainty in the position they hold on the road. With ease they chew gum; change gear or alter the volume of the radio for a favoured song. Announcements of social status and cultural capital are echoed in Turnbull’s collages of reclaimed visual culture. Turnbull herself describes these works as ‘suggestive co-ordinates’—‘this person, this house’<sup>5</sup>. With titles such as ‘Rich Arabs have got the Builders in’, narrative is lent to the co-ordinate, or adjacent, images and their respective cultural tags—a seductive and teasing fantasised wealth, tyranny visually spills out with careful cuttings from vintage Harpers & Queen and Observer supplements. Turnbull’s re-fashioning of saved or salvaged disposable visuals both describe and create acute

situations, real and imagined, dreamed and remembered, they in turn problematise the artifice involved in the manufacture of identity and self-image—“The gold road’s sure a long road”<sup>6</sup>, it seems we are not there yet.

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<sup>1</sup> from Amelia Bywater & Christian Newby, ‘Toilet Group Shift Happening Live and on Fire’, 2011, screenprint on paper

<sup>2</sup> The Stone Roses, ‘She Bangs The Drums’

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., ‘How Do You Sleep?’

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., ‘(Song For My) Sugar Spun Sister’

<sup>5</sup> In conversation with Rhianna Turnbull, October 2011

<sup>6</sup> The Stone Roses, ‘Fools Gold’