

Scale



Microsphaeric Howard Hughes Heaven Movie (2014)



Compression Fern Face (2014)

The installations of **Charlotte Prodger** explore the vastness and intimacy of online time and space

Models

Unofficial Channels Onstage Banter

Charlotte Prodger's work suspends fragments from the history of technology, avant garde film, music, queer subculture, industrial sculpture and the internet between and among media and subjectivities. In *Compression Fern Face/Percussion Biface*, which is included in *The Weight Of Data*, a new group display at Tate Britain, a two channel video mounted on an old-fashioned aluminium stand opposes what appears to be an early digital video. It shows two rotating shapes like akimbo legs, accompanied by the artist's voice reading descriptions of footage of performances by the late conceptual artist Dennis Oppenheim, to a ripped YouTube clip of a craftsman making a flint axe. *Microsphaeric Howard Hughes Heaven Movie*, performed last year at Glasgow's Tramway, juxtaposed a DVD monitor, 16mm projection and a boombox, with spoken texts moving between the stereo and the theatre sound system.

Her installations, the form to which Prodger has increasingly turned after a period working primarily with 16mm film, compose themselves like rave tracks, decontextualised bits of material returning in elliptical loops, with multiple visual and narrative rhythms sparking against each other. In *Percussion Biface 1-13*, a work for two monitors some of whose elements reappear in *Compression Fern Face/Percussion Biface*, video ripped from a sneaker fetishist's YouTube channel showing him scrambling up and down a dirt slope in vintage white Adidas is soundtracked by Prodger's descriptions of the flint tool making clip, philosopher Bernard Stiegler's speculations about the emergence of tool use and language in the Paleolithic era and a woman's description of her experiences dealing with volume in nightclubs. Using the one-shot format of structural film rather than complex editing, it braids together multiple temporalities: prehistoric time, the time of the digital archive, the sonic time of language, the bodily time of craft or eroticism. On the other monitor, in what looks like a demonstration video, a massive boombox pumps out trance builds.

Born in Bournemouth in 1974, Prodger trained at Goldsmiths College and Glasgow School of Art, before settling in Glasgow. On the soundtrack to *:+**, a two channel film first presented at Glasgow's CCA, a narrator, voiced by the artist, remembers listening

to house and techno on a Walkman in the woods. These references, she says, "talk about a particular formative moment in the evolution of my queer identity as an adolescent in Aberdeen, when I stopped going to the progressive house/minimalist techno clubs which played amazing music with amazing drugs but were totally hetero, and started going to a provincial gay bar that played trashy vocal garage. It was like I had to take a step backward in one way to take a step forward in another... In my work I think about this moment in relation to wider historical movements and the tension between minimalism and language."

Prodger uses sound to change the quality of material, from the Godardian technique of tearing apart film and soundtrack to spatially redistributing a piece's sound. Thus, in *Compression Fern Face/Percussion Biface*, only one monitor features sound, on headphones, and the spectator can only view one screen at once. The fact that the flint axe video plays out in silence lends the action a mysterious quality, telescoping together the fetishistic character of a Lumière short with primal and digital-era temporalities. In other works, sound is split between headphones and speakers. This separation "brings something anthropomorphic to the technology. It allows me to think of each object as characters in the room, and play with relationships between them." Thus, in *:+**, videos from two trainer fetishists who are also sexual partners play on separate monitors, but "just their hands and feet. My voice is on the boombox across the room. And so are the voices of two male friends of mine. And they're speaking other people's words."

When much post-internet art presents its flatness as a means of mystification – witness the rise of PC Music – Prodger's work resurrects more fruitful historical trajectories through sonic media. "With YouTube, the endlessness of online content is becoming flatter and flatter. The body is changing. From a queer perspective this excites me," she says. "With the internet you can simultaneously feel the absolute vastness of it and then these moments of minute close-up. I enjoy that feeling of vastness turning into extreme intimacy." □ *The Weight Of Data* is at Tate Britain until October

Dan Barrow



*:+** (2012)

In the pre-internet days soundboard/FM quality cassettes of gigs were traded via mailing lists, and became a glimpse of unedited events, banter and breakdowns that no record company would approve. The appeal of these 'lost' moments was first underlined for me in 1987 by Sonic Youth's *Master Dik* EP, which included excerpts from their *Sister* tour. These were equal measures art and absurdity, shining a Warholian spotlight on themselves that involved goofball shoutouts to Sun Ra, Sonny Sharrock and George Benson. Thurston Moore's *Ecstatic Peace* would later issue the hilarious *Live At City Gardens 7"* from *Venom*, all spoken word banter from the Newcastle group's 1986 performance in New Jersey. This record resonated in the underground, was sampled by The Beastie Boys on "Mark On The Bus", and certain phrases like "Newcastle Brown Ale, it'll knock you on your fuckin' back" entered my friends' vocabulary.

Through my role as a host and the music director at WFMU, audio like this has fallen into my lap constantly, and in 2001 I compiled *Shut Up And Play*, a gift CD-R from the station, the entirety of which is now available to download for free via WFMU's *Beware Of The Blog*. It later ballooned into three volumes of several hours, including an infamous tape of Slayer banter where a necrophilia joke gets dredged up again and again on tour, and David Lee Roth boasting he was drinking real Jack Daniels and that "the only people who put iced tea in their Jack bottles are The Claaaaaash, baby!".

Peter Neal and Nicholas Roeg's *Glastonbury Fayre* documentary of the festival in its early days features some notable banter from the stage – one particularly acid-ravaged nude attendee, with a chicken under his arm, explains the "sun's giant orgasm" to the masses. But possibly my favorite ever recording was in the WFMU studios, when Welsh punk vets The Partisans rolled in after some heavy drinking and proceeded to bark obscene epithets about George Bush, each other, and anything else while trying to jumpstart their session as tape rolled.

YouTube is now the main source for finding any kind of abnormal concert or studio moment. A mere search for "on stage meltdown" is a key discovery tool. On a recording of the infamous Black Sabbath riot at their 1980 Milwaukee gig, a flustered stage manager urges attendees to remember that "1776 was a long time ago!", while tossed folding chairs rain down like Xenakis's metallic birds at the end of *La Legende D'Eer*. The feeling of intrusion, the sense of certain sounds like slamming chairs amplified over a scattering crowd with a lo-fi but vivid atmosphere, evokes a Shadow Ring record. Sound art comes in all shapes and highbrow/lowbrow forms for sure. □ blog.wfmu.org

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