Shipsides and Beggs Projects - Decimation in D. Pre-Fix, Venice

Still Not Out Of The Woods - Decimation in D
Shipsides and Beggs Projects
Performance of music, sound, spoken word, video and animation.
Approx 110 min
2017

Audio Visual performance/happening performed at Microclima in the Giardini della Biennale, Venice, commissioned by Catalyst Arts.

A socio-phenomenological, transversal audio-visual work exploring the altitude, geo-political legacies, brutalities and strange poetics of the Dolomites' mountain frontier of World War 1. The spine of this work processes the elevation data gathered from the frontier into a soundscape which connects and laterally morphs 'pata-perceptively into songs, anecdotes and visual art.

Above images: 1,3,4,5,7,8,9,11 credit Danto Productions
Through, video, music, sound and spoken-word this performance folds together new artworks with existing artworks, songs and materials. In many aspects this performance is a conscious attempt to create a new space across the formats of a music gig, an artist’s talk, a video screening and a ‘happening’. The new aspects of this work develop long standing themes, topics and research from the wider Still Not Out Of The Woods umbrella project and material.

In particular, this work re-visits the Italian Dolomites research stemming from our interest and activity in climbing Via Ferrata (see BIVACCO) and connecting again with the WW1 histories of the Dolomite’s mountainous war frontier. The core element of Decimation in D takes the line of the WW1 Italian frontier from the Adriatic sea to the highest point in the Dolomites, which is Mt. Marmolada (Punta Penia, 3343m) then right across through the mountains to the the west coast. Transcoding a data-set derived from frontier’s elevation heights, taken at regular points of this border, into sound (using the segmenting principle in sheet-music which is French is called partition). The term partition also clearly refers to concepts of geo-political separations of borders and the construct of the nation-state. This audio process produces a framework which literally sounds outs that geopolitical and topological frontier. We then use that audio framework, in a series of three partitions, to weave in existing and new songs (some our own, some covers of ‘old timer’ or modern or popular songs from the genres of folk, rock and pop) using sound-scaping as bridging between sections. The initial sound-scaping begins with Neal using a small iron shrapnel ball, which was found on Marmolada, to roll along his guitar strings generating a peculiar and particular sound. Other sound-scaping comes from recordings developed from the sound of karabiners running up the tensioned steel via ferrata wires in the mountains.

Around this there are ‘artist talk’ style spoken-word elements which speak to the video and still images which are being projected and introduce or inform about the songs and sound we perform. It has a very casual, open style which at times is hopefully also humorous. This is serious and at times dark material but we give ourselves licence to make play with it. In fact the strange tree motif (of two hands placed together) references this strange playfulness – the origin of the tree motif coming from WW1 no-mans-land observation points which were designed to look like bombed out tree trunks. The spoken-word introduces the ideas of research and process in terms of the subject matter of geo-political culture and politics – based around histories and experiential research. So we discuss ideas of the Via Ferrata (meaning Iron Way) as a poetic way into articulations around Fascism and Modernism, but also as a way out of those oppressive ways, into imagining future music and communications – the guitar string, the counter-culture, electronic music (the oscillator) and the internet. The talk speaks of a lightening strike we encountered on Marmolada, to which we both responded to with small artworks which here lead us, through a star motif, to discuss a link between the romantic sublime of mountainous nature with it’s awe, terror and fear, to a more street level sublime terror of Northern Irish paramilitaries - in particular the British Loyalist terror groups UDA and UFF.

We then discuss ideas around the realities and concepts of Europe or Europa (including a discussion on the most bombed hotel in Europe, the Europa Hotel in Belfast) and combine this with a ‘demoralisation’ of the Summit – so that we might imagine an abject summit (see SHUMMIT), where, during WW1 mountains were tunnelled to explode the enemy’s strategic summit positions (see YUPA STAR). We then also come to some potential for re-articulating the concept of Europe (see YUPA, RURRP, YORP – the phonetic pronunciations of Europe by a two-year-old boy). From here we follow that period of history to discuss the idea of the bicycle (and also in another level, the guitar) as both a tool of individual emancipation and Avant-guard motifs (e.g. Jarry and Duchamp). We juxtapose or integrate the idea of the wire with the bicycle – enclosure and mobility. But we also frame the bicycle as an agent of über masculinity and the supermalé, with both the Futurists and Ulster Volunteers (UVF) forming bicycle battalions (see ZOMBIE LINE). Steve Job’s efficiency fuelled vision of the computer serving as the ‘bicycle for the mind’ then leads us into the era of mass communication, the media age and the rise of the notion of zombie-hood. All this chimes strongly with the contemporary situation where there seems to be a blind sleepwalk to the hard political right, towards fascism, towards deepening economic structures that drives and necessitates constant violence, categorical
oppression and a regime of image rhetoric to condition society. In this sense the fulcrum of the
Decimation in D frontier partition morphs into the Black Sabbath song War Pigs, re-versioned as an
electronic karaoke track (see WAR PIGS) a hand made crankie film (see Nottanum - War Pigs) and
followed by video works (see MORTAR|DEVICE) and further footage and audio which draws us off the
mountain and deeply back into the woods.

The whole video projection itself (which acts mostly a silent movie to which we add the live sound
track) constitutes a new video work. It purposely combines previous work (as indicated above) with
newly edited footage and newly made video and animation material. At heart this project has been a
major re-visiting of the archive of Italian research that we have undertaken and drawn from for many
works. This working however returns us to the start of the research which began in 2009 on our first
trip to the Dolomites (via Venice) and to woods in the foothills where we first made a STILL NOT OUT
OF THE WOODS twig text work. In this sense it seemed extremely pertinent to return to the region
and present and perform in Venice.

The actual performance began in a period of chaos as the heavens opened up with a heavy downpour
of rain. So the whole event was scrambled to provide cover for the electrical equipment – but the
show went on and the result seemed to be successful – in actuality, unusually for ‘art performances’,
there was a call for an ‘encore’ which allowed us pertinently (in relation to the Venice Biennale) to
perform Withdrawing from the Visual for which several members of the host organisation and Keef
Winter spontaneously joined us in playing.

The running of the performance in term of songs follows something like this:

Going Across the Mountain (Old Timer)
Going over the Top (SBP)
Frontier Soldier (SBP)
Still Not Out Of The Woods (SBP)
Mountain Bird (SBP)
War Pigs (Black Sabbath)
Poor Pilgrim of Sorrow (Old Timer)
Just beyond the Border (SBP)
Withdrawning from the Visual (SBP)

Video works included (or re-edited into the new work are)

BIVACCO
MASS HERMIT VOLUME
YUPA STAR
ZOMBIE LINE
STILL NOT OUT OF THE WOODS
SHUMMIT
WAR PIGS - KARAOKE
NOTTANUM – WAR PIGS
MORTAR|DEVICE

The work is an open-work and will be re-developed and re-performed to explore specific
themes or research in different contexts – each time generating new material for further
research.

Kindly supported by the British Council and ACNI
Zombie Mask for Decimation in D
Commercially printed flyer mask.
21x29cm
edition of 100
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