

SHOT/COUNTERSHOT. WHEN THINGS ARE THE WAY THEY LOOK.

SAM BELINFANTE, CHRIS GRYGIEL, SVEIN MOXVOLD, ADAM ROMPEL, THEA STALLWOOD, MARIA THEODORAKI
curated by Marialaura Ghidini

Texts by Marialaura Ghidini and Nadine Pütz

28 -29 August 2008, 10 – 6 pm

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Room BG02, Block B, 1st floor
Chelsea College of Art and
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Shot-countershot is the term used to describe a film editing technique often employed to compose a dialogue scene. More precisely, a *shot/countershot* is a series of cinematic shots that alternately and in succession show what each character is looking at in the same space, providing different perspectives on the scene. The deriving effect is that the viewer assumes that two subjects are looking at each other. Therefore, a coherent and logic narrative is generated by inferring the observer's response to a particular *assemblage* of fragments.

What the viewer sees is what the viewer perceives as real, no matter how highly constructed the composition is (paradoxically, the two subjects in conversation may not have been standing in front one another at the time of the shooting). Ultimately, the way things look on the screen is understood to be genuine.

The artists included in this show have elaborated their own approach to the idea of montage, whether applied to the reality of the exhibition space or the inner dimension of the work itself. All the artists' works, although operating on different levels, manipulate a chosen context by extending, minimizing, delaying or restructuring their tempos, only maintaining an apparent resemblance to the source's.

The works have been brought together for their reflecting on the blurring

boundaries between what is usually perceived as real or true and the effects of interfering or creating dissonance with what is given. Each of the works invites the audience to engage with the rhythm they suggest.

As in film editing, they shift back and forth in time and create different narratives that are based on their own self-generated rules. Unlike the *shot-counter-shot* effect, these works make transparent their inherent logic.

THE WAY THEY LOOK.

MOVING FORTH FROM THE ENTRANCE DOOR, ZOOMING IN ON THE RIGHT END SIDE OF THE ROOM.

There is a printed text. It is a reconstruction of a book about time and memory which encapsulates the legacy of *À la recherche du temps perdu* by Marcel Proust. In its footnotes, it proposes a journey through time and space, highlighting indirect interrelations between the original text and the writings that followed. This set of references seems to symbolise how every object is in constant flux. The act of appropriation, which is central to the execution of the book, exemplifies how things are often re-located and shifted. It brings to light the being-in-transition of cultural objects, as well as the painstaking effort that is made to grasp a logical coherence.

STEPPING BACK FROM THE SHELF AND ZOOMING OUT. The white room appears in its quasi-bareness. **SCRUTINISING THE SPACE.**

A sound reverberates across the room. It is constantly repeated, but at asynchronous intervals. It then appears that something as immaterial as the sound of a drop has been captured and then re-spatialised.



Sam Belinfante, *Dip Piece*, 2008

As the composer Alvin Lucier once said regarding sound's site-specificity: "every room has its own melody hiding there until it is made audible"¹. In this room, the tinkle of the drop has been liberated not only from its spatial limits but also its time frame. Its frequency has been altered, revealing many different tempos, which bear almost no resemblance to that of the sink behind the wall.

MOVING AWAY FROM THE WHITE ROOM. ZOOMING IN ON THE CORRIDOR ON THE LEFT-HAND SIDE. A man is endlessly marching along the corridors contained by the TV screen. **GOING CLOSER.**



Svein Moxvold, *Aggressive marching in the corridors*, 2005

The passage of time is marked by the regular repetition of the man's stride, whereas the space unfolds while he proceeds. The iteration of the act of marching, the relentless rhythmic advancing, put the dimension of the scene on hold, exposing the circularity of the march itself. There is no beginning nor end. Apparently the march is purposeless. Yet, there are many doors that could be opened along the way, potential sideways paths that could break the loop which controls the time and space of this scenario.

THERE IS A ROOM ON THE RIGHT. It is all black but something is glowing in it. **CLOSING IN ON THE FRONT WALL.**

¹ Adam Licht, *Beyond Music, Between Categories*, Rizzoli, New York, 2007, pp. 47

Here is another TV screen. The camera goes slowly from right to left and left to right, in a continuous moving shot that scans a bleak prison cell.



Chris Grygiel, *Tom Waits*, 2008

The cell is inhabited by the repeated actions of the inmate, who seems to desperately try not to lose the count of time passing, as if waiting for something to progress. The tempo of the scene is frozen to the point of timelessness. There is no narration here, no unfolding of a story. Jim Jarmush's film *Dawn by law* has been stripped down to the level of iterated acts that are constrained by the complex editing process. It seems like Tom Waits could be about to burst out loud: "I'm going straight to the top- oh yea up where the air is-fresh and clean- I'm going straight up to the top- if you know me, you know what I mean²".

WALKING SLOWLY AROUND THE BUILT-IN ROOMS AND PEERING THROUGH THE OTHER DOOR IN THE CORRIDOR. There is a woman. **FOCUSING ON THE MOVING IMAGES AHEAD.**

Maria Theodoraki, *version 1, at sea*, 2007



She is standing still in front of what appears to be a video of a seascape and eating an ice-cream while contemplating the scenery. The backdrop is Chris Welsby's *At Sea* (2003), a digitally recomposed seascape. At the time of the making of the video Welsby invited the viewers to reflect on their own role in the construction of a

fiction³. Here, the woman in swimming costume seems to take his words literally, relocating the seascape into a framework that is regulated by the duration of her eating the ice-cream. Subtly criticising Welsby's proposal, the so framed fictionalised scenario of his video is then re-proposed to the viewer.

FADING IT OUT. GOING BACK TO THE MAIN ROOM. There is a plinth nearby by the entrance. **ZOOMING IN ON IT.**

Thea Stallwood, *shot-countershot audio guide*, 2008



A pair of headphones lie there, waiting to be worn. It is an audio tour of the exhibition; guided exploration into the way things look, waiting to be experienced.

2 Tom Waits, *16 shells from a thirty-ought six*, 1993, audio, 4:32 min.

3 See Chris Welsby's synopsis of *At Sea*, <http://www.sfu.ca/~welsby/AtSeaNot.htm>

LIST OF WORKS:

- Sam Belinfante, *Dip Piece*, 2008
6 channel sound-installation; dimensions variable
- Chris Grygiel, *Tom Waits*, 2008
video DVD; 7 min looped
- Svein Moxvold, *Aggressive marching in the corridors*, 2005
audio/video DVD; 3:30 min looped endlessly
- Adam Rompel, *Remembrance of things past¹*, 2008
2 digital prints / A3 (to take the form of a 330 x 280 mm book)
- Maria Theodoraki, *version 1, at sea*, 2007
video DVD; 7:15 min looped
- Thea Stallwood, *shot-countershot audio guide*, 2008
sound performance; dimensions variable

Onehourandthirtysixminutes

by Nadine Puetz

She sits at her desk starring at the blank white screen of her laptop, her fingers tracing the edges of a business card, which has been stuck below the keyboard. She begins to type 'Dear Mr Paton', she stops and erases what she has written 'Dear Mike, I don't know, if you will remember me', she stops, lights a cigarette and stares back at the screen. Shutting the lid of the laptop abruptly she gets up and leaves the room.

cut

She sinks into the velvet-covered seat, carefully placing her hands with the chewed down fingernails onto the armrest, and closes her eyes hoping for a sense of oblivion to enter her mind. It is a very old cinema with the original décor, even though the seat covers might have been replaced by a sensitive upholstery machine. The faint smell of carpet-disinfectant hangs in the air. Not many people have turned up for this screening, on a weeknight; in fact only twelve seats are occupied. But it is still early. Fabric brushes the tips of her hair. Someone has come to a sudden halt behind her. 'Could you do me a favour and keep an eye on my bag for a minute, while I go to the bathroom? I 'm not meaning to suggest that anyone would steal in this place, but I would feel better, if you could look after it. I've got some important things in there.'

She slowly turns around, unsure whether the voice is addressing her or somebody else who might have miraculously appeared at her side.

The first thing that enters her field of vision is a shaggy cowboy hat, pressed low onto the forehead, partly obscuring an impressive set of

sideburns any Elvis impersonator would be envious of. A pair of espresso coloured eyes that do not seem to have given themselves the luxury of sleep for several days are scanning her face, as if some secret truth could be learned from this investigation. Suddenly she is self-consciously aware of the heat under her eyelids and the puffy redness of her cheeks, so she attempts a smile, mumbles something in affirmation and quickly looks away. Words are dry leaves in her mouth, rigid and brittle. Apart from the brief encounter with the guy, who sold her the ticket, she has not spoken to anyone all day.

A black rain jacket, two bags, overflowing with various newspapers and leaflets, are flung on the seat beside her; a jumbo-size box of popcorn is placed on top like a ski hut, precariously balancing on the edge of the makeshift mountainscape, making the occurrence of a sticky avalanche more than a distant possibility. She looks back at the screen to watch the preview trailers. *A young and old Edith Piaf then a Philippe Petit preparing 'the artistic crime of the century' balancing on a tightrope between the two towers of the world trade centre.*

The man has returned, sitting behind her now. He is shifting around in his seat in attempt to get comfortable. 'It's nice to come to the cinema by yourself sometimes. I often do it. It's a good place to zone out and forget what was worrying you for a bit'.' Yes, it has its benefits'. A tight little smile. After a moment's hesitation, as if realising that she has been unnecessarily rude she adds with a broad smile, exposing her teeth. 'I love it on a day like this'.

Tango music, a beauty salon somewhere in

Beirut, the roads covered with a film of brownish dust, heat, everything in a state of disregard, a shop sign inclined to detach itself from the wall, the chatter of several young woman dealing with a few regulars. One of them rushes out of the shop, heading for a fast food romance underneath a highway bridge. The man's face remains outside the frame. A clandestine encounter. His leg is restlessly whipping against her backrest.

A police man is following an old woman, hunched over, apparently searching for something on the ground, her right hand clutching several brightly coloured plastic bags filled with papers. Occasionally she bends down to pick up a parking ticket from the ground, without interrupting her continuous patter. When the police man stops to question her, she replies 'I know he wrote to me, but the note must have been blown away. I know he wrote to me', he attempts to convince her that these are not her personal notes but are property of the state, she begins to wail, warning him that she would call the police if he did not stop harassing her. Hardly audible laughter like flapping wings. Muttering she shuffles on, a woollen hat crowning the white fuzz of hair. A hand lightly touches her shoulder. He hands her a business card. She strains her eyes in an attempt to read the note scribbled on the back but she can't make out much of the teenage left-handed script.

'You don't need to read it now, just have a look at it after the film'.

She slips the card into her pocket not aiming to look at it again. A middle-aged woman struggling away on her home trainer, while listening to her daughter reading out the homework, interrupting her every now and again to voice some out-of-breath grammatical corrections .The phone rings. Her son answers .It is her ex-husband. Feral

gestures; she wants him to pretend that she is not at home. The son informs the phone's mouthpiece of her absence, 'She is smoking a joint with the neighbour'. Sighing, she wipes her forehead with the pink towel, loosely hanging over her shoulder and reaches for the receiver.

The rhythmic vibrations in her back have stopped, he might have fallen asleep.

His head flaps to his chest causing him to wake up with a start. He massages his neck. The throbbing pain has returned. She has sunk lower into her seat, sneakers resting on the drinkholder. Her hair is nearly dry now.

A marriage. Everybody seems happy. Good.

She looks behind her but he has disappeared. It is still humid as she steps outside the building, a fine drizzle spraying her head. She switches on her phone and checks the time on the display. The last tube has just gone, she will have to walk. Something makes her hesitate. She feels for the card in her pocket. It is almost decadently weighty. She pulls it out. A few drop of water land on the writing causing the ink to run.' In case you ever want a chat, I'm better at other people's problems than my own, Mike.' She quickly flips over the card and stares at the official looking emblem above the name:

Mr Michael Paton
MIET
Ministry of Defence
Level 2 Zone F
St George's Court
24-30 Bloomsbury Way
London WC1 A 2SH

She lights a cigarette.