Art Sheffield 08
Yes
No
Other Options*

16 February – 30 March
Citywide Contemporary Art Event
www.artsheffield.org
Art Sheffield 08
Yes, No & Other Options
16 February – 30 March

Art Sheffield 08: Yes, No & Other Options is a citywide contemporary art exhibition involving work by 38 artists in 8 venues including Bloc, End Gallery, Millennium Galleries, S1 Artspace, Site Gallery, Yorkshire ArtSpace, Sylvester Space, the Winter Garden and the public realm.

Taking as its foundation a specially commissioned essay by art critic Jan Verwoert, this citywide exhibition addresses the fact that in a post-industrial condition, one particularly pertinent to Sheffield, we have entered into a service culture where we no longer just work, we perform in a perpetual mode of 'I Can'. (Even advertising tells us that ‘Life gets more exciting when you say yes’).

Verwoert asks, ‘What would it mean to put up resistance against a social order in which high performance and performance-related evaluation has become a growing demand, if not a norm? What would it mean to resist the need to perform?’ He suggests that certain means of resisting are in themselves creative – that as well as embracing exuberant performativity, art has also used the ‘I Can’t’, by creating moments where the flow of action is interrupted, established meanings are suspended & alternative ways to act become imaginable. He suggests that as well as yes & no, there may be other options.

The citywide programme was collaboratively selected and curated by Jan Verwoert and Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum and includes a high proportion of specially commissioned new work and a mix of emergent and established artists, and of Sheffield based, nationally and internationally based artists.

All venues are free to enter – see back page for information on venues, opening times and linked events.

www.artsheffield.org

---

Hilary Lloyd
Site Gallery

In her video and slide installations, Hilary Lloyd shows people casually displaying themselves, or places that look as if they could be a stage for an act or event of a yet unspecified nature. Combining strong attention to detail with a stance of relaxed detachment, Lloyd carefully studies the intricacies of people’s body language as well as the specific pace at which time passes in particular locations. In doing so, she creates a heightened awareness of the ways in which, on a most basic level, social life is structured through the routines that we perform everyday, at work, in the city and among ourselves.

Primarily, however, Lloyd looks at people and places that interrupt these vernacular choreographies. Such interruptions may occur because the physical presence of a particular person – or maybe just the slightest particularity about their body language or gestures – is so distinctive that he or she transforms the space around them into a stage and commands the flow of time through the pace of their actions (as around some people life is always fast, around others it slows down). Likewise she shows how structured routines fall apart in specific places because time there stands still, like it does when you take a break, gaze at something and let your thoughts wander off.

There is a subtle politics of resistance implied in these interruptions. By highlighting certain exuberant gestures Lloyd points to a defiance of the standardisation of body language in social routines. Likewise, she shows that the spaces where the pressure to perform falls away may in fact be right there in the everyday, so that the regimented patterns of social performance, in the end, are always porous.

---

Silke Otto-Knapp
Site Gallery

Could we collectively perform differently? In her recent paintings Silke Otto-Knapp points towards this possibility. The works are based on her ongoing study of the ways in which modern ballet has translated patterns of social life into dance. Otto-Knapp appropriates moments from this history and transforms them into pictures that focus the attention on the formalised body language through which dance reflects the relation of the individual to the collective.

Many of Otto-Knapp’s works are painted in monochromatic silver tones, others in luminous water-colours. Through this painterly form abstraction enters the picture. Isolated from the plot of the ballet, the gestures are no longer designed to tell a story. It is precisely this moment of abstraction (from narrative) that brings out the intrinsic exuberance of the body language of dance. The depiction of dance, then, is a cipher for a communality that is not organised around an ulterior end, a task or function it has to perform. People here perform coming together and falling apart in ways that are solely determined by the communication of their bodies. What the paintings make you see, then, is a utopian state of exuberance.

---

Texts on the works by
Jan Verwoert and the artists.
Janice Kerbel
‘Remarkable’
& ‘Ball Game’ Live performance
Saturday 16 February 2.30pm
Site Gallery

When we do things, we like to plot and make plans, not realising that the world of action and the world of plans may be separate universes. In her work, Janice Kerbel explores the rifts and concurrences between these two spheres: drawing up plans, diagrams or blueprints for potential actions, even or entire cities is her main medium. That an element of fiction is at play in the work is tangible. Yet, at the same time, Kerbel’s plans are so meticulously researched that they instantly strike you as completely feasible and sound. In the past she has developed a foolproof scheme for robbing a local bank, diagrams for creating self-sustaining micro-ecosystems on your roof terrace or blueprints for love letters for each season of the year.

In Art Sheffield 08, Kerbel will present ‘Remarkable’ (2007), a series of posters depicting all 12 months of the year. In each poster, artistic and practical ideas are documented by a simple photo and descriptive text. The undiminished fascination of Kovanda’s actions lies in the way they allow you to see how an individual builds up a basic vocabulary of gestures for social interaction from scratch, when his nonconformist position would otherwise have condemned him to inaction under the political conditions of his time. On this most existential level, Kovanda then raises a question, that in its political and ethical implications, is more contemporary then ever: how – according to whose terms – do you want to engage with the social?

Jiri Kovanda
Photographs of Performances
Site Gallery

Jiri Kovanda’s performances are concise reflections on the potentials of personal agency: what can you do when, as an individual, you may not be able to do much but still you face a social order that has to be changed?

Developing his practice from the mid-1970s under political conditions imposed on Czechoslovakia after the quelling of the Prague Spring, Kovanda’s works take the form of small interventions into everyday life that insert an element of uncertainty into its order. Such incursions included simple gestures like gazing fixedly into the eyes of people encountered on an escalator or bumping into people on a Prague pavement, as attempts to make contact, or, conversely, to break it by suddenly, without comment, running away from a group of friends assembled in a public place. These acts are documented by a simple photo and descriptive text. The artworks are shown in the gallery. On another occasion, Pieroth took the invitation to ‘collaborate’ with a local entrepreneur for an exhibition literally (in the criminal sense), Together they stole the minute hand from a clocktower in broad daylight and recorded the time it took (27 minutes).

In a series of works dedicated to Thomas Edison, Pieroth dissected the myth of the unbridled productivity of a creative genius. Edison is celebrated for turning his gift for inventing things into an industry by running his business like a factory. Pieroth turned what it means to perform an act or produce an artefact. Crudely, these gestures follow a completely stringent logic which, however, leads to a result that defeats all expectations of what could or should be achieved through purposeful actions.

Pieroth has in the past, for instance, plotted the perfect murder. She killed an ant with a detective novel, a crime that was bound to pass unseen, if you failed to see that the victim was hidden on the murder weapon, as the poor thing was stuck to the back of the novel, displayed in the gallery. On another occasion, Pieroth took the invitation to ‘collaborate’ with a local entrepreneur for an exhibition literally (in the criminal sense), Together they stole the minute hand from a clocktower in broad daylight and recorded the time it took (27 minutes).

In a series of works dedicated to Thomas Edison, Pieroth dissected the myth of the unbridled productivity of a creative genius. Edison is celebrated for turning his gift for inventing things into an industry by running his business like a factory. Pieroth turned what it means to perform an act or produce an artefact.Crudely, these gestures follow a completely stringent logic which, however, leads to a result that defeats all expectations of what could or should be achieved through purposeful actions.

Kirsten Pieroth
Site Gallery
In her art, Kirsten Pieroth enacts symbolic gestures that question the very nature of what it means to perform an act or produce an artefact. Crudely, these gestures follow a completely stringent logic which, however, leads to a result that defeats all expectations of what could or should be achieved through purposeful actions.

Pieroth has in the past, for instance, plotted the perfect murder. She killed an ant with a detective novel, a crime that was bound to pass unseen, if you failed to see that the victim was hidden on the murder weapon, as the poor thing was stuck to the back of the novel, displayed in the gallery. On another occasion, Pieroth took the invitation to ‘collaborate’ with a local entrepreneur for an exhibition literally (in the criminal sense), Together they stole the minute hand from a clocktower in broad daylight and recorded the time it took (27 minutes).

In a series of works dedicated to Thomas Edison, Pieroth dissected the myth of the unbridled productivity of a creative genius. Edison is celebrated for turning his gift for inventing things into an industry by running his business like a factory. Pieroth turned what it means to perform an act or produce an artefact. Crudely, these gestures follow a completely stringent logic which, however, leads to a result that defeats all expectations of what could or should be achieved through purposeful actions.

Kan Xuan
Recent videos
Yorkshire ArtSpace
Persistence Works

One of the key categories that we today use to describe meaningful acts and experiences is the event. But what constitutes an event? And how does it make meaning?

Kan Xuan raises these questions in her work, precisely by shifting all conventional parameters for what we perceive as an event and what we see in it. In her videos she enacts small gestures that take you into a microcosm of performance where anything goes but everything matters – in ways that have yet to be established.

She films, for instance, the breaking of eggs and the slow oozing out of their inner liquid – or the ceremony of going through her rubbish bin and carefully addressing each item by its proper name – or spiders crawling across human skin investigating all folds and crevices. Object (2003) in turn is a black and white video that shows small items (coffee, hair, apple…) dropping into water, accompanied by a voice describing the (invisible) colors of each object.

Under the scrutinizing gaze of Kan Xuan’s camera, hierarchy of importance are inverted. Notions of the monumental, spectacular and heroic collapse, as you are made to experience the smallest acts and occurrences as fully fleshed out events.
George Henry Longly

In his work George Henry Longly inquires into the rules, habitual ways of looking and norms of behaviour that are enforced by our education and shape our experience. He traces the rigid logic of such standards back to the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone’s song Here’s to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone’s song Here’s to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone’s song Here’s to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone’s song Here’s to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone’s song Here’s to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone’s song Here’s to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.

For Art Sheffield 08 George Henry Longly has looked at composers Joan Baez and Ennio Morricone’s song Here’s to you, a homage to Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, two Italian American anarchists controversially sentenced to death in 1927. The emotional force of this political anthem is generated by the functional character of everyday objects that are used to delineate space, measure things or bodies and elicit patterns of norm-regulated behaviour. By staging these objects in installations he makes them perform in an ambiguous way: exposing the social function they fulfill, he equally also strips them of their utilitarian programme, and charges them with a different sense of unscripted potential.
Tomma Abts ‘Untitled #1 – #7’
S1 Artspace

Parallel to her abstract paintings, last year’s Turner prize winner Tomma Abts has been continuously developing a series of drawings. In this series of drawings (‘Untitled #1 – #7’) Abts unpacks the logic of geometrical structures; through small yet decisive displacements she destabilises the form of seemingly rigid shapes and patterns, as she makes them drift apart, she also allows them to reconfigure themselves in unpredictable constellations. By performatively unworking structures in the process of working on them, Abts reveals their hidden latencies and thereby deconstructs their organisation from the inside out.

Unmaking the logic of systematic structures in these drawings therefore is an act, a practice or performance that, in a much wider sense, speaks about how to deal with the structures that determine the way we think, make decisions and experience space and time. Today we live with a dominance of cybernetic structures of thought, decision making and experience (the choice always only being one between 1 and 0, yes and no). When we choose, we choose from menus of options predefined by programmes. By unworking the systematic logic of this rationality in works – that indeed look at times like cybernetic systems gone out of sync – Abts demonstrates what it means to mess with the programme. Her drawings document conversations with an old friend, Helene Hermann. As the two speak about shared memories and everyday things, they casually build the backdrop for a shadowplay (shown at the end of the video), in the conversation it transpires that, just when her career was taking off, Hermann had to give up her work as a theatre set designer because of an onset of manic depression. She still feels awkward about mentioning the subject, she says, as this usually prompts responses of empathy that mostly only inadvertently confirm her social status as an outsider.

It is precisely this outcome that Villesen prevents, by creating a situation in the conversation where the issue can be raised without being overly dramatised. As the two work on the shadowplay set, the very parameters of what it means to work and to be capable of performing are in fact shifted: as both, obviously, are working together to make a set and film a documentary, yet at their own pace and on their own terms. While she addresses what may today be one of the biggest taboos among creative professionals – the incapacity to perform – Villesen thereby makes it clear that we do have the power to define the parameters of this performance and defy the outside pressure to perform.

Gitte Villesen ‘I Capture You, You Capture Me’
Sylvester Space

In her documentary videos, Gitte Villesen goes against the grain of social generalisations by negotiating the terms of her (and our) relation to the individual she portrays with great care. Her works consequently show an exchange over the way in which someone enters into the process of being portrayed. In ‘I Capture You, You Capture Me’, Villesen documents conversations with an old friend, Helene Hermann. As the two speak about shared memories and everyday things, they casually build the backdrop for a shadowplay (shown at the end of the video). In the conversation it transpires that, just when her career was taking off, Hermann had to give up her work as a theatre set designer because of an onset of manic depression. She still feels awkward about mentioning the subject, she says, as this usually prompts responses of empathy that mostly only inadvertently confirm her social status as an outsider.

It is precisely this outcome that Villesen prevents, by creating a situation in the conversation where the issue can be raised without being overly dramatised. As the two work on the shadowplay set, the very parameters of what it means to work and to be capable of performing are in fact shifted: as both, obviously, are working together to make a set and film a documentary, yet at their own pace and on their own terms. While she addresses what may today be one of the biggest taboos among creative professionals – the incapacity to perform – Villesen thereby makes it clear that we do have the power to define the parameters of this performance and defy the outside pressure to perform.

Nicole Wermers ‘Double Sandtable’
S1 Artspace

In her collages and sculptures Nicole Wermers isolates the sources of visual allure in the surfaces of modern design, architecture and commodity culture. Dissociated from their primary context of use and consumption, these visual stimuli are presented as sources of sheer fascination and purpose-free desire. As their original function, however, is still tangible as a more or less latent presence, the dislocation of desire is experienced all the more consciously.

The Sculpture ‘Double Sandtable’ exemplifies this vividly. It consists of two interconnected tables with tray like tops filled with fine beach sand; a hybrid between a piece of modular office furniture, a giant ashtray and an autonomous sculpture. Littered with cigarette butts, the patches of sand still look like a stretch of beach cut out from the landscape, contained in a geometric frame and elevated to table height for practical use. On the one hand, the table ashtray could surely be seen to mock the aesthetics of modern formalist sculptures (a lot of which would indeed make good ashtrays) as well as the pretence of modernist design to provide elegant forms that only followed function (as if they ever did). On the other hand, however, Wermers’ work goes beyond mockery, since she fully embraces the fascination of modern functionalist design even and especially in its warped and exhausted vernacular manifestations.

In much the same way in which smoking celebrates the gesture of elegantly wasting your money, time and health, Wermers rejoices in wasting the assets of functionalism. Because it is precisely at the point of their exhaustion, when their meaning and use is again up for grabs, that these modernist concepts begin to radiate with a strange sense of new potential.
Katy Woods (new work) ‘Sailing Dinghy Hawk 20 Passing Lookout on Passage from Falmouth Towards Fal Rock is Starting to Disappear in the Mist’ Sylvester Space

In her video Katy Woods works with footage that she took from active and empty coastal lookouts positioned along the Cornish coastline. These places have an evocative history: coastal lookout became almost obsolete in the 1980s when maritime technology so advanced that HM Coastguard deemed it unnecessary to have a person watching the ocean. Following a fatal tragedy at sea in 1994, however, the National Coastwatch Institution was established, to reinstate many of the disused coastal lookouts around the country.

A contemplative study of a largely unnoticed and invisible organisation, the film explores ideas of stasis, of constancy and permanence, of time passing and time slowing down. In long takes and carefully composed images, Woods conveys a strong impression of the cinematic experience of a place that is out of immediate experience. In her video Katy Woods works with footage that she took from active and empty coastal lookouts or photos of domestic situations, you can see a strong impression of the cinematic experience of a place that is out of immediate experience.

Frances Stark “Structures That Fit My Opening’ and Other Parts Considered to the Whole’ Sylvester Space

In the piece “Structures That Fit My Opening’ and Other Parts Considered to the Whole’ Stark deliberately chooses one of the most awkwardly conventionalised media for public address, the power-point presentation, to voice her reflections on the politics of her art practice. As the sentences continue from slide to slide, sometimes interrupted by images of works or photos of domestic situations, you curiously follow the unravelling of Stark’s thoughts that go through sudden twists and reversals. Stark clearly stakes her position, yet in doing so she constantly shifts between categories, moving from feminist concern to motives of desire, fear and inspiration. As the categoriesinterlace and open up in the process, Stark gives you a very strong sense that all these aspects are different dimensions of one practice and one life.

At the same time, however, this practice and life is home to many voices. In this, as in many of her works, Stark proceeds by time and again incorporating ideas, quotes and excerpts from other people’s work. This gesture of appropriation, as much as it echoes an act of stealing, also communicates a sense of appreciation. The personal space opened up in the work is fact a public space. In it, the powerful position of the artist is displaced by a form of conviviality with the ghosts of other artists, writers, friends or lovers.

Ryszard Wasko Sylvester Space

Richard Wasko uses film as a tool for an investigation of the conditions of personal agency and experience. Measured or unmeasured time, architecturally defined space or the space of the body in motion, language as meaningful communication or simply sounds and signs – these are the basic categories that Wasko probes and dismantles in his film experiments. See also under Millennium Galleries.

Ines Schaber ‘Picture Mining’ End Gallery

Pictures do not simply represent this or that; they work in the most literal sense of the word: images are a means of production, they generate communication, power and capital. In the global economy of the information age images are therefore performers in their own right.

In her video Ines Schaber explores the material conditions of this global performance of pictures. ‘Picture Mining’ took its point of departure in Schaber reconstructing the history and current whereabouts of a series of iconic photographs of Pennsylvania workers taken by Lewis Hine, a pioneer of social documentary photography, for the National Child Labor Committee in the 1910s. The copyright for several images from this series, it turned out, are today sold by Bill Gates’ firm Corbis, which offers over 70 million images for sale online, and stores the negatives and prints in a former limestone mine, also in Pennsylvania.

Schaber travelled to the site of the mine and documented the journey in photographs and a video essay that evoke the eerie nature of the place. Home to one the world’s largest image archives, the mine is inconspicuous, an overgrown mound of earth blending into the mining country landscape. The sight of the invisible archive is hardly remarkable. Taking the thought into his own hands, Mr Zheng creates a revolutionary form of new folklore, merging the tunes of the past with the improvised songs of the present into a hybrid form that, even and especially in its most bizarre moments, seems perfectly suited for telling the story of contemporary working biographies. In presenting Mr Zheng’s life on the one hand and as an example, Xu Tan seems to suggest that it is from his songwriting that we could learn how to, now and in the future, tell the story of our lives.

Xu Tan ‘Concert Hall of Zheng Daoxing’ End Gallery

In his video ‘Concert Hall of Zheng Daoxing’, Xu Tan presents the documentation of a concert performance of Mr Zheng Daoxing, of Yangjiang County, China, which he organised. Accompanying himself on a self-built electric guitar, Mr Zheng sings songs about his life, mixing his own tunes with revolutionary songs and traditional Chinese motifs. The story of his life is a convoluted tale about work: he has been a farmer, soldier, and truck driver. During the Chinese economic reforms of the 1980s, he established his own transportation company which went bankrupt during the 1997 economic crisis, when he became a singer, touring the country at the age of 60.

It has often been observed that under the ‘flexible’ and precarious working conditions imposed by current forms of turbo-capitalism, professional careers have become disjointed. Since the life-long employment that used to provide the connecting thread in people’s biography is no longer the norm, the stories of their lives come to sound like an arbitrary collage of fragments.

The story of Mr Zheng’s life on the one hand and as an example, Xu Tan seems to suggest that it is from his songwriting that we could learn how to, now and in the future, tell the story of our lives.
Laziness is the absence of movement and thought, dumb time – total amnesia. It is sheer stupidity, a time of pain, indifference, staring at nothing, non-activity, impotence. It is also an open potential. Consequently, the images dissolve into abstraction, they are no longer pressed into performing this service. Their impotence. It is sheer stupidity, a time of pain, indifference, staring at nothing, non-activity, impotence. It is also a given situation, Tillmans’ images have an iconic quality. They in fact reflect on what it means for a photo or person to become an icon in the media. As they circulate widely through different media, Tillmans’ photos still always also remain part of his expanding personal universe of images. As pictures, they perform both in a public and personal sphere. Thereby they also speak about how it feels to live your life in public.

In 2003 Tillmans shot a portrait of Morrissey for the American magazine Index while the singer was in the studio recording his album “You are the Quarry” (2004). As the patron saint of a counterculture dedicated to romantic revolt, Morrissey is an iconic public performer come of age. In a pop culture capitalising on the promise of youth, getting older is not part of the plan. Both in his music and in the remodeling of his public persona, Morrissey challenges these conventions as he negotiates his own terms of how to age in public. Tillmans portrays him doing so, as reeling on the studio floor, Morrissey casts a sceptical glance to the side, somewhat exhausted maybe or just getting ready to perform or, most likely, performing a moment of sceptical reflection as a conscious means of interrupting the pressure to perform.

The context in which the late Július Koller began to develop his work in the late 1960s in Bratislava was marked both by the hopes of the thaw period in Czechoslovakia and by the violent quelling of the Prague spring in 1968. Against this violence Koller’s art is a firm gesture of objection. The erratic poetic wit of his work implies an uncompromising insistence on the utopian potential of free thought and communication between people in the face of an authoritarian social order. Sustaining his practice with most minimal means, Koller realised his works in the form of simple diagrams on postcards and as symbolic gestures performed in public and private places, at times just for the camera. Koller called these gestures ‘anti-happenings’ and this term fits. Often they just consisted of a question mark or endless wave graffitied onto a street with whipped cream, or in a table tennis match staged in a gallery as a model of direct social exchange – or in the act of redrawing the lines on a tennis court, designated as minimal yet fundamental form of agency by being titled “Time / Space Definition of the Psycho-physical Activity of Matter” (1968).

Central to his work is a play on the acronym UFO, which in diagram drawings came to stand for, e.g. Univerzálna Futurologická Organizácia (Universal Futurological Organization, 1972–3), Univerzálny Filozofický Ornament (Universal Philosophical Ornament, 1978) or Underground Fantastic Organization (1975). The infinite variations on the cipher UFO resemble an ongoing exuberant incantation of the utopian principle. Defining his own terms for what it means to perform, Koller shows the imagination to be a force that can transcend the realities of the dominant social order through a defiant, utopian optimism.
The publication will be displayed in the editors and printers assembled for a brief community of writers, publishers, designers, of production in terms of this collaboration, considering alternative distribution strategies, Art Sheffield 08, the pamphlet ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance’ assembled the group of writers contributing and collapsing distinctions of editing, design, and mindless overproduction, it seemed natural to collaborate. Commissioned for Art Sheffield 08, the pamphlet ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance’ was produced on site at the Centre d’Art Contemporain in Geneva, Switzerland during a two week period. Dexter Sinister used the opportunity to assemble the group of writers contributing to the forthcoming issue 15 of Dot Dot Dot magazine (ed. by Stuart Bailey) to work and discuss together, cheek by jowl with the Dutch printers’ collective Knust who were printing the magazine and pamphlet on stencil printing machines in the same gallery / workspace.

Largely written on site, the final version of the essay is both included in Dot Dot Dot and published as a pamphlet, as part of Art Sheffield 08. By renegotiating the conditions of production in terms of this collaboration, Dexter Sinister created a different ecology of production and distribution – as well as a community of writers, publishers, designers, editors and printers assembled for a brief moment under one roof.

The publication will be displayed in the Millennium Galleries and available to purchase from gallery bookshops.

Dexter Sinister (new work) ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance’ Millennium Galleries

Dexter Sinister is a workshop and publishers based in New York City, run by Stuart Bailey and David Reinfurt. The workshop seeks to counter the contemporary assembly line realities of large-scale publishing. This involves avoiding waste by working on-demand, utilising local cheap machinery, considering alternative distribution strategies, and collapsing distinctions of editing, design, production and distribution into one activity.

In view of the connections between this philosophy and Jan Vertoevert’s sceptical exploration (in his essay for Art Sheffield 08) of the culture of high performance and mindless overproduction, it seemed natural to collaborate. Commissioned for Art Sheffield 08, the pamphlet ‘Exhaustion & Exuberance’ was produced on site at the Centre d’Art Contemporain in Geneva, Switzerland during a two week period. Dexter Sinister used the opportunity to assemble the group of writers contributing to the forthcoming issue 15 of Dot Dot Dot magazine (ed. by Stuart Bailey) to work and discuss together, cheek by jowl with the Dutch printers’ collective Knust who were printing the magazine and pamphlet on stencil printing machines in the same gallery / workspace.

Largely written on site, the final version of the essay is both included in Dot Dot Dot and published as a pamphlet, as part of Art Sheffield 08. By renegotiating the conditions of production in terms of this collaboration, Dexter Sinister created a different ecology of production and distribution – as well as a community of writers, publishers, designers, editors and printers assembled for a brief moment under one roof.

The publication will be displayed in the Millennium Galleries and available to purchase from gallery bookshops.
Andrew Cooke
Millennium Galleries

In our current so-called ‘service society’ the conditions under which services are provided differ drastically, from the tasks performed by skilled professionals like media designers, IT technicians to the monotonous work at call centres, to serving or cleaning in hotels or restaurant kitchens. Still, effectively we perform the same job: we provide services.

In his work Cooke examines the working conditions of menial labour and the effect performing such services has on the person doing so. Status, respect, dignity and aspiration are what the menial worker struggles to maintain but is equally also denied on a daily basis. Facing this situation, Cooke proposes different strategies. In the video ‘Performance Under Working Conditions’ he can be seen, moving his head across a hotel room carpet as if he was Hoovering. ‘A Guide to Maintaining Dignity in the Workplace’ is a handbook for employees. Cooke compiled it, offers practical advice on how to elude the will of your employers, and carve out autonomous zones for yourself as an employee during the working day by disengaging from the pressure to perform in subtle ways.

Turning your head into a Hoover is a strategy of pushing over-identification with work to the point of defiance. The subtle ways of emotionally and practically disengaging from the routines of everyday work, conversely, constitute a form of reticence that, in the long run, may actually be more effective than theatrical forms of open resistance, because it is untraceable and therefore unstoppable. In a more general context, Cooke’s work raises the question of what gestures of resistance mean and look like in a service society, where in different ways, we all perform to serve.

Tim Etchells
‘Wait Here’, ‘Please Come Back’ & ‘Let’s Pretend’
Millennium Galleries

Every day we do things with words; performing ‘speech acts’ such as greetings or apologies, picking fights or ordering drinks. On this simple level, words alone become a kind of performance – changing the world and the situation we find ourselves in. In his newly commissioned works for Art Sheffield 08, Tim Etchells plays with this performative dimension of language in a series of neon signs that spell out enigmatic, comical and slightly perplexing phrases. Each of Etchells’ new works – speech acts of sorts – creates an awkward moment in the space in which the viewer is implicated, but imprecisely, as a lover perhaps, or as an accomplice, or as a friend. The pressure for the viewer to perform in response to these texts is on, but the logic and the rules of the performance have not been clearly determined.

In the two video works, ‘Insults & Praises’ and ‘Threats & Promises’, Tim Etchells and Vlatka Horvat explore the theatrical rituals connected to emotions and judgements, playfully cataloguing the possibilities of both complimentary and critical statements that define us in relationships and social situations. In ‘Insults & Praises’, a man and a woman face the camera and take turns insulting and praising each other over the course of an hour, drawing on an exhaustive list of abuses and derogatory terms on the one side, and compliments and declarations of affection on the other. In the new work ‘Threats & Promises’, a follow-up of sorts to ‘Insults & Praises’, the same two people console, lure, shame, intimate or tease each other with proposals about future things they might do from bringing flowers to behaving badly, from playing safe to smashing up the town.

In both of these works, it’s clear that all the statements are just that – phrases, positions and possibilities for a multitude of contexts which may or may not apply to these two people in particular. However, the energy generated by their performance, testing the system as they egg each other on, is so strong at times that the tipping point of play becoming real never seems too far away. In these works Etchells and Horvat expose how, in the performative exchanges that shape our relationships, real and staged drama are irresolvably intertwined.

Host Artists’ Group
‘Insults & Praises’ & ‘Promises & Threats’

Love owes a lot to theatre: if you want to work out what your emotions are towards someone you love, the best way to find out is to make a scene. Often it seems that feelings must be enacted to become real, but what is real when everyone knows that we’re all playing roles?

In the video works, ‘Insults & Praises’ and ‘Threats & Promises’, Tim Etchells and Vlatka Horvat expose how, in the performative exchanges that shape our relationships, real and staged drama are irresolvably intertwined.

Host Artists’ Group’s project focuses on the process, location and politics of artistic production. Their piece is an installation of models and sound broadcasts which reflect on the activities of 21 invited artists. The ‘Host 8: Observatory’ comprises 21 semi-transparent perspex models, made to scaled down plans of each represented artist’s workspace. Each model contains a light, the intensity of which will be set to a level that corresponds to the artist’s own perception of their current productivity. If the artist is running at full power, then so will the light; if in a period of latency, then the light will be dimmed. In addition, the participating artists compose bulletins on the state of their current activities that will be automatically relayed and played back intermittently in the space.

The project provokes questions concerning the viability and evaluation of artistic productivity. The trouble with artistic labour has always been that, while the inner and outer pressure to perform and be creative is always on, standards for assessing this creativity are impossible to determine. How do you measure the degree of dedication, the quality of ideas or the intensity of inspired moments that define the creative process?

While, for good reasons, artistic labour then resists objective evaluation, its conditions are not entirely subjective either – because they are shared. A lot of people make art, work under comparable precarious conditions and face similar pressures. It is precisely this ambivalence between the personal and the collective perception of artistic labour that the ‘Host 8: Observatory’ highlights (literally, and with tongue firmly in cheek) and politicises.
confabulation. Ever since labour has been industrialised, work time has been a heavily regulated system. The worker can then hold a call open and relax for a few seconds, while leaving a long, mysteriously silent message on the answer machine. The telephone system in many workplaces squanders this resource, winning back an alternative way of seeing – and thinking about structures – become tangible. By exposing the inherent ambiguities of seemingly regular patterns, Stocker effectively undermines the confidence in the rationality of structures on which a social etiquette is built.

In 'I Cannot in All Conscience Do What You Request', Stocker translates this sceptical stance from painting into the medium of video. The work consists of a series of posters, stating phrases of polite declining. Featuring a different phrase for each of the six weeks of the exhibition, the posters are displayed on fly poster sites around the city. Together, all six statements appear on a billboard outside Bloc on Eyre Lane. As the gesture of polite declining carves out a space in between open refusal and willing acceptance, it opens up a world of options beyond the restrictive binary alternative of yes and no that otherwise governs our actions. By unworking such rigid structures in painting and language, Stocker then formulates what might be called a reticent politics of purposeful vagueness. A stance that, in the face of the social pressure to perform, may constitute a most forceful form of opposition.

In his sculptures Polish artist Michal Budny presents autobiographical testimonies of semi-fictional characters. In written, sung or spoken monologues these characters speak about their life and work using a language that may be personal or formal or literary. These different forms of storytelling create an intimate way to address broader issues concerning the history of a place or the political stakes in a particular work situation.

In the sound piece ‘Words & Silence’ you listen to the voice of a fictional call centre worker. Her story is related to the listener in the form of a message left on an anonymous answer phone. The telephone system in many ‘call centres’ is programmed to automatically dial the next number as soon as one call is ended, so that the worker has to launch straight into the next call. The chance to take a break arises only if a call goes to an answer machine. The worker can then hold that call open and relax for a few seconds, while leaving a long, mysteriously silent message on the answer machine.

In the silence of such a moment, the worker in Rooney’s work begins to speak and tell her story. Defying the pressure to perform in the expected way, she carries out a different kind of performance, a performance of contemplation. Ever since labour has been industrialised, work time has been a heavily controlled resource. Rooney’s protagonist squanders this resource, winning back an intimate relationship between the human voice and silence in the process.

In his text, sound and video works, Paul Rooney presents autobiographical testimonies of semi-fictional characters. In written, sung or spoken monologues these characters speak about their life and work using a language that may be personal or formal or literary. These different forms of storytelling create an intimate way to address broader issues concerning the history of a place or the political stakes in a particular work situation.

In the sound piece ‘Words & Silence’ you listen to the voice of a fictional call centre worker. Her story is related to the listener in the form of a message left on an anonymous answer phone. The telephone system in many ‘call centres’ is programmed to automatically dial the next number as soon as one call is ended, so that the worker has to launch straight into the next call. The chance to take a break arises only if a call goes to an answer machine. The worker can then hold that call open and relax for a few seconds, while leaving a long, mysteriously silent message on the answer machine.

In the silence of such a moment, the worker in Rooney’s work begins to speak and tell her story. Defying the pressure to perform in the expected way, she carries out a different kind of performance, a performance of contemplation. Ever since labour has been industrialised, work time has been a heavily controlled resource. Rooney’s protagonist squanders this resource, winning back an intimate relationship between the human voice and silence in the process.

In his text, sound and video works, Paul Rooney presents autobiographical testimonies of semi-fictional characters. In written, sung or spoken monologues these characters speak about their life and work using a language that may be personal or formal or literary. These different forms of storytelling create an intimate way to address broader issues concerning the history of a place or the political stakes in a particular work situation.

In the sound piece ‘Words & Silence’ you listen to the voice of a fictional call centre worker. Her story is related to the listener in the form of a message left on an anonymous answer phone. The telephone system in many ‘call centres’ is programmed to automatically dial the next number as soon as one call is ended, so that the worker has to launch straight into the next call. The chance to take a break arises only if a call goes to an answer machine. The worker can then hold that call open and relax for a few seconds, while leaving a long, mysteriously silent message on the answer machine.

In the silence of such a moment, the worker in Rooney’s work begins to speak and tell her story. Defying the pressure to perform in the expected way, she carries out a different kind of performance, a performance of contemplation. Ever since labour has been industrialised, work time has been a heavily controlled resource. Rooney’s protagonist squanders this resource, winning back an intimate relationship between the human voice and silence in the process.

In his text, sound and video works, Paul Rooney presents autobiographical testimonies of semi-fictional characters. In written, sung or spoken monologues these characters speak about their life and work using a language that may be personal or formal or literary. These different forms of storytelling create an intimate way to address broader issues concerning the history of a place or the political stakes in a particular work situation.

In the sound piece ‘Words & Silence’ you listen to the voice of a fictional call centre worker. Her story is related to the listener in the form of a message left on an anonymous answer phone. The telephone system in many ‘call centres’ is programmed to automatically dial the next number as soon as one call is ended, so that the worker has to launch straight into the next call. The chance to take a break arises only if a call goes to an answer machine. The worker can then hold that call open and relax for a few seconds, while leaving a long, mysteriously silent message on the answer machine.

In the silence of such a moment, the worker in Rooney’s work begins to speak and tell her story. Defying the pressure to perform in the expected way, she carries out a different kind of performance, a performance of contemplation. Ever since labour has been industrialised, work time has been a heavily controlled resource. Rooney’s protagonist squanders this resource, winning back an intimate relationship between the human voice and silence in the process.

In his text, sound and video works, Paul Rooney presents autobiographical testimonies of semi-fictional characters. In written, sung or spoken monologues these characters speak about their life and work using a language that may be personal or formal or literary. These different forms of storytelling create an intimate way to address broader issues concerning the history of a place or the political stakes in a particular work situation.

In the sound piece ‘Words & Silence’ you listen to the voice of a fictional call centre worker. Her story is related to the listener in the form of a message left on an anonymous answer phone. The telephone system in many ‘call centres’ is programmed to automatically dial the next number as soon as one call is ended, so that the worker has to launch straight into the next call. The chance to take a break arises only if a call goes to an answer machine. The worker can then hold that call open and relax for a few seconds, while leaving a long, mysteriously silent message on the answer machine.

In the silence of such a moment, the worker in Rooney’s work begins to speak and tell her story. Defying the pressure to perform in the expected way, she carries out a different kind of performance, a performance of contemplation. Ever since labour has been industrialised, work time has been a heavily controlled resource. Rooney’s protagonist squanders this resource, winning back an intimate relationship between the human voice and silence in the process.
The Zone exists in a constant state of deserted strip of land and bleak interrogation empty gestures enacted on the stage of ceremonies of authority prescribed by their guards on both sides execute the silent acts of decorum performed in suspended time. It is a geopolitical void. Constantly alert, constantly inert, North and South face each other in a stalemate situation sealed by a cease-fire agreement 55 years ago.

Ever since then the heavy military presence on both sides of the Demilitarised Zone persists, turning the Zone into a symbol for the irresolvable conflict between two political systems that splits the country and haunts its citizens. George Bush described it in dramatic words as “The line dividing freedom and oppression and the one of the most dangerous places on earth”. In actually, however, the Demilitarised Zone is a no-man’s land where nothing happens, because it is there to prevent things from happening. The Zone exists in a constant state of suspense. Is it a geopolitical void.

In her video, Davies operates in this void. She shows how political reality manifests itself here in the ways how space is structured and time is regimented in this militarised environment. Facing each other across the turnpike, for instance, border guards on both sides execute the silent ceremonies of authority prescribed by their military protocol. It’s a choreography of empty gestures enacted on the stage of a deserted strip of land and bleak interrogation rooms. Davies then shows the local epicentre of a conflict of global proportions to be a non-place where power manifests itself in ghostly acts of decorum performed in suspended time.

Throughout modernity, architecture, like information, has become a global currency. Copies and clones of buildings appear in cities all over the world. Like commercial imagery and product brands they form the dialect of the modern planet. In his work Sean Snyder taps into this global currency, drawing on sources that range from news agencies like dpa or Reuters to American soldiers’ image exchange websites, from commercial satellite imagery of cityscapes to his own photos and videos from modern non-places like army compounds and metropolitan outskirts. Snyder channels this material into works that make you see what the world looks like today. The facades of the cities and surfaces of media images blend and form a world picture that looks pixelated, raw and connected, always updated but still eerily familiar and enigmatic.

For ‘Analepsis’, Snyder recorded hours of news footage from satellite television and isolated the short passages at the start of news items that show panoramic views of the city in which the reported event took place. He then arranged them according to the camera movement: panning across or zooming into cityscapes the camera scans the globe like a sentinel on a watchtower in the centre of the world. Wherever the camera turns, something seems about to happen. But nothing does. So, in the moment of an exhaustive overview, the gaze of the camera exhausts itself as it travels on endlessly. In this state of exhaustion, the power of the media image, the fantasy of absolute world-wide visibility, is most tangible, yet in the form of an empty potential and a most eerie sense of premonition. Some time soon something will happen somewhere. And one of the zillion camera-eyes will relate it right back, via satellite, to the nerve centre of the globe: your tv screen.

The art of Phil Collins investigates the nuances of social relations in various locations and global communities. Collins sometimes employs elements of popular culture, low-budget television or reportage-style documentary to address problems of representation within different media, and the complex relationship between the producer, the participant and the viewer.

For ‘they shoot horses’ Collins organised a disco dance marathon in Ramallah with young Palestinians. He filmed two separate groups dancing over the course of a working day, without breaks, to the soundtrack of pop hits from the past four decades. The resulting work is presented as a real time installation, interrupted only by intermittent technical problems, occasional power failures and calls to prayer from a nearby mosque. Dance marathons were a popular form of entertainment in the United States during the Great Depression. The historical irony of this craze for self-exhaustion during times of hardship was portrayed in the 1935 novel by Horace McCoy (adapted to film by Sydney Pollack in 1969) from which Collins took the title for his work.

Restaging such a marathon in Ramallah, a Palestinian city under Israeli occupation, and the place of daily discrimination and violence, would at first seem to invoke an even stronger sense of irony. However, as we experience the elation, stoicism and, finally, exhaustion of the dancers, it becomes clear that while Collins points to the tragedy of living in the midst of a violent conflict, he also celebrates the spirit of resilience, and a defiant insistence on having a life and enjoying it.

The performance of exhaustion, endurance and eventual collapse, then, comes to epitomise both a daily practice of survival under oppressive living conditions and a stance of resistance in the face of a seemingly interminable political crisis.
Neil Webb (new work)

‘Adrift’
The Winter Garden

In his sound works Neil Webb unframes time and creates places for thinking. Against the backdrop of a contemporary event culture that steadily increases the daily dose of media stimulation, Webb seeks to create moments of interruption that allow you to recalibrate your senses.

For his sound installation in the Winter Garden he works with diverse recordings: the ambient sound of people within the building is mixed with sounds of the building’s inner workings and external sound sources from nature. The recordings are further de-familiarised by being played back through water rather than air in the post-production process. The mix is then presented through ‘surface exciting speakers’ which activate glass surfaces within the building’s ambient sound of people within the building something more akin to an aquarium.

For ‘SK Parking’ (2001), for instance, Ondák used the exhibition budget provided by the Vienna gallery Secession to rent several Slovakian Skoda cars from friends in his home town Bratislava. Together they drove across the border, and parked the cars behind the exhibition space in the heart of Vienna. There the cars remained, unused, for the duration of the show, as an anti-monument publicly commemorating the interruption of time.

For Art Sheffield 08 Ondák will again realise an anti-monument for interrupted time – the piece ‘Failed Fall’, in the Winter Garden in the town centre. The temperate glass house contains evergreen exotic plants that are not subject to the seasonal cycle. Inspired by this moment of temporal suspension, Ondák decided to both underscore and invert the logic of the garden: for one winter week in February, the interior pavements of the Winter Garden will be filled with dry autumn leaves from average city trees.

Inconspicuously then, autumn invades the space of perpetual summer, as its remnants had just been blown in through the door. Yet, as the title affirms, it is a ‘Failed Fall’. The last one happened long ago. This one is an echo of the seasonal cycle exhausting itself. Time is out of joint and the place becomes surreal. As an anti-monument for interrupted time, ‘Failed Fall’ surely seems melancholy at heart, yet it equally also testifies to the liberating possibility of radically unravelling the structures that otherwise govern our expectations of how things should work. If even fall can fail, why should we be forced to always succeed?
Visiting Art Sheffield 08 – see www.artsheffield.org for travel / accommodation info.

Admission to all venues is free.

Art Sheffield 08 is organised by Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum, a not-for-profit company working to further the presence and awareness of contemporary art in Sheffield through joint programming, audience development and profile raising activities.

The directors of the company are Sheila McGregor (chair), Jeanine Griffin, Richard Bartle (Bloc Studios), Caroline Krzesinska (Sheffield Galleries & Museums Trust), Lesley Sanderson (artist & Sheffield Hallam University representative), Carol Maund (Site Gallery), Louise Hutchinson (S1 Artspace), Mir Jansen (Yorkshire ArtSpace Society) and Steve Dutton (artist & lecturer).

SCAF Director & Artistic Programme Manager: Jeanine Griffin
SCAF Marketing Officer: Jo Hodgson
Media Relations: Catharine Braithwaite
Festival Co-ordination Assistant: Hondartza Fraga

Sheffield Contemporary Art Forum
PO Box 3754, Sheffield S1 9AH
Telephone +44 (0)114 281 2013
Email contact@artsheffield.org
Website www.artsheffield.org