

Glossolalia

Launch Speech Notes

Definition and Interpretations

I want to approach the articulation of the nature and significance of the works in this exhibition through an elaboration on the definition of the title, and an evocation of the many interrelated states that are suggested through it, finally establishing why these are present in many forms of art but are central to the work in this exhibition.

Definition

The term is usually associated with the religious experience of 'speaking in tongues'. It implies a certain hysteria, a removal from the familiar, a direct apprehension of the spiritual or divine. This though, is still a limited definition. There is a broader and more secular application which is related but extended more broadly.

'Ecstatic Utterances' (For me, this is a key concept).

Other related concepts which come to mind are –

Uncanny Weird or unsettling, perhaps inexplicable

Sublime (Thomas Weiskel's definition) "The suspension of all known relations"

Liminal A transitional state, a between, a 'becoming' and possibly a 'leaving' a state or place. An indeterminate place which fluidly contains that being left and that being entered simultaneously. The 'Verge'. This has a dynamic, a time sense associated with it.

Ineffible Beyond the capacity of language to effectively describe.

Spiritual Not of this world, beyond the merely human, but also possibly contained within it. Relating to the Soul.

Relates to akin to transcendent experiences through more than, or beyond language, subliminal apprehension and associated inculcation. There is some relation to the Sublime both in formation but particularly in perception and 'effect'. Emanating from 'beyond' and creating an experience of transport to a 'beyond'. The concept of removal and return. The experience which goes beyond rational interpretation. Subverts normal rational practice, (which is reductive). Enters and expands consciousness.

The concept of the unknown, that which lies beyond whose existence can neither be conclusively proven or disproven. This Relates to the practices of art in many ways. Historically the connections are many, from Surrealism to Abstract Expressionism particularly. It resurfaces in Science Fiction, much of which is now Science Fact, The term the 'Uncanny Valley' has arrived in the fine art lexicon, – it derives from Robotics and refers to the possible negative potentiality within Artificial Intelligence and Robot development. With the entrance of more recent and contemporary technologies the contributions of the form begin to be more than mere means to create, they bring with them a new language, character and possibility, which in turn enlarges the potential of the artist's imagination.

There is a ghost in every machine. Yes, I am misquoting Arthur Koestler somewhat, but perhaps being faithful to him in this sense, "Every holon, (whole and part simultaneously), is willing to express two contradictory tendencies: to express itself, and to disappear into something greater" But I am also conveniently using the phrase to imply that in every machine or device there exists an inherent 'nature' which can extend beyond its initially-devised purpose - and artists discover these 'ghosts' and explore and exploit them. (That's why artists are often used to trial new technologies and uncover their unforeseen capacities).

But there is also an implication of the 'Release the Beast' anxiety which harks back to Mary Shelly's Frankenstein or Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde. Essentially, the fear of the unknown, or the unleashing of forces of evil, or opening a portal, Pandora's Box - so deeply embedded in the human psyche, currently expressed in the great Artificial Intelligence anxiety, not unrelated to the '50's Robot anxiety. (Exemplified the juxtaposition of an Advertisement in a Life magazine from the 1950's depicting Robot servants, (slaves) trimming the hedge, mowing the lawn and serving drinks, balanced in Science Fiction with stories of the possibility of Robots developing without our control and ultimately, enslaving humans.

We remain fascinated with the unknown and perhaps unknowable, it is a central defining aspect of the human condition and has always been so and always will. What intrigues a scientist may simply terrify or confound someone else. The tendency to retreat and delimit experience is the often-negative side of confrontation with the inexplicable. But through art we can open a portal, and invite the 'other' in, or let the

'inner' out. The process of Art is usually one of always reaching beyond our known capacity, a way of extending into new territory.

Enough of that, but in relating to the work of the artists in this exhibition, one of the key elements which fascinates me is the ways in which they manifest those elements which realise in another form, like Gail Priest's creation of a sonic and visual equivalence so that the experience of the works hovers simultaneously between and across the two forms. She is also manipulating the human sound source digitally thereby extending the capacity of the technology to create a secondary new source based on her own voice, as well as interpreting and expressing the source, and the visual interpretation is as analogue as art can get - drawing with pencil.

Sean Bacon's works, 'Moment to Moment 1 and 2' also combine analogue and digital and foregrounds the transformation from an analogue form to a digital one, as well as the interaction of the two. Video as "transformation imagery" as he quotes from Yvonne Spielmann. Werner Herzog's use of the term 'ecstatic truth' for video which Sean also invokes reminded me of Van Gogh's retort to a criticism of his work as being untrue to nature was that his art was, "untruth if you like, but more true than the literal truth". Sean's work also brings to mind without comment or judgement, the network of surveillance satellites which both measure and monitor our activity on this globe. Sean calls his process "A live occurrence represented", (re-presented probably fits too).

Abbie Calvert's recording and representation of Bird sounds is a rich, interplay of bird sounds recorded in the field, a sound with which we are in many ways quite familiar, but in the context of a dark space in this exhibition we can both concentrate on and become enmeshed by this dynamic sonic web without distraction. A suspended microphone allows us to traverse the space creating an interaction with the recorded sound. We can begin to contemplate what these sounds are signifying. Is it language, is it melody, or, as Calvert suggests, are these questions even relevant? We seem inevitably to assess any phenomenon through our own human nature. (Bird 'Song'?) Australia has been determined as the as the origin of Bird sounds Imagine a silent Forest?

I have known Matt Warren and his creative output for many years, initially as a percussionist in the avant-garde metal outfit 'Bodies Drawn Backwards', the first metal band to have a name which did not imply death, destruction of incorrectly placed umlauts. And a name which tangentially, implied some sort of ecstatic possession, even demonic perhaps.

There is a clue here for me at least – the idea of possession, the idea of transposition, of transcendence even, (note, 'Trance')

His output as an artist incorporates extraordinary adventures in video, interactions involving analogue and digital forms interacting, and numerous works across a wide range of digital media, not to mention his maintenance of an experimental music practice as in the Project 'Machines of Indeterminate Origin' (can you see a pattern here?)

His is a truly democratic and consistently exploratory practice, but suffice to say it is a practice which is constantly testing and questing, not defined by style, not constrained by medium or methodology and always working through the nature of perception, always alert to the presence of the magical within the banal, always hovering at the point where altered states are entering, or may be entered into.

We have become aware that our human selves are constantly being entered and traversed by any number of particles and signals, radio waves from light years hence and more from the many devices that we have created, and we traverse radio and electric fields and are essentially unaware of most of them. Yet they have the capacity to modify us in a variety of subtle ways. This constant flow of signals can be identified and utilised within artworks and can even be the primary elements of them. Such signals can be the outsider force intervening and having to be mediated, or nullified. In one work the sporadic appearance of points of light is in fact the record of a relic emanation from the 'Big Bang' a phenomenon from an entirely different place and an entirely different time. Yet 'alive' in our presence.

A physicist I once knew asserted that everything that exists is 'natural', and that once a human intervention had produced an object or a system it was inevitably 'natural'. Matt seems to be someone who might appreciate such a conception.

Matt's work, both in this show and generally, is quite diverse both in form and content but in many cases, it springs directly from life, and at times even contains partial or suggested 'narratives', sometimes very personal as in 'TWOOT' which

imagines the environment through a traverse of the birth canal. Or perhaps sometimes a moody (dare I say), Lynchian evocation of an interior space reminiscent of a Motel room, with a grainy night view to passing life outside. 'Project Blue Book' addresses the '50's obsession with extra-terrestrial visits which taps into both our fear and fascination with the 'Other', and this was of course also the golden age of Science Fiction.

Matt's work is thoroughly developed within his extensive understanding of digital media and installation practice. This virtuosity allows him great freedom to freely navigate concepts, narratives and emotions. His works are entirely engaging, and the methodology is always at the service of the concept, (which may also arise in concert with the medium). This often-immersive quality renders his work accessible and deeply engaging. While these works may explicate concepts they also act as compelling environments, subtle, evocative and emotionally powerful, despite their sometimes apparently 'mundane' or seemingly-banal triggers.

He invests the 'normal' with a paranormal value.

Seán Kelly

May 2022