

Present Place

Matt Green

June 5th – July 5th 2008

PS², Belfast

Opening hours: Wed-Sat 1-5pm

“Present Place” is the culmination of my activity within the PS² project space over a three-week period. This has been an act of both creative sound practice and ethnographic documentation.

The Sound Installation

In total over 8 hours of sound recordings have been assessed. These provide document of the sonic character of the space at varying times of day and differing days of the week. From this catalogue a number of short samples (generally 3 minutes in length) have been created that either form a typical ‘din’ or include a salient event of interest. These fragments have been collected together and appropriately arranged. The resulting collage is projected back into the space through speakers positioned in reference to the original recording locations.

Once projected, the sound composition becomes juxtaposed against the present resounding activity within the space. The augmenting and real sound layers exhibit a strong correlation and relation, they are both ‘of’ the same place. The listener is thus easily drawn into creating synthetic connections between the two: they struggle to clarify whether sound is real or a speaker projection, they believe that recorded elements are properties of present events (seen visually) and distrust real sounds that raise above the ordinary, supposing that they are the aesthetic inclusions of the artist. The result is an uncanny experience, one of apprehension, surprise and unease.

In support of the above, the installation has been configured cinematically: the front window as the screen and the actual and augmenting soundscapes providing the soundtrack. This analogy is continued through out the presented composition: The sound work has been accented with a series of scenes which form a stark narrative and outline how the space could be, or has been, inhabited. These constructed events, played out in real time within real space, feed the viewers curiosity and provide further incarnations of ‘the uncanny’.

The Audiovisual Analysis

Presented alongside the sound projection is a selection of surveys which account the sonic and visual occurrences observed through the gallery window over 12 minute periods. The audio was annotated first, with the visual removed. The accompanying recorded image was then examined without it's soundtrack.

The timeline down the centre of the printed analysis marks the middle of the windowpane. Events found to the far left of this line were observed to be projecting from this position. Similarly, annotations on the right were observed to be projecting from the right side of the space. The arrows denote movement.

The original expectation of these assessments was that they would provide a detailed account of the space and it's street view, and highlight typical patterns (over minutes or over days) and sonic traits (e.g. the rattling of the right window panel upon the passing of large vehicles). However, the surveys expose much more than this: a reading of an audio analysis alongside it's respective visual analysis reveals differences in the information delivered through the two channels, such as events you hear but don't see. Furthermore, they demonstrate an inadequacy in our language for describing certain sounds when we cannot give reference to a visual form. For example, I found describing the sound of a pram being folded down and placed into a car boot incredibly difficult when assessing only the audio.

For more information on this exhibit and on the PS² itself, please visit the work blog at <http://presentplace.wordpress.com> or <http://www.pssquared.org/>

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