



Cally Spooner
Post-production 2015
video installation

Theatrical and carefully choreographed, the footage disorients by fracturing space and overlaying chronology. It is also crude, uneven and fallible. It shows the mess of the studio environment, preserving mistakes as part of the process: one of the dancers loses her earpiece and struggles to replace it; the cameras roll on.

Interspersed is another film, *Off-Camera Dialogue*, and it marks the only time that all five screens synchronise. It is the close-up of an anonymous employee looming large, his head cropped. He is heckled by a voice, playing God, which interjects repeatedly in a bid to improve the employee's spoken delivery, putting words in his mouth. These are the ads, putting thoughts in your head.

And then there is Spooner's script. Phrases like, 'He can talk the talk but can he walk the walk?' – made meaningless through overuse in the marketing machines of business, politics and the media – are repeated, trilled and chanted. Spooner feeds her cast a collage of tired words borrowed from internet forums which her singers transform through their incantations. Their delivery renders the disconnect between the banal and the dramatic unexpectedly poignant at times. The result moves between cacophony and harmony, both comedic and beautiful, building up to a gospel-like crescendo with 'finalise'.

According to Hannah Arendt, to whom Spooner is openly indebted, 'the doer of deeds, is possible only if he is at the same time the speaker of words'. No one is left intact through *Post-production* as action and speech are repeatedly divorced. As director – the ultimate doer – Spooner's voice chirps cheerful directives at intervals. We hear but don't see her. She communicates to her entire crew via earpieces throughout (words we don't hear but presumably see the result of). Her singers fall in and out of sync with the visual and audio footage or are muted unexpectedly. And her army of stagehands remains largely silent – doing not speaking. The human condition appears disenfranchised: words are reappropriated or otherwise ventriloquised; actions made irrelevant; and voices unheard. It feels familiar in this post-election fog.

Though clearly meta-cinema, *Post-production* avoids the academic pitfalls of cold, dry self-consciousness by echoing the nature of contemporary existence dislocated by and beholden to attention-seeking technology. It enacts a series of power relations turning on the primacy of personal voice and its dislocation through choreography, live and recorded performance and ventriloquism, calling to mind a seminal text like Steven Connor's *Dumbstruck*. This all lends Spooner's work impressive conceptual traction: it is intellectually substantial as well as meticulously and spiritedly executed. That's quite something. ■

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Vong Phaophanit & Claire Oboussier: it is as if

Block 336 London 2 May to 26 June

It is a basement space in an industrial warehouse block of artists' studios: bare concrete floor, white walls, no natural light. The only illumination is from three wall-filling video projections, but they are obscured as we enter by a scattered forest of thin timber struts wedged at angles between floor and ceiling. The function of these beams is to transport the viewer to a theatrical realm that acts as an imagination amplifier, unbinding us from quotidian realities and enhancing the free play of associative metaphor. It is in this state that the films – and the relationship between them – are to be encountered and understood. But if the work employs theatre in order to effect dramatic emotional change, it relies for its charge, as we will see, on two other theatres: surgery and war.

But first, those struts. Linearity has long been a trope of Vong Phaophanit & Claire Oboussier, who have worked together – at first informally and later as a collaborative partnership – for 25 years. While some may remember Phaophanit's use of neon strips in his Turner Prize exhibition in 1993, his hanging forest of bamboo poles from 1991 and field of steel rods from 1998 are more obvious precedents. But something is different here. The beams are not aligned and do not hint at an overarching sense of spiritual order and serenity; instead this is organic – order by growth not design. At first, the impression on entering the space is of a shallow ocean environment, with the sound of trickling water combining with the dim blue video glow to suggest that these sticks are reeds, weeds or, better still, mangrove roots – the mesh that saved undeveloped coastal regions during the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami of 2004.

Water is an explicit component of the work; the first video shows a river surface, rippling with constant, endless eddies of unfathomable complexity. Occasionally the image blends, merges and reveals another shot of water; we learn that the two scenes are of the Thames and the Mekong rivers – 'here' and 'there', although these terms are reversible for an artist duo born in Laos and London respectively. Opposite, a second film shows rural Laotian landscapes, though the derelict buildings depicted are not the result of the tsunami – Laos is land-locked – but rather the aftermath of civil war and the Vietnam War, during which Laos became the most heavily bombed country on the planet as the US dropped more ordnance than was used in the whole of the Second World War in an attempt to lay waste to what the US called the Ho Chi Minh trail that ran, like the Mekong, through



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