

the voice one cannot control

'The Voice One Cannot Control' was a text/audio installation, originally commissioned for *Concrete Feedback*, curated by Brandon La Belle, Southern Californian Institute of Architecture, Los Angeles, Nov 2002.

'The Voice One Cannot Control' is a triptych. Three stories about three places. Three stories written in London travel to Seoul and then to Los Angeles. At the same time they are translated from English to Korean and back again, from writing to speaking and back again. To travel to Los Angeles, the Korean audio tapes were translated back into their mother tongue, but into written rather than verbal English.

The installation consists of three pairs of texts in English (size determined by site) and three audio recordings (approximately 2 minutes each in length) in Korean. Each story exists as a pair of texts, set either side of a pillar at eye level, far apart to make simultaneous reading difficult but possible. Both texts are in English, one is the original, the other a written translation once removed through a Korean voice. The Korean audio recordings are placed between the texts, audible just at the point where the reader can no longer read both texts simultaneously.

Much of Jacques Derrida's work has been a defence of writing against speech: he discusses how speech has been prioritised for being closer to the presence of meaning. It is in writing that Derrida finds a distance from presence and so a potential for slippage in meaning to occur. It is the uncertainty of meaning found in writing that Derrida celebrates. But rather than focus on the misreadings possible through writing; what about the misunderstandings possible in speech? What about the inability of the speaker to say what s/he 'really means'? Mladen Dolar has critiqued Derrida for depriving the voice of ambiguity, commenting that the voice is not only the voice of self-presence but also that voice that one cannot control.

moss green

It's a beautiful house - one storey building, with a square plan - born at the birth of modernism in the aftermath of the First World War. It embodies the values of early English modernism, of the arts and crafts movement: 'truth to materials' and honest craftsmanship. From the road it looks a little un-loved, in need of some care and attention. Up close it is clearly derelict, almost in ruins. We enter a room with windows at each end. Curtains are falling away from the runners. The fabric has been soaked overnight and is drying in the spring afternoon sunshine. On the window cill and spilling over onto the floor are piles of old magazines. The pages are stuck together and disintegrate if you pull them apart. There are some photographs of buildings. One is particularly damp, the corners are soft, the surface is

wrinkled. It shows a tower block, just completed, empty and pristine, a moss green utopia, the modernist dream dispersing as it soaks up spring rain.

Green of spread moss.

A beautiful house evolved from a one-story square plan at the dusk of modernism after the World War I. This house presents values of the early English modernism on the basis of the truthfulness of materials and honest craftsmanship. When viewed from a street, however, it looks never-beloved and is in need of attention and care. If approaching it to take a closer look, we are to realise it is deserted to become a ruin. We go into the room through windows on both sides of the house. A curtain is drawn long down as if it block people from the access in, and the fabric is slowly drying its wet body in the sunshine of Spring. Heaps of magazines spread throughout on the window frame and the floor. When tried to open their pages, they become broken apart. Among a few pictures of buildings one is very wet, and its surface is wrinkled, though its corners are smooth. It is very like a tile-block. Green utopia covered with primitive moss just created and thus empty.(?) A modernist's dream becomes wet with Spring rain and dispersed.

white linen

I dreamt of the house last night. My mothers house in Cwmgors, south Wales, a place where it always rained in the holidays, that as a kid I resented, but now as it is being taken from me, I already begin to miss. I was in the dining room; the rest of the house was empty except this one room. The furniture was far too big and covered in linen. The air was thick and still, silent. With the curtains drawn, it was very dark, but the linen glowed white. I went towards the mantel- piece to take a look at myself in the mirror, and I saw for the first time in the reflection, that the room was full of plants; so alive I could smell moisture still on their leaves.

White linen.

Last night, I dreamt of mother's house in South Wales. Though, in my childhood, I was angry, for it always rained on weekends, now I begin to miss it (the time?) as it slips out of my memory. I was in the dining room, and all the other spaces of the house was empty. All the furniture were huge and they were covered with linen. Air was turbid in silence. Though very dark was it with curtains drawn down, linen was radiating its whiteness. To see myself in a mirror, I approached to the ornament(?). And, for the first time, I saw the reflection of myself. The room was full of plants, and they were so lively that I could smell still damp fragrance from their leaves.

Bittersweet

In Palafrugell, a small town north of Barcelona on the Costa Brava is a derelict cork factory with a clock tower in front. The clock tower is a handsome structure, elegant and robust, but the clock on top has stopped. The floor is covered in dust and pieces of furniture, lamp-stands, chairs and old printing machinery. There are words everywhere scattered all over the floor: burnt orange, turquoise, black and white, bittersweet. We stay in the factory a long time. We don't speak, just walk and look. Later, once we've left the building, he brings something to show me. It is a white sign with carefully painted black letters: 'Bittersweet'. I reach into my bag and pull out a clear square section rod; along one side of it letters printed onto cardboard are embedded in the perspex. From the top it is out of focus, but from the side, you can read it: 'Bittersweet'.

Bittersweet.

There in a small town of Costa Brava in the north of Barcelona is a deserted cork-factory, and standing in front of it is a clock tower. Though the clock tower is a good-looking structure, as much as it is elegant and strong, the clock itself is dead. The floor is covered with dust and furniture such as a lamp stand, a chair and an old printing machine. Words are spread throughout on the floor. Burnt Orange, Jade Green, Black and White, Bittersweet..... We stay in the factory for a while. Without speaking, we just walk and see. When we leave the building, he brings something to show me. A white sign on which black letters painted carefully. Bittersweet. I take a square rod from my bag and use it to clean the letters that is printed on one side of the strawboard. They are legible from sides though out of focus if seeing from the top. Bittersweet.

In 2001 when Jules Wright asked me to write about 'Spring', a work by Elina Brotherus she had commissioned for the Wapping Project in London, I found myself turning to three short texts I had written concerning three sites – two remembered, one dreamed. 'Spring' was composed of two installations: a video triptych, 'Rain, The Oak Forest and Flood', in the boiler house and a back-lit image 'Untitled', showing a pale grey Icelandic sky over lava covered in moss, reflected in the water tank on the roof. A work that anticipates spring, the work opened in Wapping just after the autumn equinox in the northern hemisphere. Brotherus' interest in longing and my own in nostalgia provided me with three positions from which to consider her work in relation to themes of longing, nostalgia, anticipation and yearning.

'Moss Green' describes a derelict house in the green belt where in early March we found photographs of a brave new world of modernist high-rise housing. Just after the autumn equinox, just after her death, I dreamt of the home of my Welsh great aunt. 'White Linen' recalls this dream, while 'Bittersweet' remembers a spring visit to an abandoned cork factory in Catalunya where we found the names of colours scattered over the floor.

For an expedition to Seoul, as 'what is the colour of memory?' (April 2002), each text was translated into Korean and accompanied by its 'object': an album of photographs found at Moss Green, a white linen cloth, and the word 'bittersweet' found in the factory. The texts were translated back into written English from the Korean audio recordings for their journey to Los Angeles as 'the voice one cannot control' (November 2002). In moving, the words were translated from English to Korean and back again, from writing to speaking and back again. For 'Concrete Feedback at SYARC curated by artist Brandon La Belle, the three pairs of texts were placed along a corridor with three columns, each one either side of a column. Three audio installations positioned the Korean voice at the point where the texts could no longer be read together.

See Jane Rendell, 'Writing in place of speaking', Sharon Kivland and Lesley Sanderson (eds.), Transmission: Speaking and Listening, (Sheffield Hallam University and the Site Gallery, 2003).

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