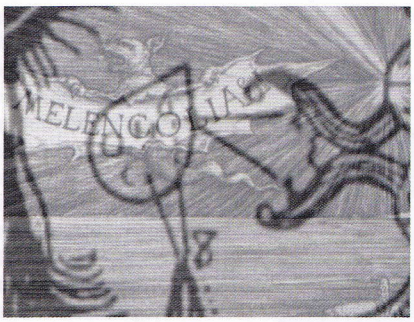
Dicksmith Gallery, London, UK

Writing in Strobe

The first time I visited 'Writing in Strobe' I was in a hurry, having arrived just minutes before the gallery was due to close. I was relieved to learn that the exhibition, curated by Andrew Hunt, was designed to be read quickly, conceived as a response to Gilles Deleuze's analysis of Hélène Cixous' *Neutre* (Neutral, 1972), which proposes that Cixous' writing only begins to open itself up to the reader when read at pace. The faster one reads, argues Deleuze, the more freely the elements in Cixous' writing connect in chains of association, ultimately reaching a point of 'perpetual slippage' at which they no longer connect to one another but create a kind of literary white noise, and thus a cohesive whole. In the text adorning their *Plastique Fantastique Shrine* (2006), one of a number of works made especially for this show, David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan write hopefully of embracing this white noise and arriving 'finally, at that frozen stillness at the heart of the cosmos'. In fact the work presents a mockery of such aspirations, employing psychedelic graphics, joss-sticks, candles and a human skull as weary motifs of counter-culture lifestyle choices that have long been absorbed by the high-street fashion industry.

In an adjacent work Steven Shearer offers a less cynical study of youth subculture in his *List* (2004–6). The names of thousands of Black Metal bands and their corresponding releases are arranged in columns on a large sheet of paper, creating an awesome document that attests to both the breadth of this culture and the seemingly infinite nuances of the specific language that describes it. The work chimes neatly with Pavel Buchler and Nick Thurston's *Head Over Heels and Far Away* (2006) in the room upstairs, a publication of every Franz Kafka quotation in Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* (1986), giving a strobed reading of Kafka's *oeuvre* that is neither entirely arbitrary nor meaningfully comprehensive. In both works it is left to the viewer to create their own strobing effect, determining the jump-cuts according to the personal limits of patience and curiosity.

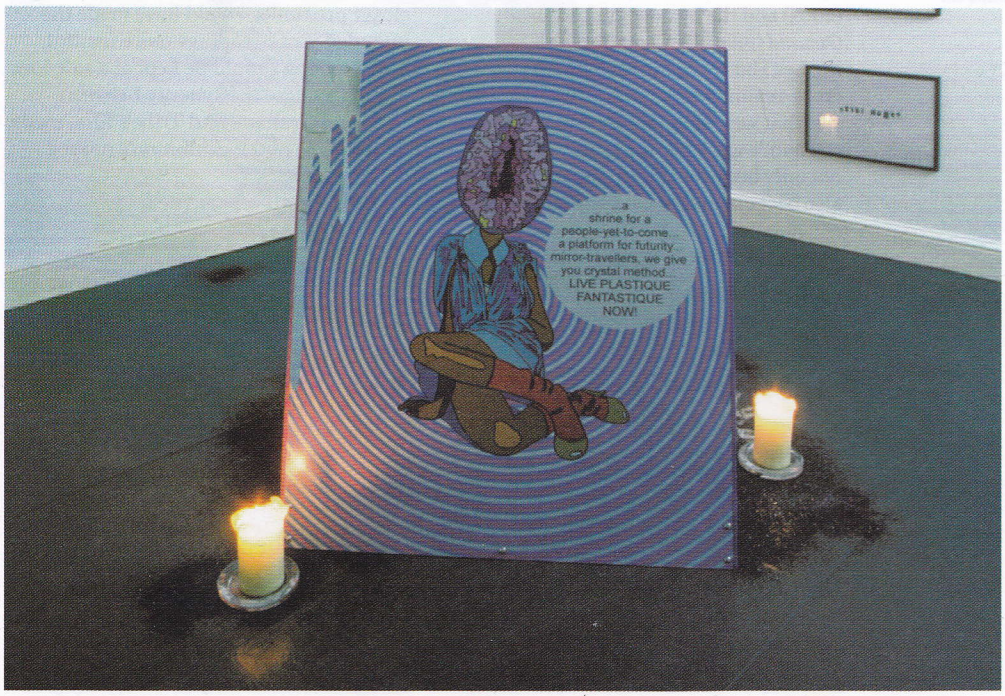


John Cussans
The Materialization of the Phantom Muse
2006
DVD still

Most works, however, were quick to read and lent themselves readily to cross-pollination with other elements in the show. The immediacy of newspaper headlines recurred in the text collages and drawings of Matthew Thompson and Adam McEwen, while Eva Weinmayr covered a page of *The Sun* newspaper in a pearlescent layer of metallic car lacquer, which in turn reflected the flashing neon of The Thirteenth Collective's *#1 Record (after Ron Pekar)* (2006), a reproduction of artwork for the band Big Star's first album. The use of stroboscopic light effects (seen also in Thompson's neon *Empty*, 2003, in the upper gallery), which filled nearly all of the exhibition, and the loud, pervasive soundtrack to Aline Bouvy and John Gillis' video *Politics of the Self* (2003) were rather straightforward ways of creating linkage, or interference, between art works. In fact at times in the exhibition it felt as though fulfilment of the curatorial conceit, succinct as it was, threatened to smother the work itself, denying it air to breathe. The very tightness of the web of associations, and the diverse means by which these connections were achieved, resulted in a sense that every possible path through the work had already been signposted and trampled before the audience had a chance to make its own explorations.

The most rewarding moments in the exhibition arose when I became less aware of the clatter of the show behind me; John Cussans' *The Materialization of the Phantom Muse* (2006), for instance, was entirely appropriate to the theme of the show and managed (it being a DVD display with headphones) to maintain a degree of autonomy from the work around it. A deeply personal ode to a lost love, the work attempted to come to terms with a failed relationship through the examination of the 'memorial clusters' of the self – which in Cussans' case included footage of his home town, a scene from Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* (2002) and a panning close-up of Albrecht Dürer's *Melancholia* (1514). The piece was hermetic enough to allow the viewer to wander within it and to reach a point at which it was no longer entwined with the rest of the show. Other works, such as Sue Tompkins' typed text works or John Latham's split-second spray paintings, as captivating as they might be when seen alone, only seemed to defer to and illustrate the exhibition's curatorial premise. Ultimately everything returned to 'Writing in Strobe', which, as Deleuze makes clear in his original text, is an 'effect' rather than a satisfying subject in itself. The second time I visited the show I stayed far longer, and although I was able to read and re-read works at higher and higher speeds, I found the frozen heart of the cosmos an unsurprisingly empty place to be.

Jonathan Griffin



David Burrows and Simon O'Sullivan
Plastique Fantastique Shrine
2006
Mixed media
Dimensions variable