



Event Sculpture 2
Ceal Floyer, 'Silent Movie' (2014)
24 November 2014

Response by Agnieszka Gratza, 26 November 2014

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Before the advent of the first 'talkies,' or 'talking pictures,' in the late 1920s, the term 'silent movie' would have been tautological. In the so-called silent era, the attribute would merely have stated the obvious just as 'sound film' does today, now that we take synchronised recorded sound in films more or less for granted.

En route to the Henry Moore Institute for the second instalment of The Event Sculpture exhibition, I try to imagine what a 'silent movie' according to Ceal Floyer might be. The work's title is pretty much all I have to go on at this stage, but that's plenty to be getting on with given the programmatic nature of the artist's titles. Descriptive common idioms such as this are grist to Floyer's mill. So I wrestle with the titular words for a while, sounding out their metaphoric potential, turning them upside down and inside out, coming at them from different angles. I am wide of the mark, as it turns out. But who could fathom that the artist's silent film would be made using a metal detector? Metal detectors are not known for being silent; and yet that seems to be precisely Floyer's point. Part of the object's very identity is the familiar beep - something many of us are likely to associate with going through airport security rather than treasure hunting or mineral prospecting. This sound, paradoxically, will be edited out of the work.

During a lull in the preparations for the filming itself, which is to take place the next day on the public square outside the Henry Moore Institute, I ask Floyer if silence has ever previously been part of the material fabric of her work. Heinrich Böll's (1917-85) short story *Murke's Collected Silences* (1955) centres on a radio editor who collects and splices together discarded taped recordings of silences to listen to in his spare time. Something akin to this peculiar occupation described by the German writer is at work in the 'edited' video pieces that Floyer tells me about in reply to the question.

Made shortly after she moved to Berlin, 'Edit (Stralauer Platz)' (1999) is perhaps the most obvious precedent to the work the artist is making for The Event Sculpture. At first glance, all we see in this work is a grey concrete façade with three windows filmed from across a street. Despite the audible traffic noise generated by the vehicles driving past, there are no actual cars to be seen. Barely perceptible changes in the intensity of the light, and a leaf or two moving along the pavement, signal a

car's phantom passage. 'Filming absence,' as Floyer puts it, is what connects the five-minute video to the 'Silent Movie' in the making.

Shot with a tiny GoPro camera affixed to the metal detector's coiled stem, this site-specific video work will show in the centre of the image the head of the handheld metal detector as it moves over the pavement stones in front of the Henry Moore Institute. In the artist's eyes, this is a 'readymade' sculptural element. But, in the work, the characteristic beep that the metal detector makes every time it goes over a metallic object will have been excised, resulting in a jump cut, a shifting ground effect – what Floyer eloquently describes, borrowing from the vocabulary of sound, as a 'staccato image.'

Just how silent the movie will be depends on the goodwill of the fairground ride attendants who have set up shop in Victoria Gardens, the square on the Institute's doorstep, in the run up to Christmas. No stranger to irony, Floyer appeared somewhat bemused at the thought of a 'silent movie' with a soundtrack of Christmas songs loud enough to drown out the metal detector's piercing beep. Then again, 'silent movie' was always something of a misnomer.