Event Sculpture 4

**Simon Martin, ‘Lemon 03 Generations (Turn It Around version)’ (2014)**
22 December 2014

Response by Agnieszka Gratza, 24 December 2014

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Two weeks after Roman Signer’s ‘Chair’ (2014) extravaganza unfolded against the backdrop of the Henry Moore Institute its polished black granite surface is yet again the focus of attention. The black expanse seems to almost naturally designate it as a projection screen - with Hollis Frampton’s iconic 1969 film ‘Lemon’, in which the light-bearing titular fruit at first appears against a jet-black background, an ideal candidate. This film is revisited by artist Simon Martin in ‘Lemon 03 Generations (Turn It Around version)’ (2014), the fourth in The Event Sculpture series. ‘What I enjoy about the Frampton film,’ he tells me following the event, ‘is the revelation of the fruit coming out of the darkness.’

The word ‘revelation’ is a charged one, particularly so close to Christmas. There is evidence of it all around us in front of the Institute – not least in the strings of lit-up garlands reflected in the bottom part of the façade, framing the projected image of the lemon. The evening before, I had attended a Sunday carol service where the church lights had been dramatically dimmed, according to custom, in prelude to a reading from St John’s Book of Revelation. In like manner, Martin’s event began as soon as the two nearest streetlights had been exceptionally turned off by the city council, creating a window of darkness lasting about twenty minutes for the action.

Frampton’s original and Martin’s digital appropriation of it last just under seven and a half minutes. Martin remembers first seeing the image of Frampton’s film, which was to haunt him for years, at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. In his recollection, the 16mm film was shown as a DVD on a loop in an ambient-lit space. The film was never meant to be presented like that, according to Martin. Like many experimental filmmakers, Frampton would have favoured a one-off projection and conceived the screenings as an event. Projecting a version of the film, albeit digitalized and distorted, in a specific setting, as a singular event, would appear closer to the spirit of the original work.

Martin acknowledges, with more than a hint of scepticism, that he does not know what Frampton’s film – widely available on YouTube – is meant to look like. I point out that the exact reproduction of ‘Lemon’ he made digitally robs the fruit of its surface detail and lustrous texture to the point where it appears less voluptuous than Frampton’s ur-lemon. Martin admits to having ‘damaged, messed up, run through a VHS tape, done something to destroy the integrity of the Hollis Frampton original’
every time he has shown it. The result is a deliberately compromised, non-definitive, contingent version of it – what he calls ‘a bad copy.’

The original one-shot film unfolds in silence; it is an exercise in concentrated looking. Martin further violates its integrity by endowing the film with a soundtrack. Not just any soundtrack. Once the techno beat kicks in, after a tentative beginning, the muffled thump emanating from two sets of loudspeakers placed to the right of the Institute’s entrance, below the projected image, sounds remarkably like what one might hear outside a night club. This ambient sound is the artist’s idea of ‘a ghost song to go with the ghost image.’ The continuous beat disguises the composite nature of the soundtrack, which is made up of all kinds of samples: voices, discrete sounds, techno tracks, even a one-word quote from ‘The Fire Sermon’ section in *The Waste Land* (1922). Martin waxes lyrical about the word ‘burning,’ uttered by T. S. Eliot himself (though the artist has altered the pitch of his voice beyond recognition). Easily missed, or lost to the drizzle and the rain, this ‘submerged, buried sound’ crops up at the very end, when the title comes up in the credits.

That the event happens to (nearly) coincide with the winter’s solstice – incidentally, the title of a 1974 film by Frampton, featuring a burning globe and fiery imagery – is a coincidence, but a happy one. In one dazzling moment, the drizzle catches the light of projection as the outline of the bulky fruit that darkness had just engulfed reappears against a violet backdrop, standing for dawn and light returning.