



FILM

Rewind and repeat to fade

Is it film? Live art? Rock? Who cares? Subversive re-enactments are the way forward

The late 1970s: rebellion, revolution, resistance, destruction as creation. Cliché or commentary? Maybe neither, maybe both. Maybe mayhem is a determining condition of myth, the final irony of a period so resistant to authority guaranteeing its own legacy. Fabrication as history's fuel is both the form and content of Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler's multi-media installation "The Poetics Project 1977-1997" being shown in the UK for the first time, reconfigured for the Barbican's Curve Gallery by the artists and curator Christine Van Assche of the Pompidou.

Shown at documenta X in 1997, it was preceded by the first ever release of remixed tracks from 1977 to 1983 by Kelley and Oursler's band-cum-artists'-collective, The Poetics. The CD box set is a product adrift from the original set of circumstances that it capitalises on, a brand new relic of the semi-calamitous live performances and private experiments that are both re-told and told for the first time in "The Poetics Project". A clash of aesthetic registers, modes of reception and display enact a chaotic chronicle of interdisciplinary mayhem as historical document. Sculpture, painting, video projection and constructed sets all defy their traditional parameters, overlapping each other, becoming the functional space-dividers and screens of multiple installations. This mesh of index points confuses the relationship between origin and

exhibit, author and object, compounded by video recordings ranging from interviews with eye-witnesses of The Poetics' performances, their collaborators, critics attempting definitions, reality-style recreations of the band's rehearsals, performances and squabbles, and ambient shots of an unlikely Californian landscape. The spectator physically moves through Kelley and Oursler's rigorously investigated fakes: history made manifest by unapologetic façade and the mess of its re-experiencing.

If the simultaneous fusion and dissolution of boundaries characterise The Poetics, Ian Forsyth and Jane Pollard's latest work occupies a not dissimilar territory. No strangers to the intersection between popular culture and the spectacles that fuel it, their 1998 re-enactment at the ICA of David Bowie's final Ziggy Stardust concert was an amazing moment of iconic avant-rock as live art. "File Under Sacred Music" pushes their practice further, recreating the Cramps' legendary performance at Napa Mental Institute in 1978 in order to produce the bootleg video of that event. The gig, also at the ICA, though this time in a closed set, was staged for the benefit of carefully controlled cameras, themselves mimicking the original, limited recording equipment with awkward panning shots and fixed positions, to an audience of "users and survivors of the psychiatric system" invited by the artists and mental health charities.

The magnitude and sensitivity of this engagement should not be underestimated. Its terms, beyond any binary, liberal accusations of exploitation, dared to embrace, more extremely than before, the tragic flaw lying between chance and action that makes Forsyth and Pollard's epic structures of re-performance such extraordinary works of art. While the Cramps' anarchic energy was passionately re-enacted by Alfonso Pinto, Holly Golightly, Bruce Brand and John Gibbs, the audience's freedom was collapsed simultaneously onto the pressure of recording. The gap between past and present became the difference between acting and being, a process both facilitated by and commenting upon today's mental health service and a lost dynamic between radical 'pop' and political action – something no less articulated by the coveted, cult-status bootleg video made art object, another façade from that glorious theatre of failure we ought by now to call the truth.

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"The Poetics Project 1977-1997", to 20 July, The Curve, Barbican Centre, London EC2 (+44 (0)20 7638 4141, www.barbican.org.uk). "File Under Sacred Music", 13 June, ICA, London SW1 (+44 (0)20 7930 3647, www.ica.org.uk)

Mike Kelley and Tony Oursler, *Nondiscript God*, 1997