



IAIN FORSYTH AND JANE POLLARD

Kate MacGarry, London
16 September to 24 October 2005

Reviewed by Miria Swain

It looks to be early evening from the light that illuminates a small section of wall in an otherwise dimly lit and apparently windowless corridor. A young man strides towards us - the camera - reaches forward and sounds a buzzer; 'Hâello, hello, I know you're there...' he says.

In a similar vein to previous works by Iain Forsyth and Jane Pollard their new work, *Walking After Acconci (Redirected Approaches)* (2005) re-enacts, reworks and revises a seminal work from 1973 by Vito Acconci entitled *Walk-Over (Indirect Approaches)*. In this video work Acconci paces up and down the corridor of an apartment block, humming to himself and talking to the camera as if to a past lover. With what seems like cruel self-indulgence he recounts the details of his new lover, while intermittently smoking a cigarette.

Calling the piece *Walking After Acconci* is immediately relevant, playing on the way that art history describes attributing artworks that are in the style of a master. In a contemporary version of this, Forsyth and Pollard's work pays homage to Acconci by appropriating the idea behind his work and imitating the process by which the idea is made manifest. Just as Acconci's original was conceived as a filmed performance, so too is Forsyth and Pollard's version - performed in an almost exact replica environment to the space in which Acconci enacted the original.

Where the new piece departs from the old is in Forsyth and Pollard's choice of performer. Rather than one of the artists, or an actor impersonating Acconci, Acconci's part is played by Plan B (679 recordings), a freestyling MC. Instructed by the artists, Plan B takes the spirit of Acconci's original and updates it; reinterpreting the filmed performance in his own language, drawing inspiration from his own personal frame of reference. Shot in a single take, without any editing, Plan B presents a twenty-four minute virtuoso performance; but without rehearsal or script there are inevitably some additions and adaptations that go beyond the words spoken. The doorbell, for instance, does not feature in the original and rather than breaking up the monologue with humming as Acconci does, Plan B whistles.

The doorbell in particular is a clever addition that draws us, the viewer, into the action. Presenting the video on a widescreen plasma TV also comes across as more than just a slick display choice, mimicking as it does, the kind of view you get if you peer through a letterbox. These details contribute to a sense of the viewer being implicated in the work, as if it is 'we' that are standing behind a door looking through a letterbox or at the display of a video intercom. Plan B's use of the first person further accentuates this feeling; 'you' and 'we' becomes us - a mute soundboard against which Plan B projects his improvised monologue. Faced with this spatial dynamic the work elicits a personal response that makes it hard not to reflect upon past and failed relationships, broken hearts and difficult break-ups.

As we are drawn further into the piece, a voyeuristic pleasure in watching becomes more central to our experience. 'I know you like to watch' says Plan B in playful recognition of this; forcing us to acknowledge the titillation



Iain Forsyth & Jane Pollard
Walking After Acconci (Redirected Approaches) 2005
24 mins, DVD
Courtesy Kate MacGarry, London

in someone divulging details of their love life. The intimacy of this statement and its affect on the viewer is heightened by a series of full screen close ups of Plan B's eyes and lips as he leans up close to the camera. In a contemporary take on *Susannah and the Elders*, we can see him, we can hear his accusations and confessions, but he can't see us. Exploring the power-dynamic between looking and being looked at was undoubtedly in the mind of Acconci when he first conceived *Walk-Over*, as are many of the ideas that come through in Forsyth and Pollard's version. This forces the question of what Forsyth and Pollard bring to the piece that wasn't already present in the original.

Their choice to work with Plan B and not either one of themselves or an actor seems to be crucial to understanding the intention behind the work. As much as the piece might pay homage to Acconci, it also pays respect to the art of freestyle rapping and the ability of Plan B to seamlessly improvise. A quick look at Forsyth and Pollard's previous work indicates the extent to which music and performance informs their practice at every level (other works have taken performances made by The Cramps and David Bowie as their starting point). There is even a kind of pop-video aesthetic to *Walking After Acconci*. With this in mind, the artists' ongoing interest in re-enactment or a 'redirected approach' to making work seems to find a parallel in the musical tradition of covering songs. A cover of a song is, after all, a form of re-enactment, and like all covers, it is left up to the viewer to decide whether they feel the need to search out the original.