

Difference

by Kye Wilson

*"Now, here is what happened. When I became schizophrenic, sometime after, I can't remember exactly when I began seeing faces in things, like trees and clouds and in the material that the walls are made of. But it isn't a hallucination at all, given the time to show someone I could show them what I was seeing. Before I was schizophrenic this never happened."*¹

James Paddock is a visual artist who uses mixed media, video, installation and conceptual art to focus on overlooked matters in contemporary society such as loneliness and isolation, the human condition and mental health. His art is informed by lived experiences of schizophrenia.

Schizophrenia is a severe long-term mental health condition. It causes a range of different psychological symptoms² including thought-insertion, thought-broadcasting, somatic passivity, delusional perception.³

Paddock comments on his new conceptual video artwork:

"Popping up, celebrates what is rarely heard when discussing people living with schizophrenia. Which are the historical figures who have lived with the condition, using the positives and uniqueness of the schizophrenic mind to change the course of humanity and ecology. I would like to be accepted as different, kind, and useful. Some of us might need support, yet we also have something to give. There is a balance to be reached here."⁴

Upon viewing the work immediately, similarities can be found in Bruce Nauman's artwork 'Stamping in the Studio'. One of Nauman's first forays into video...a period of self-examination in which he was searching for a vocabulary for his work...evocative of one's mental space, apparent via a single, long take.⁵ His movement patterns...of walking, stomping, bouncing, spinning, and various ways of shifting weight⁶ evoking the modest, repetitive performative actions in Paddock's video. This is referenced further by the appearance of a disembodied hand that repeatedly pushes the artist's head out of the screen. By the end of the film overcoming the struggle and fixing his gaze on the viewer. The accompanying quirky, non-diegetic soundtrack pays homage to the artists own interest in European films and gives the artwork both a familiar and uncanny flavour.

Paddock's working-class roots are aligned with one of the earliest proponents of conceptual art, Victor Burgin. Burgin's humble beginnings in Sheffield led him to feel that:

"In a sense, growing up in the working class is an intellectual advantage – you had no stake in the *status quo*, and so were naturally inclined to question and oppose...though his own life wanting to bring about and question...what was an acceptable social position for an artist. What was an artist supposed to be actually doing? I worried about this particular product of the working class. Suddenly I found myself out of that class and moving in a different milieu."⁷

'Popping up' allows the viewer to experience schizophrenia and social mobility in a direct and easily accessible way. Although some may find this psychological artwork difficult because it's something different than they often experience. Paddock's work should be considered in a way affirmed by Victor Burgin in his seminal publication 'Parallel Texts':

"Precisely its *difference*. The art I value is often judged 'difficult'. But the supposed difficulty of the work comes merely from the fact that it cannot be understood in terms of the established categories and conventions on which entertainment relies."⁸

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¹ Gielen, D. (ed.) (2013). *Tony Oursler/Vox Vernacular: An Anthology*. Yale: Mercatorfonds.

² Overview – Schizophrenia, Retrieved March 18, 2021 from: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/conditions/schizophrenia/overview/>

³ F. Ferroni, M. Ardizzi, M. Sestito, et al., Shared multisensory experience affects Others' boundary: The enfacement illusion in schizophrenia, *Schizophrenia Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.schres.2018.11.018>

⁴ Paddock, J. (2021) Email to Kye Wilson, March 29, 2021.

⁵ Assche, V.C. & Ross D.A. (2011). *100 Video Artists*. Spain: Exit.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Burgin, V. (2011). *Parallel Texts: Interviews and Interventions About Art*. London: Reaktion Books, Limited.

⁸ Ibid.