

98 *Matt Stokes*

Lost in the rhythm



Walking into Temple Bar Gallery's start to 2007, you were confronted with a crowded assembly of speakers, banners, photos and paraphernalia, an array of pleasingly broken narratives made of personal mementos and documentation. Slowly, it surfaced that the works presented embodied three separate projects dealing with different genres of music, each using a different methodology in exploring that genre. Two elements in this exhibition represented what led Matt Stokes to be awarded the Beck's Futures Award last year, with the short film *Long after tonight* (2005) and the *Sacred selections* (2005 – ongoing) series of organ recitals.

Focusing on the Northern Soul music of the '70s, *Long after tonight* is an atmospheric, cinematically alluring music video that pivots around the recreation of a soul night, gathering ongoing devotees within the intricately decorated main hall of a Scottish Episcopalian church. Dance flourishes are placed alongside architectural and ornamental details in equal reverence, both edited in rhythm with the music's beat, re-casting both into a tender enactment of individual faith. This trace of personal history was complemented by a set of large photographs, two of the film's confident groovers captured standing slack and awkward, staring expectantly at the camera.

A green banner near the entrance of the gallery carried the icons of a wagon wheel and two horse heads, apparently for the offsite performance of *Sacred selections*, a series of organ transcriptions of 'underground music'. A playful expansion of the musical theme and the exhibition's provenance, the *Selections* on this occasion represented a concert entitled *Happy hardcore*, featuring a set of hardcore rave music performed on Christ Church Cathedral's Grand Organ on Valentine's Day.

The majority of the exhibition, however, was a sprawling installation under the title *Real Arcadia*. An anthropological, illustrative archive of a Cumbrian acid-house promoter and a series of raves organised in an abandoned mining cave, the installation appears to present the rave culture as in a history museum, displaying the artefacts of a now defunct civilisation, complete with the cause of extinction: news broadcasts tell of plans for the cave's demolition. T-shirts, flyers, mix tapes, newspaper articles and admission tickets are mounted in glass cases, in a technique similar to fellow Beck's Futures exhibitor Jamie Shovlin, who used a comparable method to convincingly depict the history of krautrockers Luftfaust, a forgotten, experimental (and fictional) band from the '70s. Without this sense of grinning irony, Stokes is more concerned with conveying the ideals perceived at the heart of the raves, holding up his Arcadia as a spontaneous movement that was "for the people," according to a lengthy quote emblazoned on a set of wall-to-wall tarpaulins. Among the formalised museum set-up, this collective ideal seems examined from a cold, academic distance, pierced by two moments of personal intervention.

In one of the glass cases, a set of four flash photographs from the 'cave raves' shows crowds of people, hands in the air, some smiling, others serious and concentrated, all dancing. In the corner of one, a young woman looks out from the crowd, red-eye straight at the camera, her hands uncertainly mid-way on their way up, her face a mixture of worry and expectation. Just above these photos in the case lies a creased, faded black-and-white copy, placing the indexical image alongside its aged facsimile. *Collection point for the building of an international collective sound system* (ongoing) consists of a set of

dismantled, donated speaker parts, accompanied by a pair of informal photos of some of the assumed donors. The photos in both examples serve to anchor the materials and objects in the show, and counteract the anonymous character of a generalised anthropological 'rave culture', connecting the constituent people with the owners and creators of the numerous arranged objects. The latent potency of the ongoing *collection point* also provides a vision, a hint at the resurrection of Arcadia.

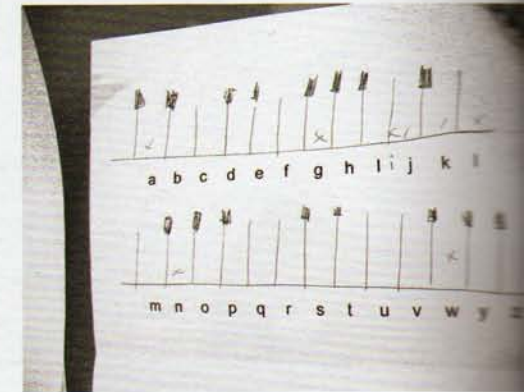
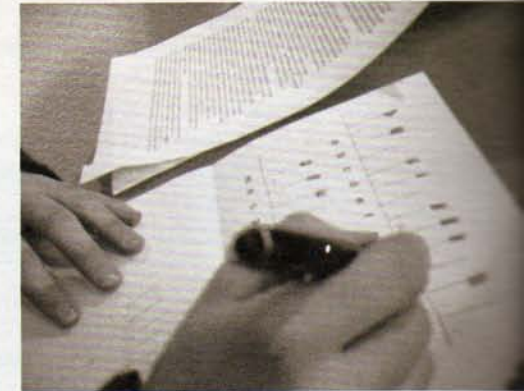
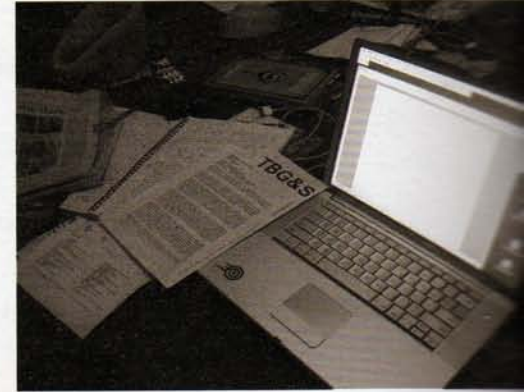
Stokes' timely examination of past musical cultures positions his practice near to that of a populist historian, or a cultural theorist in the vein of Dick Hebdige's *Subcultures* (1979), where his own position to the issues he raises is elliptical, almost touristic. While Stokes' interest in the present condition of these real musical communities is clear, the intervention, active participation and risk on the part of the artist are not. *Arcadia* presents a largely fixed image of the past, where *Long after tonight* uses the moving image to create a heartfelt manifestation in the present, while *Happy hardcore* perhaps goes the furthest in actively re-imagining the artist's creative community for the future.

Chris Fite-Wassilak is a writer and curator currently based in Dublin; he is the former editor of collaborative comic *This way up* (www.growgnome.com).

(opposite)
Matt Stokes
from *Real arcadia*
2003 – ongoing
one of twelve framed archive
inkjet prints on paper
courtesy Temple Bar Gallery
and Studios

This page displays the process of the collaboration between writer and curator Chris Fite-Wassilak and artist David Beattie. Fite-Wassilak invited Beattie to respond to the review on the previous page. The result is found on the following page.

Similar to a film or comic's relationship to its script to explore the connection between art and art writing and the levels and types of response to an art work: I wanted to have a piece of writing, in the form of a review, to expand on the creative moment at the heart of ~~critical~~ writing by inviting an artist to respond to the text. I chose to work with David Beattie, interested in how he might approach the project with his practice, that involves very physical, present uses of installation + video.



As part of the House Project series of exhibitions starting in April, Beattie and Fite-Wassilak will be co-curating the Light house caravan cinema in London in June of this year.

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