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Sarah Byrne
Concrete Joke

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PROJECTS

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**CREATIVE
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'Concrete Joke' is an ongoing exploration into the construction and deconstruction of meaning making, through confused language and re-appropriated word association. Caught in an ever collapsing state of 'trying to make sense', four fractured conversations direct and diverge awkward utterings and throwaway verse through cyclic and psychotic patterns of video assemblage.

Sarah Byrne is a Brisbane-based artist interested in the cross-pollination of video, sound, and performative installation practice tainted by cringe culture and pop critique. Through modes of appropriated video manipulation, Byrne investigates conceptual and material forms of distortion, video poetics, and the disruption of psychological, physical, and screen space. Playing emphasis upon repetition and nonsensical dialectics; Sarah creates alienated spaces for the uncomfortable and off-kilter, utilizing Thought Vaccum dialogues and scratch video methods to explore abstract reflective deconstructions of contemporary identity.

Sarah Byrne
 Concrete Joke
 14.08.13–31.08.13

Sarah graduated Fine Arts with Honours from the Queensland University of Technology in 2008. Recent developments in Sarah's practice currently focus upon the dissection of VHS materials and media artifacts. Such materials have been primarily explored within multi-screen installation works included in exhibitions such as; Artists' Proof #1, Monash University Museum of Art, 2012; Time Machine, Serial Space, 2012; GHOSTHOUSE, Boxcopy, 2011; Psycho Subtropics, OtherFilm 2010; and Fresh Cut, Institute of Modern Art, 2009.

Sarah Byrne: Concrete Joke

Working with found VHS cassettes as her raw material, Sarah Byrne has developed a video installation and performance practice that plays on the frailties of the medium. Time has bestowed on vintage video, particularly the specimens that Byrne selects, not only defects but an unintended comedy. Byrne has an eye for the slightly misplaced production values of the immediate past, which seems not to have been quite so polished as the present – the technology of each new age invariably makes what went just before seem quaint – giving Byrne’s work a comic edge. It is the effect that age has on magnetic tape that most attracts her, however, and is the point of departure for her extension of the medium’s possibilities.

For Concrete Joke, Byrne has used a series called ‘Reading Master’, a New Zealand production from the early 1990s intended to assist children in learning to read. Key words from a story are pulled out and carefully pronounced over brightly-coloured intertitles. Their over enunciation resonates with Byrne’s own editing techniques that emphasise the sonic potential of selected morsels of video tape. Byrne has isolated these words from their stories and strung them together into an abstract poem.

It could be said that this is concrete poetry, a genre where conventionally the layout of the text forms an illustration of its content. Byrne’s poem pulls out the illustrated and laboriously pronounced words from ‘Reading Master’, breaking up the syntax of the original narrative to form absurd fragments in which meaning flickers and dies repeatedly. Concrete Joke plays out the rupture of linguistic structure as the mirror of the artist’s intervention into her found video content, which she manipulates through analogue video mixing, VCR operated scratch work, digital cut-ups and datamoshing. This last technique is the disruption of codes that govern the transition of one frame to the next; a dissolution of the data’s own rules of grammar, as it were.

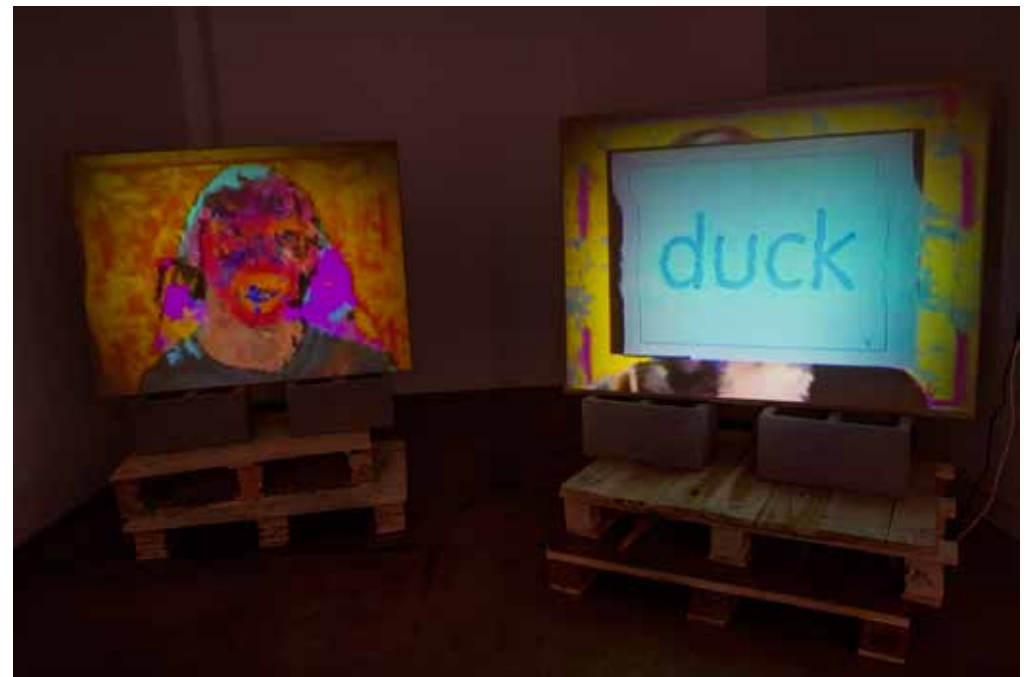
The title Concrete Joke also alludes to concrete music, a form of composition using recorded sound and the innumerable technical possibilities that magnetic tape and electronics opened up in the middle of last century. Musique concrète is the antecedent of much experimental video, not to mention popular

music. While Byrne works in a similar vein with tape as well as with digital files, her work cannibalises her medium, mining earlier video content for its raw materials.

With Concrete Joke, however, Byrne has used her own purpose-made content for the first time, slipping it in as the middle ground between the background and foreground planes of her sampled content. Byrne separately recorded four friends playing a word association game that she launched with words picked out from ‘Reading Master’; their faces are painted with clown-like circles around their eyes and mouths in high key colours that blend them, literally by virtue of the datamoshing, with the background and one another. On the one hand is the random selection of words from ‘Reading Master’, which echoes the surrealist word game ‘The exquisite corpse’, and on the other a connected succession of words that follows the personal logics of her sitters.

The exquisite corpse and word association, not to mention the chance element unleashed by datamoshing the digital files, brings moments of unintentionality into Byrne’s installation. It is very often in the unintentional where humour lies; a revelatory slip of the tongue that, according to Freudian psychology, exposes unconscious desire and risks embarrassing the speaker, for example. VHS tape too finds itself embarrassed by its own instability, its content et down by the changes that age wreaks upon it; Concrete Joke is the revelation of video’s solidity as an illusion.







Not only but also

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This exhibition and publication series, *Not Only But Also*, invests in the creation of innovative works by 24 young and emerging Australian artists and writers, forming an integral part of Bus Projects' inaugural artistic program in its new galleries on Rokeby Street in Collingwood.

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