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#1 / 'Dear Patrick Jolley'

PATRICK JOLLEY *THIS MONKEY* (2009)

KERRY GROUP PLANT

EVA INTERNATIONAL 2014

'Dear Patrick Jolley' is the first of a series of textual responses, that take the form of a review / letter addressed to selected EVA artists. It is left open to each addressee artist to respond in his or her way, or not at all. This textual component compliments and completes the ongoing 'recorded conversations' portion of +billion-'s discursive project for EVA International 2014.

Filming in Delhi in 2012, Patrick Jolley suddenly died at the age of 47, just when his art was taking flight. Considering my discursive project for EVA is built around conversations with the curator and selected artists, Jolley's art will have to speak for itself. The following is a response to *This Monkey* (2009), installed currently in one of multiple warehouse spaces at the Kerry Group Plant venue for EVA International 2014.



lectures or by tutors or other students in art college. Strangely, there's nothing much written on his work. A scattering of unfocused articles. A few blogs mention his films in a fanboy way. The 'reviews and essays' links on his website are ghosts? I know nothing of his emotional or physical makeup as an artist, acquaintance, friend. His gait? His ideology? His smile? His awkwardness on first meeting? His fears? Google offers a couple of head and shoulders portraits. Another shows him standing with his early career collaborator, Reynold Reynolds.³ Although his online persona is shy, there's enough physiognomical information to tell me that he is the star of his own short film, *Snakes* (2009). One of my personal favourites, and an unofficial partner to his submitted film for EVA International 2014. Why a favourite? Well, it's like the crescendo of anxiety performed in his other film works has transitioned into a diminuendo of acceptance, as he lies on a bed, unflinching, while snakes rummage in his cheap suit and coil around his flaccid body: the tension that exists whilst watching is ours, not his. *Snakes* tells me that fear was something that Jolley exposed himself and the viewer to time and time again. Burning, drowning, falling, are oneiric contemplations that temporally unwind the spool of his art.

However, sometimes an air of despondency overwhelms the traces of humour. All stick and no slap. No tickle. Other times I am reminded of Sam Raimi's *Evil Dead*, with the extreme stop-motion expressions and animated hi-jinks. Other times, again, I feel I am being dragged by the vestigial tail through the dregs of humanity's apathetic self- and other-destruction. I make a point about humour because it's as if humour is the one thing that fails to push through the grey *unheimlich* of his cinematic architectures. He threads those lines that separate laughter and fear, madness and sanity, human and animal, life and death. All of which seem to sidewind purposefully throughout the body of his film work.

Of course, emotional subjectivities are attached to watching his art and its future promise unfulfilled, casting an emotive spell that perplexes judgement. His seven-minute short, *This Monkey*, is one such emotive animal, that compounds those inherited and unavoidable subjectivities. On the opening night of Eva International 2014

the rumours were flying and mythologies were already being formed around the artist's rarely seen short. Submitted by his estate, curator Bassam El Baroni admitted that, not only was he "blown away" on first viewing the film, but *This Monkey* suggested different curatorial avenues, other artworks, alternative ways of thinking about the exhibition. Those that visit EVA would not be blamed for thinking that Noah has come ashore in Limerick City.

Whilst first experiencing *This Monkey* on the day before the official opening, technicians were swarming the Kerry Group Plant and midges bunched in the crepuscular light. No artwork labels, I was physically and emotionally sold before the credits told me Patrick Jolley was its author. Projected square, large and raised, alongside Hassan Khan's complimentary but more irreverent *The Dead Dog Speaks* (2010), Jolley's *This Monkey* seems to breath textures; environmental textures that swap back-and-forth between belonging to the industrial tomb of the warehouse, with a great facility for holding the cold, to the implied heat of the rural and urban settings of Haryana, Northern India, where he shot the film in 2009. A sound dome localises the haunting composition by Brian Crosby in place, but not to the point that the overall ambience of the warehouse is not affected by the charango acoustics and charged Foley.

What resonates long after experiencing Jolley's *This Monkey*, in what seventeenth century English philosopher John Locke described as the *camera obscura* of the brain, is the enigmatic images that veer away from the norm. "The understanding is not much unlike a small room [*un cabinet entierement obscur* in Leibniz's French] wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external and visible images; would the images coming into such a dark room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the understanding of a man."⁴ Jolley's *This Monkey* is one such *cabinet entierement obscur*, albeit a disordered and discordant one. Surprisingly miniature and windowless playhouse corridors weave past the artist's fidgeting lens. Corridors wherein rhesus monkeys flirt wearily with the camera as if in a cognitive experiment conducted by a dicky bow wearing David Lynch wannabe. Anthony Vidler (*The Architectural Uncanny*) writes *via* Leibniz and Deleuze: "So the closed room, itself a soul, has no windows. Its only furnishing, to use Bernard Cache's term, is that of the screen, which represents the brain, a pulsating, organic substance, 'active and elastic,' 'not unified, but diversified by folds'."⁵

Jolley makes us squint anew when rhesus monkeys are seen feasting on what look like beef jerky remains of humans with extra barbecue sauce. Facetiousness aside, these moments are anything but ironic. Given that we share over 90% of our DNA with the rhesus monkey – making them the preferred 'soulless' receptacles for experimental psychology during the twentieth century – Jolley's involved vignettes rewind the brutal 'pit of despair' attachment and deprivation tests on our primate cousins, carried out in the '70s by American psychologist, Harry Harlow.

If you are not from the *Indiana Jones* generation, in which the rhesus monkey is the clever minion of the patch-eye no-gooder, *This Monkey* portends to a steam of consciousness being emptied out before humanity wakes to a New World. A post-human world removed of human tinkering. In fact, humanity as we understand it – ethically and lawfully – evanesced. The science-fiction trope of post-apocalyptic existence, in which humanity is searching through the ruin of its own nuclear, ecological or technological mistakes, is replaced in Jolley's *This Monkey* by a world perhaps absent from hubris, progress, history, philosophy. A Garden of Eden minus the apple monger. French philosopher Alexandre Kojève – to whom I will leave the last words before they vanish

beyond readability and relevance in the wake of Jolley's simian send off – writes that Post-historical man will be 'reanimalized' in his absence:

The disappearance of Man at the end of History is not a cosmic catastrophe: the natural World remains what it has been from all eternity. And it is not a biological catastrophe either: Man remains alive as animal in harmony with Nature or given Being. [...] Practically, this means: the disappearance of wars and bloody revolutions. And the disappearance of Philosophy; for since Man no longer changes himself essentially, there is no longer any reason to change the (true) principles which are at the basis of his knowledge of the World and of himself. But all the rest can be preserved indefinitely; art, love, play, etc., etc.; in short, everything that makes Man happy.⁶

***Thank you to Bassam El Baroni for the reference to Giorgio Agamben's *The Open: Man and Animal*.**

Notes

- 1 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, Stanford University Press, 2003, p. 12.
- 2 Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Cornell University Press, 1980.
- 3 *See select Reynold Reynolds/Patrick Jolley collaborations on Vimeo:
 Sugar (2005) (short cut) [<https://vimeo.com/19667993>]
 Seven Days 'Til Sunday (1998): [<https://vimeo.com/26733270>]
 Drowning Room (2000): [<https://vimeo.com/63351380>]
 Burn (2001): [<https://vimeo.com/20706577>]
- *And select solo works by Patrick Jolley:
 *Snakes (2009): [<https://vimeo.com/35886158>]
 Fall (2008): [<https://vimeo.com/35516469>]
 Hereafter (2004): [<https://vimeo.com/35882401>]
- 4 Anthony Vidler, *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety in Modern Culture*, MIT Press, 2002.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Giorgio Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, p. 6.

...home

