

Shadowed Spaces

6 - 15 JULY VARIOUS VENUES AROUND SCOTLAND

Music, by its very nature, can take you anywhere. On record, the private consumption of something designed for public dissemination is already transcendent enough. In the live arena, the communal experience makes such experiences even more pronounced. Hence the mass appeal of stadium-rock fascist rallies and the mud-bath pilgrimages of the open-air festival.

Shadowed Spaces confounded expectations of both these secular desires to share... something. Or other. The Arika organisation's follow-up to last year's *Resonant Spaces*, a Scotland-wide tour which utilised the unique timbres of venues such as Hamilton Mausoleum and Smoo Cave for musicians John Butcher and Akio Suzuki to bounce off, *Shadowed Spaces* aimed to do likewise with urban alleyways normally hidden from view, their doors for once left ajar. Over two week period, New York based drummer Dan Meehan, Japanese saxophonist Tamio Shiraishi and fellow countryman percussionist Ikuro Takahashi visited six sites which, under the beady eye of veteran American psychogeographer Denis Wood, were made public, private and secret all at once.

So, from a deserted railroad in Aberdeen to something similar in Edinburgh, the tour took in a car park and a smelly alleyway in Dundee and space nearby the shopping centre in Easterhouse, where one of the locals joined in playing a blade of grass. Newcastle saw an unfinished bridge and its needle-strewn underpass - both follies leftover as a legacy of the notoriously corrupt council leader T Dan Smith's misguided stab at civic pride following his imprisonment on bribery charges in 1974 - finally put to some use. Corridors and stairwells were used to similar effect in Cumbernauld.

There was a Pied Piper feel to the Edinburgh leg, as the audience were led from a cemetery to the Nuremburg style façade of the Scottish Office, winding towards a normally locked up (but clearly not impregnable) disused railway line, under a bridge, through densely overgrown bushes and beyond to a wasteland as yet untouched by the Legoland vampires of urban regeneration.

At random points in the undergrowth, Shiraishi's sax squeaked aloft a barren pyre of burnt wood, while Takahashi and Meehan's amped up drums set up a low-level call and response. At times, the sense of Zen calm that prevailed had more to do with the whoops of children playing and gulls overhead, not so much noises off as noises of.

There's something unavoidably nostalgic about visiting such off-limits arenas, a foreboding stickiness recalling Bill Nelson's early stab of ambient, *The Shadow Garden*. Beyond the junkies and the drunks, here are



Shadowed Spaces, 2007, Cumbernauld

places where school truants go to masturbate and dream, creating secret little worlds for themselves that reek of some barren no-man's-land between town and country.

As Wood made clear standing aloft the railway siding's natural stage evoking the spirits of Guy Debord and radical American town planner Kevin Lynch, it's the spaces' very lack of purpose that's important. As he spoke, impassioned, evangelical, but never cranky, you sensed that Wood too has been hiding out in the wilderness while the rest of the world caught up with him.

Because the idea of 'drift' has become deeply fashionable over the last decade. American instrumentalists Labradford even had a Festival Of Drifting, both pre-dating and setting a template for the current swathe of left-field music festivals. Since then, in musical terms, 'drift' has become a by-word for ethereal washes of sounds so random as to do Brian Eno's notions of 'ambient' a serious disservice. The grab-bag accessibility of the means of production via laptops, etc, has created a glut of such material, most of it prettily pointless.

Similarly, 'psychogeography' is one of those words dropped by part-time punks high on the Situationist rhetoric employed by the likes of Stewart Home in his thumbnail umbilical zigzag through would-be revolutionary currents, 'The Assault On Culture'.

Neither is re-appropriating neglected

landscapes anything new. On a formal level, urban regeneration, particularly in post-industrial cities, was based on it. Hence Tramway in Glasgow, Bristol's Tobacco Factory and others. In the negative, yesterday's now deserted banks are today's designer bars.

Moving outdoors, rave culture was founded on secret gatherings in forgotten fields well off the main drag and word-of-mouth networking. The mini wave of guerrilla gigs did a similar thing for Shoreditch fashionistas with badly-tuned guitars.

More significantly, theatre has been ahead of the game. The rise of site-specific and site-sensitive shows both indoors and out by Edinburgh's Grid Iron company in particular opened the door for other practitioners. Angus Farquhar's NVA company have been mediating landscapes in this manner for years, so it's no surprise that Arika and Farquhar will be collaborating in September 2007.

As the audience are ferried to the next venue in a fleet of black cabs, it's clear that *Shadowed Spaces* has body-swerved any ready-made presumptions of some alternative heritage industry fetish. Rather, as Meehan and Takahashi play a pindrop duet beside the city bypass traffic roar before Shiraishi leads us home into the familiar, it's a once in a lifetime pause on the road to nowhere.

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