

Animate Projects interviews Charlie Tweed

Were Notes Part I, II & III always intended as a series?

No - the Notes set of films has grown over time and began with the video We Are The Above, which I developed during my MFA at Goldsmiths - I then developed the idea of the Notes series of films. This series represents a different way of working for me which focuses on using appropriated material, computerised voices and various editing processes to effect the image.

So is it all found material, appropriated material?

The material is mainly appropriated. This method fits in with how I want to work, because it comes out of my interest in control systems and the desire to control and also how the image is controlled. So it made sense to use appropriated material, to take material that was already out there, and transpose it out of context and provide a new narrative.

However I did shoot some of the material - for example in Notes II there's a film called navstevnici that I made on a residency in the Czech Republic. I was in a remote location at the Galerie Klatovy Klenova and shot some footage of an old military base and some woodland. I then subjected all of that footage to the same process as the appropriated material - that breaks it down, slightly pixelates it, disfigures it, drops frames and so on.

Can you say something more about the term 'control images'?

Some of the research that I've looked at is around ideas of control and its relationship with fiction and semblance in developing ideologies of fear, anxiety and survival. In connection with this, visual material plays a key role in portraying 'real' risks and 'real' dangers, so my interest in the way images are used to control comes from this research.

I'm interested in the representation of reality that moving images portray particularly in the virtual sphere where home shot documentary footage are constantly added. It becomes difficult to understand what or where reality is and as Alain Badiou notes in his book *The Century*, our constant obsession with the real has led to a state where tools of fiction are often mistaken for reality.

I am interested in utilising this plethora of material that is available online and wonder how that material can be transposed into something that is more critical, into something that begins to address the mechanisms of control.

Do you think the Internet means that our understanding or definitions of things as fundamental as truth and authenticity are thrown into question?

Yes. I think that on one hand it is enabling but at the same time it can completely allow for the blurring of reality: for example it can allow for anyone to create a fictional online persona or to create fictional material supposedly showing 'real events'. It can also be used as a tracking tool; tracking user's actions in order to deliver them appropriate advertising. Once everyone begins living a large part of their lives in the virtual world not only is authenticity blurred, but also they are potentially more controllable.

Can you say something about some of the control theories that you have looked at in your research for the work?

I began by looking at cybernetic control and the concept of pre-empting actions with pre-defined responses. In the 1950s cybernetics was applied to formulating new methods of social control - thinking about how to control people and prepare for what they might do if one thing happens and triggers another. At the same time there was the application of new methods for controlling and manipulating our unconscious selves.

And is this the CIA or is it advertising?

It's both. In advertising, a man called Edward Bernays, who was Freud's nephew, took his uncle's ideas on control of the unconscious and applied them to advertising and then later to helping the US government.

This was the beginning of the development of methods for controlling the unconscious self, which are widespread and the norm today. The concept of biopower identifies an idea of everyone controlling and managing one another, of power coming from everywhere. Hardt and Negri have expanded on this with their concept of virtualised biopolitical control - the idea of virtualised control that aims at controlling life by formulating it into the logistical life, by systematising life. At the route of this controlling force is the fear of the unknown, the biological, the un-predictable.

I am interested in how the desire to control and manage all things can play out and be manipulated. I am particularly interested in the language that is used to formulate systems of control, systems of cause and effect that are particularly visible within

corporate situations. The Notes series takes some of this language and manipulates it, over-identifies with it, constructs new words and made up sounds.

In the work, I analyse the language and the theories related to control, evaluate them and try to visualise a way in or a way out. I begin writing scripts, which are often based on a real situation or set of plans. For example, in *We must undo*, I take the idea of re-wilding and look at its most extreme outcome as a way to critique it.

In *We are the above*, I make reference to actual plans to re-flood areas of the Thames Gateway and turn them back into marshes. And in *Singularity* I use the ideas of groups that are involved in seeking complete technological singularity and I describe how this could be achieved.

How does the script come about?

I do a lot of research into theories, control language, new and old forms of community, and the development of ideologies, as well as real world situations that are pertinent, and I begin to develop a script which seeks to inscribe a sort of alternative history to current conditions, using the voice of an anonymous group to describe a set of instructions for change which generally seek to improve control or look at methods of escape. I also begin thinking about the images I want to collect that can form a tension with the text.

Then I'll begin to create a kind of archive of video clips and begin the editing process. The script is developed further as I edit the video and collect clips - I utilise various pieces of digital speech software to generate voices that I use as a form of voice over.

And is it only online that you search?

It's mainly online. It feels for me a good way to work. I think it almost provides me with something that maybe doing animation by yourself does, which is a way to work completely independently. Also, for the ideas behind this work, it makes no sense to me to actually shoot material. Appropriating digital material, which itself may have been appropriated, is more interesting to me - the process of re-contextualising it and making it difficult to place in terms of time and geographical location creates a tension in the work. For me working in this way is particularly related to Boris Groys' essay where he discusses the importance of creating new forms of documentation and re-inscription within the conditions of biopolitical control. My work is a form of re-montaging what we perceive as reality into something that itself becomes performative and critical.

And how do you then go about putting it together - because you use classic film construction - editing, montage... these are carefully constructed 'propaganda' films?

Well, I go through a complex editing process, which involves re-filming, applying effects and ultimately editing down the material so that, yes, on the one hand they become tightly constructed propaganda films, but on the other hand, the process of editing and transposing the material attempts to move it beyond its origin and take it to a new place - one that's more difficult to pin down and less straightforward than a typical propaganda film. I want to both draw the viewer in and also make them feel uncomfortable and question why they have been drawn in, and why these statements appear to make sense. The films are manipulating our unconscious fears, long instilled in us, by exposing these within the viewing experience.

You've clearly watched a lot of films - what influences or references are there - from both art and cinema?

For me the references are wide ranging - Chris Marker and his fictive documentary works such as Sans Soleil set in a sort of parallel future are an obvious reference point as well as the films of Patrick Keiller, such as Robinson in Space and London.

In terms of video art I would draw on Nam June Paik in reference to his focus on destructing the analogue TV image by manipulating electrical components.

The content of the work has been informed by the work of Adam Curtis' documentary films related to control. My wider ranging interest is in creating a duality in the work whilst outlining a potential critical future that is rooted in the present. This has been done effectively in books such as the Time Machine by H G Wells and also in Looking Backwards by Edward Bellamy where the book's narrator falls asleep and wakes up in a socialist utopian version of their world.

If the Notes are transmissions, what is the message?!

I think I'll leave that up to the audience!

How are the Notes being shown at Spike Island? How do those differences in scale, and intimacy, between gallery and online work?

They are being shown as a three-screen installation - the films are synchronised so that as one ends another starts on a different screen in quite a large space. This effect will

itself be quite controlling on the viewer and this will be the first time the work has been shown in a multi-screen scenario.

For Animate Projects, I am showing the films online as a single screen experience. The films are returning to their source medium - the place from where most of their clips have been appropriated. Within these conditions, someone else could potentially rip the videos and create their own version, re-edit them and this process could go on many times. Within an online context they can also become more divorced from the gallery context and from being 'art videos'. Whilst they are often watched by a single viewer on his or her computer screen, they are also accessible from anywhere, and this opens up the interpretation of the narrative in a wider context that could potentially increase their believability - or at least increase the confusion and the paradoxes that they may trigger in the viewer.

At the end of Notes III the image becomes drowned in red - like a poisonous cloud. What's the intention there?

The final video takes the book *The Coming Insurrection* (by the Invisible Committee) as its starting point. The book advises on how to escape from conditions of control by destroying networks, and the group behind this film take the destruction of networks concept further by appearing to address the image of the video itself. Thus, in its final moments the video image in Notes appears distorted and abstracted, whilst the voice appears to reveal a strategy from the creators of the films. The ultimate intention is to expose the underlying semblance of the works and their virtualised and biopolitical syntax.