

of concatenation or squelching under foot. Here, instead, words have disintegrated beyond recognition, become nothingness. From this blank surface, instead of new words, different body parts emerge, whether Rebecca Ackroyd's crudely oversized limbs, Joanna Piotrowska's choreographed bodies or the hands piercing Johann Arens's acrylic screens.

In Ackroyd's *Everyone's Gone, Now Nothing Works*, 2017, a disembodied leg stretches floor to ceiling, standing on the ball of its foot, and an arm trails across the space with its fingers curled up against the lower part of the wall. The trunk of each limb is coated white with its chicken-wire armature visible below the skin; they resemble cartoon extensions of the existing pipe work, a leg-shaped radiator or an arm-as-air-conditioning unit, accentuated by a series of air ducts sticking out from the main trunk. These are suggestive of emission, as though we might lean in and listen carefully to tune in to the 'inner speech' of this particular body part. In his 1934 book *Thought and Language*, Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky observes that inner speech 'cannot be achieved by merely vocalising silent speech'. It is not simply an internal aspect of talking; it is instead a particular subjective experience of language.

Inner speech has its own peculiar syntax, one that uses shortcuts to arrive at the sense of what is meant. We also experience a similar type of abbreviated communication with those with whom we most closely share our lives. This moment where our internal experience comes into direct contact with others is clearly evident in Devlin Shea's paintings, which portray various intimate relations between naked couples. These unguarded moments represent an interface between inside and outside; they describe a form of communication that occurs at this boundary between bodies, where one person makes something known to another. However, part of the relational subtext remains hidden from us – because each glimpse is cropped, we only have access to an abridged version of this encounter. Even in *Foot Face*, which does not have the fixed physical edges of other painted surfaces, since it is painted directly on the wall, a choice is made to truncate the body so that the 'foot' that pushes into the 'face' of another does not have its own body above the thigh. Here we have further dislocated limbs on a reduced scale.

Hung on top of the wall painting are not only further works by Shea, but also David Austen's nudes – causing a layering, a compositing and an agglutination of forms. Each of Austen's beguiling watercolours depicts a lonely, somewhat inhuman figure in the void. The paint is pushed around in a quick, free and uninhibited manner, but results in surprising details. A bound male figure hangs upside down, the space that remains unpainted creating the outline of his penis dangling down over his stomach. In another a void is created within the body that offers a double reading, whereby the hammer that the man holds could be seen either as being held at his side or as having been inserted into his rectum. Each figure is an

utterance, functioning both as a device to express meaning and as a tool to affect us through a more profound sense of communication.

An idiom develops in certain works, of the kind where words acquire peculiar meaning and language functions with a specialised vocabulary – an argot, a patois or a bodily vernacular. Marie-Michelle Deschamps' posters and performance utilise the glossopoeist Louis Wolfson's 'own' language, and when we lower the arm of the turntable to play Anneke Kampman's *Songs for Another Voice* the gallery is filled with the words of a young girl, Lingua, and her embodied character, referencing the 12th-century abbess St Hildegarde of Bingen's constructed language, Lingua ignota. Through her encounters with institutional others (classmates, doctors and therapists) she develops a language that flows through her, producing multiple characters and voices. Part spoken, part sung, the audio monologue is complemented by two textual versions (on the record sleeve and within the exhibition booklet), where each is a distinct way of communicating, with an emphasis on rhythms, flows and patterns.

Anna Barham's new video *Sick Ardour* provides a second audible voice in the exhibition, that of the intermittent call of a male cicada. Digital imagery flickers on the screen, slice by slice, providing a model of the insect's interior. Notably, the cicada's loud song is not produced by rubbing parts of the body together (as with other insects) but from within a corrugated exoskeletal structure called a tymbal. The high-pitched noises and clicks of the male cicada would usually speak to the female, but here the flow of communication is with the technology itself: as each call overlaps with the digital imaging process, it becomes a rejoinder to each mechanic utterance.

With these rotten words the linguistic task does not match the classic Saussurean model of communication, in which we transfer an idea from one person to another via learned signs. The flow of thought and meaning is a process, a continual back-and-forth motion between what we see, hear and feel. There are numerous feedback loops, entrainments, oscillations, periodicities and other temporally organised movements of becoming and actualisation. It is much more like Vygotsky's process of 'instruction', with a preponderance of sense over meaning, as gradually we get the picture. ■

'These Rotten Words' installation view, Chapter Gallery, Cardiff

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These Rotten Words

Chapter Cardiff 18 March to 11 June

By definition, a word (within speech or writing) is a discrete element of communication. Each is an act of sharing – one that either singularly, or in combination with others, can be expected to convey a particular meaning. Yet as William James notes in *The Principles of Psychology*: 'large tracts of human speech are nothing but signs of direction in thought ... [they] are psychic transmissions'. Whereas James's analogy for speech is transcendental, the titling of this group exhibition brings language back down to ground. Would it be safe to say that words that are rotten must be inadequate to the task in hand? As the semiotic rules break down, words cease to function as mutually understood signs. However, the exhibition posits that out of this decomposing matter new possibilities emerge; that words are able to 'do things as much as represent things'.

On entering the gallery what is immediately striking is the seeming absence of words. 'Rotten' brings with it putrid associations, as though to expect language festering in a dump

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