

MUSIC: PAUL ROONEY

31 May–12 July 2008, Collective Gallery, Edinburgh



It's a good life on the buses. Ask Paul Rooney, whose alter-ego revisits his alma mater via the tourist route on an open-topped double-decker in this newly commissioned video installation, which plays on the sort of wood-finish screen every des-res aspired to in the three-channel age.

Like a VHS version of Lindsay Anderson's *The White Bus*, which sent *A Taste Of Honey* writer Shelagh Delaney's own imagined self on an impressionistic voyage round her native Salford, Rooney's journey isn't so much into some urban heart of darkness, but visits a leaf-lined, heritage-industry limbo where the ghosts of wartime spies lurk.

Unlike *The White Bus*, there are no stopping off points in Rooney's 'Lost High Street', 2008. Rather, he is trapped in some Sisyphean Groundhog Day, sentenced to traverse the streets of Edinburgh forever, undercover and in danger of being shot by both sides, whoever they might be.

Such first-person interior monologues are the *raison-d'être* of Rooney, who last graced *MAP's* pages with 'Lucy Over Lancashire', 2006, a 12-inch single on which an imagined sprite regales her lusty tale of life and death trapped within the record's grooves. A more formal narrative is contained in 'Failing That', 2008, the published text that formed part of his recent *La Décision Doypack* show at Matt's Gallery in London. Even more ambitious, 'The Pendular Destabiliser Show', 2008, a new sound-based work at Wolverhampton Art Gallery, imagines two Paris 1968 radicals arguing through a hole in the wall.

'Lost High Street' is more personal; a nostalgic wander through old haunts Rooney's character can no longer visit, but can only see through a lens as if occupying some shaky-handed DIY Cold War flick. Its spindly punk theme song, 'performed' by tour guide Aileen, could be a kindred spirit of Lucy's, and suggests a kind of Rooney-verse, parallel or not, in which all his characters eventually connect up to create some kind of six degrees of separation soap opera.

Accompanying 'Lost High Street', 'Monster' dates from 2004, and was filmed in Melbourne, Australia. As filmed street scenes are reflected into mirrors either side of the scene, a male Australian voice recounts what may be the collected works of imagined poet Ern Malley. The result is a quasi-Whickeresque travelogue which, if you stand just-so, gives the viewer a glimpse of infinity which Rooney-verse has already been orbiting for some considerable time.

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