

“A concept is a brick. It can be used to build a courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window.” — Gilles Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 1987.

ZONWEE: The last known recording of a daydream embraces a surreal approach to meaning making, grounded in the subconscious and the intuitive linking of sound, words and images. A sparse suburban setting is inhabited by a number of entities, most notably a 3D model of the artist James Barth and a golem-like creature described by her collaborator Spencer Harvie as an ‘imaginary friend’. These figures investigate their surroundings, seemingly unsurprised by the strange world they find themselves in, but not entirely of it either, their internal and external worlds ruled by the dream logic of association and suspended disbelief.

The video is the first collaboration between Barth and Harvie and the first time that either has worked in animation. *ZONWEE* reveals a syncretic approach to artmaking - taking discrete practices, ideas and imagery and fusing them to create something altogether new. While existing works by each artist feature prominently throughout the video, it is the result of a true collaboration over every detail, with Barth and Harvie working together to create the 3D models, animation, sound and text.

A voice - sometimes sing-song, other times verging on anger - reveals thoughts that are hanging in the room, parallel to the actions of the characters in the video. Part-narrator, part-daydreamer, the speaker swerves between the poetic and the sinister, between breezy and anxious. ‘A concept is a boring brick. This brick concept is so boring, it seems so obvious,’ she says as Harvie’s golem considers a table full of children’s building blocks. Riffing off Deleuze, the dreamer rejects the transformative power of ideas, evincing instead a deep ennui and exhaustion with the world.

The value of ideas is central to the work. A number of motifs recur throughout, including bricks, cakes and snails, each suggesting the potential to create something greater than the whole, but each fragile and susceptible to collapse in their own way. Selected intuitively, the failure to create relationships of meaning between them is as important as any links the viewer may make.

The dream logic of the video is underpinned by a sense of unreality created by references to the cinematic. The house has no ceiling as though it were the set of a film, the golem wears a director’s megaphone as a dunce cap, and a blue screen (one of the few objects to display colour) historically used in special effects shots features prominently. Is this recording of a daydream staged for the viewer? Or have we incorporated the logic of the cinematic so profoundly that it manifests through our subconscious?

ZONWEE is an enigmatic and compelling collaboration. Described by the artists as ‘two house builders negotiating over the fate of their bricks’, the outcome is the product of creative tension and negotiation, a chimera incorporating each artist’s existing practice but which has also enabled them to create something truly new.

Peter H. Johnson, November 2019