

Right: Transit by Christopher Thomas Allen and Robert Pyecroft-Rainbow
 Below: Entrance to the exhibition
 Bottom right: Dialogue by Christopher Thomas Allen



EXHIBITION

Articulated

An all-singing, all-dancing digital media show about communication failed to fully connect, says Rosie Spencer

Articulated, a cross-disciplinary exhibition curated by multimedia arts practice The Light Surgeons and sponsored by Nokia Nseries (more of which later), was a show about that most ubiquitous of contemporary subjects, boundaries and the blurring of them – though some of these boundaries could probably have done with being a lot less blurry.

The arc of this digital media show seemed to move loosely from global travel to the city to the domestic realm, conceptually framed around mapping the thresholds between public and private, and the relationships between people and the built environment. On entering London's labyrinthine Bargehouse at Oxo Tower Wharf, you were confronted with a predictable sensory bombardment – projections on all sides, a pile of suitcases uttering words by disembodied voices, flickering lights, screens and wall texts. The initial effect was that of anxiety – the kind of anxiety induced by technology saturation, and the knowledge that there's a whole building filled with this stuff, and you've got to try and somehow make sense of it all.

This was a show sponsored not just by Nokia, but Nokia Nseries – multimedia “smartphones” that according to the company's website feature “exclusive content from

cutting-edge designers, artists and generally mobile people”. The sponsor's blurb on the wall stated that “the artist's studio is now in our pocket”. I hope not. Upstairs a wall of mobiles was encased in glass, as if these objects warranted special attention beyond the audio artworks contained within them – the ultimate in phone fetishisation.

Many art shows are sponsored by global corporations, but it's the inextricable link with the medium that's so problematic here. If the medium is the message, then the message has become the sponsor's. This isn't possible in, say, an exhibition of paintings.

One of the most affecting pieces in the show was Bilal Mian's contribution to Protocol, an installation of video and photography on the first floor. Time-delayed footage of you walking into the space was presented on a CCTV camera, allowing you to watch your actions a few seconds after performing them. I watched myself from behind, writing notes about the effect I was witnessing – a vertiginous self-referentiality. Like Bruce Nauman's Going Around the Corner of 1970, the piece nurtures both curiosity and narcissism, the pursuit of catching a view that's usually the privilege of others.



Single Story Building by Blast Theory was a series of empty promises, played out on an old-school Macintosh computer. Like a huge digital Russian Doll, you clicked on a folder that opened a series of others, presenting you with choices such as urban or rural, residential or non-residential, Georgian terrace or cottage. Each folder led to others, until you were left with just an empty folder. A comment, perhaps, on modern life's illusion of choice and the void at the heart of consumer society – the generation of false expectations.

With so much communications technology on display here all trying to say so much, the danger was to end up saying very little, to reach an endpoint of nothing. Or perhaps its very cacophony was exactly what it wanted to say – the babble of contemporary urban life, with brief moments of meaning or engagement punctuating the

unmanageable mass.

Reams of speeded-up video footage of the city at night set to techno/ambient soundtracks recalled The Light Surgeons' background in club visuals. In fact, their style of curation was all pervasive, stamping a style on much of the show that made it frequently impossible to differentiate between individuals' works. It often felt as if the rooms, the artists, the curator and the sponsor blurred into each other so that no single voice was discernible. The problem here is one often encountered in new media exhibitions: the points being made have been lost in the temptation to fill the space with a mass of shiny, flickering visual stimuli.

Articulated was at Bargehouse, London, 1-10 December
www.articulatedlondon.org