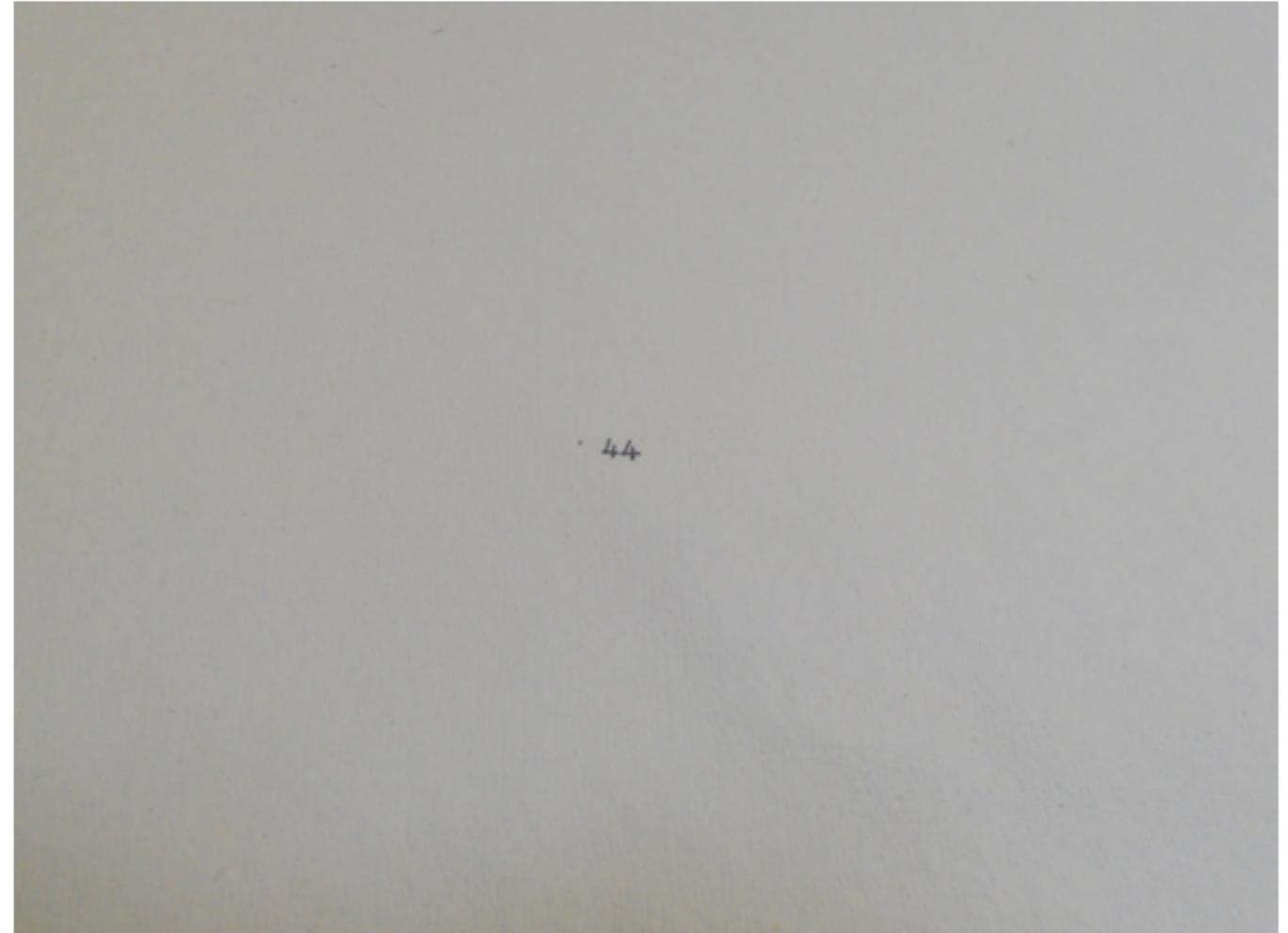


The elephant in the room:
Bill Drummond's *Curfew Tower*

Alan Dunn





Since 1999 the Curfew Tower in Cushindall, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, has been run as an artists' residency programme by a Board that includes Bill Drummond and Susan Philipsz. Throughout 2012, all the artworks ever produced during these residencies have been removed and locked in the Tower's dungeon. This act has been instigated by Paul Sullivan from Liverpool's Static Gallery, selected by Drummond to curate the year of activities. In place of objects, Sullivan is inviting a series of creative practitioners to stay in the Tower to make analogue audio recordings of the building and its locale. Alan Dunn was the first artist in residence after the confinement took place and this is his report.

Arriving into Belfast International on a crisp first day of March, I am met by the Spurs-supporting Micky and his Radiohead-loving brother Zippy, fourth generation fleshers (butchers) from the beautiful small village of Cushindall on the stunning north east coast of Northern Ireland. I am driven up and over the highest town in Ireland and down into one of the nine Glens. The Scottish coast is now nearer than Belfast and before the coast road was built the main trade route

was between these Glens and the Mull of Kintyre.

The 40ft high Tower was built in 1809 by Francis Turnly, freshly returned from services with the East India Company. Designed as a garrison for a single soldier with a Curfew Bell to be rung nightly at 9pm, for many it remains a symbol of British Imperialism. The locals I ask seem nonplussed by it. Driving down into Cushindall is akin to entering someone's warm and homely living room, with a large hearth in the middle. The elephant in the room. The librarian seems flustered when I ask if there is any literature on the Tower and the tourist board raise an eyebrow when I say I am spending the night there.

Zippy lets me in and points out the two analogue tape recorders that have just arrived. In 1999 Drummond bought the Tower from the Hearth, an organisation responsible for historic buildings, and offered it to artists for short residencies. Work produced during residencies are exhibited at the annual Festival of the Glens and a prize for best artwork awarded. Walking along the narrow ground floor corridor, a red door flanks a thin brown one with eye-level window and two metal bars. Unlatching it and pushing

it open brings one into a 6x8ft dungeon that is now packed with around 120 artworks including postcards, framed photos, gold covered guitars, models of towers, paper boats, shells and surveys, evidence of artists desperately trying to make sense of the context. Voices from outside constantly float through cracks in windows. Young men looking for the restaurant. Sitting in the dungeon, the pointlessness of making art permeates the damp walls, as does the pointlessness of not making art.

The art in the dungeon feels absolutely useless, clutter for our modern world. Failures. Fireworks. Drummond's previous work comes to mind, his burning, cutting up and 'NO MUSIC DAY' billboards. I think of Michael Landy's 'Breakdown', rumours of great artworks stored under Liverpool's Stanley Dock during wartime, the MOMART fire and the burning of 'Hell'. Stacked right at the back I find a panoramic frame with ten faded photographs of blank billboards. These grey billboards have faded until they are the same grey as the sky. A blank billboard merely serves to advertise its own slow death as marketing budgets shrink; ten postcards from an analogue city.

I take the billboard images upstairs to the warm living room to revive them. I place next to it a copy of the new 'Adventures in numb4rland' CD I put together as I turned 44, in homage to Drummond's '45'.

I go to the kitchen to make coffee and sit under the Echo & The Bunnymen poster cellotaped to the ceiling and flick through the large logbook that has been kept since the first residency. 'Surrounded by Foot & Mouth, after five days we concluded that the Tower is peculiarly Irish and the Irish are great writers', writes John in April 2001, 'shouldn't we be writing here?'

I turn to the next blank page and write only a tiny '44'. I go back upstairs and slip the copy of 'Adventures' into the shelf of other CDs. Ask me why but don't ask me why.

AD: What made you decide to remove all the artworks from the Tower?

Paul Sullivan: Before I went to the Tower, my first mental image was that it was on its own in a field, removed from a town. After some initial research I found out it was in fact in the town and very

much part of the identity of that town. Before my first site visit in November 2011 with Craig Pennington and Bill Drummond I had started to think about removing all the artworks as I wanted to remove the possibility of the invited residents responding to the previous works.

I wanted the idea that when everyone arrived they were faced with an architecture that was itself the object of response. I was interested in the idea of the stories of the previous thirteen years worth of artists and artifacts being mediated to the residents not through the works themselves, but through talking to the local community. I wanted the community in effect to make the images, if indeed the residents were interested. The moment I walked into the Tower for the first time, I knew that we had to incarcerate all the previous works in the dungeon, apart from one, which was Bill's original NOTICE, the first thing you see when you walk in. It informs you of what you are meant to do. I liked the idea that we had returned the Tower to the state it was in when the first resident walked in 13 years ago.

AD: You simply carried all the artworks into the dungeon?

PS: Yes, myself and Alan Scroggie visited in early February 2012 and systematically removed all the works from their locations and placed them in the ground floor dungeon. We made plans of each floor and drew up a simple system that allowed us to name, number and place each item just in case they ever have to be repositioned.

AD: Removing the artworks makes one focus more on the details that are left such as the one-handed clock, the handprint and 'redrum' text in the bathroom. In a sense you un-gallery the building.

PS: Yes, as stated earlier, we wanted to remove everything and un-gallery it, however, as you mention, it became clear that by removing the artworks, it heightened your awareness of a number of works that were actually in-situ, fixed to the walls. We also left a series of audio works and texts in the Tower as we wanted to leave some media traces of previous activity, traces that could potentially be used or deciphered by new visitors. In this way we were acting as anonymous members of the community, leaving our selective or curated history of the tower in order for it to become part of our record.

AD: And the aim is to replace them all at the end of the year?

PS: The aim was to itemise, name, number and show the previous location of each item before placing them in the dungeon and leave it up to Bill to think about what he wants to do with them. We will replace as we found them if required, or maybe not.

AD: What is to happen to the recordings made in and around the Tower?

PS: The recordings made in the tower will be made into two things. Firstly, a full and unedited radio transmission of all the field recordings that will be broadcast from the Tower as part of the Antrim Festival of the Glens in August 2013. This is the time when previously the people of Cushendall have been invited into the Tower to choose their favourite artwork from the previous years residency. However, in 2013 they will only be able to choose from a series of field recordings. The usual temporary radio license in the UK that is still run by the government is an 8-mile radius and you can normally get a Sunday night shift from 9pm onwards.

AD: Similar to the four very successful Sunday radio slots that Static programmed as part of the 2002 Liverpool Biennial?

PS: Yes. As the Tower is near the coast some of this radius will be in the water. To listen to the live event you will need to be in the radius thus the project starts to play around with invisible geometries and a movement of people from the outlying towns and cities who may make their way to within the radius to listen. It will also examine who controls the radio waves in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, the field recordings on tape will be collected between each residency as each participant will be required to put it in a stamped self addressed envelope and send to Static guaranteed delivery. We will then edit and produce a record. The recording of a record or cassette tape of course references Bill's own music industry history as well as providing a delivery mechanism for the ideas of the invited residents. We will then put 50 copies of the record (25 signed and 25 unsigned) on an e-bay auction sale exactly 5 days before the ONLY ever live broadcast of the piece in its raw state which will be transmit-

ted from the Tower as a radio broadcast. At the exact time the e-bay auction finishes the live radio broadcast will begin.

This will be the time that the normal prize-giving event happens as part of the Heart of the Glens Festival. This element of the project examines the relative fame or celebrity of the recording artists as the records are bought without ever being listened to. During the 2013 summer Festival we will also sell a further 50 copies of the record and may also develop it into a larger art/music event.

AD: Your project is in a sense a coming together of Bill's ideas and your own. Could you sum up what are the fundamental ideas involved in staying at the Tower and recording?

PS: The fundamental idea from Static's perspective was to continue with some of our current ideas about residency and practice. As we are working across the disciplines of art, architecture, music, film and writing, we wanted to invite all of these practices to have a residency. The idea of making a record came first, the idea of field recording then followed and then the idea of analogue rather than digital. The idea of asking these practitioners to each make a field recording was like making them force their ideas through an analogue interchange, some form of neutral space which allows all of them operate as opposed to asking them all to make a piece of visual art.

We also wanted to invite practitioners to stay between 1 day and 3 weeks as we know that everyone is at different points in their practices and some have more time for residencies than others. We also wanted to tap into a transient community of practitioners who may be visiting Belfast, Derry or Dublin to give a talk, do a gig or open an exhibition. By setting up contacts in these places, we wanted to create a flexible network of agents who would be able to ask people who were only in Northern Ireland or Ireland for a short period of time to participate in the project. We wanted to tap into travel networks. We have also asked three practitioners to make a series of works remotely, firstly because we want to work with these practitioners but also because when we come to edit the record we are interested to see the difference of recordings and to give ourselves different possibilities in our decision making due to the field recording vs. remote recording geographies.

Although many of the ideas are Static's and

come from the moment Bill invited us to do the project, there are of course a number of obvious linkages to Bill's practice and history, not least the production of a record, the use of invisible geometries, in our case a radio circumference, and the use of media, celebrity or publicity stunts within elements of the project, in particular the sale of the record on e-bay and during The Festival of the Glens in 2013.

For further information:
The Curfew Tower
www.curfewtower.com

Static Gallery
www.statictrading.com

Bill Drummond
www.penkilnburn.com

For supporting audio files:
www.alandunn67.co.uk/stimulusaudio.html