

THE WIRE 438 | AUGUST 2020

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ADVENTURES IN SOUND AND MUSIC | INDEPENDENT SINCE 1982

Cosmic guitars

THE WIRE
TAPPER 53
CD

LONNIE HOLLEY
DJ TOOLS
JOHN EDWARDS
× CAROLINE KRAABEL
+ 38 pages of reviews

MARISA ANDERSON
Sarah Louise
Gwenifer Raymond
Davey Graham
C Joynes
Robbie Basho

Cosmic guitars | Marisa Anderson | Lonnie Holley | DJ tools | John Edwards x Caroline Kraabel

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Cover: Marisa Anderson photographed by Clayton Cotterell

On Site

Exhibitions, installations, etc



Carol Szymanski, *Lost Contact With 12 Sentiments: A Nod To Resignation* (2020)

Carol Szymanski
Lost Contact With 12 Sentiments:
A Nod To Resignation, Instalments 1
And 2

Online/signs and symbols, New York, US
 If the world of office work wasn't already alienating enough, the requirement for many of us to now do it through the glitchy, compression-misted impersonality of conferencing apps like Zoom during the pandemic has generously increased this alienation, and often to the point of absurdity. Our bookshelves, potted plants and errant pets are now available to be scrutinised by co-workers. If we opt to obscure the background, why? What is there to hide? Or perhaps you've experienced the peculiar qualities of the 'Zoom Drinks', as a dozen people pause agonisingly, awaiting the next installment of a single lowest common denominator conversation.

On these apps, the abstractions of institutional structure are made to clash even more vividly than normal with the interactive human immediacy of bodies,

appearances, gestures and living spaces. Nothing represents this tragedy more succinctly than the observation made at least once in virtually every Zoom call: "You're breaking up."

Sudden disconnection is what opens this series of videos that multimedia artist Carol Szymanski is producing for the signs and symbols gallery as part of her residency there. The director of a bank flatly reads out her resignation email, thanking the "dedicated and capable professionals" she has worked with, and adding with ambiguous irony that "my time here has taught me to embrace and realise the single most fundamental axiom of banking, namely, that you always have to be sure to take more than you give".

Szymanski has incorporated her experience of working in a bank for many years into her artistic output, resulting in the text and image pieces of *Cockshut Dummy*, which serves as the basis for the texts read out on webcam here. The director's parting shot casts the formal play of *Lost Contact* in a diffuse satirical

light, as connections between people, symbols and ambitions are lost somewhere in the sequence of jpegs, clips and statements awkwardly externalised by bodies still somewhat human.

Szymanski uses serialism to divide up and organise her materials evenly yet apparently randomly, much as the technique's inventor Arnold Schoenberg did in the 1920s with the 12 pitches of the Western tonal system. Accordingly, there are 12 videos, each a "breakout session" featuring the opinions of one eccentrically named co-worker (played by Szymanski's friends and family) sharing their thoughts on the departure of the director.

The serialist technique redistributes the last vestiges of meaning, grammar and syntax towards greater meaninglessness still, exploding it perfectly into the 12 corners of the executive board: a democracy with all the ennoblement of an email cc. What's more, the formal process intermittently appears onscreen as a grid of 12 by 12, as if in a legalistic yet impenetrable show of transparency.

Yet other signs of the working process secretly hint at the survival of the humanity eradicated by the bank: a clip of the group counting down to action as the share screen function generates a mise en abyme, the painter Sherman Sam smiling as he entertains the meeting by turning his camera upside down. Whether or not he does this in his workplace role as Nodd Ball, or as himself, remains aptly unclear.

The alienation so multifariously on display in *Lost Contact With 12 Sentiments* is disalienating, the relief of the work is not one of escapism but one of recognition. With so many attempts to promise audiences they can survive the pandemic through a screen-based transcendence that can replace the rich physical circulation we once enjoyed – #TogetherAtHome, as the pop megastars put it – the confusion, scattering and passive aggression woven so systematically through *Lost Contact* feels honest, at least.

Adam Harper

Courtesy Carol Szymanski/signs and symbols