tele-

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The Neolithic period signalled great change in the Stone Age, as man made the gradual transition from hunter-gatherer to farmer. Becoming less nomadic and finding the opportunity for self-organisation within the natural order, the first cultivators and settled communities emerged. Undeniably connected to this new formation of community, the ritualistic traditions of the Neolithic people left their greatest legacy in the form of astonishing monuments, emphasising the basis of their beliefs in nature and the worship of the unseen forces of its cycles.

Today, as all around us existing systems disintegrate and mutate, true progress seems to be inconceivable. The difficulty of coming to terms with the intricate language of dying capitalist economies is enough for anyone to go in search of something new and question the market driven values and beliefs of our society. It has been proven that periods of economic instability give rise to self-organisation in various forms as a way to for people to grasp on to a reality over which they can exercise some semblance of control.

In his two new video works, Dan Walwin takes prehistoric and contemporary belief systems as starting points in an exploration of freedom and rationality. Set in rural South West England, the films take two distinct journeys that symbolise a desire for progress and new experience both in their subject matter and their execution.

Telemotive and *Immortality* (both 2011) suggest in their titles the hope of an eternally advanced future. Presented as distinct but connected works, the artist's approach to production augments the multiple elements and references that form the two videos. Filmed and edited using contrasting techniques, the two works find overlaps in their presentation, where the use of adjoining spaces and sound bleed make for a subtle dialogue on human behaviour. They present prehistoric communities and their ritualistic traditions as an avenue through which to investigate contemporary culture.

Walwin's approach to the production of image strikes a chord with Jacques Ranciere's conception of the dialectical montage and symbolic montage, in which he discusses the effect of bringing together such disparate subjects as "assimilating heterogeneous elements and combining incompatible things..."[1] in order to create two different affects through image. Whereas the dialectical montage aims to reveal the unexpected and hidden meanings of an image through a clash and "establishes the absolute reality of desires and dreams"[2] the symbolic montage works "between elements that are foreign to one another [it works] to establish a familiarity, an occasional analogy, attesting to a more fundamental relationship of co-belonging."[3]

These two concepts of image production and affect seem apt for discussing Walwin's works as there is something both of the dialectical and the symbolic in these videos that attests, respectively, to the political and mystery, as Ranciere describes them [4]. The formal presentation of the works and the points at which they overlap become devices in an exploration of belief and behaviour in contemporary society through an unlikely association with the practices of our Neolithic ancestors.

In Ranciere's sense of the dialectical montage as a tool for revealing hidden meanings through a clash of disparate elements, *Telemotive* presents the car not as the cocoon of purpose and safety for consumer marketing's image of freedom, but as an aid to the men in their mysterious and ominous actions. The car is the fifth protagonist in this unfolding broken narrative and acts as a confine for the one man who is led by the other three, perhaps against his own will. It is apparent the men are on a journey in a literal sense and although their purpose is enigmatic, their trance-like behaviour is ritualistic and somehow associated with the natural land. Each scene is presented from a myriad of vantage points with the camera capturing the action from multiple angles like CCTV footage, creating an air of suspicion. An accomplice to their actions, the car becomes a symbol of our reliance on and submission to the uncompromising development of technology. Even in a paganistic relationship with the earth, modern technology is required to make the spiritual journey more practical; the clash questioning both our attachment to such technology and the possibility that we might live without it.

In *Immortality*, a free party (5) is taking place away from the structures of law and society. The scene is silent, despite the importance of sound in what is taking place. At points dance music filters through from the soundtrack of *Telemotive* and introduces a dialogue between the two works. This cross-referencing creates associations between the strange ritualistic journey of the men in the car and the group of revellers. The disparity of the gliding and free camera movements of *Immortality* provides an alternate sense of physicality to the fast sequences of the previous video. It echoes the state of the individuals at the party, together and free like the communities who gathered around monuments during the solstices in prehistoric times to experience statelessness and collective awareness, in crucial moments for man and cosmos. The unrestricted freedom of the free party scene is one in which this self-organised community is searching for an enlightening experience akin to a spiritual journey. Subtly playing out the relationship between the distant periods of contemporary culture and prehistoric religious practices, Walwin's work presents a symbolic approach in assembling "elements in the form of mystery"(6). Mystery for Ranciere is that affect of a symbolic montage where two distant elements are presented "not to contrast worlds, but to present, in the most unexpected ways, a co-belonging." Through doing so, the silent scene is both the search for transcendence and the place of social dissent.

The English countryside is a reoccurring element in Walwin's practice, serving as a neutral, active or occasionally hostile setting for a sequence of events. As the cosmic cycles were key to the prehistoric people, these works romanticise a nostalgic longing for a closer connection; sweeping panoramas, details and sounds providing stark contrast to the inharmonious nature of contemporary human activity. It is in both works passive but very much present. The complete absence of speech in *Telemotive* heightens the soundtrack of the surrounding countryside, cut abruptly with that of footsteps, the intrusive car engine, and the distant sound of dance music. We are allowed to imagine the disruption to the countryside that a free party might cause but the floating footage is eerily silent, as if seen by an external force.

Any notions of freedom are coupled with the impossibility of true escapism, proposing that all practices of communities in the 21st century are mediated by consumerism (the symbol of the car in *Telemotive*) or state regulation (the all seeing eye of the camera in *Immortality*). The groups are practicing outside of what society might deem rational, whether it is a strange oppressive ritualism or drug-fuelled hedonism. It seems that neither will achieve what they have set out to, as each work carries in it a moment of disruption that indicates the power of that external force. In *Telemotive* it is

the presence of law and order when our four protagonists drive through what looks to be a police check point. In *Immortality* it is when the revellers simultaneously turn and run into the woods, for no apparent reason. Taken from a scene in E.M. Forster's short story *The Story of a Panic* (1911), the driving force here seems unlikely to be that of mysterious nature (7) and more a result of our surveillance society. The enforcement of strict controls on such events and gatherings leaves little room for this kind of community to be anything but temporary. The initial rise of the free party scene may have been over 20 years ago, but it is a reminder of more recent news reports on the return of underground rave culture. The political and economic situation of the present day echoes those of the late 1980s; recession, austerity measures and a highly disenchanted youth searching for an alternative. The idea of a need for genuine experience becomes futile for Walwin, as he reminds us with equal doses of romanticism and cynicism that this has been the eternal goal of human societies.

Notes
(1) Ranciere, Jacques, *The Future of the Image*, Verso: London 2007, pp.56
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ranciere, pp.57
(4) Ranciere describes the dialectical montage as having activist potential in its ability to use a violent conflict of difference to reveal hidden truths. On the other hand, the symbolic montage is much more cohesive, and uses a sense of mystery in an image of unity to present heterogeneous elements; it is much more in the field of artifice than revelation. Ranciere, pp.56-8
(5) The 'free party' (or illegal rave) culture of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the UK saw thousands of people convene with sound systems for large parties at various locations around the country. Information of the location would only be given at short notice in order to keep it from reaching the police. With the aim of holding a rave in the freedom of an unregulated environment, the countryside of the South West and Wales were prime locations.
(6) Ranciere, pp.57
(7) In E.M. Forster's story, a group of people visiting a scenic hillside in Southern Italy are overcome with an indescribable fear of the power of the natural landscape, which causes them all to simultaneously turn and flee down into the woods. One of the party, a young boy, remains and becomes changed after the event. The story makes subtle references to the Greek God of the wilds, Pan.