

Abbas Zahedi *ME, MYSELF & A I I I* (2017)

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Abbas Zahedi's video *Me, Myself & A I I I*, 4 mins 37 secs (2017), evoked a sadness in me I did not recognise; it made my heart twinge and forehead furrow. This work was included in his exhibition, *MANNA 2.0*, which I saw at Wolverhampton Art Gallery (February-April 2018), that was one of seven re-staged exhibitions of artists' work, taken from the Venice Biennale's Diaspora Pavilion. The Vimeo description for *Me, Myself & A I I I* is: "Digital archive of MANNA from the Diaspora Pavilion, Venice 2017". In effect, the work virtually encapsulates, in both senses, his mixed-media installation from Venice: *Machine Aided Neural Networking of Affect* (May - November 2017). The video work has a transitioning form and a sense of estrangement due to the unrest of information; this is displayed by quick changes of imagery that slide between one another. Screened first in Venice, at the Diaspora Pavilion closing programme, the work was then displayed for the first time in exhibition, in Wolverhampton.

Zahedi's exhibition, *MANNA 2.0*, was spread across different floors of Wolverhampton Art Gallery and comprised of large photographic prints, cropped archival photographs, a tasty *Saffrock Shandy* drink, which you could buy in the cafe, and an installation in the William Morris room, found near the gallery entrance. Unsurprisingly, the William Morris room had highly-patterned green wallpaper stretching from wall to ceiling, which quickly produced a claustrophobic effect. This was heightened by a loud techno beat, remixed by Zahedi, that intermittently engulfed the room, like blaring music from a car passing by, only to be held at a red light. The room had a domestic quality due to the careful selection of personal items, which made it seem as though I was stepping into someone's home; it felt deeply personal and erratic.



Abbas Zahedi, *MANNA 2.0*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Feb - Apr 2018, installation view, photo courtesy the Artist

At the back of the room, placed upon a TV stand, was an inactive rice cooker, which inside stood a small, white, Barbara Hepworth-esque, sculpture that the artist made in 2013 whilst spending time in a friend's studio in Hackney. Above the door hung a leopard-print shopping trolley. Positioned on top of the fireplace, was a framed still from the 2016 BBC Documentary, *Peter York's Hipster Handbook*, which captured the artist working in an East London soda brewery, and this is where he subsequently produced his *Saffrock Shandy drinks*. Underneath the image were a mix of celebratory, and questionable, comments from Facebook users, including: "You free tonight to be an extra? Need Ethnic looking people".



Abbas Zahedi, *MANNA 2.0*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Feb - Apr 2018, installation view, photo courtesy the Artist

A small sculpture, a shopping trolley, and a TV stand: these objects are the type of disparate items, indicative of someone's departure, that could be found outside a house in London. These are the things that are left behind in a city where, willingly and unwillingly, people often move; never home, never secure, and endlessly unsettled... unless, of course, your class makes you believe otherwise. The final component of the William Morris room, and the main subject of this text, was *Me, Myself & A I I I*, as quite simply, it got to me. The video work was displayed on a 32" TV screen positioned angularly to the floor, resting against a metal shopping basket.

The video starts with an extract from a conversation, lasting thirty seconds. A confident male voice leads the conversation, making a series of points about philosophers Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, the Imam Reza shrine in Mashhad, Iran, and musician / fashion designer, Kanye West. The final line: "If you have a Nokia, do you go to Ikea?" draws a smile to my

face. The narrative was chewed up but I liked what I heard. This is where I should reference Zahedi's succinct Instagram bio: "conceptual survivalist; transitioning from Hegel to a post-Drake future."¹ The language in the video draws on Zahedi's manner.



Abbas Zahedi, *MANNA 2.0*, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Feb - Apr 2018, installation view, photo courtesy the Artist

After the male voice speaks in *Me, Myself & A I I I*, there is an influx of images that depart shortly after they arrive. Cut to what looks like a moderately sized living room, a patterned cloth is laid out on the floor, with a provincial spread of items arranged with an awkward sense of ceremony. Juicy red pomegranate seeds and sharp yellow lemons have been considerably placed. Cut to a computer-generated voice that says aloud: "Machine-Aided Neural Networking of Affect". Next, a brief snippet is shown of someone, who is seen working with the bottling-machine used to make his beverages. The computer-generated voice then says: "Installation of

¹ Abbas Zahedi Instagram @abbzah [Last accessed 28.07.18]

MANNA requires a series of technical deposits, responding to trauma that is routine in the awkwardness of your neo-diasporic predicament". The term neo-diaspora offers an alternative to the term diaspora, that differs from it's traditional definition of being defined by geographic movements of people from their original homeland. Rather, Zahedi described neo-diaspora as "an entanglement of survival, within a complex and transitional state of belonging to multiple imaginal spaces."²

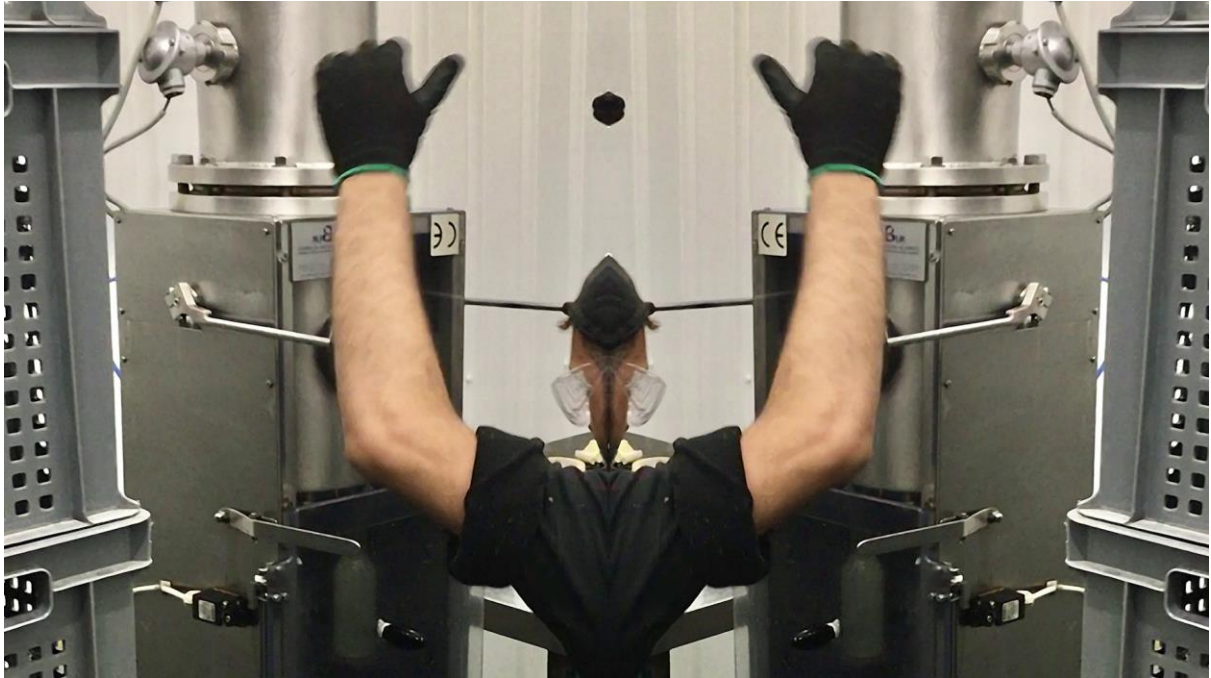


Abbas Zahedi, *Me, Myself and A I I I*, 2017, single Channel HD video (00:04:37), still 00:00:54, image courtesy the Artist

The computer-generated voice resumes by saying: "take the next right to continue your journey onto Hipster way - oops!". Here, the mentioning of hipsters is indicating to the mosaic effect of living in multicultural areas and, perhaps unknowingly, using tendencies from other cultures, consequently putting one's identity into a limbo. The *Saffrock Shandy*, seen being made in the video, looks like something that would be found in a craft-beer-house; in fact the label on the shandy bottle plays against this, detailed with a "token amount of Iranian Saffron". Once

² Abbas Zahedi Website www.abbzah.com/about/ [Last accessed 28.07.18]

again, the artist openly hangs his identity on these linguistic twists, estranged and on display for us all to see.



Abbas Zahedi, *Me, Myself and A I I I*, 2017, single Channel HD video (00:04:37), still 00:01:06, image courtesy the Artist

Cut to a variety of imagery: a charity shop bundle of clothes, an abandoned toaster, a painting of an archetypal Persian peasant. The computer-generated voice-over continues the use of language such as “proximal empathetic distance” and “high limbic frame rates”; neurological terms drawn from the artist’s medical background which are related to emotion and the formation of memories. The flow imagery presented a drip-feed of information which slowly, sunk in, as I pushed my thought cycles aside and carefully listened to what’s going on around me.



Abbas Zahedi, *Me, Myself and A I I I*, 2017, single Channel HD video (00:04:37), still 00:01:06, image courtesy the Artist

A discarded lemon is shown, simultaneously the techno soundtrack recurs, though this time, the music is contrasted with the sound of people singing eulogies and beating their chests in a quick tempo, which fades out. The sound and imagery build; a man's face emerges from a plastic ball-pit with a distressed expression. This is followed by a shot of a group of men passionately arguing in a what looks like a fast-food restaurant. They use large expressive hand movements to exaggerate their points.

The work slows down; a dancer's silhouette is shown, similarly they move in an expressive form. A new track plays that sounds like it belongs to the rock genre, which was co-produced by Zahedi and his close friend. The first line is sung, "They see it all with HD eye..." which continues, whilst the computer-generated voice cuts in with: "Machine-aided adjustment will help you to process feelings into sensitive modes of ephemeral culture". The way sound has been applied to this work is reminiscent of flicking through TV channels and hearing a stream of incongruous sounds, yet how these sounds have been weaved together yields a lucidity. To draw back to Zahedi's description of neo-diaspora as "an entanglement of survival,

within a complex and transitional state of belonging to multiple imaginal spaces” - this channel of thought is articulated.



Abbas Zahedi, *Me, Myself and A I I I*, 2017, single Channel HD video (00:04:37), still 00:02:20, image courtesy the Artist

The sound harks to the everyday nature of sounds within a environment that constantly moves. Prompting memories of riding a stuffy bus, contemplating life or scrolling through my phone, with dissonant sounds around me. When it is just *me, myself and I*, I don't ask myself about my identity. I don't consider my viewpoints or beliefs, perhaps this is consequential of my privilege of being a white, cis-female. The building of frames in *Me, Myself & A I I I* could be interpreted as emblematic of the quick, quip ways information is shared online, alluding to the hyper-connected time we live in, and the overflow of narrow interests that feed into one another on smartphones. The work is not slick, rather, the scenes appear rawly cut, like when you finish something at 00:01, yet there is a fluidity and poetic quality that make it seem whole. The emotive quality to the work; the palpable sadness is human, relatable and known. It was refreshingly honest and it reminded me of why I started to like art many years ago - it sort of hurt.

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