

# Céline Condorelli



*Additional (Night Piece)* 2012  
installation

Study for *Additional*  
(*Structure for Reading*) 2012  
production still, in situ  
placement as prop during  
the shoot of Beatrice  
Gibson's *The Tiger's Mind*

After the failure of Modernism we cannot – not quite – atavistically inhabit the past, as if its ruins were enough shelter against the predators of the present. If, as modernists as diverse as Nietzsche and F Scott Fitzgerald observed, the future presses back into the past, so too the past throws itself upon us, throws itself forward, past us, towards that unguessable horizon where the what-might-have-been is transformed into what-might-yet-pass for Utopia. History collaborates with us: the effect might be an echo, an afterthought, the whisper of Modernism. The consequence is not necessarily one of those arcane exegeses of the modernist codex, rendering it palatable for the market in which neo-conceptualism indulges: ‘some drew provocatives of mirth from Anatomies, and Juglers shewed tricks with Skeletons’, as Sir Thomas Browne observed.

Céline Condorelli might be said to work in Modernism's aftermath. She does not, however, toy, ignorant, with the excavations of intellectual archaeology. Art still belongs to a larger scheme that, if it is not utopian, nonetheless maintains an investment in social practice and transformation rather than an investment in one's market value. A large part of her work to date has been concerned with property relations, architecture and the everyday – perhaps reflecting her initial study at the Architectural Association. A second strand of work is explicitly performative, while a third is largely concerned with collaboration and the creation of alternative institutional structures (Condorelli was one of the founders of Eastside Projects in Birmingham). Few artists, I think, could meaningfully condense the theme of their practice to a single word; Condorelli can. The word is ‘support’, whether physical, conceptual or institutional. Her concerns, and the way in which they are realised, mean, of course, that Condorelli largely works outside the commercial gallery system. Instead she

negotiates larger scale projects with public institutions and spaces. Those projects often have historical and political resonance, such as in her concern with exploring colonial and cultural exploitation in the series *Il n'y a plus rien*, 2010-11, or intellectual heritage, as, for example, in her remaking of the elite, even courtly, scholar's *scrittori* from Antonello da Messina's *Saint Jerome in his Study* of c.1475 in Artists Space, New York, as a repository for books donated to the only public art library in Istanbul.

The sculptures in Condorelli's *Additional*s, now on show as a Pavilion project at University of Leeds, were made as objects for a film, *The Tiger's Mind*, 2012, conceived by Beatrice Gibson and Will Holder. But the project is a collaboration with her contemporaries and with history, and more generally with the inanimate. The abiding presence in *The Tiger's Mind* is the British composer and political radical Cornelius Cardew (1936-81), and the project's framing device is the textual ‘score’ for his sextet of the same name. Cardew has become a fashionable figure of late, most notably as the focus for Luke Fowler's *Pilgrimage from Scattered Points*, 2006, and Adrian Rifkin and Grant Watson's superb show at the Drawing Room, London, and MUHKA, Antwerp, in 2009. Gibson (Profile AM345) has already ‘collaborated’ with Cardew, in her film *The Future's Getting Old, Like the Rest of Us*, 2010, and with one of Cardew's leading students, the pianist John Tilbury. Holder, too, has been here before with his enterprising project grounded in the work of the American composer Robert Ashley. *The Tiger's Mind* is, essentially, an event score in the manner of performance art, a scripting with which Cardew, grounded in the atelier scene around Stockhausen and Mary Bauermeister in Cologne in the late 1950s, was wholly familiar.

Condorelli's objects are actants in this drama but they emerge from further collaboration: her engagement with Michelangelo Pistoletto's *Oggetti in meno* (*Subtracted Objects*), 1965-66. Condorelli's title is an answer to

Pistoletto's, one which returns the sum to zero. If his 'objects' were a collection assembled haphazardly from the everyday, Condorelli's are similarly fashioned from the low-key. They share, however, that character which Pistoletto identified in an interview with Germano Celant: that they were objects in the sense that they carried within themselves a perceptible experience that is finally given voice. We are, then, dealing with that boundary between the inanimate and animate, between the human and the instrumental, that so fascinated and troubled modernists (and indeed the romantics before them). We confront the problem of agency within the man-made thing, or within the material, natural world. In Modernism this confrontation reaches its apotheosis with the conceit of characters who seemingly escape authorial control to write their own narratives: Faulkner's Quentin Compson, Leopold Bloom, perhaps, whose peregrinations might be construed as an unruly struggle against authorial regulation – while all the time being firmly the product of that regulation – and, of course, the principal cast (minus the director) in Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*.

It is perhaps hard to credit poetic effect to a gold foil curtain, blown by a wind machine in a cavernous, redundant, studio space in one of those ferro-concrete monoliths with which the red-brick universities were endowed in the 1970s, but such is the power of Condorelli's symbolism. Indeed, for something that starts out looking like six objects in search of an artist, this installation ends up with a narrative structure, of sorts, or at least a suite of exchanges between one character/object and another. Breath becomes fire; becomes voice in the recordings played by a set of speakers; becomes music/sound in the piano stool (with handy light) that Condorelli made for John Tilbury from which to play, and modify, pianos; becomes a reflective screen for reading while standing that is also a passable, if inadvertent realisation of Picabia's drawing *Gabrielle Buffet, elle corrige les mœurs en riant* of 1915 (one of those modernist works that simultaneously reflects anxieties about the instrument and revels in its pleasures).

There is, then, drama across the studio space, a performance by objects. The wind speaks through the trees, it brings us poetry. We are on the edge of that register, beyond man, where another language is spoken to which we must be attentive if we are to survive. This, indeed, is the realm of Cardew's 'Tiger'. But for me there is something else brought into play by this rustling of leaves, something that I hope Cardew might have appreciated as he sought a voice for those denied it in society even if, by the 1970s, he probably thought Theodor Adorno a bourgeois reactionary. In two essays, 'The Essay as Form' and 'On Lyric Poetry and Society', Adorno develops the idea of *rauschen*, the rustling sound made by dry leaves in the wind, as standing for the poetic dimension of language that is corroded by modernity and locates it specifically as a 'voice' from the margins. In this he is probably influenced by Franz Kafka's character Odradek in *The Cares of a Family Man* – a crucial figure for Adorno – whose enigmatic laughter (*rascheln*) Kafka places somewhere between the human voice and noise. Odradek is, of course, a prototype of the marginal men of modernity, beyond the law, precursor to Agamben's *Muselmänner* among others. *Rauschen* then is not the voice of the authentic, autonomous subject; it is the voice of the marginal, the dead, the alienated plural, and it requires – as Shierry Weber Nichol森 observes – our self-extinction as



*Il n'y a plus rien* (There is nothing left)  
First Movement 2010  
installation view at  
Manifesta 8,  
Murcia, Spain

*Revision - part I* 2009  
installation view at  
Artists Space,  
New York



subjects in order to apprehend or understand it. The rustlings of Condorelli's characters, their dry communication between things conducted on the edge of life, is itself a kind of *Rauschen*. It is the last voice we hear through the shattered debris of Modernism, if we can, for a moment, put ourselves to one side in order to hear it. ■

Céline Condorelli's exhibition **Additionalis** is at Roger Stevens TV Studio, Leeds until 19 January.

CHRISTOPHER TOWNSEND is professor in the department of media arts, Royal Holloway, University of London and senior research fellow at the Henry Moore Institute, 2012-13.