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***Fatal Act* by 13BC, Douglas Hyde Gallery, September 21 – December 7 2019**

The words 'FATAL ACT', rendered in glowing red neon, hang above the entrance to Douglas Hyde Gallery. Temporally ambiguous, the title of this exhibition by 13BC—a research collective for the moving image founded by Vic Brooks, Lucy Raven and Evan Calder Williams—suggests both an invitation and a warning. The gallery's concrete floor have been carpeted in a deep red, its walls painted achromatic grey, and windows covered in UV-blocking red vinyl, similar to that used in laboratories to manipulate the sleep cycles of nocturnal creatures. This atmospheric architecture, evoking spaces of experiment and entertainment, bears the title *Good Times*, after a specific pattern favoured in the hospitality industry for its capacity to conceal and disorient.

Straight Flush, 2019, one of four moving image works in the exhibition, is structured around an unlikely epistolary exchange between two individuals; Günther Anders, a German philosopher and anti-nuclear activist and Claude R. Eatherly, the US Army Air Force pilot (of the reconnaissance aircraft *Straight Flush*) who gave the all-clear weather report for the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Eatherly's action resulted in the selection of Hiroshima from several possible targets. Clear weather was needed to take propaganda photographs propaganda, rather than for targeting purposes. Consequently, photography is itself implicated as an 'actor' in the event of destruction. This hidden complicity fuels 13BC's rigorous engagement with the ethics and mechanics of image production and consumption. Yet the exhibition withholds a linear account of the specific conditions that determined the bombing of Hiroshima, focusing instead on the aftermath of this act. Anders regarded Eatherly as one of the first people to experience what a new kind of 'guiltless guilt', brought about by the 'technification of being'. Anders' philosophy, much of which has yet to be published in English translation, calls for a radical expansion of the human capacity for imagination that seems both prescient and wholly relevant to the present moment.

Conventional representations of nuclear warfare and testing are deliberately absent from *Fatal Act* yet the first video work encountered in the exhibition discloses an unstable conjunction of sound and image that lies at the heart of atomic spectacle. *When Horses Were Coconuts*, 2019 is a silent video featuring lush colourful imagery, which appears computer-generated but was actually recorded below a waterfall and simply flipped in orientation. The title of this work is a reference to a book by Foley artist Robert L. Mott, creator of the sound effects that accompanied the first film footage of atomic bomb tests shown on American news television in 1951. With no access to audio of the test, Mott manipulated a stock recording of an unidentified 'African waterfall' to produce what came to be (mis)recognised as the sound of an atomic explosion.

Mott's own writing on sound is cited in *Straight Flush*, 2019, the large-scale, 2 channel video that dominates the subterranean space of the main gallery. This video is projected onto a

simple free-standing screen, supported by wooden props that are both stage-like and infrastructural in their aesthetic. *Straight Flush* was shot in a barracks on the decommissioned Wendover Air Force Base near Utah-Nevada State line. Once a highly significant site for military tests, Wendover is now regularly used as a film location and *Straight Flush* is entangled both materially and conceptually with the present and past of commercial film production. 13BC's film opens with a distant image of nocturnal military manoeuvres, which are actually being staged for a different shoot. Other cinematic reference points include John Wayne's 1956 Genghis Khan biopic *The Conqueror*, which may have exposed its actors and extras to contamination from nearby atomic test sites. 13BC are, however, primarily focused on a film that was never realised; Bob Hope's production company sought to make a biopic of Eatherly, in which he might even play himself, but Anders urged him to resist on the basis that this dramatisation would deprive his 'most fatal act' of its meaning.

The camerawork in *Straight Flush* is self-consciously diagrammatic and, with the exception of the opening shot, the action unfolds entirely within the confined space of the barracks, inhabited by three performers. Taking occasional breaks to play cards, Lily Gladstone, Bill Sage and Dana Wheeler-Nicholson read through a script assembled from multiple sources, including letters and published texts by Anders, Eatherly, Mott and others. Mistakes in reading are retained rather than removed and there is no voiceover or other non-diegetic sound. At various points, audio recordings of music and speech can be heard but these sounds emanate from cassette player operated by the performers. Anders's own words are spoken by someone who is not present; we hear only the recorded voice of Patrick Winczewski, a German director and actor known for dubbing Hollywood stars such as Tom Cruise and Morgan Freeman. Another character— Charlotte Zeike, the American pianist who was Anders' partner (and occasional typist)—is represented solely through a piano composition by Jason Moran, also responsible for the music heard in the upper gallery on entry to *Fatal Act*.

If *Straight Flush* insists on the display of 13BC's documentary sources, then *Corpse Cleaner*, 2016/2019 is structured around the far more unstable signifier of the film prop, exploring its dual status as artefact and replica through reference to the writings of both Anders and Siegfried Kracauer. The setting is a direct allusion to Anders' own experience of working as a cleaner of Hollywood props while exiled in the US yet his position is deliberately decentred in a voiceover (delivered by Dana Wheeler-Nicholson) that addresses both 'Dear Günther' and 'Dear Claude'. Histories of cinema and warfare, linking locations in the US, Japan and Germany, are interwoven as the camera moves steadily through a carefully choreographed interior, passing a human-sized statute of Liberty, a stack of antique traffic lights, and assorted neon signs. This journey ends with the opening of the storehouse doors, temporarily exposing the deep red bunker-like interior of the gallery space to a blast of natural light, but the prop house itself persist as a compelling and still unfolding archive.