

**Vitrine (noun): a glass display case: from French, shop window: ultimately from Latin - vitrum, glass (Oxford English Dictionary)**



## **‘Nightworkers’ by Anthony Shapland**

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‘Non-hours and Boredom’

Anthony Shapland in conversation with Lisa Le Feuvre

Lisa Le Feuvre: Throughout your practice you keep on returning to a very specific moment: that vague in-between period between night and day. It is a point where time takes on a more spatial identity that usually is encountered when one is moving between definite points so going out for the evening, coming home later than intended, or working so-called un-social hours. It seems to me that the almost intangible switch between night and day is something you are trying to capture; I say trying as it is an impossible task.

Anthony Shapland: My earlier work was concerned with change, with a point of transformation, and I was very interested in exploring how a location between one thing and another can be expanded. I like the uncertainty of the moment between night and day it is an indefinite point where, rather like in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the onset of darkness allows different things to happen side by side. One particular early work that led to this investigation was *Horizontal* (1999), a site-specific work I made for Hurst Castle in Hampshire. It consisted of a camera simply scanning the horizon line and recording it resulting in a sense of waiting for something to happen being communicated. I started to think about this sense of expectation, raising questions of what might happen if the wait is not fulfilled, or if it is stretched out.

LLF: It is almost a point of non-event that you are documenting. You also explored this in your earlier work *Thermohygrograph* (2003) where a single image shows the device used in galleries to measure humidity. Through its objectivity the thermohygrograph becomes a signifier of the traces of people in a space. It waits to record the unusual in order for the conditions to be kept constant and unchanging it’s almost a signifier to ensure dullness and lack of event.

AS: Yes this moment of in-between non-activity is a place where I like to be. I find the easiest time to think about work is on trains, when you are relieved from thinking and can sit and stare for an extended period of time.

LLF: Doing nothing can be productive - you can lose yourself in the situation. It can become an immersion in experience reminiscent of the ways actual experience is suspended in a cinema. Your practice seems to be concerned with constantly extending indefinite and intangible points. If we think about night and day it is impossible to measure a distinct second, or fraction of a second, when this takes place the shift is an experiential rather than measured moment. With your video work *Rise* (2003) showing in the exhibition *Something of the Night* at Leeds City Art Gallery, you explicitly explore this. Shot over an extended period, the viewer ostensibly is waiting for a sodium street lamp to go on – the point that signifies night as a drop in light-level triggers the action. In theory it marks the onset of night, but in practice such a marker is meaningless pushing indeterminacy to centre stage.

AS: *Rise* explores the same areas as *Spectate* (2004) where I was interested in the ways in which the moment you take your seat in a cinema you start to exist in a

different way: darkness transports you somewhere else.

LLF: In this video you are filming the audience and showing how they behave. The darkness makes each person feel they are in a private space despite being seated next to others. The auditorium becomes a suspended space operating rather like the city after dark.

AS: It is similar to early morning in a city before normal activities take place - it feels as if you are experiencing 'non-hours'. In the city the street lamps extend twilight which creates a situation where anything can happen, where possibilities are infinite. It is as if the entire rules of engagement for the day have been replaced and new rules are waiting to be made up. In *5am Return* (2002) I took a camera and moved continually forward in the city from 10pm or so until it became light the next morning. The act of doing this was incredible it opened my mind to how the city operates; I was absorbed by my surroundings, absorbed in time rather than a fixed destination.

LLF: It is as if you are stealing time in some way by working with these moments. These non-hours you talk of are similar to the sense of non-place that Marc Auge describes he looks at being in transitory spaces, such as on train journeys, or at airport terminals. All places are worked on by time, but this is exemplified in these 'waiting spaces'. In the city the non-hours are made far more apparent through the extended transition between night and day caused by the street lighting, a doubt that does not exist in rural areas.

AS: I grew up in a rural area and moving to the city opened up a new sense of the night. There is a certain point in the city at night when you can feel as if you are on your own you can possess the space in some way. The urban early morning can be incredibly peaceful. There is a sense that everything has stopped for a while, that everyone is sleeping. You can rest in that waiting moment before it all starts again. When I was filming in the city I discovered there is one hour when it is OK to be polite to people when you can say "good morning" to strangers and it is acceptable. It is that moment when it starts to get light - the first time I experienced it I was really taken by surprise, and I realised that the healthy dog-walkers and workers were assuming I had got up early, rather than stayed out late.

LLF: It's as if there is a sense of early morning collusion. Your *Nightworkers* (2005) piece that will be showing in the Vitrine spaces explores this secret time of the city in more detail. It will mirror your own flaner in *5am Return*, but this time the viewer will be the one moving through the city. In six city centre windows at night you show individuals who work at night (including a nurse, electrician, and night porter) sleeping. They will be seen resting at the very time when they will be at work.

AS: These are the people that keep the city functioning, but they remain hidden. Each night it is as if they come in, shift the scenery, and then disappear as soon as the curtain comes up again in the morning. As well as filming each night worker sleeping in their homes, I have interviewed each person to learn about how this nocturnal occupation influences their lives.

LLF: And the night workers become visible in this very intimate view you present. These people own the city at night like people who work in a cinema or in a gallery they are looking on at others' leisure behaviour with a different, almost irreverent,

relationship to the nocturnal city that to others becomes a special place as night falls. This perception relates to *Nocturne* (2005), also showing at Leeds City Art Gallery, where you film a single shadowed doorway at night. On one monitor the video reveals the action - kissing couples, arguing couples, people pissing, secret exchanges. On a second monitor you transcribe the actions, turning the activities into a screenplay that recounts the most banal events. People use the shadows as a private space at night within the public city, as if one can become invisible.

AS: In this framed three-metre wide space in the middle of a city all this activity happens. I think that if you look and wait every place has its own stories and layers of meanings that, over time, open a space of speculation. I noticed how the same events kept on repeating – you could pretty much write scenes that would happen again and again as dramas would unfold. In the editing I would identify the lead protagonist, or actor, and each scene would begin when they entered the frame and end when they left.

LLF: Cities become places for performance at night people act out an ideal identity on stepping out for the night or steel themselves into an untouchable being when walking alone. As the light changes and colour seeps out our behaviour changes, and your work focuses how people operate within this nocturnal suspension of time.

AS: Yes, I know the script of the city at night. Waiting becomes a part of the process of the work itself in the act of editing as I review what happens. With this work the viewer, I hope, will allow himself or herself to wait and wait, to see if something happens. The medium of video changes real time just three minutes can seem so long once it is recorded, as measured and experiential time are so very different. Boredom is tied to expectation.

LLF: Boredom is fascinating it is certain state of mind that is related to repetition. Gertrude Stein wrote of the continuous present where she described how experience and knowledge, as well as knowledge of experience and experience of knowledge, are based on endless repetition that becomes new with each return. You are offering non-hours to the viewer, giving us extra time by turning your attention to it, and with this experience doubles. It is as if you take up John Cage's advice that "the world changes according to the place we place our attention. This process is addictive and energetic".

**Lisa Le Feuvre** is a writer and curator based in London. She teaches on the MA Creative Curating course at Goldsmiths and is New Visions Curator of Contemporary Art at the National Maritime Museum.

'Non-hours and Boredom' © Anthony Shapland and Lisa Le Feuvre 2005

