

Oliver Clegg

*I HOPE WE NEVER DIE. SO DO I. DO YOU THINK THERE'S
ANY CHANCE OF IT?*[nbsp]

12 – 21 October 2011

The sign announces the exhibition; from its very beginning, a show that is concerned with the end.

The title is derived from the final exchange between Henry II and his wife Eleanor in the 1968 film, 'The Lion in Winter'. Film and its history are a constant throughout Oliver Clegg and Andy Cooke's exhibition, which takes place in a former locksmiths' shop.

Clegg has created an installation on the ground floor that takes its inspiration from classic cinema interiors of yesteryear. Clegg isn't concerned with creating a replica, rather he is using the idea of cinema and the time bound up within it as a means through which to consider our mortality. On entry to Clegg's space, the viewer is confronted with five rows of four wooden French cinema seats. These are divided into sections of four and face the far end wall. On the back of the upper part of each chair is a letter carved in reverse. Instead of numbers, the carved letters are mirrored and spell out 'Everything should be OK'.

The end wall is covered from floor to ceiling with birth certificates. Derived from disparate sources, but primarily from auctions and specialist dealers in America, the certificates have all had an end title from a film of the corresponding year laser etched into them. Each spells out "The End". It is a very static cinematic experience. A film can carry us away into another world, can even connect or reconnect us with the dead. For as long as these personages are on screen, they seem to be 'alive'—at least animate. The artist has selected birth certificates of the dead. It is a closed loop. Death is cut out of birth- 'The end' to our Apollonian bureaucracy. The exercise reinforces Thomas Fuller's miserable assertion that "birth is the beginning of death."

Human nature is such that it is tempered by the quality of unfounded optimism that flies in the face of all logic. Death is something that happens to other people; at least that's what most of us secretly believe. It is, without exception, the most bizarre occurrence in life: the one experience we cannot know; the ultimate paradox. Shrouded in mystery, death is nevertheless the only certainty from the beginning. We die. Most people at some point question whether the end really is the end. Many believe it to be a precursor to a new and possibly eternal beginning, but all know that while delay might be an option, leaving this life cannot be avoided. Strange then how human nature has this inbuilt, redolent hope that somehow, 'as if by magic' (or science and technology), the end can be escaped.

There is a sense of worship to Clegg's arrangement of the objects in the space—an almost devotional element. The pews all look expectantly towards the front 'altar' like wall space. It is a reliquary.

Leaving the boldly static environment of Clegg's piece, the viewer heads downstairs to find a small hand held pocket television. On the screen one can make out a horse, running and flying. Andy Cooke's "Andromeda Strain" is developed from Edward Muybridge's Galloping Horse of 1878. It is alleged that Muybridge set about the task of photographing a galloping horse to settle a wager - the bet being whether or not at any point in a horse's gallop all four of its hooves are simultaneously airborne. The evocative nature of this conundrum has rendered it the archetypal technological analysis for the gait of the horse. Cooke has developed the notion further by adding propulsion and flight into the equation. The rider has been replaced by wings - the horse, no longer earthbound, has become an aerial creature - the mythical Pegasus. The character of the reanimation of the image sequence suggests the famous stop motion animations of mythical beasts and dinosaurs by the likes of Willis O'Brian and Ray Harryhausen. The interference and 'doubling' present in the image suggests an elusive ethereal signal transmission drifting in and out of our perception.

It was Freud who said, "with every tool man is perfecting his own organs". In Muybridge's case though, he used the camera shutter to extend the ability of the human eye to slow down time. Early technological inventions were often greeted as a kind of magic. The miracles of invention of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, rather than eliminating sorcery and mocking the magical, instead met the demands of even the most ambitious alchemist. Electricity, rapid transport, the camera, radio and television, the airplane and the computer all carried into effect the promises first formulated by magic. We tend to take for granted this legacy of the magical that courses through our communications networks. The television is full of the animated dead and mysterious creatures and via the radio, phone

and Internet, the average person is in almost constant communication with disembodied voices.

“The force of the tools that a society provides itself and that of its imagination are never dissociable.” Charles Grivel (The Horned Phonograph)

‘The End’ has already happened. Yet we’re still running. Like a star whose light is still visible to us here on earth, life exists so long as the life force is perceivable - even if its ‘original’ container has long since disappeared. It is our fear of being forgotten, of being an accident of chance that so moves us to qualify ourselves in the here and now. It is interesting to think about how the desire to preserve a legacy is one that found renewed favour during the Renaissance. The promise of life everlasting and heavenly riches was one that the medieval church had fully exploited. The blossoming of humanism and accompanying burgeoning materialism saw men becoming more concerned with their lasting presence on earth long after their death. Securing a legacy, be it through film, achievement, architecture or the fond memories of loved ones, has become increasingly important. To be animate on the film or television screen is to be available to the minds and hearts of the living - and as such so it is to shine the flickering light of life for a little while longer.

Jane Neal