

**No Exit with Zeitgeist:
Surreality — the Unconscious
at SPACES (Dec. 2)**

by Daniel Hathaway



It's got to be a daunting task to create something even more surreal than what we wake up to every morning in our 21st-century world, but Timothy Beyer and his No Exit new music ensemble are pulling that trick off with élan in their *Surreality* project during this, their 15th season.

The second chapter — a collaboration with No Exit's St. Paul, Minnesota counterparts, Zeitgeist, which I caught at SPACES on December 2 — began with a trilogy of movies by Beyer, James Praznik, and Luke Haaksma, and progressed to Zeitgeist & Philip Blackburn's *Between Here and There*. That virtuosic concerto for unlikely "instruments" was performed in front of *Revelations of the Unconscious Mind (A Surrealist Dreamscape)*, a

center-of-the-gallery, beach-like installation devised by Leila Khoury and Kristen Newell, and studded with objects that shouldn't be there.

While No Exit's season centers around the unconscious, "taking the leap into the irrational, illogical, inexplicable, strange, and utterly fantastical world of Surreality," Friday's installment zeroed in on "the most fertile embodiment of the Unconscious: dreams," which artists have found ways to manipulate for inspiration. (Example: Salvador Dalí falling asleep holding an object which stimulates the unconscious mind to build a narrative around it.)

Beyer's *The Birdhouse*, presented without music or other audio, shared the contents of his own dreamworld with the audience.

Haaksma's *breathing room* uses stop motion to focus on "a single character residing in subliminal space with live music blurring the line between film-sound and film-music."

In a poem, Praznik describes his *In Fourteen Steps* as "a collection of my most terrifying dreams made manifest. I stand in front of you, fooling you into thinking that I know something, that I made something." The composer's unconscious visions include the piano, with which he appears to have a complicated relationship. Is it planning to kill him?

At the end of the first half, the audience moved their chairs to the other side of the installation, where *Zeitgeist* and *No Exit* collaborated to present *Between Here and There*, "a house full of rooms of imagery and sonic possibility" featuring those "occasionally improbable musical instruments."



The latter included balloons, conch shells (which apparently delivered performance instructions to Blackburn), manual typewriters, a lobster banjo, metal canes and anything else that could accommodate a clarinet mouthpiece, and bicycle wheels. Finally, the highlight — or nadir: Blackburn appearing in a gas mask to spray audience members with who knows what.

Another evening of serious but immensely entertaining music from *No Exit* and their colleagues, with more to come. Next stop on the Surrealism itinerary: Cleveland Museum of Art on February 9.

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