

# THE TRUTH WILL NOT BE TELEVISED

Words by *Alan Dunn, Leo Plumb, Bex Ilsley and Ben Parry*

Skimming through Leo Plumb's pages rapidly, as we should, we see a series of photographic streaks, blurs, blacks and reds. They are made from a process of exposing and scanning camera film before television screens that are broadcasting 24-hour newsreels. The final compositions that exist digitally for now, and collectively known as Lucky Escape, are the result of playfully arranging these photographs.

The works come about from a period of the artist marvelling at the different 24-hour news channels available to stream or watch globally. Leo considers this continual sequence of programming an abundant cycle of source imagery from which to make new work while becoming increasingly drawn to the phenomenological sensations one experiences when watching this type of broadcasting. Raymond Williams describes this as the 'flow' of television: the effort of creating uninterrupted programming, designed specifically to hook and hold viewers. For Williams, 'flow' is "the defining characteristic of broadcasting, simultaneously as a technology and as a cultural form."

Leo's work is born from a preoccupation with the news ticker, the feed of text running right to left or vice versa, a form of text communication emerging from the stock market and televised sports. In the West, the ticker is usually positioned in the red or blue ribbon in the lower portion of the television screen. The first continuous news tickers, that is those that were not just used periodically, were rolled out hours after the September 11th World Trade Centre attacks in New York by Fox News with CNN following just twenty minutes later. Within weeks, virtually all stations were doing the same.

Leo unwinds the camera film at the same

speed as the ticker to track the news images from right to left and mimic the motion, translating the continuum of news into a series of moments caught on film. He considers this approach to image-making as speaking to an imagination we have of news information travelling in these beams of light from news source to TV studio via satellites. This process symbolises the constant nature of news broadcasting. Keeping those satellites in orbit costs phenomenal amounts and news broadcasting is so expensive it is pushing itself towards extinction. As an artist, Leo enjoys the idea that the tickers reproduce and mirror the death drive of the media.

The quality of the scanned negative film has a real poignancy here; it demands close examination. It is creatively satisfying to scan in and to finally get to grips with what has been exposed. It also denies true clarity and Leo quotes Susan Sontag in regarding the pain of others, where she describes the distance employed by journalistic images: "For the photography of atrocity, people want the weight of witnessing without the taint of artistry." Throughout the development of these works, Leo refers to the website wwiTV.com that links to the world's different satellite news broadcasting stations. It is a reminder that many different news providers exist and equally that they all have an agenda. It is also fascinating if you wish to know what is going on in the Congo at 5am or what Hungarian breakfast time debate is like.

I ask Leo about truth. He expresses his current fears around the threshold between fact and law exercised at state level, a slippage that Agamben writes about. He is as scared as anything about the interchangeability of law and fact, those chicken and egg scenarios that always serve as a means to an end. Then there is truth as we tend

to experience it, aligned somehow with a notion of responsibility. We stand back shocked and offended, as individuals and institutions operate beyond what we understand to be the reach of the truth or legal parameters. There remains an issue about truth seemingly operating at different scales; within, and beyond the individual. We know if we were ourselves to become those exceptions to the rule, to act as they do, we would have to face different consequences involving our own convictions.

Can any artist then be objective? Why would they be, replies Leo. We remain interpretative creatures, absorptive to different features of the world around us. We appear to function best when we operate on different scales and can therefore think beyond the different hierarchies of truth. In this way we can be receptive for example to different issues, struggles, comforts and celebrations affecting different groups. Eventually we tend to turn this fluid practice to something more plastic, so that we can align ourselves with particular causes or beliefs, usually at a time when it is most urgently needed. Being subjective gives you a position from which to align yourself with others.

## LEARN TO READ (DIFFERENTLY)

Wednesday 20th January 2016 at 3.40pm and the sun drops behind the Holiday Inn Hotel and Radio City Tower in Liverpool city centre. A large crowd, wrapped up against the cold, stares at the 31x7m digital screen adjacent to the lower section of the hotel. A series of bold four-word statements appear on the screen, each for ten seconds: I MISS DOING NOTHING, MAKE JAM NOT WAR, NO COMFORT NO JOY. There are no

questions, no products, no lifestyles, no special offers, no ... YOU WILL NEVER LEARN, WE CAN DIE BETTER, IT AINT A GAME, TIRED BOY AT BREAKFAST, WISH IT WAS CHRISTMAS.

The large digital screen below the tower is installed to mark Liverpool's year as European Capital of Culture in 2008. It is a commercial advertising space and its graphic frame is decorated with references to local landmarks such as the Liver Birds, the Beatles and the Mersey Ferry. There are also visual references to public artwork such as Jorge Pardo's Penelope and Antony Gormley's Another Place; public art about other public art. Or rather, public design about public art and public art as tourism. Over the years, the area around the screen presents numerous bland and meaningless straplines about the city: A WINNING SPIRIT, THE BEAT OF A DIFFERENT DRUM, FEEL ITS PASSIONS, A PLACE WHERE THINGS HAPPEN, USUALLY FOR THE FIRST TIME. These mantras are ingrained into a population over time. The screen faces the entrance and exit of the city's main railway station, Lime Street, and is seen by an estimated one million adults per fortnight.

REVOLUTION WILL BE TELEVISED,  
MAKE THE ECONOMY CIRCULAR. I  
REALLY HATE JANUARY. LOOK! NEW  
HUMAN TRAFFIC.

Working with commissioning agency Metal, I hire this digital screen, known as the Liverpool Media Wall, for one hour to present one-hundred ten-second four-word animations. At the time, it is Europe's largest full-motion outdoor screen. I invite

a range of people to create four-word statements that reflect upon January, a complex month in which many of us contemplate self-image, debt, the weather and our future. It is also a culturally-void month, grey and bleak. **GET OFF OUR LAND, WOMENS PAY IS LESS. VALUE CRASH CRUNCH BOOM.** Contributors range from the known such as The Andy Warhol Foundation, David Shrigley, Fiona Banner, Paul Morley, Gerhard Richter, Shaista Aziz and Jamie Reid through to those for whom having a voice writ large in public is a new experience. I invite an A Level student, priest, retired footballer, poet, imaginary school, seafarer, disability arts festival, community gardener, economist, urban planner and journalist to compose these statements that are seen by around 4,000 people between 3.00-4.00pm. Every few minutes we interject a fake advert from stock library footage of swaying palm trees or rotating confectionary, void of text, logo or strapline.

From where we are, how do we picture the world and ourselves? The arts community have different memories, experiences and truths across a city. We access its public and private spaces, towers, tunnels, closed buildings, billboards, empty shops, car parks, hotels, flagpoles, offices, radiowaves, TV feeds and pavements. We land projects gently over the city like particles falling over time. Our projects are occasionally fleeting and require documentation to exist in any tangible form. Our project documentation becomes our instrument of navigation and our PDFs are our atlases. What do we see in ourselves when we use our city as playground? **FOUR WORDS** reflects order amidst chaos, the static within the commute, personal statements framed by abstract jingoism

and broadcast against reception. The economist and the journalist write: **PEOPLE RESPOND TO INCENTIVES** and at 4pm it ends with a teenager and art student respectively: **I OWE YOU NOTHING. THIS WAS ONLY TEMPORARY:** <http://alandunn67.co.uk/fourwords.html>.

Looking at Bex Ilsley's images, we see a blank-looking female avatar casually located in a futuristic interior environment. **Puerta del Cielo** is a set of seven photographs taken during a single night in the Hotel Silken Puerta America, Madrid - [www.bexilsley.com/Puerta-del-Cielo](http://www.bexilsley.com/Puerta-del-Cielo). The floors of the hotel offer Y2K-era sci-fi sterility alongside soft edges and blob-like malleable forms. The lighting is harsh and institutional. We, the viewer, look down on the avatar.

The images are part of a wider body of work Bex makes while thinking about the effect that living in cyberspace has had on her. There seems to be complex implications for the relationship she has with her physical form and her work queries the authenticity of the constructions of body and personality inside and outside of cyberspace. Her existence is sucked into something unavoidably performative, but is a costume worn purposefully more honest than pretending to be real? Is cyberspace a refuge from an equally wobbly wider reality, and should we run to it? Is it problematic to use it as validation engine, something to fill the voids in our self-esteem? Is it okay to admit all of this, or should we, you, me be ashamed of all this self-indulgent mirror-gazing?

Her avatar, Bex Ilsley's own Bex Ilsley, forms many intense relationships online and becomes a kind of therapeutic object, a safe receptacle for confession and a site of projection that adapts to the needs of its audience. She continues: No, that is

an older interview. She continued: "I question my authenticity. I think about fantasy and retreating to the safe stages of cyberspace. This place can be a refuge from an equally wobbly wider reality, post-truth, while also providing the instant (and questionable) service of being a validation engine for the filling of my psychological voids. What does that say about a human, or about these times?"

We return to her eyes. Look me in the eyes and tell me the truth. **FOUR WORDS.** We never catch Bex's gaze. Post-9/11 ticker-tape. Her eyes are hidden behind a visor, virtual reality glasses or directed towards her selfie-stick. But even then she is looking beyond it into nothingness off screen. Four eyes. Her eyes are black pools and lifeless. These are eyes that will never cry, never blink under pressure, never twitch nervously, never look down in shame, never see life for the first time, never say goodbye, never coil in horror at atrocity, never reveal her soul, never widen in arousal, never flicker wildly, never sleep, never feel the sun hitting their insides, never roll in disgust, never glare with anger and ultimately never ever lie.

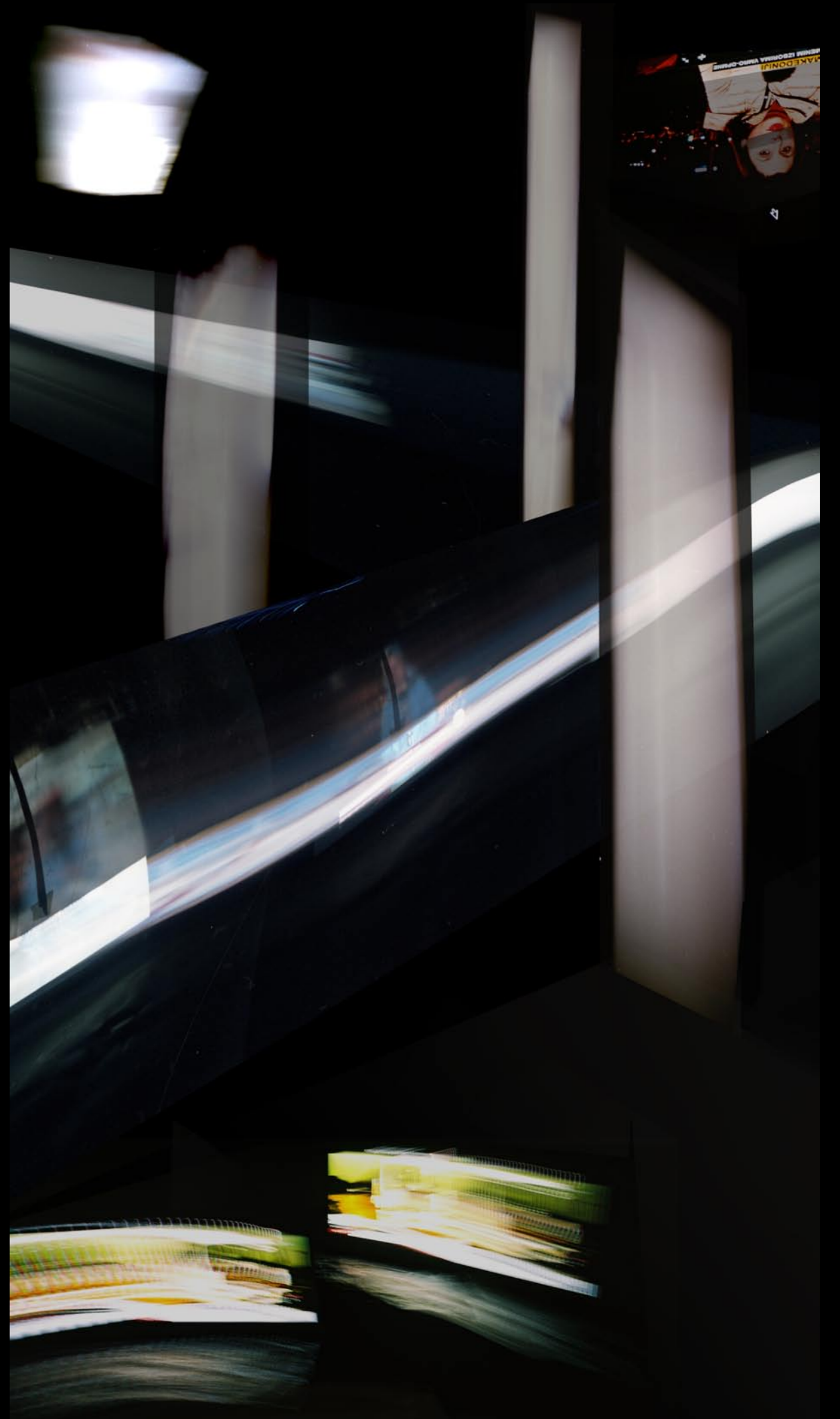
#### FURTHER READING

<https://readymag.com/tribe/520061/52/>

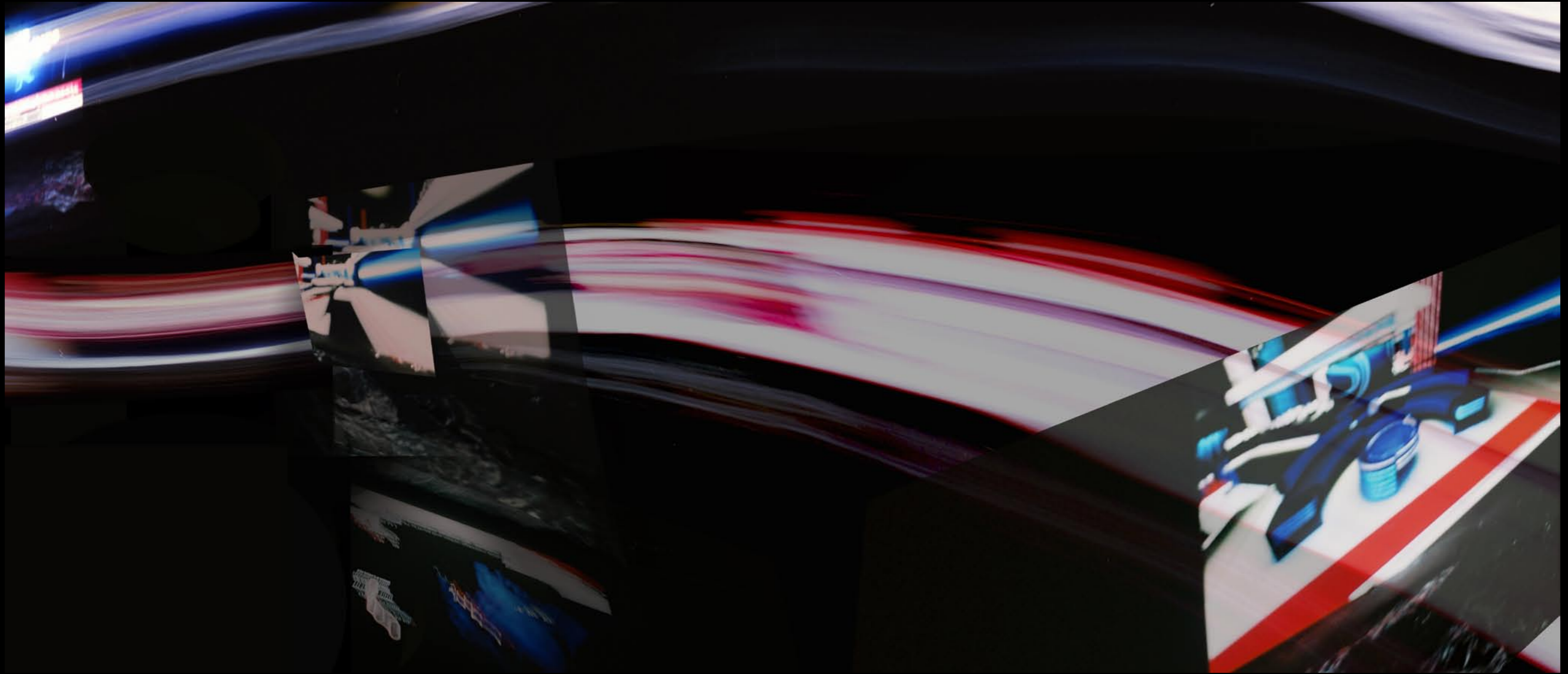
LEO PLUMB















FOUR WORDS

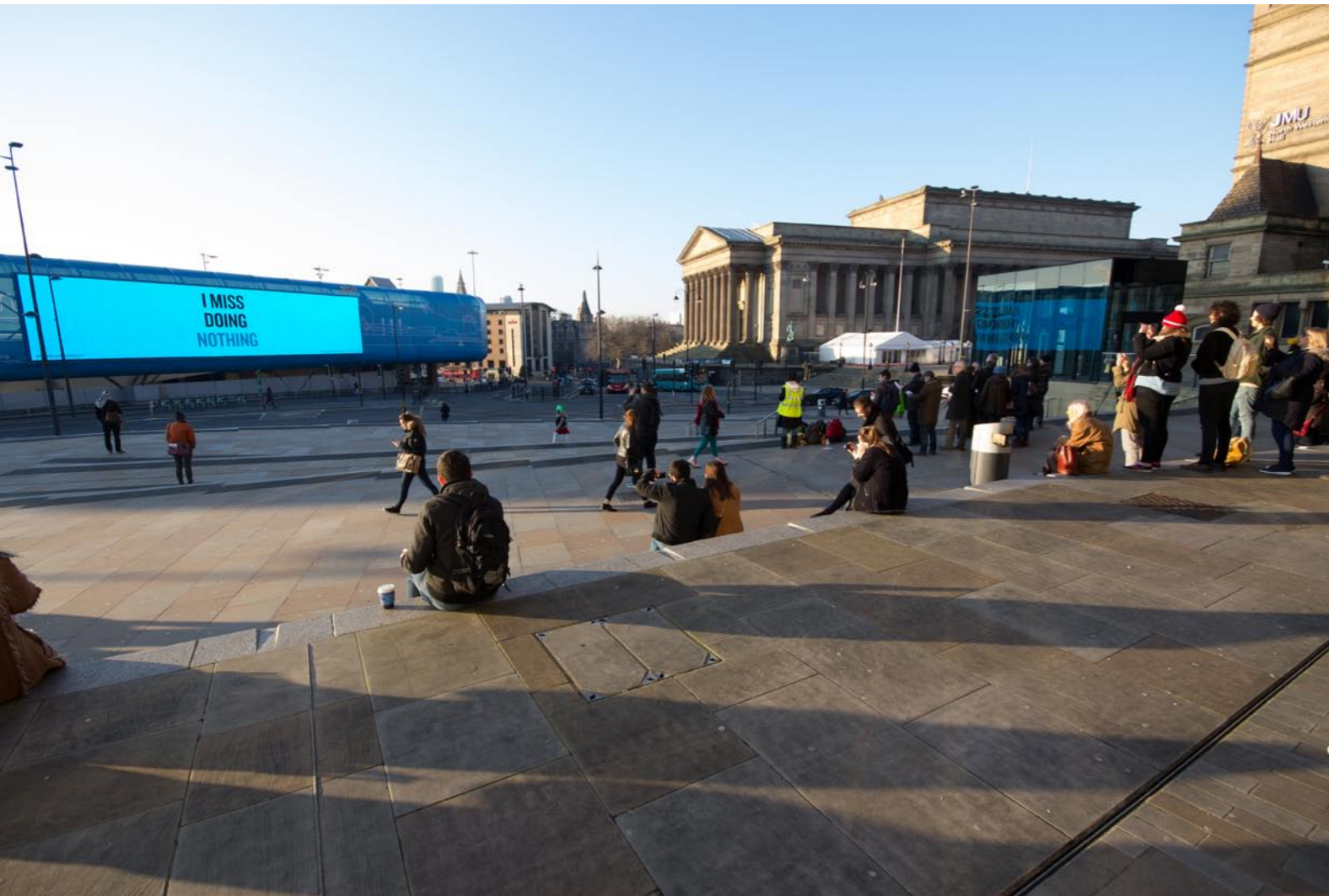




Conway and Young photograph by John McLaughlin



David Harding photograph by Mark McNulty



Douglas Coupland photograph by Ashe McDonnell



Harry Meadley photograph by Mark McNulty



Forest Swords photograph by Mark McNulty



Harriet Walsh photograph by John McLaughlin



Reverend Max Ripple photograph by John McLaughlin



Ross Sinclair photograph by John McLaughlin



Shaun Curtis photograph by Mark McNulty



Simon Morris photograph by Ashe McDonnell



Levitt Dubner photograph by Mark McNulty



Ollie Longhurst photograph by Brigitte Jurack



Pavel Büchler photograph by Mark McNulty



BEX ILSLEY













