

Transposition (Variations), Installation, 2008.

“Let sounds be themselves”. John Cage

French artist Dominique Blais presents *Transposition (Variations)*, an artistic video featuring Montreal-based improv-musician Gordon Allen. Over 26 minutes, *Transposition (Variations)* focuses on the trumpeter’s unique playing- the technique, the gestures, the performance, the rhythm, the sound, the silence, and the breath are all demystified by Blais’ camera. The traces of a narrative wind their way through this live-recorded improvisation.

Blais’ video works are often interlacing portraits of the visual and the aural, where moving images perform dialogues with sonic installations. His interest lays in diversion, subtly evoking many of the layers that, together, form popular culture- not least when they pertain to its musical branch.

Describing his motivation behind *Transposition (Variations)*, Dominique said: “The choice to collaborate with a trumpeter was, above all, based on the instrument, which can produce a wide range of notes on a limited number of keys. Sculpturally and plastically, the instrument’s design interests me. Of course Gordon Allen’s brass mastery made my decision easier. In fact, the title of this piece comes from a specific aspect of brass instruments, which can transpose the tonality of written notes when they play them.”

Upon entering the gallery, the projector’s beam cutting across the room leaves no doubt as to the medium. At first glance it could be a silent film: there is a temporal disconnect between the movement of the musician and the sound of his music. It is a step away from the traditional audio-visual setup, where the speakers and the screen are placed in close proximity to enhance synchronization. In *Transposition (Variations)*, three cylindrical structures over top of which a collection of tubes hang like a Hydran light fixture whose bulbs have been replaced by speakers that, in concert, emit a confined circle of sound.

Borrowing from portraiture and documentary, *Transposition (Variations)* is an artistic film that possesses a meditative quality. Raymond Bellour¹ has noted that the latest works in this field have taken a page from the Lumière brothers by neglecting to develop events and have instead filmed workers leaving factories or the arrival and departure of a train. The films of Mark Lewis come to mind, as well as Smithfield’s four-minute piece showing a maid cleaning a floor. *Transposition (Variations)* juxtaposes many sequential shots of a unique, improvised action; a trumpeter intensely absorbed in his playing. Filmed in a tight space with an ascetic décor, Allen is bathed in a fine light that removes his silhouette from the physical realm. Such an intense focus on the subject is reminiscent of the 18th century portrait artists.

Esther Bourdages

¹ French writer, critique and theorist renowned for his writings on the subject of cinema.

Commentaire [JB1]: I have no idea if what i just described is true. It is very difficult when you’ve never seen/heard the work so change whatever you need to. Oh, and Hydran isn’t a word, i just made it up as the adjectival form of Hydra (the many headed serpent monster from greek mythology)

Commentaire [JB2]: Who??? Is this a critic? An artist? A prof? We can’t just drop names without qualification.