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Exhibitions, installations, etc



Stills from Object Collection's *Look Out Shithead: Episode 1* (2021)

Look Out Shithead: Episode 1 Object Collection

YouTube

In Éric Rohmer's *Le Rayon Vert*, Delphine (Marie Rivière) is stuck in Paris at the start of the summer holiday and, abandoned by a friend who's gone off to Greece with her boyfriend, she can't decide where to go for her mandated vacation. As she oscillates between plans she spots playing cards like an obscure version of the Tarot, distributed as the signs of a system of fate, but one whose lineaments are all unclear.

Rohmer's films hinge in their plot movement on duos and trios of people discussing what each other wants, which most of them don't know themselves, until the fatal moment of narrative action – the end of the night in *Ma Nuit Chez Maud*, the early morning break-up in *Les Nuits De La Pleine Lune*, the green ray breaking

through the clouds at the end of *Le Rayon Vert* – reveals what was really at stake in the light, intricate fractures and fizz of the dialogue.

The latest performance by Brooklyn based troupe Object Collection takes the texture of Rohmer's films as the material for a story only apparently more sinister. The work was filmed by individual members at home in lockdown, which gives an uncanny quality to the interactions between characters: a number of two-shots of men and women in dialogue, sitting either side of a table or facing each other in a garden, obviously blend different spaces with a border down the middle, while the opening sequence between three characters is edited through shot/reverse-shots that ping between different rooms.

The group's blurb for the work describes how a "vampire-novelist weaves her web of intrigue", a plot event that many

viewers would be hard-put to notice: the text, by co-founder Travis Just, reads like the dialogue of Rohmer's 80s films rewritten by a lazy and querulous AI, with long disquisitions on the nature of desire and love – characters talking in circles and verbal feints around how they do or don't fit into each others' lives – becoming iterative, uncoiling and repetitive strings of abstract nouns and conjunctions. Every response is a non-response. The vampire-novelist, a woman with a severe black bob, floats around after her opening dialogue in scenes that seem to take place at a remove from the diegesis, as if slyly observing rather than controlling events.

Yet in a way these narrative oddities were always present in Rohmer's films. The distinctive *mise-en-scène* of the 80s films – cramped and vaguely artistic Parisian flats, workaday but bold fashion choices – promised a redemption through

ordinary life that the magic-laced realism of the plots always frustrated. This look reappears here as a series of fragments, interiors in which characters are condemned to live out their narrative without exit: in one comedic scene, one half of a sort of male couple is reading a book about philosopher Alain Badiou, who theorised "the Event" as a break with the present, before they draw guns on each other.

Unlike some previous Object Collection productions, there's hardly any music in *Look Out Shithead*, but when it arrives it comes as something like catharsis, clangorous guitar and spindly electric jazz suggesting the real worry that lies behind the dialogue's lightness. The series is a quiet, dizzy pleasure, moving through the same circles of attraction and dissonance, but often feels like little more than that.

Dan Barrow