

'In Time', Live Art UK - a response from Paul Hurley for publication launch event at Bristol Live Open Platform, Arnolfini, Bristol, 28th March 2010.

Good morning. What I'd like to do today is share with you some thoughts and reflections I've made, in response to an initial reading of *In Time*, which is a timely and impressive project.

- To quote Rosi Braidotti, feminist philosopher and theorist, "these are strange times, and strange things are happening" (*Metamorphoses*, Cambridge: Polity. 1)
- We are at an important political and cultural moment, when the consumerism of the 90s and noughties has proven itself unsustainable – economically, environmentally, politically, etc. - and the art world is not separate from that. Live Art as a "new" sector has also enjoyed the benefits of this, and both embraced and been embraced by popular and digital culture and internationalism in a way that Aaron Williamson recently called 'art tourism'¹. In Live Art's development as a sector, a scene, and a cultural industry, it has produced its own art stars, created its own market, and has often shown a penchant for glamour, fashion, ego and excess.
- I've been thinking about both the noughties and Live Art, and how it feels a bit like the party's over. It's as though many of the things that we've been enjoying materially and culturally have proven themselves to be unsustainable and untrue. Arts organisations are facing cuts, unemployment is at the highest been for some time, the funding landscape is shifting, and the days of treating the British Council like a travel agency are no more. As with any party, in the cold light of morning we're faced with a bit of a hangover, with a clear up, perhaps with disgruntled neighbours, with the prospect of getting back to work. But this clear up can also be refreshing, and be an opportunity to throw away things we don't really need anyway. And often (I know after my parties), we find ourselves with a couple more bottles of wine than we started with and perhaps half a trifle left over for

¹ Artist's talk at Spike Island Studios, Bristol, 4th March 2010.

breakfast. This is not necessarily a bad thing.

- And I was thinking about resilience, and about something that Robyn Archer said at the NRLA last week, about resilience being the opposite of efficiency, and I was thinking about Live Art and artists' networks in light of this. I was thinking about artists' networks being based not on policy, strategy or efficiency, but on friendship, kinship and intuition, and about how this relates to resilience, to sticking through times thick and thin.
- As LADA write in 'In Time' "[a] key strength of the sector is the extraordinary collaborative sharing that takes place therein," (6)
- In these strange times, the revisions and changes that we and that Live Art face are unavoidable, and I wonder if perhaps a decentralized future will not be a bad thing. As a diverse and amorphous "sector" Live Art more than other forms is not reliant on London, on regional centres, on institutions and museums, although we (/I) sometimes still crave the validation that establishment provides. We should be prepared to go further, to actively decentralize both geographically and contextually – placing ourselves in rural, suburban and non-art contexts - and as artists in the South West explore what networks, contexts, enthusiasms and sensibilities we share.
- The optimistic side of me wonders if this might work with ACE's proclaimed objective of making art available to all. Live Art does this not through extensive and expensive outreach programmes to bring people in to our galleries and theatres, but through us taking the initiative to go out into non-art contexts, be they in urban, suburban or rural areas, neighbourhoods and communities.
- Richard Kingdom writes in 'In Time' about the opportunities "to present new work in unusual contexts within cities, commuter towns, sleepy hamlets and bygone seaside resorts – sometimes with funding, often without – replacing the decaying UK touring circuit with something far more exciting, and finding innovative and effective ways of engaging with the people that live there"

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- I think most of us will agree on the importance and strength of local, regional, national and international artists networks in Live Art, but as Niki Russell points out, “[a]ny attempt to measure the importance or impact of a network is fraught with difficulties. From within, productive activity is judged according to autonomously determined values, decided through the ongoing and repeated interactions of the network members. This renders such relations distinct from the formal hierarchies of measurement and means the value of a network is difficult to quantify because of its collective, intangible nature. I believe that this viewpoint is at odds with the nature of funding. I therefore appreciate the requirement for these two contrasting structures to meet somewhere in the middle for each to support the other, whilst I also wonder what a counterstrategy of value production might be?” (14)

- Is there something ‘anarchic’, unconventional, fluid and rhizomatic about Live Art that is resistant / incompatible with state funding? (ref. Residence event at Tobacco Factory and Gary Anderson at the Institute for the Practice of Art and Dissent at Home)

- Is there something politically problematic about artists working often hand-to-mouth, living with instability and often working below minimum wage and / or unpaid, whilst the bureaucrats, programmers, curators and academics who validate and control the structures and contexts within which we sometimes work, are on substantially larger and steadier incomes?

- I think here of *puissance* (pressure) / *pouvoir* (potential), or conceptions of power as a dual force of oppression and resistance?

- And finally I want to quote a couple of further things from Rosi Braidotti:

- “Crucial to the ethics of sustainability: the transformation of negative into positive passion and through that a non-normative concept of limit. Affectivity in fact is that which activates an embodied subject, empowering him/her to interact with

others. This acceleration of one's existential speed, or increase of one's affective temperature, is the dynamic process of becoming.”

And also: “The subject-in-becoming is the one for whom "what's the point?" is an all-important question. A high-intensity subject is also animated by unparalleled levels of vulnerability. With nomadic patterns comes also a fundamental fragility. Processes without foundations need to be handled with care; potentia requires great levels of containment in the mode of framing. Sustainability assumes the idea of continuity - it does assume faith in a future, and also a sense of responsibility for 'passing on' to future generations a world that is liveable and worth living in. A present that endures is a sustainable model of the future. "You play you win you play you lose, you play." [J. Winterson]" (Braidotti, R. 'Between the no longer and the not yet: nomadic variations on the body')

The question of “What’s the point” is, I think, a key and familiar one to artists, audiences and producers of Live Art. And it is to this question that I think ‘In Time’ presents a range of answers and evidence which give us much food for thought. It shows some of the myriad ways in which Live Art has already developed tools and methodologies of resilience and vitality, and makes the case that despite (or perhaps because of) its inherent vulnerability, these tools will enable it to live much longer yet

References:

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