

Out of Time

Group Action and Temporary Autonomous Zone, almost

By Victoria Gray and Nathan Walker

“If History IS “Time,” as it claims to be, then the uprising is a moment that springs up and out of Time, violates the “law” of History. If the state IS History, as it claims to be, then the insurrection is the forbidden moment, an unforgivable denial of the dialectic – shimmying up the pole and out of the smokehole, a shaman’s maneuver carried out at an “impossible angle” to the universe.”
(Hakim Bey 1985: 98)

ArtEvict is happening in a once launderette, now squat building, just off Mare St in Hackney, East London. Since 2010, ArtEvict has established itself, modestly, as an important platform for emerging contemporary performance practices most notably in the area of action art. It employs an open and democratic approach to curation, which negates an institutionalized curatorial approach; one often considered as a hierarchical practice that is predicated on the ‘good work’, ‘bad work’ school of thought. ArtEvict maintain this principle, however fluctuating and therefore risky it might be. This is the first of principles that set ArtEvict outside of the mainstream, the second is that ArtEvict happens in empty disused buildings, forgotten spaces, usually squats, and is organized with the collaboration and consent of residents. Using spaces such as this, those that in a social context are in direct opposition to state control are also, in an artistic context in direct opposition to the institutionalized control exercised by the theatre and the gallery. This negation of establishment happens in the event of it taking place outside of these hierarchical contexts, permitting ArtEvict to perform its own autonomy and simultaneously perform its political stance. This idea mirrors Hakim Bey's concept of the Temporary Autonomous Zone (TAZ), a

space which 'does not engage directly with the State, a guerilla operation which liberates an area (of land, of time, of imagination) and then dissolves itself to re-form elsewhere/elsewhen, before the State can crush it.' (Bey 1985: 99). As such, for ArtEvict to happen it must keep moving, between abandoned spaces, between artists, between practices and between times.

What follows is an account of the event of a group action that took place on 18th September, 2010 in the old laundry, now squat, off Mare Street. The term 'Group Action', when put into a historical context seems, deliberately to escape any concrete definition or chronology and so in this instance, and at this moment, we simply identify collectives that have significantly informed theories of group action performance. From this lineage, which is not linear, we borrow and carry the torch of the theoretical principles practiced by Black Market International and Bbeyond; highlighting them as foundational and influential to our own practicing of this mode of performance.

The performances begin early in the evening with solo actions; Colm Clarke has spilt milk, Victoria Gray has burnt cotton, Christina Brooks has danced naked, Nathalie Bikoro has covered her face in clay and jamie lewis hadley has bitch slapped and been bitch slapped. After a break, Kiki Taira initiates a 'group action' signaling its beginnings by marching continuously on the spot, facing a wall. The atmosphere changes and the space between performing and not performing, spectating and not-just-spectating blurs. The 'audience' can no longer attempt any form of passivity, they are implicated just by 'being' there, they are amongst and inside the group action. Moments of grunge, deathly marching and ghostly shouts emerge. These phantom actions of old, re-embodied by these new shamans are performed without any attempt to conjure spectacle, or repeat the past. Squatting there in-between pillars, surrounded by sleeping people and dead plants, dirty mattresses, sleeping bags and old dogs; the air clogs the air ducts, fabric is unrolled and shakes like a specter curtain in a gale. Duncan Ward's soiled face is talcum powdered so as to become as white as an apparitions sheet. Medical bags are used as muzzles to muffle faces that are barking at ghosts; dust is rising, smoke holes are eyes. We didn't think people felt like this anymore, a group

action feels like stormy sea, like unwashed cabin crew, like disappearance.

Like Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone these young artists are playing with time, history, and the law. The group action acts on a network of relations whereby participants negotiate the performance of individual actions within the politics of a group situation. The events operate within an open structure, a methodology to explore modes of synchronization, communication and participation between performers and audiences and bodies and objects; relations that resonate aesthetically and politically. The group experienced a synchronization of actions accessed via physical, verbal and psychic dimensions, folding and weaving to form a rhizomatic network. Here, there is positivity in difference, felt in the rub of synchronic and discordant actions, sensed in the relationship between informed intuition and arbitrary coincidence; witnessed in the visual rhyme between bodies, objects and the re-claimed architecture. Synchronicity occurs as a moment of communication and takes place in the squatted space between things.

A network of relations was exercised in the performance, but on a wider scale, this group action fused together a network of relations between key artist groups working in action art in the UK. Present were members of Bbeyond (Belfast),]Performance s p a c e[(London), O U I Performance (York) and ArtEvict (London/Japan). All artists acknowledged that this meeting strengthened the community between these geographically disparate groups, making the connections momentarily physical and tangible.

“Like festivals, uprisings cannot happen every day...But such moments of intensity give shape and meaning to the entirety of a life...shifts and integrations have occurred--a difference is made.” (Bey 1985: 98) Bey notes that revolution, whilst seemingly attaining to a new permanence, rarely achieves permanent change. Instead, we favor these impermanent uprisings, temporary experiences that surface a new network of performance art in the U.K, practicing a contemporary experience of this group action art in this new decade.

Victoria Gray & Nathan Walker 2011

Further Reading

Bey, H. 'T. A. Z. : The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism', Autonomedia. HTML Edition. Accessed online at http://hermetic.com/bey/taz_cont.html

LaChance, M. '15 Principles of Black Market International'. Accessed online at <http://performancelogia.blogspot.com/2007/09/15-principles-of-black-market.html>

www.artevict.com

www.bbeyondperformance.org

www.blackmarketinternational.blogspot.com

www.ouiperformance.org.uk

www.performancespace.org