

THE SKINNY

KILL YOUR TIMID NOTION

Posted by Gareth K Vile, Thu 18 Feb 2010

For years, Barry Esson and Bryony McIntyre, creative directors of the Arika organisation, have been asked whether their festivals are “experimental music” or “experimental festivals”. Esson has reluctantly replied that “well, it’s the music.” After spending a year in research, Arika return with a Kill Your Timid Notion that is addressing this problem.

Chatting to McIntyre and Esson is infinitely fascinating. They take in modern philosophy’s resistance to absolutes, question whether a performance ought to be enjoyable, search out the moments of connection between audience and act and alternate between a warm humour and a rigorous intellectualism. Like Luther Blisset, they reject commonplace ideas about the status of the art, and are opening up KYTN to a radically different experience.

Rather than simply arranging for a group of musicians to perform in front of customers, Arika have invited the audience to take part in a series of workshops, that will ultimately define the festival’s programme. “We asked the artists to take a particular axiom, and question it,” explains Esson. The outcome will depend on the participants. “It might fail,” Esson adds. “But then you have to ask: did it fail on its own terms?”

This simple starting point is inspired by Arika’s dynamic engagement with contemporary critical theory, and a righteous disdain for the old fashioned sanctity afforded to the idea of the artistic object. “Painter Barnett Newman said it should be enough for someone to simply look at his paintings for all of capitalism to fall,” Esson scoffs. Since capitalism is still here, either Newman is wrong, or nobody has been looking.

Philosophy is often seen as an esoteric science, largely irrelevant to actual art or life. Yet for Esson, the ideas that inform criticism have secretly caged our ability to perceive art, and demanded certain fixed responses which do not necessarily reflect the experience.

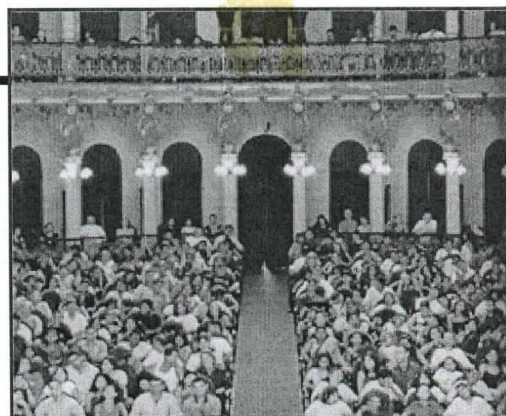
“Multiplicity is all there is,” he insists. Taking Sharon Lockhart’s film – a long, single shot of an audience in Brazil – as an example, he points out that “it completely destroys Greenberg’s idea about how we watch art: that the viewer has a totalising gaze, and understands and absorbs everything they see instantly.” Lockhart’s *Teatro Amazonas* forces the audience to decide what they want to watch. Shot on “a fixed camera: it shows you everything that is happening. You can’t ever master that entire field. She says she has watched it maybe 50, 60 times and she is still seeing different things.

“I don’t believe in thought that has no action,” Esson continues. Across the festival, the artists have been encouraged to take control, not to be herded by the curators, but open their work to a collaboration with the audience.

That this feels radical, even dangerous, is a testament to the hegemony of the association of art with entertainment. “As Adorno says, the point of art is not to make me happy: it ought to be turned against itself. Happiness implies a wilful acceptance of a situation.”

Arika have pushed ideas of taste and entertainment for many years, mostly through the range of musicians they have programmed. Now, they are attacking the very notion of the musical event.

“KYTN’s driving factor is not entertainment, or high minded preaching. It’s about investigation,” Esson concludes. For years, we have accepted the idea that experimentation means following the vision of an artist, receiving the wisdom of a great soul in an acceptable space. Arika are inviting a more immersive response. Time to slaughter that craven lie.



Teatro Amazonas

Image: Sharon Lockhart

EVENT PREVIEW

Event name Kill Your Timid Notion
Venue DCA
Date Sunday 21 - Sunday 28 February

MORE INFO

Kill Your Timid Notion, DCA, Sunday 21 – Sunday 28 Feb

ON THE WEB

www.arika.org.uk/kytn/2010/investigations

TOOLS

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