

Personal Space*

Art is not the most precious manifestation of life. Art has not the celestial and universal value that people like to attribute to it. Life is far more interesting. — Tristan Tzara

I here accuse you of believing that art, first and foremost, should be elevating. I suggest instead that we elevate ourselves. — Hollis Frampton

Everyday living is a subversive act

To get by in the world, to eek out our own ways of coping, of making do, we all engage in creativity, every single day. We take shortcuts, we cook, we get lost, we engage in illegal acts, we take drugs, we double park, we steal, we owe money, we have sex in cars.

We go for a walk, and in doing so undertake a narrative, aesthetic practice: we start out somewhere, and by taking a series of creative decisions, by creating our own story (with a start, a detour, a conclusion), we activate the landscape in a chorus of idle footsteps. Or we take the train and from a spectators distance, behind and framed by the train's window, again create (an untouchable) narrative, one you can't hold, but which can only be owned by the eye. A silent film.

Each day we poach on other people's territory, develop our own ways of negotiating the strategic environment set out by government, by institutions, by commercial companies. We develop ways of living, not just accepting what we're given but using it to live.

* As a footnote, I should say that these notes are hugely influenced by Michel de Certeau, read his books!

The way society tells us to live attributes us the role of consumers; homogenous and passive. Cities are built to transport you from your home to work and back again. Our mainstream and partisan mass media no longer questions but rather reinforces the perceived and controlling wisdom; social, commercial and cultural products and ideas are handed down to us for our implied benefit, but in fact serve the status quo, or the interests of others.

But in real life nobody is passive; there is an inherent, heterogeneous creativity in engaging with the world. Because each of us, to varying degrees, refuse the uniformity that our administrative powers would like to see reign in the name of common interest, and instead choose the truant freedom of non-conformity. People are tactical, they are active. Instead of just accepting these handed down ideas, these products at face value, they creatively re-use them to serve their own ends.

In this way, and below the gaze of the mainstream media, out of sight of institutions (anywhere people meet, or indeed spend time by themselves) you can find a Brownian motion of micro-resistances. And in these resistances are found micro-freedoms.

Living our everyday lives is a subversive act in which we tactically find our own ways of getting by.

Consumers are passive, users can be active

I don't think any intelligent person would say that they actually believe that the car that they drive defines them, or that they believe in the 'centre ground' of British politics, or in the blandised views of the silent majority. Why then are our most of our experiences of art defined by the same consumer based model? Can't there be ways of acknowledging people as *users* of art, as being creative and having ways of operating which are not passive, but *active*.

Because that's how art gets its real meaning, its sense of value, timeliness and pertinence: by its relationship with people (who also have relationships with each other.)

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We've been thinking about these ideas while working on future projects for Arika. And I would say that the way INSTAL has been presented in the past, (and to a large degree this year too) falls into many of the traps that I've talked about crudely above. But we wanted to start thinking about ways in which we could move away from only engaging with artists on a stage (and as a product), and to at least connect with them in everyday situations. This still kind of sets them up on a pedestal, but it's a start. We're working up these ideas more, and hope to present a bunch of new events in the future that much more directly engage with personal creativity.

But in the mean time, and for INSTAL this year we've asked a number of local artists to think about situations in their everyday lives that they consider to be creative. While nobody has suggested double parking, cooking with the contents of their fridge, or indeed having sex in cars as part of Personal Space, each of the artists we've asked has come back with an event that in some way reflects their own everyday creativity, a personal space which music occupies for them. We've tried to build events around those situations, and hope they offer something slightly different from the norm, a chance for you to engage with experimental music in a slightly different way.

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February 2008