

Keywords with O U I Performance

Interviewed by Jade Blood

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O U I Performance is led by artists Victoria Gray & Nathan Walker. I asked O U I Performance to respond to a list of key words and sentences that I put together. These words and sentences are areas of my own interest (I know, how very selfish). Nathan, Victoria and all of the artists that take/have taken part in O U I performance live and breath their work- it's admirable.

Every single one of their events I have attended has pushed me; mentally and even physically (If anyone remembers the freezing basement durational performance last year...?) and I have never walked away and just 'switched off'. O U I performance events will make you think...and they are based here in York for your pleasure.

O U I Performance on *Collaboration (yourselves, Nathan and Victoria)

Nathan: We started by organising 'The Sixth National Whippit Night' together in February 2010, and the day after the event, without any sleep and following an insane clean-up in the snow, we knew we wanted to continue curating art in York. O U I Performance was born that Sunday around the dining room table. We live together and we run the organisation alone. All of the work we've done organising events, receiving funding, bringing international artists to the city, we've done together, two people, in their living room, its remarkable to think what we have achieved in less than two years.

O U I Performance on *Labor

Victoria: Making O U I happen requires labor, in fact, as jobs go it is really physical although people might not consider this when we use words like artist, curator, organiser, co-director to define what we do. Those titles disguise the fact that we are all in fact labourers in some way. Putting on our events usually requires shifting heavy furniture, sourcing cumbersome objects and time consuming clean up operations; all of which require a bit of muscle. We call this 'Sweat Equity' in a recent poster work that we made for an event called Adhocracy: An unFair of Benevolence in London convened by New Work Network. Adhocracy addressed D.I.Y attitudes to making art work and O U I were interested in the economy of the body in this process. In 'Sweat Equity' we state that we 'actively encourage difficult modes of production and

consumption' and this requires physical and mental labor; executing endurance testing, task based actions; both as performance and in order to make performance happen.

O U I Performance on *York is waking up?

Nathan: I think Action Art Now might be helping keep the city awake, in my opinion its widely acknowledged that there is a lack of contemporary culture in York, because the city is concentrated on the tourist and not the resident. There are art venues – not many but they are there – but they are not ran by artists, they are still concentrating on commerce. We've definitely noticed a critical mass of artists and artistic folk in the city. The artist studios, internships and events at Bar Lane Studios coupled with active artist groups like the YMA Collective, and the Postal Project are testament to this. The connectivity between recent graduates coming out of York St John Faculty of Arts and the city through internships at Bar Lane and Proof of Concept commissions has helped keep young artists in the city after graduation. This is contributing massively to the visibility of contemporary art and culture in the city. I don't think its a question of whether York is asleep or awake but more a question of why it is still so difficult to see contemporary work, you have to actively seek it out.

O U I Performance on *The importance of supporting local and international performers by providing a platform for them

Victoria: The performance art community is very well connected internationally, in fact the amount of organisations, networks, curators and festivals can be overwhelming. When we started O U I Performance we immediately tapped into this international community and became a bit seduced by it perhaps. On a research trip to Belfast to visit Bbeyond, a performance collective who have been very influential and supportive, performance artist Alastair MacLennan advised us that it is most important to 'focus on the local situation.' This was a timely reminder and since then we have thought very carefully about how any international activity, whether it be bringing artists to York or O U I Performance performing abroad impacts on York and the 'local situation'. The international exchanges that O U I initiate now are always reciprocal and the word 'exchange' is key. The international artists that we have curated in Action Art Now are also often curators themselves. In the curatorial statement for Action Art Now we refer to an, 'international community of artists whose practice involves the action of establishing artist-led organisations and platforms for the continual evolution of action art.' The platforms that we offer through O U I aim to give local, national and international artists an opportunity to share in the diversity of this work and to allow ideas to cross-fertilise and mingle.

In the UK we are part of a strong network, particularly between] performance s p a c e[and ArtEvict, both based in London. Although geographically disparate, the physicality of the exchange between our

organisations has been crucial in the establishment of a tangible, supportive community. Locally, through initiatives such as Compass Live Art of which we are associates the network is beginning to grow but there is still more work to do; in fact we realise that we see more work from international artists or London based artists than ones in our own region, this is starting to change.

In all instances, collaboration between our organisations and networks is considered a performative action; i.e making art happen becomes an art in itself.

O U I performance on *Being ‘in the market for art, not the art market’

Nathan: Our idea is to self-organise to decentralise. We’re not selling anything, we are a not-for-profit organisation so we’re not governed by the rules of the market. In ‘Sweat Equity’ for Adhocracy we said we wanted to ‘make a social space, physical and conceptual, for parallel practices and transitory artists and actionists to meet and make work’ This is what we are aiming for with Action Art Now. Going to a new city and being with other artists is a great way to make work. We like the idea of a market-place as a social space for meeting and exchanging, a non-competitive situation for a radical gathering where we become active participants not passive consumers – where we are all pro-sumers. We want our audiences to realise that they are pro-sumers, that they have the potential to make things happen.

That’s why all Action Art Now events are free to Walmgate Residents and why we use Space 109 Community Arts. The venue itself has an important role in the city and is extremely supportive of everyone. We are so lucky to have a space like this in York and Action Art Now relies on the ethos of open doors and visible art in the heart of the city. We hope that by using this venue we are making the work (of O U I Performance and of our artists) more accessible and inclusive, because contemporary art and performance art can often be difficult to access, it is difficult work, if we programmed these events in a gallery, an exclusive place, then we are limiting our audiences. Action Art Now is in the market for art and not in the art market.

Jade Blood

Jade Blood is an artist and art journalist based in York (UK). Jade makes lo-fi, DIY artworks and events including [The Postal Project](#). You can see more at her website: <http://www.jadeblood.co.uk/>