

The Sixth National Whippit Night

Space 109 Walmgate, York

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IT

It is happening! It is here! An evening of live, unapologetic actions, sounds, videos, words. The documentation taking place is immense. This is a scene unknown to the eye or to the mind in York, so cameras click continuously as if to prove its very existence - conversations erupt in every possible moment of silence. There are smart folk in overcoats, young girls in fish net tights, all ready, for a Saturday night provided by the Sixth National Whippit Night of Contemporary Art. But this is no ordinary event. This is the evening long awaited by many art lovers in the area. Gathered here because you just had to be here, to see it, to believe it is really happening on Walmgate, York, North Yorkshire. Maybe a lecturer told you it was compulsory, a friend invited you, or a daughter needed your support. There are many reasons to be here, but the best part of all, is that the community that care about this work, and those who have no idea what they are letting themselves in for, are here in numbers. BIG numbers. [HIGH 1465]

ME

And I seem to be floundering in its wake - how on earth can I take all this in during one night, all this work and activity in a space I have never been to in a city I know not for it? York has so long needed an evening of this sort that it now gushes in rolling video cameras and inappropriate applause, as the nine artists' present work in Space 109. The night has magnetism; drawing in fellow artists, practitioners, students and even more delightfully - people from the streets. It is glistening and we are magpies flocking. Thieves in the night, we steal away ideas, as these artists make it happen; creating, repeating, throwing out, throwing up all that is new, live, ART - PERFORMANCE - VIDEO - SOUND. It is spilling out on to the street as the light of Katy Connor's projection beams on to the pavement. It is compact, yet efficient, teetering at the edges of what it can be, full to the very brim - from 7pm until 11pm - three small rooms, one toilet, one kitchen. The audience migrate around the space, as three durational pieces take place; Connor, Hunter and Sykes and five timed works from; Bean, Bennett, Gray, Greenwood and Walker. Some short actions, some long intense sequences that

we encounter time and time again.

WEB

Reading the manual post-event, I begin to filter through the additional layers of the work, written texts, putting it all into some new order. The work begins to exist beyond the live interaction, now on the page and on the screen. Images of the night appear gradually on my laptop and I discover new online communities, where they are debating the work I saw, pre-empted and archived, before I even got there. What was seen unravels. Whippit and all its spin off and starting points, points to; undoing, redoing, rewriting, criticality, honesty. And through Whippit's sixth night, a reason is coming in to existence for contemporary artists to not only stay in Yorkshire, but in York. Artists here are not just talking about work and, they are making work happen.

MAP

This night in the city represents not only four local artists, but five national contributions as well, and this is the point at which Whippit can really be seen as more than a platform for new work. It places these artists, through the curation of their work in these events, on a national and international map, as Whippit grows in size as a network of artists, it hosts its next event in Berlin. This places the artists involved, as well as the city of York at the heart of something much bigger than this sole evening, it places them in a network and ongoing collaboration with endless possibilities. A close social and professional network such as Whippit generates work for those involved as they thrive on self promoting, self curating and create a supportive, yet critical and fastidious community, putting artists in touch with spaces, with each other, with educational institutes and even encouraging artists to take on the role of curator, project manager, marketer and agent.

Notes from the work I witnessed:

1) BEAN

OTHERS WORDS MAKE SENSE OF WHAT I AM ALREADY DOING

Reflexive and pre-emptive, these words go beyond the live event I witnessed. The bleeding and the running, the water and the glass. They are provocative and threatening to a writer. Particularly when read post-event. They encompass an acknowledgement to 'everything else', everything that has gone before, the vast winds of knowledge and work that have already existed and continue to exist. They write my words before I write them, they stall me and they spur me on, to write about the event, after the event, to write the words that were already written as I stood in the corner of the space at Whippit and watched. Yet Bean's performance sits deeply in the

present, the current flow of time and our own measly human efforts to interrupt it, stop it or change that flow: FIGHTING THROUGH CIRCUITS CIRCLES LINES BEYOND BUOYS. This sceptical statement packs an awful lot of punch, on the page and in the dark in the back room. It bites.

Bean circles the space towards the end of her performance. The materials she uses; butter, cut glass, knife, and blood are sharp and soft, blunt and broken, gushing and refined. The small sound system plays a monotonous list of 4 digit figures. HIGH 1582 LOW 1643 HIGH 1465 LOW 1478. I watch and collect my thoughts as she spins her circles and catches me inside them.

2) VICTORIA GRAY

JULY

all people are like grass all flesh is like grass all men are like grass

and various translations on the passage

AN ACTION FOR JULY IN FEBRUARY WITH GRASS

July in February

A face full of peace.

Victoria stands, with the stillness of a bird in hand. Several days after the event I can still see her clearly. Breathing. In. Out. Eyes closed and dressed simply. She made a tree for me. She dressed it, watered it and laid down at its feet. She stripped herself of her gold necklace and kept it close by in a glass bowl of water. Purity/Clarity. Clear white sheet. Grass, cut at its roots, is kept for months, dried like toast. A relic, it is straight and bundled, faded in colour. To now have its moment, to be spread out at our feet.

February in July

Folding time. Time bends elegantly now, like a dancer, back on to itself. Time against time. Flesh against flesh. Blinded by her own eyelids, groping, searching, striding, she paces into the long cut grass - collecting it at her feet. Walking into the past. It is dry, it is watered, it is soggy. This is summer too soon, hot July in wet February. The materials move when artist moves. They shift in form and meaning, they disappear and re-appear. They stand tall, they become shy.

3) CHARLOTTE SYKES

Drawing with her eyes closed, there is a clear determination and

focus in SYKES as she works. Her arms stretch up and out, her reach is marked on the paper. I return to her durational performance time and time again. There is something incredibly soothing in the repetition of the line making with the graphite she holds in both hands to mark the paper. It is a marking of time, but also of release. Two lungs appear on the page in front of me and the rhythmic actions seem to follow a pattern of breathing. One hand begins to work quickly, drawing over itself again and again, whilst the left hand continues with broad sweeping motions. There is a sadness in it. It is quiet work, and when left alone it is as though Charlotte has been abandoned. Not attention-seeking, but dream making. Making and marking. Erasing from the paper later, the lines blur and congeal under rubber. Her arms become heavy under the work and she begins to move beyond the marking of time in to erasing it, ending it, covering up and blurring what once was. There is no declaration in this work. No statement shoving its way into our consciousness. Just a continuous stream of energies; both positive in mark-making, then deductive, reducing the moment of creation in to a small pile of rubber shavings and graphite. It is thankless but rewarding - for it is done.

1) BEAN - AND THE BUOY AT THE END OF THE LINE

2) VICTORIA GRAY - JULY

3) CHARLOTTE SYKES - DRAWING FOR A DURATION WITH EYES CLOSED – THEN ERASE DRAWING

Founded in 2007, Whippit is an international network of artists who host and participate in Whippit Nights, art event evenings for performance, video and sound art. Whippit 6 was organised by OUI Performance, York. <http://www.ouiperformance.org.uk/vn-02>

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