

Tim Etchells

I dont know how to make this introduction.

I was at the National Review of Live Art in 1989 when Alistair McLennan made a long performance in the gallery at Third Eye Centre. He was in there several days. One time I went in it was very dark and he had this mask on and he was standing with a supermarket trolley full of severed sheep heads. I think he was whispering. Another time I went in there and the fluorescent lights were all on very painful bright and he had a penknife and was doing something (carving? cutting?) with these dead trees that he had in there. I still have the smell of that performance in my head somewhere.

Maybe at the same Review, Anne Bean did something outside. Or maybe that was a later one. She had this long trail of heat-sensitive paper that she had been ironing and then she launched it into the sky on what might have been helium balloons. I still have the chill of that night air in my bones somewhere.

Another time, maybe the first National Review I went to, I dont remember the work so much as the people in the bar. Meeting people for the first time or being aware of them in the background. Or being aware of other people in the foreground and me and my colleagues from the more-or-less newly formed Forced Entertainment in the background. Looking around. By now (2003) I have spent a couple of decades working alongside some of those people that I met in that bar, or bumping into them here and there and at the National Review of Live Art -which is one of those necessary places that is summoned from the efforts of dedicated people, a special place on the borders of the world.

Ive been back many times. To me, the National Review has always been important as a space to meet people and to see new stuff. Important as a place for artists and audiences to meet and talk and as a temporary home for work that otherwise has none, or for work that only ever finds temporary homes, or work that only seeks or hopes for a temporary home. The National Review has always been important because its passionate and idiosyncratic and because it mixes younger artists with more established ones, UK artists with their peers from elsewhere in the world. And I like the ideas. In talks or in the bar The National Review is a place where stuff gets talked about - I mean politics and funding and technologies and ethnicity and writing and gender and whats real and whats not and scandalous gossip and news on who is sick and who is dead and who is in love and who finally left the country.

I dont know how to make this introduction. Some things are hard to quantify.

Of course it is not the smell of that performance by Alistair McLennan that I have in my head. The thing I carry with me still is its marvellous disquiet. Its disturbance of my ordinary. Its made-me-think-again-ness. Its pit of questions. Its everyday made strange.

I think that the National Review of Live Art has long been about that disquiet, has long sought that disquiet and has long been a champion of that disquiet. I love it for that and for many other reasons.

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It is the start of 2003 and I am riding third class on a one class train. I am wishing that you (and the National Review) have a long long and happy life of permanent disquiet, a pit of questions and a steady hand on the trigger.

Tim Etchells

Tim Etchells is the writer and artistic director of Forced Entertainment who present the performance

Instructions for Forgetting and join Goat Island for an Institute of Failure event at this years NRLA.