LIGHTENING FIELD

BODY-SONIC-DRAWING

PERFORMANCE EXPERIMENT

LIGHTENING FIELD brings together, for the first time, the diverse and fluctuating practices of performance drawer Kellie O’Dempsey, installation butoh artist Megan Janet White and sonic artist Luke Jaaniste in a new collaborative work.

The Laundry Artspace is proud to present the premiere performance of LIGHTENING FIELD as part of BARI Festival, within a disheveled warehouse space in Teneriffe, amongst the grime of disused floors, the grift of recent graffiti, and the darkness of night.
**Kellie O'Dempsey**’s drawing practice is hybrid and diverse, incorporating projection, video, collage, architectural space, gestural line, site-specific installation and live art, through which she explores transformational processes through improvisation and happenstance. The performance drawing works invite the audience to engage directly with the visceral process of making. O’Dempsey’s public and private productions aims to enable an inclusive form of cultural interaction via performance and play.

**Megan Janet White** and **Luke Jaaniste** are the co-directors of Brisbane-based ensemble Theatre of Thunder. TOT intertwines butoh dance with immersive sound and atmospheric landscape. Raw and ambient sounds propel the body into a state of poetic rupture and transmutation, whilst illuminated smoke-bubble storms make palpable the fluid dynamic between the sound, body, architecture and audience.
Currently in Brisbane, only one gallery-based platform for experimental art (Boxcopy) exists in the hierarchy from emerging art spaces to GOMA. Overwhelmingly, the most common platform for showing experimental contemporary art is for one night only in an ARI; the majority of which occurs in laundries, sheds, garages, trucks, living rooms, sites soon-to-be-demolished, and roving locations around the city. The scarcity of traditional galleries means it is commonplace to see mid-career artists and those with doctorates exhibiting in these spaces. Surely, the effect of so many one-night-only exhibitions outside the gallery fundamentally affects the way an artist considers art production and exhibition practice.

One can’t help but notice that Brisbane has no self-proclaimed “performance (only) artists”, however breeds prolific numbers of artists with interdisciplinary practices that utilise performance in varying degrees, aspects and mediations. I understand these approaches through examining the sort of spaces that the cities’ artists are functioning in.

Presenting work in an ARI means one is provided with a unique cocktail of ingredients and limitations. The walls cannot have holes made in them, the lighting system is limited, and equipment must be sought out well in advance. Artists are faced with the difficulties that come with spaces that are often small, dirty, distracting, weirdly-shaped, and sometimes semi-outdoor. They are too-often forced to compromise.

With limited space, restrictions on permanent fixtures, and exhibitions that last three hours, performance makes sense. However, the impacts of such parameters run deeper. Most artists know the intimidation and paralysis felt when faced with the task of filling a large, square, white cube: “what (the fuck) do I put here?”, and by extension, “what (the fuck) do I do here?”. Instead, when bounded by spatial and practical limitations, artists are freed from anxiety about “filling” a space from scratch and are instead able to respond to it. These questions become more pertinent: “do I integrate with the space, or contrast with it?”, “that bit of space is interesting, how can I work with that?” and “how will the audience experience and move through the work according to the unique space?”

One wonders if, when artists are continually asked to navigate and respond to “weird-space”, such considerations become a regular influence on their practice; whether ARI spaces provide situations conducive to phenomenological concerns on a practical level, so that presence, experience and immediacy are brought to the forefront of artistic approach. Is performance practice simply the natural next step in forced phenomenological considerations, and conversely, have we created a culture of art practice through ARI events that is naturally open to performance?

On a deeper level, there is a feeling that the lived-in ARI space innately encourages sensory engagement. Unlike the white gallery, which is arguably a dead-space of sensory alienation and deprivation, lived-in space allows for easy corporeal, existential and atmospheric engagement. In an experimental scene where practice is fluid and outcomes are temporary, such spaces are inherently conducive to embodied experience, and by extension performative outcomes.

For me, it is a chicken-and-egg (art-and-life?) understanding: that the propagation of site-specific, spatially engaged, performative and interdisciplinary art practice is a result of the unique conditions that lived-in ARIs provide, whilst artists are intelligently making work that is responsive and tailored to the impermanent and inhabited nature of these exhibition formats.

MARISA GEORGIOU
Within recent years, I have noticed an upsurge in collaboration among local emerging artists in Brisbane, with a wide array of artist collaborations and collaborative exhibitions popping up everywhere. This is exciting to me, because I believe that collaboration has the potential to act as a solution to the politically and economically driven rat race that we sometimes get caught up in. This rat race seems to just be a big ball of competitiveness that grows out of many factors like a lack of funding and exhibition opportunities. There are also basic structures in place that nurture competition amongst artists. These are fostered by institutions through grants, art prizes and assessment within academic arts education.

I have heard people’s withering remarks that being pitted against each other brings out the best and keeps up high standards in the arts. I think banding together would work a lot better. Maybe these damaging ideas come from the national psyche - the idea that the arts isn’t important, isn’t valuable or can’t be economically viable - or maybe just from the obsessive and competitive sports culture Australians have. But even in football the players need to work as a team. Collaboration is our chance to work as a team and fight against the system that only allows a select few artists the ability to have their voices heard.

As an artist I work on a very personal scale. As individual artists we become very comfortable working with ourselves. Even if our ideas are part of grander narratives, or our creative methods involve directing teams of people, our conceptual process is still incredibly self-managed. This is good in some ways. It has meant that my self-awareness and self-criticality are well developed. But I also think that collaboration can be used as a tool to open up this pattern of introspection into a more open conversation and process. When I collaborate, I have the opportunity to break down my individual identity in order to generate new ideas that challenge my own practice and perspectives. In doing so I can broaden the dialogue of my practice to incorporate more ideas, narratives and voices then I could ever do on my own. This keeps my ideas grounded, relevant and contextualised.

Solo practices are usually so heavily reliant on the identity of the individual that the name is their currency. This can make collaborative practices hard to value. In this way, collaboration challenges notions of what is valuable in art, and interrupts capitalist value construction. It therefore makes sense to me that most of the collaborative practices I have witnessed or been involved in take place in Artist Run Initiatives. ARI’s are spaces which, by their very nature, encourage experimentation and collaboration between the exhibiting artists and also the artists that run them. The people I’ve met who are involved in these spaces are a lot like me - driven by passion with little regard for monetary gain. The Old Queenslander architecture has lent itself to many a Brisbane ARI, including my own. They create a unique system in the national ARI scene, as rent for the space below where art is shown can be subsidised by the people living above it. As a result, Brisbane ARI’s usually charge artists little to nothing and the main goal becomes facilitating and supporting artists. ARI teams work together because they share this passion and excitement for the artists they show and what their art can be and do. ARI teams also work together out of necessity. Running an ARI is hard work, and the more brains on board the more artists and idea makers you can facilitate.

At their very core, collaborations are a celebration of friendships. It’s very hard to make art with someone you don’t get along with. And there is something really joyous about that. A collaborative art practice gives you a glimpse into the shared ideas and experiences of a collective of individuals who have found common ground. We work together in spite of the galleries, grants, institutions and art prizes that pin us up against each other and make us compete. Being an artist is a hard slog. Making work is hard. Running an ARI is hard. When you do it together it’s a lot more fun and a lot less sad when you get to the bottom of that bottle of red.

AISHLA MANNING AND NAOMI O’REILLY
THE LAUNDRY ARTSPACE is a Brisbane Artist Run Initiative, established in April 2015. The space is dedicated to exhibiting contemporary artists with a focus on interdisciplinary, collaborative and experimental practices. Characterised by its location in the basement of an old Queenslander, we are interested in exhibitions that engage with the quasi-domestic space, critique the traditional gallery aesthetic and develop other critical discussions; contributing to the current broader discourse. Rather than attempt to change or hide the makeshift exhibition space, artists are encouraged to make site-specific works and embrace this aesthetic and break away from the traditional gallery model. The Laundry holds one-night-only events, with the aim of fostering camaraderie and collaboration among artists, strengthening the local arts community, and promoting a sense of support and pride amongst all artists in the current political and economic environment.

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