Performance Research

On Time

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Editorial Statement

Researching performance, anticipating tendencies, mapping practices, documenting processes, stimulating inquiry, performing research. Since 1996 *Performance Research* has set a precedent that has become standard for thematic and cross-disciplinary ways of bringing together the varied materials of artistic and theoretical research in the expanded field of performance. Working closely with designers, artists, academics, theorists, performance practitioners and writers *Performance Research* resists disconnected, disembodied, and disinterested forms of scholarship. We prefer instead the possibilities of imagining the journal as a dynamic space of performance that produces inspiring conversations, unlikely connections, and curious confluences. Our emphasis on contemporary performance arts within changing cultures and technologies is reflected in the interdisciplinary vision and international scope of the journal. *Performance Research* continues to combine writings and works for the page in an interplay of analysis, anecdote, polemic and criticism, interweaving the oblique with the conflicting, the pivotal with the resistant, and the eclectic with the indispensable.

On Time

Record of the Time
A Spatula&Barcode project

MICHAEL PETERSON & LAURIE BETH CLARK

NOW AND THEN

For the Stanford conference, the collaborative Spatula&Barcode (Laurie Beth Clark and Michael Peterson) created RECORD OF THE TIME, a multi-part project that yielded crowd-sourced documentation of the conference. Below is an account of how we came to make this project. The collective record is chronologically dispersed throughout this volume.

TIMELINE OF THE RECORD

We were enthusiastic when we heard the theme of the conference at Stanford: 'NOW AND THEN'. By that point, we had made nearly a dozen projects together as the collaborative Spatula&Barcode. The first one, *MisAdventure* (Zagreb, Republic of Croatia, 2009), was a recognizably theatrical performance, albeit with a lot of guest appearances and audience participation, not to mention five courses of food and beverages. But since then the work has generally had less theatre and more living; we refer to it as social performance or relational performance, or just performance, or just as 'projects'.

One of the major threads in this body of work has been constructing experiences for participants in academic conferences. We made a series of works for the American Society for Theatre Research (ASTR), which sort of escalated until we got to help programme performance for the 2013 conference in Dallas in Texas. We dispersed an international conference in Tangier in northern Morocco out into residential neighbourhoods far from the centre. We made a small 'boutique' experience for a group of scientists and artists gathered to imagine the future of the South American Institute for Resilience and Sustainability Studies (SARA(S)[2]).

But the 'natural' habitat for our work has long seemed to be PSi (Performance Studies international). Our very first work, *MisAdventure*, was made out of the sense of reuniting with our scholarly and artistic community after a year of research travel. At the follow-up conference in Rijeka in Croatia the following year, we made our first experiments both with moving participants through urban space and with connecting live audiences and Internet participants. In Utrecht in the Netherlands we translated the conference theme of 'Technology, Memory, Experience' into *Bicycle, Map, Spoon*, a free-ranging bike tour of community arts spaces, city neighbourhoods, 'crypto-forests' and things to eat.

Our love affair with PSi as audience, context and community continues unabated, and when the Stanford conference call came out we had just committed to do a project as part of the Hemispheric Institute Encuentro in São Paulo focused on urban space and 'vernacular cartography'. Surrounded by other artists working on urban interventions and performance politics, we were going to ask participants to record visually some aspect of their subjective experience of moving through the city (with three dispersed venues in that enormous city, the Encuentro gave folks a lot of material!). This piece, 'Mapping do Encuentro' was about space, so clearly we were ready to generate a companion project about time.

(SHOW) TIME

The Laurie Anderson lyrics 'This is the time/and this is the record of the time' gave us our title[1]. The lines seem to offer both a phenomenological account of temporal experience, and an aesthetic assertion that art and life are either the same or so closely connected as to be indistinguishable. By now (then?), we had come more clearly to understand making art out of social interaction as a kind of unbounded experience design, a process of creating potentialities rather than framing certainties.

Our discussions of what work to put under our title (that mostly occurred on long dog walks, the durational experience of which forms the heart of our collaborative process) began to coalesce around the idea of paying attention to time as a way of aestheticizing experience. We talked about theatrical time and conference time, but also about other temporal organizations such as durational notations in recipes. That led us to thinking about foods that required a long time (days, weeks, months) to prepare, and how 'ferment time' could serve as a model for performance.

Ultimately, it felt like there were really three parts of the project, although at first we imagined it as two: a collaboratively authored online record of the time of the conference, and an installation in the gallery space that was an energetic (if slightly out of the way) space within the conference.

Every conference attendee received at registration a package from us containing a silicon-banded digital wristwatch with our logo printed on the side and a postcard telling each participant that they had been assigned a specific ten-minute slot within the time frame of the conference. The card (designed by Amy Cannestra) instructed participants to 'contribute a description of activities during these ten minutes – in truth or in fiction, on time or after the fact'. The online interface (built by Alex Hanna) was designed to be as simple as possible, an anonymous, text-only input window and a drop-down menu for selecting the assigned time. Participants were further invited to contribute text, images or video by email, text, Twitter or hand.

To give that first, potentially ephemeral online activity a real-world anchor, we also constructed an installation in the conference gallery, filling an entire wall of the cavernous former gymnasium. We began by constructing a 'thyme line', dividing the wall space evenly by affixing 600 sprigs of thyme at eye level, one for each of the ten-minute slots assigned to conferees. In front of this were six pedestals, displaying as sculpture different time-based foods along with notes about when we planned to serve them in the gallery. We grew yoghurt and sunflower sprouts, fermented dill pickles and raised a sourdough starter that had been gathering yeast as we camped our way across seven states between Wisconsin and California. And mustering all our social capital and borrowing more, we got help from multiple Bay area brew shops, friends' kitchens and bemused Stanford staff to ferment an American wheat beer. It was displayed in a large glass fermenting carboy, then kegged, flash-chilled and force-carbonated in order to be served on Sunday as artists gathered in the gallery to de-install their work. It was surprisingly drinkable.

We had hoped the gallery piece would both solidify the social collaboration and serve as a visible reminder to attendees to make a record of their personal ten minutes, but the location of the gallery meant that conference-goers encountered it only if they made a special trip or attended a performance in the building. This gave somewhat more importance to what we would consider the third major component
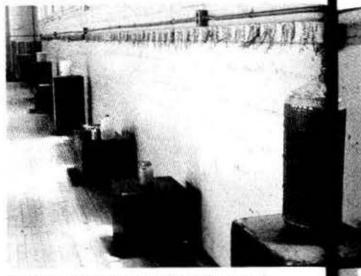
1 Laurie Anderson. "From the Air". Big Science. Warner Brothers 1982. Nonesuch. 2007.

of the project, something we have come to realize is crucial in many of our pieces. Our shorthand for it is 'persuading participation'.

To ensure that every attendee got their instructions and gift, we took up space near the registration desk and accosted people as they arrived at the conference. Wearing bright T-shirts that proclaimed 'I CAN HELP YOU SET YOUR WATCH' in block letters, we were a cross between welcoming committee and political canvassers. The language of the instruction card aside, we had no illusion that we would get 100 per cent participation and produce a full record of the time, but we were certain that many of our friends and acquaintances at least would participate, and we wanted enough general participation so that those who put particular effort into it would not see their posts as lonely.

The specific quality of our uncertainty has a lot to do with why we understand all our work to be 'social' art, even when it contains a high proportion of 'art-like' content. Theatre people know the uncertainty of audiences – will they even come, how will they respond? – but cooperative social artworks by definition depend on participation for their very existence. We discuss every project in terms of what we offer participants (often, as in this case, it includes a literal gift; usually it involves food and hospitality as well). It should be acknowledged that this is usually paired with gentle social coercion. That this may be inevitable doesn't make it less of an aesthetic/etiquette challenge. Perhaps the best outcome for us is when we succeed in recruiting participants not just into the task at hand, but also into sharing our uncertainty and excitement about the process and the outcome.

RECORD OF THE TIME

In the end, we collected about sixty submissions in various formats. The number may at first glance seem disappointing (10 percent), but we were pleased with the outcome for two reasons. First, we felt that the project had a conceptual impact on many attendees who didn't contribute to the record;

certainly many spoke to us of meaning to send something in after the fact or of mislaying their card but paying attention to time in a more general way (the second submission reads: '26 Jun 4:30: This entry would be recorded except I found the card and watch in the upstairs ladies room in Old Union, so I decided to record it. I bet it has heard a story or two in there ...'). Moreover, the watches were very visibly in use and had a quality of subtly decorating the conference.

More importantly, the 'quality' of participation was impressive, and very evenly distributed across the conference (indeed, those who drew late-night time windows often seemed to relish the arduousness of the assignment). Many of the text entries were written as poetry (27 June 16.50 has a poem, or a verse, for each minute), others in carefully worked-out voices or seemingly dashed-off streams of consciousness. Some treated the interface like Twitter or a back-channel chat for the conference, commenting on presenters' hair or clothes or simply noting the topic underway at the time assigned.

Still other posters meditated on the ten minutes as part of an overall experience of what we're calling 'conference time'. Because times were for the most part randomized, some posted retrospectively about what they had been doing before they had even arrived and others posted after returning home or going

on to another destination. Many others posted 'in the moment' during their assigned minutes. This arguably took them 'out of the moment' at the same time as it framed that period as significant.

Consider these two adjacent entries:

28 Jun 8:00: I missed my time. I'm too late. I was running. Now I'm late. There were horses, not running, not late. Now I've got to go. I'm running late.

28 Jun 9:10: I am recording this 10 minute window 4 days after the fact, after the time, which is just as well, because there was no room in that window for documentation, recording, meta anything. My life has been consumed by tracking corporeal traces of time: daily waking temperatures, luteinizing hormone in urine, estrogen in saliva crystals, electrolytes in both saliva and vaginal fluids, and more. Masses of time-based data. How hilarious that my randomly assigned ten minutes coincide with this particular interval in my general time-keeping, this moment in which time-keeping is suspended. All attention is directed toward my body, toward the precious contents of this little plastic container, toward this little glass syringe. I pull back the plunger and I send the swimmers to find their new friend. I surrender to the force of life.

While it required extra effort, several participants contributed visual images. The 27 June 23:40 contribution appears to have captured one photograph per minute of a walk across the darkened campus. In an echo of our São Paulo project, 26 June 16:30 posted a modified campus map with directional arrows and the word 'lost'. Perhaps the most inventive and dedicated submission came at 28 June 05:40: in the video the contributor notes that many presenters habitually finish their presentations at the last minute and then proceeds to sit and write, on camera, for ten minutes.

Taken together, the postings certainly reveal the playful side of the organization, but also many of its anxieties, stresses and frictions. Conferencing is revealed to be hard, and conferees are revealed to be conscious of this fact: '29 Jun 15:00: ... Earlier, I was thinking that these plenaries have demonstrated how precarious conversation actually is. But by the time my neighbor's watch reads 15:00, 15:03, 15:07, I am just counting down.' Participants also show themselves to be witty, good citizens, aware of others, admiring (and critical) of performance, and generally pleased to be together in the heat.

Finally, we want to say thanks first to all who posted in the RECORD OF THE TIME, and also to those who thought about it, wore our watches or had a snack with us in the gallery. The record we made together can be viewed at http://recordofthetime.net/view.php

26 Jun 16:30
(via email)

26 Jun 17:40
On 26 June at 17.40 I was striding purposefully toward the Bing concert hall for registration.