



# AESTHETICS IN A TIME OF EMERGENCY?

beyond the relational-aesthetic paradigm

MAY 26 and 27, 2010  
 Roland Levinsky Building (G011)  
 University of Plymouth

Relational aesthetics - introduced by philosopher Jacques Ranciere and critic Nicolas Bourriaud – proposes new relations between spectators, rather than between a spectator and an artwork. The art installation is read as catalyst to new relations between individuals who participate in it. This may be a new sociability, or those involved will simply be members of the art-world. Is this a sociable turn in art, or not? What kind of society is implied by art's new sociability? Is it as de-politicised as the white cube? Benjamin Noys asks, for instance, 'While artworks are made every day, what can really distinguish new artworks from the simulacral novelties of capital?' (1) And Gail Day observes that until recently, 'discussion of politics in art was something that had to be treated indirectly ...' (2) These issues were examined in the symposium Planetary Breakdown at the Baltic Art Gallery, Gateshead in March 2010. We continue here - questions include:

- Can a sociable art take a political turn?
- How do new technologies of sociability address this?
- How does art or theory address global issues such as climate change and social division?
- Is there a viable aesthetic for today's time of emergency?

(1) 'Monumental Constructions': Badiou and the Politics of Aesthetics', *Third Text*, 99, pp383-392  
 (2) 'The Fear of Heteronomy', *Third Text*, 99, pp393-406

## PROGRAMME

### Wednesday May 26th

Room G011 Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth  
 (chair Anya Lewin, University of Plymouth)

- 17.00 welcome, opening remarks and introductions
- 17.15 Malcolm Miles (University of Plymouth)  
 (An)aesthetics in a time of Emergency
- 17.50 response by Magdalena Tyzlik-Carver (University College Falmouth)
- 18.00 discussion
- 18.15 Nicola Kirkham (University College London)  
 Affective Aid: Towards an Ethico-aesthetics of Humanitarian Action
- 18.45 discussion
- 19.00 drinks, art, sound  
 John Matthias and Andrew Prior will perform a short 30 minute set triggering instrumental and acoustic sounds using musical instruments, vocals, contact pick-ups and a newly developed 'Neuro granular Sampler', which has been designed by John Matthias, Jane Grant, Tim Hodgson and Eduardo Miranda at the University of Plymouth with Kin design.

a special viewing of Jane Grant's exhibition *Leaving Earth* at the Peninsula Arts Gallery , UoP

## Thursday May 27th

Room G011 Levinsky Building, University of Plymouth

( morning session chaired by Geoff Cox, Aarhus University, Denmark

afternoon session chaired by David Butler, Newcastle University)

- 10.00 David Butler (Newcastle University)  
The Intersections project and Planetary Breakdown conference
- 10.15 Jane Grant and John Matthias (University of Plymouth)  
The Fragmented Orchestra
- 10.45 response by David Butler
- 10.50 discussion
- 11.00 Christoph Schäfer (Park Fiction, Hamburg)  
Praxis, not Efficacy: the Unmeasurable Value of Art
- 11.45 response by Anya Lewin
- 11.50 discussion
- 12.30 lunch [not provided]
- 14.00 Alana Jelinek (University of Cambridge)  
Art, Activism, Recuperation
- 14.30 response by Malcolm Miles
- 14.45 discussion
- 15.00 Helen Evans (HeHe, Paris)  
Green Cloud and other Man Made Clouds
- 15.30 response by Geoff Cox
- 15.35 discussion
- 16.00 Tea and close

### Contributor's Bios

David Butler is Co-Director of Intersections, Director of Engagement for the School of Arts & Cultures and Coordinator of LifeWorkArt, a professional practice programme for Fine Art students at Newcastle University. Previously he worked in the cultural sector for 25 years as a freelancer, as Development Director of A-N The Artists Information Company and with organisations such as Sunderland Arts Centre, Action Space Mobile and Globe Gallery.

Geof Cox is currently Researcher in Digital Aesthetics in the Department of Information and Media Studies at Aarhus University (DK), Associate Curator of Online Projects, Arnolfini (UK), and Adjunct Faculty, Transart Institute (DE/US).

HeHe is a Paris based art and design partnership set up in 1999 by \*Helen Evans\* and \*Heiko Hansen\*. Using a language based on light, sound and image, their practice explores the relationship between the individual and their architectural and urban environment. In 2008 they illuminated an emission cloud of a power plant in Helsinki with a fluorescent green outline, which was awarded three prizes, including a Golden Nica in Hybrid Art at Ars Electronica.

Jane Grant is an artist who works with sound, moving image and drawing. She has exhibited widely in both solo and group shows, and is the winner alongside collaborators John Matthias and Nick Ryan of the PRS Foundation's New Music Award 2008, the most financially prestigious award made for music in the UK. The work, *The Fragmented Orchestra* was premiered at FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) in Liverpool and 23 other venues including, The Roundhouse, National Portrait Gallery, Watershed and Newlyn Art Gallery from December 2008 to February 2009. She is Reader in Digital Arts at University of Plymouth.

Alana Jelinek is AHRC Creative Fellow with the Museum of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Cambridge. For the fellowship she is doing a series of site-specific interventions and exhibitions with the museum that explore the problematic history of the collections and their display. She has been a practicing artist for 20 years and curates mostly for terra incognita arts organisation.

Nicola Kirkham teaches Art History at University College London. For her Phd research into J18 - a protest event staged in the City of London - she analyses the relevance of the aesthetic in new ecologies of political action.

Anya Lewin is an artist whose works, both individual and collaborative, have taken the form of films and video, performance, projections, installation, text and textiles and have been exhibited in a range of galleries and sites in places such as Beijing, Bristol, Bulgaria, Cuba, Linz, New York, San Francisco, Siberia, and London. Her current work focusses on creative bureaucracy and constructions of narrative in digital filmmaking. She is a lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Plymouth.

John Matthias is an award winning musician and composer. In 2008, he won the PRS Foundation New Music Award (the musical equivalent of 'The Turner Prize') for the development of a huge sonic installation entitled *The Fragmented Orchestra* (with Jane Grant and Nick Ryan), which also won an award at the Prix Ars Electronica 2009. He has released three albums, has collaborated with many artists including Coldcut and Radiohead and has performed internationally and is a lecturer in Sonic Arts at the University of Plymouth

Malcolm Miles is Professor of Cultural Theory at the University of Plymouth, UK, where he convenes the Culture-Theory-Space research cluster. He is author of *Urban Utopias* (2008), *Cities & Cultures* (2007), *Urban Avant-Gardes* (2004) and *Art Space & the City* (1997), co-author of *Consuming Cities* (2004, with Steven Miles), and co-editor of the *City Cultures Reader* (2nd edition 2003, with Tim Hall and Iain Borden). His current research is on the writing of Herbert Marcuse and aspects of late modern and contemporary art.

Andrew Prior is an artist and musician working across disciplines to explore the transformative potential of media and technology. He teaches Media Art and Sound & Music Production at the University of Plymouth where he is currently undertaking an MPhil/PhD.

Christoph Schäfer is a conceptual artist living in Hamburg. Since the early nineties he works on the urban field and how it can be altered through art. His works are based on precise observations of the everyday life, and they are developed from an urban vocabulary. He has exhibited widely and his first book of drawings and texts, "The City is our Factory", has been published by Spector books Leipzig.

Magdalena Tyżlik-Carver is an independent curator and researcher working primarily within a network context. Her curatorial work is concerned with projects that utilise in an innovative and critical way online networking tools, such as wikis, Skype, iChat, and offline public spaces and galleries. Projects include a series of collaborative curatorial events *playing practice* and an upcoming series of events *common practice/language* and *common practice/code* in Arnolfini/Bristol. Magda is also a Research Assistant at iRes Research in Network Art at University College Falmouth.

## **Culture Theory Space**

a research cluster in the Faculty of Arts, University of Plymouth

This cluster produces advanced inter-disciplinary research in two, linked and overlapping areas: theories and histories of culture and society in the modern and post-modern periods; and critical cultural practices in changing urban situations. It operates at the levels of post-doctoral research, doctoral study (M Phil/ PhD), and post-graduate study (MA, M Res).

The cluster provides a rigorous and supportive environment in which, individually and collectively, to seek external research funding, to seek and manage post-RAE resources, to provide inter-disciplinary doctoral supervision and post-graduate study; to undertake and support post-doctoral research; to originate scholarly publications (for example through University of Plymouth Press); to organise scholarly symposia and seminars; to contribute to international research networks and events; to develop applied research as appropriate; to support and mentor new researchers; to support equality of opportunity for all researchers; to ensure appropriate research ethics; and to share work in progress and facilitate inter- and trans-disciplinary dialogue on the themes identified above.

**KURATOR/Art & Social Technologies Research (K/AST)** is a combined research platform and curatorial agency at the intersection of art, technology and society.

K/AST offers expertise and supports interdisciplinary research across artistic and curatorial practices, critical theory, network theory and software studies.

The group has a special interest in the parallels between the organization of objects in technical systems and in curatorial practices, and the production of experimental, performative, participatory and distributed technological systems that challenge orthodox social relations.

<http://www.kurator.org>

## **Intersections**

### **Critical dialogues on public art practice**

Intersections generates critical dialogue about public art practice and develops pioneering practice-based and theoretical research. Intersections is a project which links Fine Art at Newcastle University with the wider cultural sector through events, research projects and generating debate. Drawing together practitioners, theorists, sector organisations, policy makers and the wider public, Intersections examines issues arising from the creative friction inherent in the interaction of public art practice, policy and public space.

<http://www.intersectionspublicart.org.uk>

