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27th June: what remains

Posted by [rajni.shah](#) on June 27, 2008 at 2:00am

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I'm desperate to tell you everything before June ends and this space closes. I know it doesn't have to close, but also it does. Because it gains its energy from the knowledge that it will be over. And although I am desperate about the end, it will also be good. I will have a chance to listen, to read, and to be nourished by the residency of other artists. And to take some space from this, look at it from a distance, see what it became, notice all the typos, laugh. Before that can happen, here I go with my last few posts, energised by their status as those that fit in to the space that remains.

I never got a chance to write about this piece I did recently, *give what you can, take what you need*, where I invited passing members of the public to bring something to a table and share what was there already, meeting new people and engaging in a variety of conversations inspired by 'conversation-starters'. I performed this piece for the first time in Manchester (with the help of Ilana Mitchell and Sheila Ghelani) over two days, each of which had a very different character. The first was somewhat easy in that people really engaged, the table felt like a celebration, and we all worked together to move it into shelter when the rain came and then back out when it was sunny. People met each other, ate, made things out of plasticine, and were generous. The next day, the group was more mixed. A jumble of personalities sat at the table, and although generous gifts were brought, there was an intensity, it was a bit like 'hard work' to keep things going, it felt less naturally like a group. But then it came. We felt a sense of play taking over, conversations were emerging, and suddenly there were so many people that some had to sit on the grass. The final gift was a ping pong set, and the table transformed into a game of ping pong for anyone out in Picadilly Gardens that day. We left the people and the table and went to catch our train home. We stepped out of the picture. It had taken on its own spirit, and it felt like we had achieved what we came for.



I had a similar feeling yesterday. I'm leading a series of workshops in Fribourg (Switzerland), working with local people to write letters and make gifts and then create an altar in a public space where people can come and take them. This was my second workshop. And it was in french. I started, very nervously, and realised pretty soon that most people didn't really understand the premise of the piece that well. They asked a lot of questions and were fairly sceptical, something I hadn't really experienced the first day. But over the course of the workshop, I realised we were on a real journey, and slowly the group came together and came to an understanding of what they were doing and what it meant. By the time it came to choosing a location for the altar (they chose the train station), they were engaged in a really good dialogue. And after making the altar, there was such a sense of achievement, of solidarity and of making a difference.



I suppose it's no revelation, but it's always a good lesson for me to remember that if something seems not to be working then it's worth listening more closely, and also imbuing it with faith from my end, both in the project and in its participants. If I follow these principles, it's rare that a project fails. It might change, it might take its own direction, but it will always find its way to being most impactful for those present. Now I'm off to prepare for the next workshop - this one with a youth group, another new experience!

A bientot.

rajni.x.

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