

Editorial

Something happened here

'The event – starting from nothing, ending in nothing – slowly reaches its end when the sun sets and it becomes dark. Something happened here.' (Bik Van der Pol)

This issue of *Art & Research* is prepared in relation to the staging of four events which took place in Glasgow over 2009 and 2010: 1) a discussion 2) an exhibition 3) a symposium and 4) a festival, in particular a residency, exhibition and talk which the festival occasioned.

1) The discussion was held between Ward Blanton, Susan Spitzer and the French philosopher Alain Badiou regarding his reading of Saint Paul and his 1980s play *Incident at Antioch* which took place at the conference *Paul, Political Fidelity and the Philosophy of Alain Badiou: a Discussion of Incident at Antioch*, held at the University of Glasgow, 13-14 February 2009, and which included the first public reading of selections from the play in English. The transcript of this discussion focuses upon Badiou's take on Saint Paul in both his theatrical and theoretical writings. Why is Badiou, a self-proclaimed atheist, interested in the reputed founder of the Christian church? Why did the philosopher write this play? What is the relevance of this discussion to contemporary art and research? Perhaps a short answer can be found in the Prologue to Badiou's *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, where he writes: 'For me, Paul is a poet-thinker of the event, as well as one who practices and states the invariant traits of what can be called the militant figure.' (p. 2) As a figure who combines poetry and philosophy in their lived adherence to the 'subjective materiality' of a rupture, event or 'universal truth' Badiou's Paul acts as a potent symbol for militant activism. As Paula (Badiou's female version of Paul) declaims in *Incident at Antioch*: 'Join me in the equality of people as they think and inspire them to carry on, which is itself a good thing.' It is perhaps possible to discern in these brief remarks alone the wider implications of Badiou's thought for contemporary art practices which addresses themselves to the demands of ethics and politics;

2) The exhibition *It isn't what it used to be and will never be again*, by the Rotterdam-based artists Bik Van der Pol (Liesbeth Bik and Jos van der Pol) at CCA 10 October-21 November 2009, the culmination of a two-month residency at Cove Park, featured a room filled with radical pamphlets with instructions for a host of subversive activities from disappearance to bomb manufacture. There was also an installation of the artists' film *Art is either Plagiarism or Revolution, or: Something is Definitely Going to Happen Here* made in response to the barren site of the unrealized Museum of Revolution in Belgrade and which incorporated a specially recorded soundtrack by the Glasgow Improvisers Orchestra (a subsequent soundtrack has been performed by the young Trondheim-based punk band Bittre Bran featured on the cover page of this issue). The film and exhibition and music perform a study of

incompleteness, of foundations which are not yet ruins. But the displacement between the soundtrack and the image suggests a separation within collectivity, that we not yet worthy of the revolution in the way that Badiou suggests that philosophy is not yet worthy of Pessoa. Is it possible to resurrect a lost revolution? In Badiou's terms, Bik Van der Pol maintain fidelity to the truth of the revolution as event and their art emerges in the wake of its material consequences;

3) 'The Infinite Demand of Art: a Symposium with Simon Critchley'. This symposium with the New York-based English philosopher, chaired by Christopher Fynsk (Centre for Modern Thought), was also part of the Gi festival and was organised by Glasgow School of Art in association with the Centre for Modern Thought, University of Aberdeen, and took place at the GFT, 26 April 2010. The symposium, extended the Gi theme of 'Past, Present and Future' to address the question of infinity with specific regard to Critchley's concept of an infinite ethical demand addressed in his *Infinitely Demanding: Ethics of Commitment, Politics of Resistance* (London: Verso, 2007), in which he claims: 'Philosophy does not begin in an experience of wonder, as ancient tradition contends, but rather, I think, with the indeterminate but palpable sense that something desired has not been fulfilled, that a fantastic effort has failed. Philosophy begins in disappointment.' (p. 1). It is this view which informs the title of Anders Gullestad's introduction to the philosopher which precedes his interview which was first published in Norwegian as 'Skuffelsens Apostel' in Vagant 1/2010 [<http://www.vagant.no>]. As we see in the playful and performative notes to 'The Infinite Demand of Art' - in which he discusses the work of French artist Phillippe Parreno in relation to mere being - and in the interview with Gullestad, Critchley's philosophy is far from an acquiescence in defeatism and political nihilism, rather it is an embodiment of and call for an anarchic metapolitics which demands an ethical subjectivity and employs humour and poetry to confront and defeat the 'motivational deficit' manifest in contemporary public life. Critchley's concepts of ethical subjectivity and political resistance in response to an infinite demand which exceeds the individual subject are pertinent to an understanding perhaps of the subversive practices of Bik Van der Pol but also of the activism evident in the work of Maria Thereza Alves and Jimmie Durham.

4) Glasgow International Festival of Visual Art 16 April-3 May 2010 (Gi). Although anyone navigating the multiplicity of exhibitions, performances or symposia organized by or in association with Gi - including what appeared to be the spontaneous emergence of a festival 'fringe' - and listed on the festival publicity or website might be forgiven for concluding that the festival itself was *infinite*, the focus here is the three-month Production residency undertaken by the US artist Jimmie Durham at Glasgow Sculpture Studios and his related exhibition *Universal Miniature Golf (The Promised Land)* 17 April-4 September 2010 and the associated talks and events programme, which included 'Urgent and Not So Urgent Possibilities', a Friday Event lecture by the Brazilian-born artist Maria Thereza Alves organized by Glasgow School of Art (GFT 23 April 2010) - which all formed part of Gi2010. In her talk, Alves discussed her *Seeds of Change* project in which she has germinated long dormant seeds carried within the soil used as ballast of slave ships. A related work, *Wake: A History of the Earth of Guangzhou* (2008) commissioned for the Guangzhou Triennial 2008 and which depicts 'Three Seed Carriers' - Soon Ching-ling, Sun Yat-sen and their airplane - is presented here. Also here is Jimmie Durham's *Unter den Linden* - a previously unpublished poem from 2006. The poem opens with the recollection of a poem - a poem within a poem - the memory of a poem recited by an old friend about an old Linden tree blown over in a storm some 70 years previously in

the Swiss town of Saubraz and moves to a reflection on the qualities of the wood of the Linden tree (or Basswood) as ideal for use in the making of woodcuts and charcoal, a reflection interrupted by the question addressed to at the same time to all and to no-one in particular: 'Could anyone draw lost forests?' The interruption is not in the form of an invitation, but incantation: 'O trees, forget our old sins, remember / Our old prayers.'

It may be premature to term these conferences, residencies, exhibitions and talks individually as 'events' - particularly in the context of the writings of Alain Badiou - but it is perhaps noteworthy that this issue brings together four separate but interrelated practices - ethics, politics, philosophy and art - where they might work collectively to form something akin to an event: for we may agree with Badiou that four is the number of an event.

Selected material from this issue of Art & Research will appear in English and in Spanish translation in a forthcoming edition of [brumaria](#).