

some notes on the practice of Chris Hill



After seeing and being in Chris Hills' *happy hard haunted haus* I find myself 17 hours later transported into a another day. I'm in bed, having just woken up with sounds from all pockets of the immediate world amplifying between the walls of a room. The memory-residue of his work starts to burgeon in my brain and a call-and-response of fuzzy ideas congeal and then flow quickly, transforming into ever-shifting combinations. The pattern is erratic and explosive and currents run off in multiple directions. I attempt a mental return so as to lift them out of the electric pulse before they quickly re-submerge. I realize that this running together of multiple currents as lines of ideas is what Chris' work is and does. It's an actual-virtual, conceptual-material chamber for the amplification of *life* as an animate-inanimate force. And like anything alive to whatever degree, it's in and as a slippery perpetual motion; an ongoing drone and stammer; endlessly re-combining in a deliriously dis-unified event.

There isn't really anywhere to begin when being in or writing through this work, as you find yourself always in the middle

Christopher Hill, *happy hard haunted haus* (featuring special guests: james deutcher, kain picken & rob mckenzie, bianca hester, sean bailey, matthew griffin, nick selenitch, jane caught, nick mangan, annie wu, masto takasaka, cove of the ken can kant, and moffarfarrah), CLUBsproject inc., Melbourne, November 2005. Photo: Bianca Hester.

of its midst. Even though the work is comprised from a thousand tiny bits, there is a large-ness to this referential milieu that is inexhaustible – everywhere you turn things are shifting or revealing themselves differently. The work, like the world, is a much greater force than our will to know it. That's the sensibility of the practice that I respond to most strongly. The work offers itself up as a glut of rearrange-able relations; *between references, people (from the past, present and future simultaneously), imagined beings, symbols, icons, spaces, states of consciousness, collective movements, ideas, art works, residues, objects, sounds, liquids, fabrics, patterns* – and in this collective conglomerate the work resounds more as an engorging practice in recurrent flight



and recombination, than an object or a thing to ever be known, as if it were something that could occupy a definite space once and for all. In this sliding space (a space that is simultaneously as real and material as it is virtual and dematerialised) there is a process of both stratification and de-stratification at play. Things everywhere are coming done-undone. The leaning towards an attitude of openness is the real-term, life-oriented politic of this work; it's a practice that embraces and welcomes in the indeterminacy of life. In that sense the work in this instance (which both embodies and produces the overall ethic of the practice) not only calls for, but activates a movement towards freedom and suggests the possibility of liberation on a small but transformative scale. It's a diagram of micro-liberation structured by notions of welcome and responsivity to the *other* (that thing that arrives unexpectedly) in the face of a world that by ever-increasing degree seems bent upon regulation and closure.

The material-immaterial force of homogenization pulsing through our cities right now is pretty chilling – but something in Chris' work reminds me that even the most rigid of things will meet a moment of undoing, and that the more closed something does become, then the more potential there is for an inverse process of liquification. One of the motifs that sparks this thought for me is the acid-house smiley-face emblem that has emerged multiple times in different installation-configurations; and each time it appears, it is re-made anew. The once hard acid-edge of the smiley-face

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(a smile that to me seemed so insistently in-your-face; so imploringly 'SMILE bitch!'... while also being an irksome little icon of a dumb neo-neo-spiritualism) in Chris' work becomes something so soft and frayed. It sits on the entrance wall of CLUBS – a wall that has been painted the usual smiley-flouro-yellow – but the smile is now so wide as it is comprised of a gentle wavering curve. It makes the wall itself smile; and in this gesture an atmosphere of benevolence and welcome hovers at the threshold of the work.

The consistent move towards re-engagement and multiplication is employed as a major tactic in this practice. It demonstrates to me that nothing can ever be fully closed-off or finished. It shows me that in everything there is the potential for a renewal if we take responsibility for clearing some space and making an opening for it. Through this process of renewal things aren't simply reinstated or harked back to via a wistful violet-hued haze. Their restitution emerges from a radical motion in which things are helped along at entering unexpected relations and contexts, and in

so doing, they become unfamiliar both to us and to themselves. This unfamiliarity is the condition of possibility for a future that is other than anything we might *ever* imagine. The process of referencing (*of ideas, art, periods in human evolutionary history, of sub-cultural movements, states of consciousness...*) that continually operates in this work evokes the glimmering spectre of a utopic impetus especially as it relates to notions of community. But this work turns no nostalgic tricks and it definitely doesn't summon the utopic in any grand or meta-sense. It poses no final outcome or clear destination, but does suggest the production of a space-time in which the micro-topic (as something in continual flight) can proliferate in a real and sustainable way.

I think that the gesture of welcome and inclusion within the work produces this little micro-cosmos reality. The work is teeming full of people, of many times and places. Some of those people are called *the special guests* of the project and they comprise friends and peers all involved in Chris' practice-life; people who work with him artistically, musically and organizationally. They comprise his immediate community and they've been invited into the work by contributing residues of their own projects. There are objects scattered everywhere from other assemblages across the year. Their presence in the installation opens this work up even wider – it tells us that it never wants to close itself off, and so it stretches across, and swells out from a blanket of people, ideas and things. All production inevitably emerges from and participates in a thick collectivity; and no matter how singular a work seems, it invariably exists in, and summons the company of others. Chris' practice brings this to the fore and folds it all right in. It presents a space shared by people who in turn share ideas, images, music and friendship. It shows no fear of similarities and resonances between practices; and in its acknowledgement and celebration of the overlaps that we all have with each other, it reminds artists not to suffer their meta-egos, which are often forged by the force of miserable notions of separation and competition that invariably feed the capital-machine and ultimately dis-empower us all. We are a species who find ourselves in a situation in which we can do nothing *but* live together in perpetual negotiation with each other (and with other things, endlessly). In a political climate in which relations between us are becoming increasingly structured by fear, suspicion and separation, the simple and wonderful investment of energy into constructing places in which we can share life together more, is a small and (r)evolutionary response. Amongst a million other things, this work suggests that we can start to dissolve the matter that we've used to territorialize ourselves into our current formations by using that very matter to endlessly make new spaces and times together. It reminds us that we own absolutely nothing, and that everything will flood through us and dissolve us all, magically, forever.

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