The Dreaming Machine /

*The* *Speculative* *Risk*: Camilla Boemio Interviews artist Greig Burgoyne about his pioneering practice and the exhibition at the Galleria Bruno Lisi in Rome

“Burgoyne unites materials often sourced in and around the proximity of the site each project takes place within, alongside process-led, rule based strategies. Theoretical frameworks specific to phenomenology, literary structures around the fragment, and dilemmas about space found in modern Russian fiction also inform that evolution. He immerses in concepts of play and the speculative, that are ultimately driven by curiosity and risk, that often conclude with a de/materiality of the precarious, akin to the pathetic. Taking the anomalies of the space, he seeks to test, measure or expand the paradoxes of body/site relations with regard to space and our experience in it, of it and alongside it.”

1. **How do you start a performative project and what are your cultural influences?**

**On many occasions it’s an immersion in the role of play and speculation. This applies to materials, and an ongoing criticality around phenomenology that informs the work in the form of embodiment and the paradoxes revealed in the dialogue between body and space. Only by being open and contingent about what the context or aims of the project are, and what aspects I am drawn to respond to, does the work evolve.**

1. Can you introduce us to your methodology? The drawing can act as a performative tool. Can you introduce us to how you use it, please?

The ways in which I seek to develop a work as I have said center around not forcing a work to happen but instead, to play, be curious and speculative. The performance is between a thing and an event. This comes out of rules I set to both bring structure but also remove any sense of the emotive or instinctual in the evolution or realisation of the resulting work. *Feeling* has no place in the development of the work, instead it’s a wrestling of an informed knowledge base with a desire to be surprised.

As such the work ‘works’ when a ‘clearing’ as Heidegger would call it, manifests. This is a situation of revelation and concealment.

Many of the works seek to probe and radically contest these conceptual frameworks notably in regard to around drawing. Numerous strategies around how we measure space e.g. ‘Spaceman’ in 2020 for Bochum Kunsthallen; the role of exterior and what we see versus what we sense , as Merleau-Ponty called it ‘ a surface of inexhaustible depth’ as in a current works such as ‘Frame ‘2021, ‘See’ 2021 or ‘Inside drawing’ 2021. The role of positions and viewpoint, the idea of drawing beyond the flat surface as in ‘Beachballs’ 2019 for Hickster Projects in Italy. Drawing thus is an act of embodiment, but it also is overflowing with paradoxes.

1. How proposing new dialogues that seek to generate a condition of becoming, and grafting of an aesthetical grammar language in a fluid extension?

Drawing and performativity is an elastic process of advancing and retreating. This is expansion and contraction, both of a conceptual field that is drawing and the actions or rules I bring to the work. A fluidity based around seeking to take a neutral position, in a sense not about watching ‘me’, but immersing in the porosity of idea, body and a materiality verging on the pathetic.

1. Your response to this two year’s multiple challenges?

It’s been challenging going form an ongoing programme of presenting work, to projects cancelled, rescheduled. So its been hard, at times not having to do anything! This has intensified the sense of how important performativity, that space where work and public meet truly is. It needs an audience and that precarity, spontaniety is part of that. It’s an acknowledgement by public and artist alike of our fragility and vulnerability-I think the works I make embrace that, so this has been reinforced by the events of the last 2 years.

1. Three elements to expand in a research –domain, community, and practice – that sets apart. How to survive in an art community in this difficult time?

Its not been easy, but artists are adaptable, have a reactive agency I think, that sees them take on new challenges and alternative ways of working. Amingts other things, I’ve made online interactive works that were commissioned by the Arts council, I’ve written articles for journals that has helped consolidate some of the shifts in the conceptual frameworks and contexts as a result and finally seen work published such as ‘Performance drawing- new practices’ by Bloomsbury Books. These things only come about when artists work together not in isolation.

1. This long period of a *State* *of* *exception* is so complex, with many galleries and museums closed due to the pandemic presents several restrictions (In Italy for example the green pass), public art has become more important than ever, and the performances have become the most complex project to realize in a museum and/or a gallery program. How has the notion of public space changed for you?

Public space has revealed its precariousness, before covid it was shops and shopping that seemed to define public space. Now its losing that, as that imposed convention heads online, public space is ripe for reappraising- what we want it to be, celebrate its fluidity and shifting flux. Public space is that impure mix and all the spontaneity that suggest.

1. A lot of artists say that art can stand on its own and doesn't need an audience. Would you agree or are these merely the justifications?

Ideas and the artwork go out into the world, they can’t be propped up, or defended there is an autonomy in artworks, this is normal. However, I do think an audience is what makes the work, it gives an artist that pressure of anticipation, the demands of expectation. In these ways it intensifies that vital reciprocity of performance and public, as a result.

1. Is it important for your work to be accessible?

Yes, It’s important whatever the conceptual rigor and contexts, that the resulting works is open, never closed and final. Otherwise its ‘dead on arrival’. There is an absurdity and antagonism that I think keeps that open, fluidity of engagement going.

1. What can we learn from art, and the performative practice, outside the consuetudinary channels?

I think what art does is when it works, is it disrupts that precarious misconception of what we think our lives are about, and what makes them meaningful. So I see the work as intensifying that situation.

1. Is it important for your research to have political implications?

I follow self-imposed rules. What they ‘mean’ or signify I only appreciate when the work has been digested by me and the public after the event. I don’t have an agenda for the work. The work is driven by a desire to be intrigued and challenged, if it doesn’t do those things, then it not working.

1. How can we expand the visitor’s own physicality in relation to their environment?

I think that a really interesting question. As I said in the previous question, I don’t seek to be political as such, but I think its important we question who we think this environment we all are part of is for, and what does it say about us? Where are ‘we’ is very utopian and naïve even, but I think we need to ask this. Hegemonic structures surround us, they have been busy defining space, so we don’t have to. I think we need to realise where this is taking us, before its too late. All that ‘normality’, performed ‘living’, ‘community’ environment can seem none of those things, unless you’re an automaton. The theorists Stavros Stavrides, and Paulo Virno’s writing I admire very much. In his book ‘Common space-the city as commons’ Stavrides talks about thresholds. I like this idea, not of distinct spaces for programmed actions and homogenous behavior, but a flowing arena of intense and dynamic heterogeneity. Thresholds therefore have distinctness but are also interdependent and indicative of the benefit of that porosity, sharedness in all its forms we as human beings thrive upon.

1. Exploring dialogues with space and form, you have been invited to present the work *Paper* *cell/Bad* *Drawing* *2017*, at Galleria Bruno Lisi, in the month of June. Can you introduce it? How documentation is important for performances? The work was made for a prison cell. It’s a drawing in the form of measuring a space with paper, as such it maybe its seeking to cover the space, perhaps simultaneously contain it, but potentially evade it as a result. As the activity advances, the large rolls of paper being wielded around fragment and dissipate. The fluid space that enveloped the performer, now lies pitifully in the form of hundreds of scraps of paper on the floor. Exhausted, after hours wrestling with this dilemma, Burgoyne is reminded of the rigid reality of the site that reappears as a conclusion.
2. How are the speculative risk to an extreme practice?

We live in an era that is risk averse. Yet without risk we don’t live, we exist. We fail by not failing. In other words, we succeed in making our lives not our own, but intensify the synchronicities and limits imposed upon us. However, by seeking to do what my works do, they are a success, because they open up wonder and absurd connections I hope, that otherwise wouldn’t have been revealed.

1. Where and When will be the Art World be in 2070?

Art is a sensorial immersion, not a thing simply in front of us. So in that way, I think it will always be all around us in all its diversity and chaotic energy it aspires to. Saying that, it all depends who we identify as driving that, is it art fairs, dealers, directors, museum monopolies?

As Deleuze pointed out in ‘Negotiations’ we live in a world where people can’t top expressing themselves, this isn’t freedom talking, this is the opposite: control and coercion.

I think to answer this question, it always comes back to what art is for, not what it is. Art makes gaps, between what we know and what we don’t perhaps want to know. That gap, keeps us vigilant, by having us think and wrestle with what emerges from that contingent potential.