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## Review: Liz Crow presents 'Bedding In' as part of The Spill Festival

23 November 2012

**Rosa Postlethwaite discusses Liz Crow's thought-provoking 'Bedding In', a live art performance, which took place at Ipswich Art School Gallery from 1-3 November, as part of the SPILL Festival**

Rooftops and shifting skies were visible through the high windows of the Ipswich Art School Gallery, over the freshly installed walls of Liz Crow's bedroom/installation space. Here, she lay in bed for three days, Bedding In. Presenting her private self in the public realm. Part of the SPILL Festival 2012 National Platform, this urgent piece that sought (and continues seeking) collective action against the April 2013 Welfare Cuts. As an Artist Activist, Crow's work pursues a radical political practice, intervening in institutional attitudes and activities.

'Bedding-In' took a high risk strategy of confrontation and exposure provoking compassionate, diverse and persevering dialogues.

From 31 October - 4 November, SPILL Festival inhabited the town of Ipswich, a homecoming for its artistic director Robert Pacitti, moreover a political gesture. Anchoring sixty-four experimental performance events curated around notions of proximity away from London, at the edge between land and sea, made new networks visible and provoked artists to question the inclusivity of their work.



Liz Crow in 'Bedding In'. Photo by Trish Wheatley

As it was my first encounter with the town I naively navigated through the public spaces. And so, with the occupation of land in mind I approached Crow's living installation. The process 'to install' associated with the tangible objects: the walls, the bed, Crow's resting body, reminded me that spaces between objects are also provocative agents.

I experienced the work through two performances, wearing different guises. During the first, I stood at the open door to the bedroom, on the edge. The red rope barrier, in the manner of one used to stop searching hands from disturbing a painting, prevented further intrusion.

From this prospect I read Crow's body language, its repulsion and attraction to the crisp synthetic fabric of her bed. It spoke to me of the complexity of daily existence. Crow's intent was frankly outlined in text beside the door; the approaching disability welfare cuts threaten many with poverty and abuse, her message was clear, her medium complex.

I returned to the room for a 'Bedside Conversation' a day later. Eight audience members sat around her bed, drinking tea and hot chocolate, whilst Crow offered a verbal context to her work as a starting point for discussion. She lit a firework in the room: "What would you do if your friend couldn't enter a theatre on the grounds of race?" How can schools nourish students with invisible disabilities? We scrutinised the language of 'disability' and 'impairment'. The bedroom became a headquarters, a seminar, and a staffroom.

A friend's experience the next day was such that she felt bound to confidentiality, a curious shift, the public space had, to her, become a private one.

By placing her domestic body within the porous gallery space and shifting the audience from the door to her bedside, Crow sophisticatedly conjugates the 'public' and 'private body'. Her relationship with the audience is an acknowledgment of the fundamentally vulnerable and interdependent nature of human beings.

Bedding In made visible the violent separation of selves performed by Government rhetoric to justify the 2013 Disability Living Allowance Reform: to promote fairness between those in work and those getting benefits. This separation of selves, this 'other'-ing of bodies not only wrongfully prescribes conflicting ways of living between individuals — as Crow reminds us, 'a propagandist campaign that has seen disability hate crime leap by 50%' — but carves schisms through single bodies. Crow explains that sometimes she is not able to perform her public self; there is another life, her bed-life. She is faced with the question of how 'to be disabled' before a public panel. In order to claim the support she needs. Her art explores this question, practicing the necessary self-tentativeness when exploring the verb, 'to be'.

**[Click on this link to read an interview with Liz Crow by Jonathon Socrates in the New Statesman about the issues underpinning 'Bedding In'](#)**

[Click on this link to find out more about the SPILL Festival of Performance](#)

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