OBLIVIA

"ENTERTAIN- MENT ISLAND 1, 2, 3 - THE TRILOGY"

MARCH 30-31

3. Robin Jonsson "Simulations" (19-21.3 2011)
4. Mette Edvardsen "Black" (26-27.3 2011)
5. Aron Blom "SAM", Salka Ardal Rosengren & Mikko Hyvönen "Trash Talk" (30.3-1.4 2011)
6. Daniel AlmgrenRecén & Alma Söderberg "Abdikation Nu" (2-3.4 2011)
7. Mette Invartsen & Guillem Mont de Palol "All the way out there…" (9-10.4 2011)
8. Dorte Olesen "The Bad The Good The Ugly" (13-17.4 2011)
9. Anna Källblad, Annette Taranto & Chrichan Larson "À une raison" (14-15.5 2011)
10. DOCH (22~29.5 2011)
11. Krõõt Juurak "Scripted Smalltalk" (27.8 2011)
12. Xavier Le Roy "Le Sacre du Printemps" (26-27.8 2011)
13. The House of Bertha "White Noise" (10-11.9 2011)
14. Amanda Apetrea & Halla Ólafsdóttir "Beauty and the Beast" (23-24.9 2011)
15. Jefta van Dinther, DD Dorvillier, Frédéric Gies "The Blanket Dance" (11-12.10 2011)
16. Björn Säfsten "Display" (14-16.10 2011)
17. Sidney Leoni & Luís Miguel Félix "War of Fictions" (21-22.10 2011)
18. MDT presents a fine selection with Ludvig Daae, Jolika Sudermann, Alma Söderberg, Lisa Östberg & Maria Öhman (11-12.11 2011)
19. Sebastian Lingserius "alt. org" (25-26.11 2011)
20. Andrea Berglund, Filippa Hanzon, Louise Blad & Maria Jennefelt "Middagsbjudningen" (30.11 2011)
21. DOCH Master Students of Choreography Present "The Coming Boogie-Woogie" (8-17.12 2011)
22. Jens Östberg "Pre-study for Hamlet: looking for emotional truth"/ Jared Gradinger & Angela Schubot "What they are instead of" (14-16.3 2012)
→23. Oblivia "Entertainment Island 1, 2, 3 — the Trilogy" (30-31.3 2012)

The MDT program texts is a series of unedited fanzine-style magazines available on the MDT website and in a limited cost price edition, printed, folded and stapled on a Konica Minolta All-in-one Copier.

MDT is an international co-production platform and a leading venue for contemporary choreography and performance situated in a reconstructed torpedo workshop in the Stockholm city center. MDT has since 1986 supported and collaborated with Swedish and international emerging artists. MDT is supported by Kulturrådet, Kulturförvaltningen Stockholm stad and Kulturförvaltningen Stockholms läns landsting.

The texts below are extracted from Oblivias book Entertainment Island 6 (2010). The Book. Apart from the performances Entertainment Island was a project containing a short film, Time Passes, Entertainmnet Island 4, a photo exhibition - Entertainment Island 5, a seminar Entertainmnet Island 7 and released the books: Att vara cool i barer och Entertainment Island 6. Entertainment Island - the trilogy was premiered in December 2010 and has toured since, before that we showed the separate performances 1, 2, 3.

An acquired taste of entertainment
Roundtable discussion with Anna Krzystek, Timo Fredriksson, Annika Tudeer thinking back on the Entertainment Island project. How it had begun and what had happened.

AK: We wanted to take on a big project in order to challenge our selves, as artists and as performers. The subject can't get much bigger than this. Entertainment and popular culture is vast. The decision to create a trilogy became clear after Entertainment Island 1. We had only just scratched the surface and in order to fully engage with the subject matter we needed the space and time to assimilate the complexities it raised.
AT: I am more at ease with the notion of entertainment and popular culture now, although I still don't like how it dominates everyday life; political discourse, newspaper, news. It flattens things out.
AK: I have always enjoyed a good dose of entertainment – comedy, films, musicals, TV etc. I feel connected to entertainment because I'm a performer, but entertainment can be anything, one only has to give oneself to the moment. Entertainment is part of performing arts and thus relates to Oblivia. Popular culture on the other hand is an amalgamation of many things.

About entertainment and popular culture
TF: Entertainment is more private, whereas popular culture by definition (vox populi) is people's culture. Entertainment can be philosophy lectures at the university, but that is not necessarily popular culture. Gourmet food is sophisticated entertainment. We use different forms of entertainment in order to define our identity, and find ways of exclusive entertainment, that is not part of the masses. Entertainment is like a place where you go when you want to get out of your own real life, either to have a break from your everyday life, or whilst waiting for something to happen.
AK: Real life is becoming entertainment. The line between life and entertainment is very fine.TF: Art can also be entertainment. There is a high entertainment value in art, however difficult and complex it might be. Of course art does things to you, but entertainment is a very strong element as well. That is why entertainment is more appealing than popular culture to me. In popular culture there is very little and very limited choice, because as many as possible have to buy it. It has to be smooth, and not disturbing, kind of nice and predictable. Although it can also be very sick in it is expressions.
AT: Why this antagonism between popular culture and high culture?
TF: I have a feeling it has a lot to do with history. For a long time high art was only for royalty, clergy and aristocracy. Even though art is now available to practically anybody there seems to remain this notion that art is something too fine for a normal, healthy regular bloke. And nowadays everybody is just a regular bloke; just look at the top politicians attending, say, Bruce Springsteen's stadium concerts in their shirtsleeves.
AK: Look at how easily the masses buy into this with a "this is good for you" attitude.
TF: Popular culture is also a tool for building up a national and political identity. This is the problem with the discussion about popular culture. As soon as somebody questions popular culture he/she is looked upon as a traitor and one who tries to be clever. That is why it is hard to have a proper discussion about it. Everybody gets offended very easily.
AK: You feel that you have to go along. If you say something in opposition, you are looked upon as being negative. It's politics.
TF: It is also about identity, and therefore it becomes very personal and very touchy.
AK: It is like talking about religion. Prime example of that kind of impossible discussion, where people become hysterical. Religion is a form of popular culture. Everybody gets angry and defensive.
AT: Mass movements have to do with faith.
TF: When faith enters, reason flies out of the window. Whatever the faith is, popular culture or religion or whatever. One reason why we took on this subject was that it is a difficult subject for us; what we are, what we look like, what we prefer, what we do, we do not want to be looked upon as freaks all the time. We also wanted to get in touch with these themes that surround us. It also has to do with the idea of being with the others, and the wish to be accepted as a normal person.
AT: It is important for us (Oblivia) to belong to places, venues, networks, art scenes. But belonging is inherent in pop culture as well. When we ask critical questions about popular culture we also undermine or at least question their belonging. That is why people get so angry, when we bring up the discussion about the relation between art and entertainment. Obviously it is a sore point and reveals totalitarian traits in popular culture.
AK: The overwhelming sensation of popular culture has always frightened me. It carries with it a certain amount of brainwashing and escapism that I find unnerving and violent. I think the criticisms remain powerfully strong and rightfully so.

AT: Today we have an odd situation with the notions of the creative economy, art and business; art is reined in for market ideology. Art is flourishing and at the same time it needs to prove its usefulness.

TF: You can only use so and so much money on cars and other commodities. Perhaps when the consumption quota is filled, some money will be used on art. Like the patrons in the 18th century. The "good old days" are coming back. The artists are again happily entering through the kitchen door instead of the main entrance.

Process performances

TF: It is going to be interesting to see part 3. We cannot yet discuss it. Parts 1 and 2 will look very different in the context of the whole trilogy.

AT: We have an entity. A comment on the theme.

TF: Remember the massive lists about popular culture and entertainment that we wrote and worked with in the beginning of the project. We did lots of writing, and now it is much more immediate improvisations that we work with.

AK: The work has become more intuitive.

TF: We were always writing scenes as tasks for each other, now we have moved on to an oral transmission and the work exists only in our heads. It doesn't really exist anywhere else. We have no scripts

even in the working process. That is a change in the method. The work has become more ecological.

AT: It becomes more and more about memory, and how things and what things are remembered.

AK: Writing down was a means of arriving at action. We just seemed to cut it out of the process, eliminating that step. We are essentially doing the same but we've changed the form. Instead we are using visual and oral senses, as opposed to writing tasks down on paper, and this is adding something new to our working process. Somehow setting tasks is old hat, and very limiting. But I think we can achieve this intuitive approach because we have been working together for 10 years. There's an element of trust and understanding that passes between us.

AT: There has also been a change in our situation. We have become more established.

TF. The work has not changed – it is not easier. But we work in better conditions.

AK: In the work we have to embody and filter and structure ambitious ideas, and this is complex and demanding enough when dealing with performance, but to fully understand the mechanics of another media takes even more time.

If we look at the development of the trilogy: Entertainment Island 1 works as an overview, the ideas are free, with cheering, victory dances and laughter, but we perform these actions in a tight spatial structure, visually marked out by a white floor and the positioning

of an "off side" chair and perfectly timed with sounds that evoke large scale entertainment industry. In Entertainment Island 2, which focuses on the idea of local entertainment, the structure is freed up...

AT: ...but with the common factor of constant movement and "big papier maché"...

AK: Entertainment Island 3 looks at ideas of private entertainment and is spatially and dramaturgically fragmented, total mayhem and yet the theme references restriction, secrecy and voyeurism. The challenge is always to discover a new angle. I suppose the trilogy moves from mass crowd control through to the vast freedom of personal psyche and imagination. I like it.

Post scriptum

After scrutinizing, how savagely advocates for the poverty politics and social inequality have lost their last scruples and ruthlessly drive maximal profit policies against all reason, moral and humanity Günter Wallraff ends his latest documentation book *Aus der Schönen Neuen Welt* (2009) with the following quote. "Aldous Huxley, in his novel *Brave New World,* published in 1932 at the beginning of the great world crisis, outlines a modern caste-society, where the "alpha persons" rule and all other citizens melt together into an homogeneos mass. Consumption and forced pressure

becomes, in Huxley's dystopian picture, the fetters, which check people's individuality, development, and resisting power. Today this compulsive 'enjoy and feel good thinking' is so deeply implanted in society, that one fears that the future belongs to the DIN-person'. Values like solidarity and critical thought are looked at with distrust, if not actually thrown dirt upon – There are no alternatives to reality, and thats that."
(Wallraff quote translation Brita Tudeer)

Challenging the tools of the trade

A discussion with Juuso Voltti, Meri Ekola and Krista Petäjäjärvi

Juuso Voltti (b.1975) is a sound designer from Helsinki. He studied sound design at the Department of Lighting and Sound Design at the Theatre Academy Helsinki, followed by studies in Tallinn where he graduated as a composer from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Juuso has been involved with all the parts of the Entertainment Island trilogy. Meri Ekola (b. 1984) is a light designer from Jyväskylä who now lives in Helsinki. She graduated at the Tampere School of Art and Media and is currently studying for an MA in lighting at the Theatre Academy Helsinki. The collaboration between Meri and Oblivia began with the performance of Entertainment Island 2. Juuso and Meri were interviewed by Krista Petäjäjärvi (b.1980), a dramatic expression

teacher who did, as part of her studies, work experience in Oblivia.

Krista Petäjäjärvi: What part do sound and light play in Oblivia's productions? Juuso Voltti: It's quite a peculiar situation in the sense that basically, sound and light design aren't part of the process from the very beginning. Despite this, light and sound play a pretty important role in the performance.

Meri Ekola: I think that sound and light have a meaningful presence in the performance. In Oblivia's works, sound and light have a significant role in terms of content. In Entertainment Island 2, the performers create an illusion with their actions, and sound and light do not play an illustrative part in any way. However, it's interesting how light and sound are connected to creating these illusions.

JV: Maybe we could say that light and sound do not actively create an illusion, yet they support and enliven it...

ME: ...and the suspense within the illusions in particular.

KP: And what kind of tempo do Oblivia's works have?

JV: That's a terribly difficult question. Slow is not the right word for it.

KP: Leisurely?

JV: Yes, leisurely and soft.

ME: Yeah, energy is different from tempo. Oblivia's energy is charged but it is released in a leisurely pace...

JV: ...and in a totally different way than in any other, more traditional form of performance. In the works of drama and dance, a performance is divided into scenes or tracks with a certain dramatic curve, suspense and release. Oblivia uses this same structure to an extent, but what seems more important in Oblivia's case, is the long charge or suspense that stays throughout the performance. The suspense is not released in the ends of the scenes, nor between them.

The form reflects the content

KP: Essentially, this is already to do with the content, which is something we always get back to. JV: And that's the way it should be, that the form reflects the contents. This is, anyway, an important factor in Oblivia's case: you always need to find a totally new form to reflect the content and what you want to say.

KP: It seems that Oblivia has a clear vision of what it wants to achieve.

ME: Oblivia has a distinctive style and design. Design sounds silly, but the word nicely describes Oblivia's aesthetics. I remember the points of departure that we outlined when we met with Annika for the first few times and ruminated on Oblivia's stage aesthetics. There should be some catch, yet it should be nothing much. After the meeting I kept thinking what the light was if it's nothing. After all, you usually start off by creating lights that generate some images. I started to think about the qualities of light that I could use. I felt colour wasn't used much for expression and that the direction of light was too dramatic. I thought a lot about the parameters of light: how to distinguish the attributes of light and what kinds of expressions they entail. Form, colour, movement, intensity, and so on.

JV: It seems essential that you narrow and limit your ways of expression. But, depending on what you choose to leave out or emphasise, the end result may vary endlessly. It's not in Oblivia's style to create a spectacle like they do, for example, in musicals.

ME: Maybe that's how you get the sense of minimalism when the decisions become absolute.

JV: And you can do a lot with a little...

ME: ...or something big can also feel like something very small. For example, the movement of light that covers the whole stage could feel like gluttony in some performance, but it didn't feel too much in *Entertainment Island 2*, even if it was massive in a sense.

JV: But it works as long as it's an organic part of the performance. In a way, the aim for creating something organic describes the whole process of our work.

ME: With the performance of *Entertainment Island 2*, I felt it was essential to understand the group and what these people *really* wanted to do. It seemed important to realise the objective of the group, and this is how I also approach the question of creating something organic. Sure, this relates to all works in a way, but there are some productions where you work more from your own starting points.

Challenging the collaborators

KP: How challenging is it to work with Oblivia?

JV: It is a really big challenge because finding the right approach and balance is a long process. Oblivia's performance process forces you to question traditional starting points and requires creativity. You really need to develop your approach but also the universe of sounds that you work with. I had a similar starting position with the first and second Entertainment Island productions: I had a vague idea about what the end result could be – and what it should be. How my own work has turned out in the end is something totally different and, at the same time, includes the vision I had at the beginning. Looking back at the work afterwards, everything seems very obvious!

ME: The relationship with your own element gets deeper with this method of working. I need to think a lot about light as a way of expression, what you can *really* do with it. Oblivia challenges you to explore your own tools of the trade.

Krista Petäjäjärvi (translation Milla Kontkanen)

Art and culture in the new network world

A discussion with philosopher Nora Hämäläinen.

Nora Hämäläinen, philosopher and the weekly paper Ny Tids editor in chief, moderated the discussions during the Entertainment Island seminar *Performing Popular Culture – Between Art and Entertainment*. Annika Tudeer interviews her about art, culture and entertainment.

I start the interview by citing Maurice Blanchot, who writes that a person, who thinks that his task in the world is efficiency along the river of time, cannot choose to be active in the field of art (Maurice Blanchot (2003) quoted in Horisont 2/2010, Varför konst - för ekonomins skull? By Jaana Erkkilä)NH: That is odd. Blanchot underlines how little effect art has. On the contrary, today everybody is emphasising the effect of art in different areas of society: economists, welfare experts and artists themselves.

AT: Why is art needed?

NH: I am inclined to believe that art works inside us. It forms our visual world, how we design, how we dress, and how we perceive our surroundings. It is a crystallization of our way of forming the world we live in.

AT: There have been claims that art has hardly ever been appreciated so much as today. N: I don't know if it's so. Today the appreciation needs to be public in order to for art to be legitimate. Before, when patrons supported artists, public acceptance of art was not so much needed. Today, it is not enough that people with money and authority claim something to be art. Instead acknowledgement of art is sought within other areas than the art itself. This development is part of a democratic process, but it is not without its problems.

AT: What are the problems?

NH: Discussions about the usefulness of art are often built on the premise that art is not important in it self, but should foremost serve other purposes. A new cultural political system was developed in the 1970's when equality and accessibility were considered important. But what has happened now? Today it's all about generating growth and creative industries. When the wealthy countries place their hopes for the future upon art and culture, it can be useful to look at the history of ideas. However, you also have to look at the economic structures over the past thirty years.

Institutions create accessibility

AT: At the moment there is a very strong tendency to cut back in culture institutions. NH: The current situation is that we have a public sector that constantly has to save money. Most cultural institutions are totallydependant on public funding. Institutions are easily perceived as stiff, also by the cultural field itself. Sometimes this can create an illusion that it is in the cultural field's interest to diminish the institutions. The problem is that by undermining established structures, new structures will be needed, and that takes a long time to build up. By closing theatres, the independent field is not furthered.

AT: What do you think of the discussion about art and accessibility?

NH: Where is that question today? There is so much talk about accessibility, but in fact we already have accessibility with public libraries, museums, theatres, opera houses. This is a very accessible system that has been built up over decades. The cut backs in the public sector will have a negative effect on accessibility. The avant-garde, the progressive field is not necessarily accessible to the greater public, because it takes time for people to come into contact with those contexts. That is why continuity is important. If you are not brought up with art and have not learned to access and enjoy art, it might be difficult to find your way or to assimilate art. Art education for children is a deciding factor. There is a certain "middle class" self-confidence that opens up with art. But, children who are not introduced to art have probably more difficulties in accessing art at all.

AT: Hence, the discussion about institutions versus the independent field is in fact an ideological question. NH: Institutions are justified per definition, regardless what they do. Therefore it is both good and necessary that independent actors are generously supported so that they challenge the institutions. The discussion about the independent field versus the institutions does not have very much to do with the discussion about art generating growth. Everybody is dependent on support. Yet there is a connection through association between the independent field of art and dynamic entrepreneurship that will cope with the tough market conditions. There is this odd idea, that the art field contains a lot of knowledge that can be transformed into entrepreneurship.

AT: This leaves the artist very little time for making the art that is the basis for "the creative industries" e.g. networks, venues, producers, agents, galleries. NH: In the discussions about the usefulness of art, it seems to make no difference whether one makes art or is part of the creative industry. Art is considered useful, but artists are supposed to be occupied with something else that is more useful or profitable. But what do they think that the artist should do? It is as if they try to slip out of the demand about public funding and dependency on subsidies. What the artistic products bring in is always far too little for artists to live on. How much can you actually increase the self- financing part?

Useful art

AT: There is a tendency to confuse things, when talking about the usefulness of culture. The discussion includes pedagogy, product development and artistry.

NH: Indeed. There is talk about so many things like: art as pedagogy, art as art, art and culture as enriching

hobby activities. We have to separate between two concepts of culture: the broad anthropological notion of culture that is all-inclusive and a narrow notion of culture including: music, visual arts, performing arts and literature. The anthropological notion of culture is much in use today. But we also have to look on the function of the narrow notion of culture and how it is related to the notion of art. In the question of art, we need a discussion about whether extra-artistic demands influence the content. There are also different financial structures and support systems influencing what kind of art are to be made. The critique against the state is totally different in countries with few private funds, (like in Britain or in Sweden), than in countries with more funding options, like in Finland.

AT: In an article in Ny Tid You, you describe a model where the artistic work is in the middle, generating money and work for the intermediaries.

NH: It is a model by the Australian David Throsby that I read about in David Karlssons book *En kulturutredning: pengar, konst och politik* (Glänta 2010). It shows how poor artists' work is generating both work and money in related lines of business. It is funny how we take it for granted, that artists are the ones with little money and no security. It is a matter of organisation. It could be different. Today art has to be constantly legitimated, but the work of officials in the arts administration doesn't need to be legitimated. The chosen direction is to have a lot of artists competing with each other. However, competition takes time and is inefficient. It is uneconomical to evaluate and read through applications for in the end, rather small sums.

Art and entertainment

AT: How do you distinguish between art and entertainment?

NH: A distinction between art and entertainment is necessary. Art and entertainment have different aims and different points of departure. We can say, that art attempts to say something
important about the world, whereas entertainment is aiming at entertaining. You don't need to define which work belongs to which category in order for the distinction to be useful. There is no absolute hierarchy between art and entertainment, but they are two aspects of our world. Why go against the distinction? It is needed. Some may oppose the distinction, because it is perceived as hierarchical and discriminating. Then you have to remember, that what is art is negotiable: that goes not only for separate works of art, but for whole genres of art. Take animation for example, there are a development towards animation becoming an art form. The longer a genre has been accepted as art, the easier it is to forget that it wasn't always like this.

AT: How would you answer the question of what art is?

NH: I don't think that you have to answer the question. That is, you don't need to find an answer, although the question is necessary to ask. The definition work is needed.

The new networker

AT: In NyTid you have reflected upon the new network person, could you elaborate on this new type of network society that seems to be required today? NH: When I read texts about the new creative society, I am struck by the fact that they are describing a young and dynamic middle class. An educated, flexible, healthy person, who grabs at what is given and at the same time, is adaptable. This is not how everybody can be, because they don't have the qualifications. To say something else is hypocritical and a denial of existing class differences. At the same time we are cementing an exclusive class society. There will be a class that will be excluded, when subsidies for libraries, radio and hobby activities are cut, and the foundation that is common for all the citizens is shattered. Instead there is talk about "culture
consumers" that are supposed to keep the wheels of the cultural economy rolling with their money. We have to think of what kind of society is described in the visions that are presented and in what direction our society is moving. Today we can see that the glorification of traits like, dynamic, mobile, with light commitments, means middle class unrealistic and unsustainable ideals. Where will the elderly, the sick, the handicapped, the families with small income go? These "special" groups will be objects for cultural contributions. You have to look at how the idealisation of the "creative classes" affects other areas of our society. Most work doesn't require dynamic individuals, but common old virtues like reliability, responsibility and diligence. The flexibility that is required from employers at the university for example, means that people should adapt easily
to changing structures. This new network person is an adaptable person. But creativity doesn't equal the capability to adapt to ever changing conditions. Don't we need a more secure society for those who are working in the arts and in creative professions? Security is very important. There must be a possibility to combine art or culture with family life for instance. There is no reason to strive beyond that. You don't become creative by being disciplined by insecurity. Those who survive as artists are not hedonistic. They work hard under bad conditions. It is about engaging oneself wholeheartedly in something that is perceived as important. You don't feel that you can do your best in any other field than art. It is an inner professional drive that is not pleasurable.

Annika Tudeer