

SITUATIONS

Walk Hands Eyes (Plymouth) – Report by Elena Brake

During the Plymouth Art Weekender 2016, Bristol-based Situations brought Myriam Lefkowitz' interactive performance *Walk, Hands, Eyes (A City)* to Plymouth and I was lucky to be selected as one of 8 guides from Plymouth. We were to dedicate a week to the project, 5 days of which would be training.

As I arrived at the Barbican Theatre on the Sunday morning before the Weekender itself, I wasn't sure what to expect. I knew a little about the project, enough for me to be excited but I didn't quite realise what what a journey I was about to embark upon. At the end of the week, we would take a stranger by the hand, and guide them around the city while their eyes closed - a simultaneous leap of faith for the participant and a huge amount of responsibility for the guide.

The training got straight to it. With touch being the main method of communication, we had to get comfortable with it quickly. Myriam was amazing at facilitating this using a number of exercises to get us used to how we use our bodies. On Sunday morning we barely knew one another and the idea of touching another person was quite frightening. As soon as we started working together it became clear that the exercises in touch were creating more than physical bonds between us as performers, but also emotional bonds between one another. We had to trust each other, that we would say if our limits had been pushed too far or we felt uncomfortable, and trust that this would be responded to. We discovered new boundaries of ourselves. Each day started with a warm-up where we were close to one another, experiencing our own presence as well as the presence of the other guides. It was like dreaming. It's something that doesn't get replicated in ordinary life and it made me wonder, why not?

As we began to learn about what the project involved and how we would create the experience for a stranger at the end of the week. I experienced the performance many times myself and marvelled at the subtle differences in the way people guided me. Each time I learned something new about the process that I could put across in my own, guided tours. We would ask the participant to open their eyes like a camera shutter at points throughout the tour, and it was amazing to see what kind of images other guides chose to show. I often went for interesting architectural compositions, where some people favoured objects or people, close ups and distances. With each day together we discovered new things about the individual and the collective.

During one of my walks I opened my eyes on a lamppost with a seagull that reminded me somehow of a seaside town I had visited as a child. When I closed my eyes I felt like I was there, and as the path I walked physically went down, the path in my mind kept going up, it felt as though all the sounds I heard were above me and I

was descending into the ground. I felt the edges of the world around me blur and dissolve.

During the weekender I took around 10 people on the individual walks. Each time there was a magical moment where the person's hand suddenly became light. I knew that at that point they had decided to trust me and they were dreaming. Sometimes people grabbed and clutched for more support, but each of them reached a point where it became easy and they let go until sometimes they were barely touching my hand at all. Afterwards when we talked about it, they often told me about the moment they felt they relaxed and I could tell them that I had felt that too.

I thought I would feel the weight of responsibility more than I did, but the coaching we received from Myriam and her team was fantastic and by the Friday I was ready to go. When people come to visit, I always offer them a guided tour in this way and it re-ignites my excitement. Walk, Hands, Eyes (A City) is beautiful in every sense of the word and being involved, as a guide was such a magical and freeing experience.