

To Lucía Sanromán

30 September 2014

Lucía Sanromán
Madrid, Spain

Liverpool, UK
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We're two days into The Resident, and we look forward to seeing you and Irene here on Thursday. I thought I'd send you some notes about the discussions so far, to give you both a sense of the context you're arriving in. It will still be great for you to speak about: a) the exhibition on the history of inSite that you presented in Cuernavaca and b) on SITELines, with Irene — it will be helpful for us here to understand from the two of you the considerations around presenting a biennial in a city as different from this one as Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Here are some of the questions, desires, complaints, dreams etc. that have come up during our first day. I hope this will help.

Several participants are asking what the Liverpool Biennial is for. These are mainly questions about its extra-artistic value — whatever the value of the art, what is the value of the organisational practice of the Biennial, year on year? Sometimes people have social, cultural or urban development in mind. Relatedly, there are questions about what kinds of capacity the Biennial can build for the city, including for artists here in Liverpool.

We've also been asking about the difference between biennials and museums. These are questions of infrastructure, or institutionality — for example, whether the museum needs to devote so many resources (time, money...) to reproducing itself, in ways that can produce value for others only at its margins. How are institutions obliged to produce? For Maria Hlavajova, this includes the institutional drive to say things whether or not we have something to say.

Clearly, Sally values what she sees as the inherently productive nature of the biennial as such.

There was some discussion of what it might mean for a biennial to be driven by a multi-year research agenda. I know that's something that SITElines is thinking about.

One other issue that came up a lot: spectacle. Spectacle is a big question here in Liverpool, in relation to the Liverpool Biennial, in ways that I hadn't expected, and that I don't yet understand.

Yesterday afternoon, we visited some neighbourhoods in Toxteth: the Welsh Streets and the Granby Triangle (or Granby Four Streets). We were taken on a tour by Jimmy Jagne and Joe Farrage, who are residents and members of the Community Land Trust.

This afternoon, we visited the home of Nina Edge, an artist and activist here, who's another participant in The Resident this week. Her house, listed for demolition in 2005, is a hold-out against the dismantling of the surrounding neighbourhood. Hers is a practice of domestic residence as political resistance. She is not alone.

The fact that housing is such a charged issue here, alongside the desire of the Liverpool Biennial to support artists as residents in various ways — encourages us to feel that the community work around housing and the curatorial and educational work of the Biennial might converge. Some of the time, this convergence can seem both necessary (for the Biennial, at least) and impossible.

On Thursday, we'll be meeting at The Florrie.

See you there.

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