

Images of Happiness

'In case of rapture this car will be empty' reads a bumper-bar sticker popular among certain Evangelical Christian sects. In this event, it is envisaged that the world will be ravaged and only true believers will be saved in a performance of ecstatic, glorious mutual transformation: an image of happiness in extremis replicated throughout the violent ideologies and practices of fundamentalist cults around the world. A literal exemplification of Zygmunt Bauman's provocation: 'Is progress towards happiness to be measured by thinning out the bevy of fellow travellers?' (2008: 25). Meanwhile, other slightly less eschatological experiences of happiness are no less performative nor less deeply felt in the body. Ecstasies of sex, food, narcotics, shopping, travel, sunshine, 'magnificent' and 'excessive' (Bauman, 2008: 25) forms of consumption alongside the thrills of the will to power are all vehicles for the pursuit of happiness. As such they are transformative of contemporary experience, in modelling, controlling and inspiring states of happiness. In this respect, performance might always be an artefact conceived of as an 'Image of Happiness' (Marina Abramovic, 1996), something radically different to everyday neurosis and potentially generative of new propositions for life.

Happiness is a spiritual and revolutionary utopia, a quiet moment beside a stream, a late capitalist global shopping spree: 'Once again in postmodernity we find ourselves ... posing against the misery of power the joy of being' (Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 2000: 413).

This issue of *Performance Paradigm* reflects on the art of happiness. Contributions consider gestures, measures, spaces and critical utopias, all that help explain the often ineffaceable effects and feelings of being happy. The desire to spread happiness is also messianic and in contemporary states of capitalism an indispensable medium of exchange and desire creation. To be happy, for various perspectives explored here, is deeply satisfying, elusive and superficial sometimes, a combination of all these.

Performance Paradigm 7 (July 2011)

Buy now and save! Happiness in the home. Bring joy to your family this Christmas... 'Bang, Bang! Happiness... is a warm gun'

Peter Eckersall, Helena Grehan, Edward Scheer

July 2011

Works Cited

Abramovic, Marina 'Image of Happiness' (Netherlands: Netherlands Media Art Institute, 1996) 24'24" (sound, colour)

Bauman, Zygmunt 'Happiness in a Society of Individuals' in *Soundings: A Journal of Politics and Culture* 38 (Spring 2008) 19-28

Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000)