

My memories of the National Review of Live Art ? Well, you had to be there, really – no, really - but.... Taking Alistair McLennan a cup of tea in the early hours of the morning, and watching in respectful silence as he meticulously rearranged dead mackerel on the walls of an upstairs room at the Riverside Studios, and a chilly dawn broke over the silver Thames, and I realised that he had been at it all night, and that this too was art, and mattered very much, in some strange and inexplicable way. Dinner with Derek Jarman and Tilda Swinton after a hard, crowded day of angry people wanting to know why there were two naked women asleep in a barbed wire cage in the middle of a gallery space plastered with homophobic newspaper headlines at the Third Eye . “Manning” the front door in full drag in the middle of a riotous Nottingham Saturday night, and sweet-talking a couple of drunks lads from the pub on the other side of the street in to see the Brittonioni Brothers (I’m pretty proud of that one; they thought Chrissy and Timmy really were from LA.). Making the crowd form a human chain to drag me and my stilettos up the one in four hill to the Glasgow Art School so I could introduce a symposium on Form and Politics in Contemporary Performance. Meeting Marty St James and Anne Wilson; meeting Man Act; meeting the great Bobby Baker ; relishing their sweet seriousness, their ardour, her marvellous, womanly integrity. Feeling the clay gravestones crack and shatter beneath my feet in Robin Whitmore’s installation “Love You Always”. Introducing a student whose costume featured twenty feet of coiled clear plastic tubing, a lot of peanuts, and a live hamster; her performance consisted of her standing still , while the hamster slowly ate his way up her dress. Sharing a dressing room with Russell Maliphant, and him warming up in his Y-fronts for “Monochrome Dreams of Dead Men”. Trying to clear the bar at twenty to one in the morning. Sitting down in front of my mirror and putting on full slap and a fright wig and a fake Chanel suit and enough fake pearls to break your wrist and squeezing my aching feet back into four-inch heels at nine the next morning and feeling both absolutely knackered and absolutely exhilarated to be facing another fifteen-hour, hundred-artist day of argument, posturing, theorising, failure, possibility- and intimate beauty.

Neil Bartlett was Mistress of Ceremonies at the NRLA in Nottingham , London and Glasgow ,1986-90. His work as performer, director and author is documented at www.neil-bartlett.com