

In June 2006, the third meeting of the Cultural Analysis Summer Academy (CASA) took place in Amsterdam. We – Monika and Milena – wanted to edit this issue of CASAZine, focusing on two themes addressed through the course of the meeting: art and direct action.

Following extensive discussion, we sought to produce an issue investigating the tension between hegemonic forms of knowledge concerning what constitutes art as it is embodied by the academy versus alternative forms of creative action and knowledge production. We were looking for reflections on distinctions, limits and possibilities, and explorations into the positions our actions occupy in relation to academic knowledge sets, institutions, and ultimately to other people. Offering perspectives from across the globe, the contributors to *Drawing the Line* present specific projects and actions, and use them as starting points for further enquiry.

Is art as creative activism a productive way to social change? What do we mean by those terms? Why are we doing this? To explore these key questions, Helena Chavez MacGregor looks at protests in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Deborah Kelly introduces her practice of collaborating on interdisciplinary projects in public space.

As editors, we also asked what happens to creative forms of direct action when defined as art by public bodies or art markets. Luis Jacob and Amos Laterer explain how they persisted with their project in the face of municipal censorship, and them.ca invites us to see how the Beautiful Community Billboard Fee is becoming a reality. Andrew Mitchellson reflects on a collective creative/direct action protest during the live art festival, Performing Rights Vienna, which took place in the spring of 2007.

While those activities move outside the institution, other contributors look at the social and political aspects of gallery-based visual art practice. Artist Jayce Salloom re-presents the archive as a tool for social change in a reflection on his video installations, while Elisabeth Giegler draws attention to the political meanings and potentials in the work

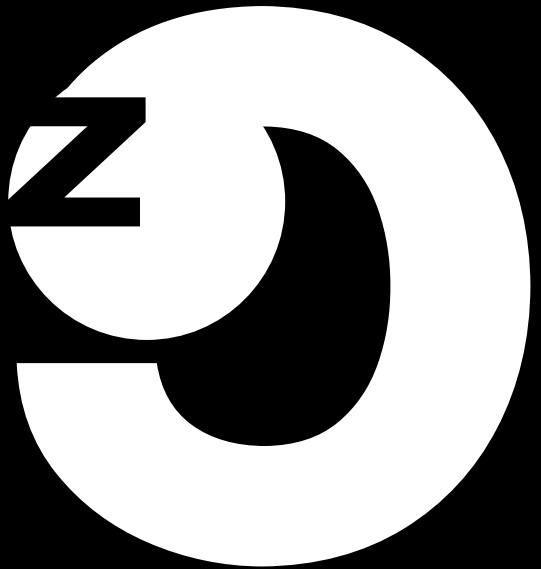
to the political meanings and potentials in the work of two Indigenous Australian photographers. The nature of engagement is crucial in all forms of activism including research, art, and direct action. How do our activities relate to those outside the group specifically engaged in alternative practices? How do the microcosms of dissent created in our daily lives relate to wider social frameworks? Stephanie Hannah expounds on her experience engaging senior citizens with street art, and Markuz Wernli Saito reflects on the motivation and meaning of his service-oriented actions in public space.

While striving to be a forum for multiple considerations and points of views, *Drawing the Line* raises many questions. We hope the selection of texts contained within will stimulate further conversation so we have included email addresses and websites in order to facilitate such interactions.

One hundred printed and hand-bound copies of *Drawing the Line* are available for sale by contacting casazine2006@gmail.com, and a pdf version is available for download (<http://casa.manifestor.org/casazine4.pdf>).

Please enjoy and circulate this collection of ideas.

Milena Placentie & Monika Vykoukal
Co-editors, CASAZine #4: Drawing the Line



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produce work that was co-authored and beneficial to all persons involved, art that depends on participation in order to be realized still makes the artist accountable for any experiential outcomes. However, by giving away some of their time, instead of spending money on admission or a commodity, participants become involved in acts of mutually reciprocal generosity. Lewis Hyde (p. 95) confirms that when conceived as a gift and not a commodity – that is when it is given away, shared, or spent – “art retains or increases its liveliness (like a human life) and becomes a means of transformation, a meaningful wasting of surplus.”

It is important to note that documentation of participatory art turns action into objects, which can also be marketed and traded. While documentation helps to include secondary audiences, it also makes it possible for artists to appropriate ownership over social processes. Therefore, it is beneficial to record exchanges in collaboration with participants using collective reports in documentary fashion. Consensual videotaping of actions during *At Your Service* meant also that the camcorder circulated among participants.

In our time of seemingly constant emergency and crisis, many artists have moved away from contemplative forms of representation to direct, participatory action. Socially engaged art can be viewed as a form of constructive anthropological research because it aims to create new connections; and if such action-based art can sustain new relationships, it might generate small-scale models for alternative social arrangements and value exchanges. Other social intervention groups such as WochenKlausur (Austria), N55 (Denmark), or HaHa (USA) appear to share this view and work with it in mind. Thus, socially engaged art can be said to start with a commitment to the possibility for social transformation through different social constellations and behaviors and thrive on a consciousness greater than the drive for individual profit.

At Your Service consisted primarily of gestures that hinted subtly at social and political issues. It offered a springboard into exploring ways of approaching strangers in public space, yet there were times when the actions felt a little undetermined to both various

participants and to me. As a result, in future projects, I would like to focus on more concrete, issue-related interventions, which I hope will allow for deeper dialog while, at the same time, expanding frameworks for being and for enhancing courage in life.

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2. *Senior Street Art* by Stephanie Hanna
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40. *Pigeon Condo* by Luis Jacob and Amos Latteier
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50. *Biographies*
52. *Acknowledgements Beautiful Community Bill Board Fee project postcard* by Devon Ostrom/them.ca

IN

an effort to ignite streamlined, hyper-functional lives with meaningful and surprise encounters, “artist-in-service” Markuz Wernli Saitō offered *At Your Service* – a series of site-specific interventions for each day of the week. For 56 consecutive days, rain or shine, between September and November 2006, everyone was invited to join unusual, daily one-hour experiences in public places in Kyoto, Japan. Actions included, among other things, a mobile tea ceremony and the occasion to express gratitude toward those whose services in cities are often overlooked and undervalued. [- Eds.]

I like to distinguish socially engaged art from activism based on motivation. I find that activism tends to follow an ideological and almost missionary urge. Often, in the quest for a better world, acting occurs at the expense of listening, which I believe is instrumental for true involvement and shared authorship. Purely ideological action often entails a certain cynical separatism and I think we already have enough splinter groups in this world.

Socially engaged art is a critical practice that invites learning through enquiry, and as described by artist/curator/writer, Miwon Kwon (2005), it is activist in the sense that it is a model of public address. It is a process of dialog that enables people to realize the importance of their stake in the community. I believe that through dialog, which includes learning about each other's differences, we can learn to design our own environments, and discover that ideology is only one point of departure.

We live in a world where many people feel disconnected, and Japan is no exception. The traditional social spaces where individuals make contributions to the common good outside of

commerce (i.e. neighborhood organizations, public bathhouses, and freely accessible squares) are diminishing rapidly in Japan. This social disconnect is reflected in outdoor spaces where everything beyond the fine-tuned shopping experience appears suspect. It is in this context that *At Your Service* reconsidered the service paradigm. The experience of collaboration – of accomplishing something bigger, together – has lost meaning in the market economy, and in an age where the public sphere is contested (from hyper-commerce to security paranoia), I feel there is something to gain from exploring the many possibilities in public spaces that remain untried.

In an interview with Eleanor Heartney (1997), the former director of the Public Art Research Institute in Tokyo, Sokichi Sugimura, stated that the “Japanese hate controversy, and they avoid it in art.” He further stated, “public space in Japan is not contested as in the United States since the homogeneity in the Japanese population makes issues of community representation less pressing.” That was a decade ago. Today, an increasing number of alternative art initiatives are challenging this view. I believe that active participation in public can be part of a democratic process where individuals transcend self-interest to become equals in a debate.

I find that discussions about what constitutes art, or the practice of artists, are somewhat tiresome because I believe we are all better served by individuals interested in sharing. Through my work, I seek to provide what I call an aesthetics of closeness, which involves creating opportunities for people to experience and cultivate the empathy that already exists in this world. I find such experiences are especially beneficial when a bit of play and surprise is involved. Therefore, I see myself as an instigator of empathy; empathy motivates my work in public spaces, and it encourages me to create experiences for everyone interested. It is through my desire to produce accessible opportunities that I set up an eight-week schedule of activities for *At Your Service*, and it is why I sought to use a language that I hoped could be accessible for a broad Japanese audience (like the cute pictograms on related print materials, and the security vests that offered better visibility for participants and the artist).

A critically engaged art practice entails challenging traditional definitions of an

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2005, I initiated the project “Senior Street Art” in Berlin that involved working with older people to explore graffiti and street art as forms of autonomous visual participation in contemporary urban space. So far, I co-operated with two organizations. The first is a communal art space, the Kunstraum Kreuzberg/Bethanien, which in 2003, 2005, and 2007 hosted an exhibition series about street art, urban communication, and aesthetics called “Backjumps - the live issue”¹. In the context of “Backjumps”, my project was part of a programming of public excursions, discussions and workshops and addressed a different group of people than normally interested in graffiti and street art. The second organization I worked with was an activity centre for senior citizens. In that context, I offered a unique art workshop, the aim of which was also to mediate through the heightening of artistic sensitivity and to encourage reflection on perceptions relating to graffiti, art, and the city.

Preliminary Considerations

My original interest was to work with individual forms of expression in public space. I wondered whose expressions in public space would mostly likely gain my attention, and soon connected these thoughts with my curiosity about the life experience of older people.

I often meet older people who want to share something with me: sometimes a personal story while on the street, in a supermarket, or at a bus stop, but more

often, they tell me not to cross a red light, or not to cycle on the pedestrian walk. Reflecting on this led me to contemplate what older people might want to express publicly and in what form. Why aren't they involved in expressing themselves in public, urban space? Have they become less rebellious with age? Are they shy to appear publicly? For what other reasons might they not claim this space?

To do experimental research on this, I created an uncommon exchange. I found inspiration in work by the Austrian artist group WochenKlausur, particularly in their project “Intervention to Improve the Conduct of Public Debate” in which they installed a cube in public space that was used as an environment for initiating and mediating talks between two groups with opposing opinions². I was also inspired by an article by political and cultural theorist Oliver Marchart, within which he defined public space and the notion of “publicness”³. His thesis is that “democratic publicness” can only be created through antagonistic conflict in a meeting of different opinions.

No one asked me to create this project; I initiated it on my own. I got started by responding to a call for projects called “How do you creatively shape your society,” which was part of a project called “evolutionary cells” organized by the artist group finger and the Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst in Berlin⁴. Although I did not win one of the prizes to fund my project, I did get a temporary job as exhibition guide for the project, which provided me with access to information about over 600 grassroots projects concerning social, cultural, artistic, and alternative living. Developing knowledge in this area eventually gave me the tools I needed for “senior street art”.

Those initial aims were often challenged by differences in values, opinions, and politics with my cooperation partners. For instance, while the tagged and sprayed exterior of the senior citizens centre is precisely what drew my attention to it in the first place, the head of the centre, as well as many of the people who used it, wanted the building



untitled, video installation
Gallery 101
Ottawa Canada, 2003
Image courtesy of the artist

Still from untitled
Image courtesy of the artist



Jayce Salloum

included encouraging participants to push their ideas a little further in directions I found interesting, and documenting the process.

When working with a group of people on an art project such as this one, the unusual and at times confrontational situations that occur can be daunting for everyone involved. To be sure I could handle the situations I created and took various precautions. For example, I made contact with some graffiti writers who frequently left their mark on the senior citizen activity centre. The older people and I had intended to work directly on the walls as well. I didn't want to unnecessarily provoke the graffiti writers' aggression, so we considered working with them. In the end, I decided not to because I had a feeling they were mainly interested in a whole wall and working material for free, and not actually interested in the process of exchanging with older people. Such processes of negotiation and conflict brought a greater understanding of our positions in everyday life, and ultimately the socio-political context.

Potential For Change Through Art

Artistic processes can lead us to question preconceptions and open up new personal ways of understanding. In this sense participatory art practice might be a form of direct action to produce small changes in society, amongst those involved. Participants reconsider their assumptions through a process of working together and concrete experience and emotional engagement, allowing for new social awareness and empathy to emerge in confrontation with the others in the group and beyond it as they are encountered in the course of the project.

Yet, rather than to allow for open questioning, and for the potential of new things to emerge through the coming together of the group in the project, political and social aims in socially engaged art projects are often

defined as specific goals from the outset. How can we artistically research society when we already have to know beforehand what will be the effects, where we will come out at the end of the way? And how can we challenge the limits of the potential for social and political change dictated by such a narrow framework?

Process Oriented Art Practices

Since practical work produces new consciousness through experience, I was curious to learn how participants might have been affected by their involvement with "senior street art". Two months after the end of the project, I interviewed the participants about their experiences over the course of the previous two years. I also interviewed participating artists about their experiences. The responses from both groups addressed the project in very individual and unique ways.

I am in the process of developing a form of presentation about the experiences gained through this project. In light of the responses and various other forms of documentation I've collected, I am seeking to create something with an artistic and political position that will further define the value of the project. At this point, I am still assessing what all of it means. In some cases, I was surprised to discover certain things. For example, through the interviews, I learned that my personal attitude, at certain moments, directed experiences more than I realize. But really, I want to help generate work that is as emancipated as possible by encouraging participants to follow individual desires and abilities, and by only gently expanding perceptions and possibilities. I discovered that the themes they wanted to explore involved issues such as 'water', 'oil', and 'Africa' instead of personal experiences and desires. I felt that those themes were not so much the shared desire of the group, as based on the suggestions of one participant. To

finished. The tape/installation's unwieldiness is analogical to the provisionality of the process.

A relationship to reality can only be arrived at through the subjective. The basis of *objectivity*, is where subjectivity is placed and how it is revealed in the issues at stake and the circumstances of the lives lived. *untitled* is situated firmly between genres on the margins of the margins in an unstable and unsettling placement, establishing this in-between state as a critical position to elucidate a context or many contexts, look at historic and present day realities, and engage in the transference of lived experiences.

This project renders different forms of resistance, the figure of the resistance fighter struggling for self-determination and liberation, resistance in a broader sense as part of one's daily life struggling against a predetermining hegemony, the act of staying on the ground or in a more domestic means working within, and, where survival is an act of resistance. I attempt to have my work function as a form of resistance that affects social, political, or personal change. Work that points to agency as the first step, and recognizing, challenging and altering our perceptions plays a decisive role. The pivotal relationship is that of *an individual to community*. This is an intrinsic part to *all* forms of resistance (and identity). The act of taking apart, building and dismantling to build again is more than an exercise in laying bare the elements, process, and motivations of power and regulating bodies, it is an attempt to articulate the conditions that exist for a subject's individual life, and the forces that confront our individual and common realities. These explode and careen from the *person* to the political, to the banal, the intimately exigent construction of nationalism(s), other ideologies, and their conjunctive subjective relationships..

[...]

Re-presenting the accounting of experience over a range of locations and contexts, the act of videotaping is used as a direct way of tracing lives, revelations of the self, and the realities

around us, as well as a tool for looking at issues of representation, governing paradigms, and the construction of meaning. The subjective enunciatory experience is central to this. From very local positions, lived history, and working with representations from the ground up that respect the individual subject immersed in the complexities of culture(s), models can be developed that confront and theorize the representation of politics and the politics of representation as part of the mandate and mode of production. This critique of all hierarchic forms of information, corporatism, and systems of overarching authority is part of a larger analysis of political and economic strategies and the effects of corporate globalism and the military industrial complex. This project provides a heterogeneous engagement with facilitating a means of contemplation that can counter the imposition of consent.

untitled brings together the intensely personal space of the dialogue moment with the context of the intrinsic social and political site, different with each subject but with overlapping and overarching points of contention, correspondence, senses of place, notions of community, domains of discursivity, legacies of conflict and capital, disenfranchisement and the ties of transnational concurrences. This project is not about *difference* per se but about separateness and a connective web. Sometimes I wonder how I carry a presentness of *home* with me, making work where others found and lost theirs, of what is left behind and what remains. How one can go on, building in the political discrepancies of the present, to move forward without ignoring the traces of the past. There is an associated agency, one of praxis or activism of sorts that emerges to engage or enrage.. with whatever means of resistance, *survival*, and will necessary.

Jayce Salloum © 2005

From the forthcoming publication: *Projecting Migration: Transcultural Documentary Practice*. Wallflower Press: London, 2007 [North American distributor: Columbia University Press]

The full text, including complete footnotes and bibliography, is available online: <http://www.16beavergroup.org/jayce/>

negative out of that we are producing. No matter, which way. If you look at nature, you see cycles. If we take out something of that cycle, we are taking away information to work with. Graffiti are partly undigested. But it is information.

And if you take a look at fairytales, if you go out and share what you have, even if it is just a piece of stale bread, you are rewarded later on, getting help from somewhere.

I find it so strange to criminalize things that are really so natural.

- Sigrid

Notes

1. Curated by Adrian Nabi and Stéphane Bauer.

2. See <http://www.wochenklausur.at>, *Intervention to Improve the Conduct of Public Debate*, Nuremberg (D), 2000.

3. See Oliver Marchart, 'Politics and Artistic Practice: On the Aesthetics of the Public Sphere', in Frakcija. *Performing Arts Magazine*, Nr. 33/34, 2004/05 (Winter), P.14-19.

4. See <http://www.ngbk.de> and <http://www.evolutionaere-zellen.org>.

5. The senior centre was constructed following the IBA architecture competition in 1988. While an unusual scenario, according to this competition the award-winning architect, in this case Alvaro Siza, is to be consulted about changes to the building.

6. As requested by another team working for the station RTL.

their personal experiences of dispossession, several generations live in a state of *permanent temporariness*.

[...]

All four current parts of *untitled* (1, 2, 3a, & 3b), and the three appendices (i, ii, & iii) come together in the installation, extending the issues of the individual parts, building further relationships between the tapes, and constructing an environment where the spheres of histories are situated in a web of connectivity. It is a sculptural space that presents the effect of walking into the videotape itself, a stillness, a silence of moving images juxtaposed, flowing and colliding, waves of scan lines, an active meditateness picturing the interstitial. A choice is made to sit or stand, and to place the headphones on closing off the preponderance of exterior sound, linking to the audio feed, the voice speaking from the image before you. It fixes the space, frames it, the act of witnessing becomes confessional, no fancy audio or video tricks, the simplest, most direct feed. The tapes take time, the installation takes more time, it is demanding. Each part is projected onto its own screen area or emanating from a monitor. It is an atmosphere of visual collusion, collaboration, contextualization, critical interference and mutual existence. The illuminations play off of each other creating an imagistic and aural experience of the physical/visceral and of the underlying subjectivities experienced through the body, as crisis, nation, and metaphor, or in transition and shift, and in the recounting or enunciatory nature of the interstitial site.

[...]

a living archive

To amass an archive is a leap of faith, not in preservation but in the belief that there will be someone to use it, that the accumulation of these histories will continue to live, that they will have listeners. *Subjective affinities* render a relationship and engagement with the viewer, linking information or *documents* and more ephemeral matter, common struggles across various states. *Objective trusts* in that relationship develop a system of delineating and promise, a

commitment that the bank of meanings being produced will recognize its presence and undermine its authority. The taping of subjects is a collaborative process, we are both aware of the medium, the dialogical aspects of the work, of transferring meaning, and the act of translating and editing that is at the core of their expressions and my mediation. The material itself has a sense of 'living', a presentness, a relevance, excerpts of life resting in their context of extraction. Enunciation carries traces of speaking before, the details of verse in an itinerant manner being part of the archive. A collaboration also exists with the viewer of the archive, unknowingly perhaps, taking on a responsibility for the representations that are consumed. The viewer becomes part of the extended archive, collecting, preserving, sharing stories that could possibly disappear, and neglecting others that are disappearing. The archive is untitled, as memory is, as the accounts of the subjects who refuse to be reducible are. The individual parts follow this practise in content, construction, and packaging in their refusal of commodification. In *the archive (and outside of it)* all viewing is incomplete in the sense of having seen all, but also in the sense that this is a living entity, it rumbles along indefinitely, growing in stops and starts, mutating.. You can walk into the vaults, there are files, stacks, and shelves of material. The records are static but movement is written all over them.

back to interstitiality

Untitled seeks to articulate the conditions of living and moving, subjectivity strewn between or through borders, nationalisms, ideologies, polarities of culture, geography, or histories. The visible act of *concretizing* and valuing this interstitiality occurs while re-constituting and re-presenting the ephemeral and transitory demarcations in which it resides. These demarcations or better yet, *zones of being* are situated in the contested and conflicted notions

Visiting a spraypaint shop
Image courtesy of the artist



indexical vein. I initially reject participation in the exhibition. A short time passes then with continued requests from the curator I contemplate it more and see the opportunity to engage with a public outside of the normative gallery or art museum mold, and the potential for an experiment in community association. From the proposed theme of *immigration* I decide to do a project dealing with concepts of *movement* (where it is permitted/restricted, desired or forced) in terms of specific histories, looking at something that is common to all of our lives and at the base of this entity called globalization. Subsequently I moved into considerations of *transition*, however we have devalued this term/position as if it is going nowhere. The ends in and out of sight, or what it is we are coming to, are usually given utmost importance but not the *inbetweenness*. This led me to focus on the notion of *interstitiality*, the interstitial subject and site, and the beginning of untitled.

[...]

part 1

[While in Brussels,] Mireille phones, she tells me there is an exhibition in Paris of artworks from Khiam detainees and other Israeli detention centres, objects that were smuggled out for 10 years and later brought out when the Red Cross was eventually permitted to visit in 1995; delicate carvings of soap, prayer beads and chess sets out of olive pits, embroideries from threads pulled from their clothes, fragile sculptures assembled from all kinds of scrounged materials, and drawings made with burnt wood.. These are tentative objects, clandestine cravings imbued with hope and faith signifying more strength than holds them together. Mireille asks me to come and screen *Up to the South..* at the gallery, she says Soha has been released months earlier and that after the screening Rabab (one of the former detainees in the tape) and Soha could speak about the ongoing detentions in Khiam and Israel. It's a great surprise to find that Soha was released, I had no prior knowledge that this was even close to being achieved. I make a deal with Mireille that if she comes to my opening we'll discuss what can be done..

it could be the rare closing of a circle that started in 1992 with the work in the south. Mireille arrives, she pulls me aside at the opening to discretely mention that after the 1995 IMA screening of *Up to the South..* she instigated the forming of a committee to free Soha and had worked to solicit world wide support, newspaper ads in the major journals in Paris, and help from activists and human rights lawyers in Europe, the Middle East and N. Africa. Somehow the tape was complicit, adding to the momentum of the movement, as a catalyst for what was undoubtedly already emerging.

A couple of days later we're in Paris. After the screening Rabab speaks about the ongoing torture and interrogation that is inflicted upon the detainees, her present freedom, and life after Khiam. Soha discusses the continued need to fight for the release of those left behind, the resistance to the occupation, and the struggles that are still going on. When the discussion ends I head out with her to get away and we talk over a Lebanese feast. At the end I am reluctant, I ponder whether to ask her to be taped, I am so ambivalent.. she is being interviewed to death by the European and Arab press over the details of her captivity, the minutiae of her surviving it, the conditions in Khiam, and the resistance. I can imagine her fatigue from all of this after the ordeal of Khiam, and the pressures of a 'living martyr'. We get along well for the first time meeting so I succumb and ask, she thinks it's no big deal and invites me for breakfast the next day.

I go to her small dorm room on the edge of Paris (she was studying international law at the Sorbonne), not much bigger than her cell except for one large window. She sits on her bed, I ask her about the distance lived between Khiam and Paris, and Beirut and Paris, what she left in Khiam and what she brought with her, a story about flowers and how she never puts them in water, how it felt for her to be under such demand now, who she was, and a few other things.. I didn't ask her specifically about the torture she underwent or the trauma of detention. I was more interested in herself, her subjectivity and agency, her will to

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Saturday, April 30 1977, 14 women drew up a request for an audience with General Jorge Rafael Videla, head of the military regime imposed on Argentina in March 1976, to demand answers regarding the disappearance of their children. They were not granted an audience, and the result was the formation of the group that we now call the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*¹. The group takes its name from the central square of Buenos Aires, where the main government buildings are situated and where the group still gathers publicly in their protest. What started as a demand by 14 women gradually became a social movement as different groups who sought to confront the military regime identified with the movement and declared their solidarity. By 1981 the Mothers no longer walked alone, and with the occupation of the Falkland Islands and the humiliating loss of the war, the dictatorship started to weaken. In the period of transition towards democratic elections, the repression and terrorism practiced by the state became visible and intolerable. People took to the streets and the Mothers were there, taking over the Plaza de Mayo to demand justice for over 30,000 people who disappeared during the military regime².

The transformation of the political context meant that the actions of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* had to change. Between 1977 and 1982, the action of the Mothers against the military regime was defensive as they tried to reclaim social territoriality, but with the new power relations after the Falklands War their action became offensive. The social demonstration reached its peak in the form of an attack when they appropriated the Plaza de Mayo during the Third March of the Resistance. The image of appropriation is related to the breakdown of social

relationships. The sociologist Juan Carlos Marin states that the appropriation was at the core of the attack. He writes, 'it can occur without using a single weapon or armed forces, or the slightest sign of violence. An attack can also take the form of disobedience³.' The appropriation of the Plaza de Mayo was significant in that it was not just a political takeover but it was also an aesthetic one. It is known today as 'the siluetazo'⁴.

To achieve a social movement, with the necessary impetus to break the sclerotic structures that kept Argentine society under state control, the public protest of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* let out a cry that left no-one untouched by the power of their presence, their demands, and their pain. Their protests contained what the art historian Roberto Amigo called, "aesthetic actions of political praxis"⁵. In other words, actions that are artistic in character, creativity and symbolic power like the 'siluetazo'.

This symbolic actions started on the night of September 21, 1983, during the Third March of the Resistance organised by the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*. It had significant impact, not only because of the way in which it was done – the protesters allowed hundreds of artists (realizadores) to draw around their bodies and each silhouette came to represent one of the disappeared – but because of the effect created by the multitude of silhouettes questioning passers-by with a silent cry from the walls of the buildings in the city centre on the following morning. This practice, was the initiative of three visual artists: Rodolfo Aguerreberry, Julio Flores, and Guillermo Kexel; and was taken on and developed through a series of movements into a powerful visual form which marks the presence of absence⁶. The fight started by the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* succeeded in building a social movement that had far-reaching consequences. It not only made public their protest against the injustices committed during the military regime, but it also succeeded in creating a new space in which people spoke and thought of themselves differently.

The clearest and most simple way to

sans titre/ untitled

*The video installation
as an active archive
(excerpts)*

Jayce Salloum

and imagination) when we are affected by a sensible object and determine by judgement whether the object is beautiful or not. Rancière says that:

If the reader is fond of analogy, aesthetics can be understood in a Kantian sense – re-examined perhaps by Foucault – as the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience.¹²

The question Rancière seems to be asking about the aesthetic is, ‘from where do the possibilities of experience come?’ and here the answer is no longer in the limitations of the individual in its transcendental sense but in the sensible. In other words, from what determines (or is determined by) time and space in the sense of knowledge regimes, that construct the common-being, in so far as they establish the forms of seeing and saying in which we constitute our selves and our relationship with the world. The sensible is the territory of the configuration of the subject, not as a sensibility but as an identity, as a regime in which some things are visible and thinkable and others not. In this sense, in the sensible, we play the possibility of re-defining subjectivity itself, breaking with hierarchical structures, which limit experience to portions that can be divided and classified. The sensible should be re-thought in order to give new meaning to experience and to achieve a complex notion that enables us to eliminate metaphysical divisions, which in turn invalidate the sensible as the possibility of knowledge. The sensible does not refer to the sensible object, which generates experience in the understanding of the individual. The sensible does not refer to simple perception, nor does it refer to sensibility as the individual’s transcendental conditions¹³ to achieve understanding.

The aesthetic can be thought as the conditions of possibility of experience and these conditions are defined by the partition of the sensible – a partition that not only talks about how we perc

eive a sensible object, but also how we are configured as subjectivities in the knowledge regimes. Experience, therefore, is shaped by time and space, if we understand these not as intuitions that enable us to receive an object, but rather as the conditioning of our own subjectivity. Rancière’s research ‘does not deal with time and space as forms of presentation of the objects of knowledge. It deals with time and space as forms of configuration of our place in society, as forms of distribution of the common-being and the private-being and as assigning everyone to their proper place.’¹⁴

The importance of aesthetic transformation, as carried out by the movements generated by the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo*, is that they encourage questioning about the distribution of the sensible¹⁵ and the possibilities of experience. They makes it possible to reinforce new modes of subjectivization.

In this sense, questioning the distribution of the sensible not only sets up a dispute about what is common to us, but it also places it at the centre of politics. Additionally, if we align ourselves to Rancière’s proposition, the political is regarded most importantly as a battle over perceptive/sensible materials. The political is therefore a way of marking out, by using sensible information, a specific sphere of experience. It is a partition of the sensible, of the visible, and of the spoken, which enables (or does not enable) specific information to appear; which, in turn, enables or does not enable certain specific individuals to name this information and speak about it. It is a specific interweaving of modes of being, doing, and speaking.¹⁶

The political is determined or configured on the basis of the partition of the sensible. And the construction of this specific distribution that creates a common which in turn imposes inclusions and exclusions is always in dispute. The political is in constant disagreement because the aesthetic aspects are not there once and for all, because time and space – as conditions for the possibility of experience – are in flux and are the core of the disagreement of the identities e

Senior Street Art

A participatory and intergenerational project on visually reclaiming street and city

Stephanie Hanna

artist. Conventional art endeavors have a tendency to split artists from audiences so that one [the artist] sends a message to the other. Art that is relevant to real life means a dialog to which all parties can contribute. As an artist, I can facilitate this process proactively: sometimes as a kind of playful trickster, sometimes as a self-motivated individual who has the courage to stand up for my beliefs – in fact something anyone can do!

Creativity researcher, Lewis Hyde (1983, p. 143) compares the role of the artist to “the boundary-crosser and joint-worker who shifts the joints or workings of society.” On that note, socially engaged art has political implications when practitioners chose to act in the dualities of being simultaneously inside and outside of the social context, and of exploring views concerning both what is good and bad. As an artist, I try to live in ways that heighten and address these dualities in order to create tensions and momentum for change. Since traditional definitions of an artist are problematic in this socio-political context, (especially in the case of ‘signature artists’ who appropriate reality for personal gain) I sometimes seek to avoid the labels ‘art’ or ‘artist’. By disregarding the status of art, I often achieve more trustworthiness while working with individuals not as frequently involved with art.

In a best-case scenario, my work offers participants access to experiences and resources that can inspire a process of small transformations. In the future, I plan to re-delegate access to resources to participants more often, which can in turn lead to increasingly democratic projects. In other words, I’d like to share authorship in order to shift my privileges of exhibition, performance, or funding in a formal way to others. In this model, socially engaged artists become a sort of placeholder for a more pluralistic expression of the participants. Meaningful participation goes both ways: the engagement of the art practitioner is just the beginning of a trajectory where participants not only influence and co-create the work, but are also integral to it. Furthermore, audiences are directly invited to internalize a work and carry it beyond the primary experience.

At Your Service inhabited the fine line between enticement and provocation by penetrating routine behavior and

tapping into our desire and curiosity for doing things differently. The combination of open play and/or meticulous dedication to action invited people to find their own meaning by looking differently at familiar or even mundane things. Being a foreigner in Japan allowed me to push the boundaries of something as traditional as the tea ceremony, which I transplanted from the teahouse onto the street.

Both activism and entertainment tend to create a certain distance (and impasse of dialog) between artists and participants. In my work, the actions mean neither to dispense a certain truth about reality, nor to be a form of comedy aimed to make people feel superior for understanding subtle cultural references. Rather, the actions seek to contribute to everyday life and public spaces that otherwise can often feel faceless and stale.

While presenting *At Your Service*, I was concerned about being perceived as a comedian, so part of the project’s concept was to provide room for guided conversations with participants before, during, and well beyond the actions (like the weekly story hours). As self-declared ‘artist-in-service’, I regarded service not as an end in itself, but as a means to collectively reach a deeper understanding of life. Ideally, true service plays on the dualities of the server and the served as artist and community forge a single dynamic and interdependent relationship. Therefore, asking what each collaborator gets out of a shared action is essential to the work.

The (usually accidental) participants in the public actions of *At Your Service* often became living examples of the need to break down barriers to interpersonal communication while, at the same time, demonstrating the need to protect parts of our social, cultural, and spiritual life from the marketplace. Using public space to create time for strengthening kinship, for creative idleness, and for the slow maturation of ideas, allowed for the (re)creation of culture beyond competition and profiteering. Accordingly, had I presented my work in a pristine gallery, the actions would have been absorbed by many of the elements associated with the status of art. By utilizing the urban outdoors, *At Your Service* ruptured expectations about where certain types of activities and behaviors are possible. While the goal of *At Your Service* was to

to look more inviting. However, I liked the ragged and somewhat aggressive appearance of the building as a visualization of the generation gap that exists in society. But the wish of the head and some of the frequent users also felt like some kind of commission.

While seeking permission to work on the façade of the centre officially and seeking funding, I started to encounter even more different interests concerning this project. In the course of so many discussions, I started to wonder for whom I was actually working.

This became clearer while trying to secure permission to alter the appearance of the building from the architect responsible for its design⁵. Specialists such as architects and urban designers typically decide how the public space is organized and looks. They plan while looking at small scale models, and frequently without considering the positions that will be occupied by actual inhabitants. Most issues are decided based on economic reasons. It's a curious reality that the people who are most affected by the appearance of a building or area are, for the most part, least responsible for how it will look.

Although the architect Alvaro Siza had formerly been interested in participatory methods, he was not willing to give permission for any alterations at this point. In effect, we had to work without permission and make interventions that were more subtle and did not change the general appearance of the building. I was happy with that decision.

Working Methods

I worked with the participants on a very personal level. In the first year, the project involved four women between the ages of 61 and 70. A few more people attended a tour of the “backjumps” exhibition hosted by the curator. The small number of participants made it possible for the project to flow according to individual

needs. In 2006, nine people between 58 and 82 years of age were involved in a week-long program of workshops and other diverse activities at the activity centre, and 13 artists between ages 20 and 34 worked with them.

Being aware that views on this matter differ from person to person, I was careful to avoid turning our work in public space into a sensationalized spectacle of “grandma doing graffiti”. While we worked people often spontaneously stopped to watch. As a group, we liked the attention we received, and regarded it as a reasonable part of the project. However, media attention was a completely different matter. One morning, at 7:30 a.m., a TV reporter called me to ask if a crew could come by and take some footage. He was unable to say why or in what context the material would be aired. His call made me feel like a dealer exhibiting exotic species. I regarded myself as an artistic co-creator working with the project participants in a shared process, and I knew that none of us wanted a TV crew to misconstrue what we were doing by reporting on our workshop or on graffiti in general⁶ for the sake of entertainment. We did not feel like serving this system, so instead we decided to produce our own video by assembling a documentary team from a nearby independent film school and conducting amateur interviews with passers-by about graffiti. In this way, we got to control how we were recorded, and most importantly, we had a lot of fun adding a new dimension to the workshop.

I find socio-cultural and art mediation work to be an excellent practical basis for artistic research into society because such projects communicate in accessible ways and are inspiring. However, this approach raises an important moral question: am I exploiting the participants for my own artistic benefits? It was only through working with the participants that I could evaluate the situation. Throughout the process, I sought balance between giving and receiving. Giving included the workshop, new awareness and sensitivity, new ideas, space for experimentation, and attention. Getting

Critical Reflections On At Your Service (And Beyond)

Markuz Wernli Saitô

me, her suggestion was not so much a reflection of a strong personal desire, but an impulse to reproduce what already existed in political graffiti. It was also an intention to focus on good and important public issues – oil and water – while not acknowledging their personal feelings and lives. In addition, I felt a lot of preconceptions amongst the participants with regards to their abilities.

To get them to relax and express their feelings, I decided to use artistic production techniques that help to let go of mental control, such as sound meditation, drawing with eyes closed, pencils in both hands etc. Using this as thematic material, we produced stencils that proved to be a good means for experimenting with spray cans, image placement, and colour. I also introduced an exercise that involved starting on a poster and then rotating work stations after 10 minutes, then after 5 minutes, and faster and faster until each person has changed places with the person sitting next to them and, in effect, all contributing to each person's original image and making all images a collaborative effort. Through a variety of such exercises, it was great to observe how the group grew together, in spite of their diverse individual characters. When placing the works outside, the group really worked together and the project was truly collaborative.

Participants' Comments

If my attitude has changed with this course, I don't know. My interest just got higher.

It's like with music, if you hear it for the first time, you're maybe..., well, I always listen three times to new music. The first time, it is often difficult, and that it was with graffiti, too. Then you start growing into it, playing around, having fun... yes, there was a lot of joy. It happens when you don't see something as work anymore, and deliver yourself to enjoy. You become very sensitive exploring colours, with art in

general, everything takes a new turn.
- Renate

I see the things different now, too, more intensive. I really don't mind if there is a face on the streets, not just bare walls. I enjoy, and know that not everything can be perfect. In our society, all has to be perfect.

I was collecting tree bark here in this park which had paint on it. Digging it up a hundred years later, one would be pleased to discover what was written, how it was written. Nowadays, we damn it.

Graffiti doesn't unite people, because there are different opinions on it, but it produces communication, encounters. That is what is beautiful about it. Many people arguing against it don't see that, they go shopping, come back, go shopping again, come back and suddenly there is something on the wall. Lucky if they still see it. Then, there can be communication.
- Toni

The communication is a little one-sided, if I look at it in public space. If I put up something on the wall which is important to me, how do I experience a reaction?

Only if I stay around listening to what people have to say about it, if they say what they think about it at all.

I think, for me, as a single person, that isn't the thing to do. In a group, in combination with actions addressing passers-by directly, yes, I could imagine. Anonymity isn't really my thing, I have to admit.

I don't see beauty in tags on houses. Also, they are only understandable for the scene, knowing each others tags. I don't want to deny the adolescents doing that have their reasons. But I am not a part of that scene, and will never be.
- Eva

Graffiti also are a hint that it can't go on just like that: Look at us, we are also there. Well, other generations of men stand and pee on the trees. This is as legitimate, really... We made something

Notes

1. Then and now the terms 'terrorism' or 'terrorist' are historically cleansed and reassigned to those whose actions we disagree with. We have stopped looking critically at the historical context as the reinvention of these terms has been used to obscure the roots of political conflict and nullify a multitude of ways of thinking and living resistance.

2. These 'strategies and means' are arrived at through the labouring over the material collected. At some points in the working process they inform the development of the videotape/project and at other points they arise from the material or process itself and the project informs the work that is being done on it. Stylistically the parts and projects may appear to be drastically different from one another even within the same piece of work where an appropriateness of means is sought after, determined, and utilized.

3. *The Lands within Me: Expressions by Canadian Artists of Arab Origin* (Oct. 19, 2001 to March 9, 2003) featured "The immigrant experience and métissage, or cultural intermixing explored." My video installation *untitled* was at the heart of the controversy over the show's attempted cancellation. After viewing the videotapes the directors of the museum "*indefinitely postponed*" the complete exhibition. With a large international email campaign and public outcry the issue received national and international press and exposure on CNN etc. The Prime Minister, pressured by his caucus and the opposition, spoke out in Parliament in support of the exhibition continuing. The Museum was forced to open and present it as originally planned. Following the closing of the exhibition the Museum eliminated the Mid-East/South-West Asian department in its entirety (the director's proclaiming that he was not interested in dealing with "conflictual histories") and reneged on its commitment to an international tour.

At the senior day centre
Tour of the backjumps exhibition
Image courtesy of the artist



At the senior day centre
Tour of the backjumps exhibition
Image courtesy of the artist

Stephanie Hanna

of homeland, nation, diaspora, exile, travel, assimilation, refuge, native, and *other*. Confronted as standard or anomaly, the subject may choose to intersect, suture, or overlay, ameliorate, reshape, redefine, morph, hybridize, separate, erase, augment, or rupture these constructions in a form of resistance or liberation from antagonizing forces. Fixing the temporal, space and time become conflated. A sense of the momentary (living between or during events) stretches from a point of being into permanency, temporally or spatially bounded, which, as interstitial subjects know, can occupy significant moments or portions of our lives, and in some cases our entire lives.

[...]

ongoing/going on

My methodological focus is one of constant research, rethinking and augmentation. This is intrinsic to all stages of production, reworking and learning from the material gathered leads the project instead of vice versa. I test out multiple forms and structures, metonymical chains, and formulate a detailed layout accounting for every frame of the piece. The editing stage is utilized as an equal forum of mediation and construction, where unanticipated and meaningful juxtapositions can be formed and the structure of the piece can be tweaked to its final intact shape. None of this is arbitrary (though occasionally affected by chance). The process becomes the product leading to the end result.

[...]

untitled has concerns common to all its parts, addressed at different times in diverse manners. Each part has its own themes which are brought to the forefront, like a juggler who drops some of the objects circling to focus on the ones in hand. These include, the disintegrating nation/body, body as nation, nation as metaphor, dysfunction and crisis, abject geographies, agents and monsters, ethno-fascism, displacement and dispossession, the self in interstitial space, refusal as a claim of the subject, and the perseverance of will. A key focus of the project is *borders*, physical and metaphorical, imaginary

and ontological, how they are constructed and defined and how they inscribe, control, restrict, shield, and screen us. Borders are seen as barriers, margins and occasionally zones of autonomy. Their emplacement reflecting apparent necessity or uselessness belies their histories and permanence/impermanence, porousness (with the movement of goods and capital) and impermeability (with peoples' movement). When meaning slips around and through borders, frontiers are crossed and new associations are made, when they can't, the body public disintegrates.

Inherent and critical references to conventional documentary (and ethnographic representations) are woven into the tapes as a subtext. Some of these are made visible through the structure, elements, techniques, and aesthetics utilized. Only available light is used, interior location shots, public settings, and abstracted direct imagery are layered underneath and around the textual elements. There is no detached authoritative voice-over dictating what to see or think. Asynchronous voices are edited from the material recorded. This audio component carries its own content (and form) which parallels the video component, forming relationships of the oblique, directional, and expansional, delineating and speculative. Working outside an essentializing gaze (which reduces and conforms the complexities of subjectivity) the audio/text /image configurations selectively release levels and layers of information from shifting positions for specific purposes, and at times for specific publics with more vernacular or fluent 'readings' dependent on *language* and affiliation. Entry points are multiple as are means of access. No *monikers* are used, i.e. restrictive forms of identification of the subjects or overdetermined representation of the sites, no artifice of 'objectivity' or naturalizing discourse of seamless *realism*, nor a 'grand' summarizing narrative or imposition of closure resolving all. With no beginning or end texts to package and objectify the tapes, each is part of one continuous endless whole, confused at times and semi-raw, the project incorporates this even as the end product is less raw and more

The Mothers of the Plaza De Mayo and the Possibility of Experience

*For Mayra and my
argen-mex family,
because they open
another world for me*

Helena Chavez McGregor
Translated by Barbara Douglas

survive or as she ‘corrects’ me, to live, how she enunciates her history and position, accounts for all that has happened, and her philosophy of resistance then and what it means now on a daily basis. I tape her before breakfast, Kishk (a Lebanese yogurt and bulghar soup, something I grew up on and loved on special Sunday mornings.) In the end I didn’t know what was there but I felt that there was something. It wasn’t until six months to a year later when Soha’s text was translated that I could read what had transpired. I didn’t know if it could be anything, until then. I knew that a trust had developed in those short hours, at least enough for her to accept my mediation. This material that I recorded of the time spent with her is not precious, just time, a conversation, and intense intimacy at a close and unbreachable distance.

One principal element the videotaping of Soha, and in the weeks immediately before that the taping in the former Yugoslavia clarified was the specificity of theme. The comprehension that the underlying thread of *interstitiality* could form the definite article or object of this indefinite study. Each part of the project addressing this in its own appropriate manner.

figuring resistance

untitled part 1: everything and nothing upon first glance appears unremarkable, shot and apparently edited out of one continuous take: a person on a bed speaks directly to the camera, the filmmaker (played by myself) behind the camera converses with her. The tape becomes disarming only gradually, once the viewer commits to several minutes of the conversation and an intimate connection is fashioned between politics and subjectivity. The engagement is latent but is carried relentlessly. This countenance is one instance of the subtle forms of resistance of the tape, a denial to give into the gratification of immediacy. More explicit references to various modes of *resistance* are made as

the tape unfolds. With Soha it is necessary to look at her image as a *figure* of resistance and a figure of *the* resistance, an image that was occupied by a history which is still being played out. This history grew into a near mythology and was used by contradictory forces to justify their aims. Her imagistic strength is superseded only by her actual life making it even more problematic to try to do a piece with her and a critical reading of her representational ‘over exposure’. Her unwavering identification with the resistance (she expressed no critical relationship to it) helped her persevere, she claims a history, one of her own that is part and parcel of the secular resistance. Soha is acutely aware of her role, her image and the mission she has laid out. Part of her mission is *the talking about* it, a responsibility to speak. She speaks to a viewer yet to be named but anticipated in the process. The (surviving) martyr’s narrative is also ever-present, an overexposed and overshadowing structure. I try to permeate these layers by interruptions in the cadence with our in-between moments of banter, the immediacy of the medium, a specificity of language, technical denotations, structural breaks, time signified, and a malleability of the image.

[...]

part 3

Late in 2000, while rough editing the first two installation tapes, I recognize that if I am going to have the current focus of the project be *articulating the condition of interstitiality as a subjective, political, or geographical state*, it will be necessary to include a component on the Palestinians in Lebanon, those residing in refugee camps of one form or another for close to 60 years. Most Palestinians in Lebanon exist in a realm of interstitiality, unable to return to *Palestine* (whether they chose to or not) or to their villages (if they exist still or not) inside or outside the green line of Israel’s borders. They are barred from working legally in over 70 professions in Lebanon and unable to obtain resident rights or citizenship (even if it was desired). Not being able to return and unable to move forward under the restrictions imposed upon them, and

think about this is to see the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* as a political movement that shows dissatisfaction and appropriates space and territory as a way of confronting the ruling group through the use of aesthetic strategies to establish the visibility and power needed to achieve its aims⁷. At the beginning of the 'Alfonsinista' period, the purpose of all the aesthetic action was to give the 'detained-disappeared' a presence. The silhouettes took on great symbolic power, and their impact on raising awareness about the genocide drove the mothers, the artists, and the support groups of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* (which had come about partly as a result of the attention generated by these activities) to produce silhouettes for a number of demonstrations. Thus, the success of the 'siluetazo' led to the continued use of aesthetic action involving silhouettes and other creative forms of symbolic representation.

However, it should be noticed that the searches and constructions made by the movement of the of the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* are varied and complex. The interpretation of the aesthetic importance of this movement engaged only on the level of the creation of artistic forms of representation. This is limited and does not allow us to think about the ways in which an experience is conquered. Nor does it enable us to understand what the conditions of possibility are for a political experience that is not limited to specifically exercising power. The search is for an aesthetic movement that opens the space of politics as a way of subjectivization⁸.

Perhaps now, more than ever, it is necessary to re-think the ways in which experience is formed and the ways in which we can transform the conditions of possibility of experience in order to modify our own subjectivization. In this sense, it is worth asking whether the real possibility of political experience lies in the actual aesthetic transformation achieved by the *Plaza de Mayo* movement. We are trying to seek this possibility by going beyond the features that we usually call aesthetic. It is important to note the significance of artistic practices in social movements because the degree of permeability and

effectiveness⁹ of a movement may depend on them. However, if we highlight only the importance of the relationship between art and social movements when thinking about the aesthetic configuration of these processes, we might lose the possibility of thinking about the aesthetic radicality of these movements as well as the political possibilities that might arise from them. In that case, we might enter into an interminable debate about the relationship between art and politics¹⁰ and lose sight of the constituent aspect, the elements that may become possible through the aesthetic, to build a different experience with new meanings both for the experience and for ourselves.

Because the mothers of the disappeared in Argentina have organised themselves for and on behalf of the disappeared for a period of over 30 years¹¹, their radical movement becomes a transformation of experience. We must be clear that experience in this instance is not the personal experience of a 'subject'. Rather, experience is related to that which happens in time and space, in the cognitive and the material, in the corporal affections and in thought. Therefore, experience is about the common-being, which translates as something public and political. How do we shape our experience? How can we transform our subjectivizations to create new possibilities of experience? Perhaps the very possibility of experience is at risk in the configuration of the sensible: in the distribution of time and space as the construction of perception and knowledge that create a common field of experience; in the partition of time and space as activities that determinate our identity.

Our possible experience of the world stems from the aesthetic, and in this instance, we are thinking of this in the terms proposed by the French philosopher, Jacques Rancière, when he suggests thinking the aesthetic as the partition of the sensible. The concept of the aesthetic according to Rancière is very different from the classical concept, whether in the study of the arts in general (or art in particular), or as part of the experience that registers the reflection of harmony in our cognitive faculties (i.e. understanding

PO

-stwar. Lebanon, January 1992, months after the city is open and traversing from East to West is made possible again (at least for us more distant from the recent war and the still remote occupation in the South) without fear of kidnapping or worse. Driving around the city, the slightly battered Fiat 128 looking somewhat the worse for wear, silver of sorts but covered in dust from years in the garage makes its way hesitantly down one of the arteries leading into the core of Beirut, or one of the cores as there are many centres here, old, new, destroyed, demolished, rebuilt, each act of construction part and parcel of a previous one of destruction.. Walid [Ra'ad] drives, I shoot, video, gazing through the camera at the passing layers of modern and ancient architecture, using it like an appendage, it inhales inadequate images of people, place.. Sites of historical and social significance, the fruit vendors, the shattered lives being pieced back together, and more tattered buildings and ruins upon ruins..

Posters of [Soha Bechara] are everywhere, lamp posts, shop windows, private homes. She is framed on one side, the wounded [SLA general, Antoine] Lahad on the other, floating on a pinkish background. The photograph on the right is from 1988, the year Soha attempted to assassinate [Lahad] came close, close enough to be an instant heroine, but not close enough to kill him. She was thrown into the 'living' hellhole of Khiam. Those who referred to it as a prison knew nothing about it, others who knew and would raise troubling references referred to it as a concentration camp, colloquially here (or there) it was called something more benign, a *detention centre*.

Before coming to Lebanon and during the year there, the occupation of the

South [Lebanon] was a predominant concern in our minds. I decided to focus one of the videotapes (*Up to the South*) on this *occupation* [by Israeli forces], the terms of its representation inherent in the discourse surrounding the issues, (i.e. terrorism', post-colonialism, occupation, collaboration, experts, spokespeople, symbols, *resistance*, the *land*), and the history and structure of the documentary genre in regards to the representation of other cultures by the West in documentary, ethnography and anthropological practise and the predicament involved from the perspective of the subjects viewed and the practitioners practising. *Up to the South*.. challenged traditional documentary formats by positing representation itself as a politicized practice. We worked with the material and our experiences of living and working in Lebanon with the insistence on a visible resistance to the acts of aggression that documentary partakes in and the violence that is inherent in its means. The videotape developed a mediating 'language' of transposed experience in the guise of a '*reluctant documentary*'. These methodologies are refined and developed further in some of the *untitled* videotapes, which incorporate them in their own strategies and means.²

[...]

The First Version

1998.. I am invited to participate in an exhibition that will take place at our national Museum of Civilization³. The theme is something to do with *immigration*. It seems a dry concept with an arbitrariness that has an opportunistic ring to it in the Canadian political climate and its history of turning back asylum seekers, an escalation of closed borders (to people, not goods), and a less than repressed racism. There is also a renewed orientalism at play, or a *neo-orientalism*. It is increasingly more fashionable to have a token show with an Arab or Middle-Eastern theme, one that avoids the complexities of subjectivity and identity outside of an

established by a particular knowledge regime. With the consolidation of a regime it is always possible to disagree, to generate some kind of movement to create new forms of visibilities, new ways of seeing and saying that generate a new subject, a new configuration of the sensible where we can create other forms of experience.

We propose to re-think the experience that established the social movement generated by the *Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo* as an aesthetic movement that, in so far as it enables a reconfiguration of time and space in its demands and its material manifestation, is a far-reaching political experience that affects the development of state power and policies, reforms, and proposals, but also builds a different society with different modes of subjectivation: New voices and bodies that reclaim other identities, other forms of visibility and enunciation that break with the sensible imposed by a specific regime, a political process that opens the regime's fields, making possible the existence of different modes of identification, making possible disagreement as a form of resistance, as a way of generating other discourses than the hegemonic one.

We do not want this paper to eliminate debate about the role that artistic practices have had in this experience, but rather we seek to question their possible importance. If we eliminate the need to justify the presence of artistic practices to consider something aesthetic, we believe the role of art could be to generate greater materiality and greater power, which in the end, may bring effectiveness to the construction of a common-being. Artistic practices should be re-thought so we can go beyond justifications and understand the role they play, and whether a degree of effectiveness, permeability, and/or the move to action depends on them¹⁷. The Argentine example is not a model as much as it is a potential path to take. It is an aesthetic movement that makes it possible to give new meaning to the notion of experience to conquer

something that is increasingly complex. It is an example of an experience that enables us to look at things in a new way because it brings the possibility of another way of existing, doing, and being.

Notes

1. This paper does not intend to give an explanation or justification for this movement, nor does it aim to provide research; it simply intends to reflect on it in an effort to find new ways for re-thinking the notion of experience.

2. It is important to emphasize that cases of people who disappear are common throughout Latin America and the fact that people are said to have 'disappeared' rather than having been murdered means that their cases are still open today. In Mexico the controversy over the military repression of students in 1968 has been revived, and while it is not legally possible to pursue a murder committed nearly 40 years ago, it is still possible to hold open a case concerning someone who has 'disappeared'. In 2002, the Inter-American Convention on the Forced Disappearance of Persons, which was adopted in Belem, Brazil, in 1994, was approved in Mexico. This Convention decrees that illegally depriving someone of their liberty is a crime that takes place over time and is therefore permanent. This Convention was approved; however, with the exception that military privilege would be respected, so it is still not possible to take military personnel through a civil court.

3. Juan Carlos Marin, *Los hechos armados. Un ejercicio posible*, Buenos Aires, CISCO, 1984, p. 15.

4. Roberto Amigo, "Aparición con vida" in *Arte y Violencia: XVIII Coloquio de Historia del Arte, IIE-UNAM*, 1995, p.265.

5. Roberto Amigo, "Aparición con vida: las siluetas de detenidos-desaparecidos" en *Arte y Violencia, XVIII Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte, IIE, México*, 1995, p. 1970.

6. Ana Longoni, "Tucuman sigue ardiendo?" in *Brumaria, Arte: la imaginación política radical N. 5*, summer 2005, Madrid p. 231.

7. "Our children were happy to be alive, and all the young people who accompany us should also enjoy the happiness of being alive. That is why we are here. We are not just protesting against the law on 'Due Obedience' (Obediencia Debida), the Full Stop Law (Punto Final), amnesty, reprieve, reconciliation, against all the things they want to impose on us, but we also want to bring our children back to life. Our children who we have brought here and the silhouettes. These silhouettes on the walls which have such an impact on us. But above all we want to show that they will always be in our memories, in history, in this movement and in this nation and above all in the thing which we have to support properly, which is the organization. They are present in all this and they will always be there as we bring them with us." Hebe de Bonafini 'Our children sowed the seeds of life' in *Madres de Plaza de Mayo Year V*, n. 58, October 1989 p.10

8. "Politics is a matter of subjects, or, rather, modes of subjectification. By subjectification I mean the production through a series of actions of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of the field of experience." Jacques Rancière. *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*. Translation by Julie Rose. University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 1998, p. 35

9. In the sense of infecting; creating a community, creating a common demand.

10. The relation between art and politics is open to new configurations and is of radical importance to look into the differences and territories of political art, activism, and social movements to see where they can put in motion new strategies and

configurations of the sensible. This paper tries to open the sphere of aesthetics, to see in this territory the possibilities of the subjectivation not as a contemplative subject but as a political one.

11. It is important to highlight that this movement, which started almost 30 years ago, has evolved in terms of its demands, in its strategies, and its formation. It is also important to note the transformation of the group itself and the formation of other groups, which have arisen out of, and been formed as a result of, this movement and have developed new proposals and strategies to continue working from different perspectives on the issues of the dictatorship, memory, and the new crises affecting Argentine society. Groups such as, 'Abuelas' H.I.J.O.S, GAC, Arde! And Etcetera, are a few that have kept up the work facing new dilemmas such as the appearance of 'children' taken by the military regime, the appearance of the bodies of the disappeared, the problems of compensation for the children of the disappeared, and the economic and social problems that have arisen since December 2001 because of the fall of the Argentine peso and related loss of savings. These new problems have given rise to the creation of new strategies such as the 'escrache', which is a graphic-visual method of revealing the identity of an oppressor by making known his address and the charges against him; or the 'piquete', which involves unemployed people and their families blocking streets, avenues, and highways.

12. Jacques Rancière. *The Politics of Aesthetics. The Distribution of the Sensible*. Translation by Gabriel Rockhill. Continuum: London/New York 2004, p. 13

13. "I call all cognition transcendental that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our a priori concepts of objects in general." Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translation by Paul Guyer and Allan Wood. Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 133

14. Jacques Rancière, 'From Politics to Aesthetics?' in *Paragraph* 28 (1), Edinburgh University Press, March 2005.

15. It is necessary to point out that Rancière himself is reluctant to look for the conditions for the transformation of experience in the social action movements. "I think that the aesthetic dimension of the reconfiguration of the relationships between doing, seeing and saying that circumscribe the being-common is inherent to every political or social movement. But this aesthetic component of politics does not lead me to see the political everywhere that there is a reconfiguration of perceptible attributes in general. I am far from believing that 'everything is political.'" Jacques Rancière. 'Literature, Politics, Aesthetics to Democratic Disagreement' in *SubStance* n. 92, 2000, p.21

16. Jacques Rancière, 'The Politics of Literature' in *SubStance* n. 103, Vol 33. n. 1, 2004.

17. Here we are thinking of the push to take action as the possibility of discussing the division and distribution of the sensible. In social action you are not only risking perception but the actual experience of becoming something else -- of seeking and conquering new subjectivizations.



*At Your Service
(Mobile Tea Ceremony)*
Kyoto, Japan 2006
Image courtesy
of the artist



*At Your Service
(Tree Guarding)*
Kyoto, Japan 2006
Image courtesy
of the artist

**Markuz
Wernli
Saitô**

The co-editors of CASAZine #4, *Drawing the Line*, would like to thank the contributors for generously sharing their ideas and time. We are likewise grateful to the many individuals and collectives who offered texts and images in response to the call.

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AS

the French theorist Roland Barthes once wrote, the 19th century gave us both history and photography¹. This statement applies to Australian and European colonial history to the extent that it suggests the connection between regimes of representation and concepts of history. The consequence of early photographs of Indigenous people is now clear in that it served to validate their systematic exclusion from public life, from the creation of the new nation of Australia, and from writing history.

Marcia Langton, Indigenous academic and head of the department of Indigenous Studies of The University of Melbourne, notes the “dense history of racial, distorted and often offensive representations of Aboriginal people”². She further argues that “the easiest and most ‘natural’ form of racism in representation is the act of making the other invisible,” which is achieved by “positioning Indigenous people as objects”³. The deliberate act of making others invisible by positioning them as objects has precedents in the history of art. Various forms of art, such as painting, photography, and film (including recent films) have shown Indigenous people as strange and exotic beings. The 19th century photographs by the German photographer Johannes Lindt, which showed Indigenous people staged in an artificial settings and in stereotypical ways, offer a widely known example. At this time, Europeans were increasingly interested in the notion of scientific theories about the origins of human races, and such fictional representations furthered misinformation and biases⁴.

The social and political abuse experienced by Indigenous Australians remains so significant to everyday reality that it inevitably informs a large portion

of the collective consciousness drawn upon by contemporary artists. For example, at the time of European invasion, Indigenous Australian people comprised approximately 300 different peoples with different languages, cultures and traditions, but now such diversity has been limited as they constitute less than three percent of the entire Australian population. An oppressive society was built around them, and they had no opportunity to negotiate, or to participate. In fact, it was only in 1967 that Indigenous Australian people were recognized as Australian citizens with equal rights to vote. It was only in 1992, with a High Court decision in the Eddie Mabo case, that the doctrine of terra nullius⁵ was overturned, paving the way for many Indigenous title claims⁶.

In the 1980s, photography by Indigenous Australian artists began to manifest in the wider art scene. However, in contrast to Indigenous Australian painting, which boomed on the international market at approximately the same time, photography was for a long time not accepted as ‘authentic’ Indigenous Australian art. There is evidence of this in the exclusion of Indigenous photography at Art Cologne in 1992⁷. Yet, Indigenous contemporary photography is a powerful medium to re-write history, to re-represent Indigenous cultures, and to open new spaces for intercultural dialogues.

Kevin Gilbert, Indigenous Australian writer, argues that even if Indigenous Australian artists share a universality with all other artists, their personal experiences as Indigenous persons are reflected in their work and thus represent an Indigenous perspective on a variety of issues⁸. Their narrative is inevitably set within anti-colonial dynamics and their aim is to re-write colonial history from the Indigenous perspective.

Michael Riley Untitled (ghala), 1998

Michael Riley, a filmmaker and

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Deborah Kelly, born in Melbourne 1962, has been making socially engaged artwork since 1983. Her projects seek to implicate broad audiences in the discourses of local histories, and to intervene into representation of place and power. Bewareofthegod.com.

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the right. Instead he tries to be a human being and make little differences in the world whenever he can. andrew@thisisLiveArt.co.uk

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Markuz Wernli Saitô looks at the mundane moment and single action of living that inherently pose the question: how it might be lived differently, more truthfully, and more respectfully. To learn more about his work, visit momentarium.org.

Jayne Salloum's work exists within and between the very personal/local and the trans-national. It engages in an intimate subjectivity and a discursive challenge. He has worked in installation, photography, video, performance and text since 1975, as well as curating exhibitions, conducting workshops and coordinating cultural projects. http://www.111101.net/artworks/jayne_salloum

Milena Placentile is a Canadian curator and writer interested in developing exhibitions of contemporary art that resonate socially and politically. To learn more about her work, please visit shintai-z.com.

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photograph, there are two black dolls wearing short trousers, sitting on the ground, and leaning against the wall. Behind them the wall is marked with graffiti in white, which reads, "Galleria di speranza" (Italian for "Gallery of hope"). There are some matchsticks lying on the floor next to one of the dolls.

This photograph includes a variety of allusions. Pointing to the socio-political situation of Indigenous Australian people and the effects of colonization, Deacon suggests the unfavourable living conditions many Indigenous people are forced to suffer. The two dolls appear to symbolize children as a reference to the "Stolen Generations". The term describes a government-sanctioned policy of kidnapping that, for many decades beginning in 1911, involved the forcible separation of Indigenous children from their families in order for them to be raised in state institutions or with "Anglo-Australian" families¹¹. This course of action was maintained until the 1980s and caused the disruption of families, leading to a loss of Indigenous languages and practices. The effects of this collective trauma have also wider social and political consequences. Michael Dodson, a leading Indigenous Australian figure in Australian politics, summarizes that Indigenous Australian people are one third as likely to complete secondary school and 18 times more likely to be in prison than other Australians. Sixty percent live in inadequate housing and sixty percent are unemployed. Indigenous Australians have a lower life expectancy and die on average 18 to 29 years earlier than other Australians¹².

While Deacon represents this harsh reality allegorically, she also includes a slightly sarcastic and darkly humorous tone that is conveyed through contradiction and juxtaposition. For example, the words "Galleria di speranza" can have various meanings. They can be a comment on Australia as a place of hope and immigration for many people who expect a better life there; however, this photo makes it clear that this 'hope' is not available to everyone. The words can also be interpreted as a statement on art in the international and intercultural arena. A

"galleria di speranza" implies that art has the potential to contribute to social change, and that gallery spaces can be actively "intersubjective, inter-cultural contact zones"¹³. Such spaces could allow, through provoking and challenging encounters, an alternative to mainstream history and to dominant knowledge.

As the French historian Michel Foucault argues, "representation [and thus photographic art] is a source for the production of social knowledge [and] knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true"¹⁴ since it has 'real' consequences on 'real' lives. Art as a cultural practice is a way of defining and constructing new knowledges.

Meaning – to refer again to Foucault – is not a finished entity lying within a 'text'. On the contrary, it is always in process and is established through discourse. The photographic works of Michael Riley and Destiny Deacon provide a version of Australian history through a series of mnemonic devices that can open new areas of dialogue. These artists aim to deconstruct stereotypes and myths, and to support the recognition of cultural difference as an invitation to gain fruitful intercultural interaction.

The opportunity to create new knowledge and to deconstruct old, colonialist stereotypes through the contemplation of provocative work that challenges the status quo has the power to transform thinking structures and to eventually change behaviour. Thus, inspired by artists to think in new ways, a change in mindsets can surely result in social change.

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Performing Rights Vienna

Boat-People.org and Hey, Hetero!

Deborah Kelly



Image courtesy of Andrew Mitchelson
and Performing Rights Vienna

than the collective “We”?

March 07

Let’s go back to March in Vienna. Rewind. Sorry for jumping around, my head is not yet clear.

Back in the workshop, a direct action was proposed for us to consider in terms of our participation. Next door to Tanzquartier, that very evening, MUMOK (Museum of Modern Art) was hosting a private viewing of a new Yves Klein exhibition. Across Museumplatz within Vienna’s vibrant Museum Quarter, Vienna’s art elite were viewing this retrospective and sipping champagne.

The direct action was proposed. We were all invited to join the artists and activists from the workshop at Tanzquartier to participate in an act of civil disobedience. To ensure everyone was happy with the decision-making process, we used a short-hand process of consensus democracy for large groups, and within the hour (and with just one person deciding to abstain from the exercise), it was agreed that we would join together to storm the exhibition in a manner that was within the context of a specific political protest. John later noted that he didn’t think the action was to obtain consensus from such a large group; although he had sculpted and structured what he describes as a “space where possibilities could happen,” there was an individual who found the action complex and unnecessary for a number of reasons, and decided to leave. John and many others in the studio felt uncomfortable about this, but time was not on our side.

The grounds upon which the action was to take place was outlined:

‘Making the invisible visible’ (Yves Klein)

In 2003, two people died during a violent deportation in Air France’s Deportation Class.

Air France is still being used for deportations. Just two weeks ago, the deportation of a father to Burkina Faso was prevented.

Air France is the sponsor of this exhibition.

Is the visible comprehensive enough?

Snap to the scene. The world is fucking fucked up and we have ants in our pants.

Within moments, a willing team of male participants were stripped naked, and the names of deportees were etched across their skin. As a living embodiment of those who had suffered violations of their rights by a corporation acting on behalf of the state, James described the feeling of using his body to challenge a global entity as “empowering, exciting, and very much about the doing”. The naked men were calmly and covertly escorted across Museumplatz and into the gallery. Next, the men were dragged across the floor by women in a subversive gender-reference to the art of Yves Klein and his subjective treatment of the female body in his work.

A physical metaphor was at work. The energy and the stakes were raised.

Flyers were distributed.

The word was being spread. Security began to close the galleries. The galleries were abandoned. “Air France departs innocent people,” someone declared angrily. The point was made. Security removed us from the building.

Collective energy was in action.

April 07

John looked back on the action and evaluated it’s crudeness and roughness, yet acknowledged that it also served to highlight the potentiality of risk and what can be achieved when large groups work quickly and effectively. Point taken. The combined energy was good, the action made the point and together the group succeeded in making a political statement. It reached out and made the invisible visible.

May 07

I’m now trying to reflect and make sense.

The world is a mess and we have to take responsibility for things. Capitalism. Globalisation. War. Poverty. Injustice. Individual Rights. Collective Rights. Human Rights.

And then, I thought, there was empathy.

seeks access to the public attention accorded to commercial messages and denied to ‘Art’. By insisting upon the social power of ‘Art’, *Hey, Hetero!* claims the heritage of the Australian traditions of dissenting cultural production. *Hey, Hetero!* has exhibited in the streets, train stations, and galleries in Sydney, Adelaide, Melbourne, Wellington, Berlin, and Cyprus. It was also the lead visual arts project for Glasgay 2006, when it appeared as large illuminated posters, throughout the Glasgow subway system.

07

May
This is my state of mind...

Last week I sat in a pub in Camden after seeing Patti Smith play at the Roundhouse, drinking and talking with a group of artists, activists, anti-capitalists, friends, environmentalists, anti-globalists, and so on and so forth.

Last Thursday was also a damp May day and, as the afternoon progressed, I remember feeling distinctly unexcited about the prospect of seeing Smith play; a woman whose poetry and work I had only been recently introduced to, yet who's words and lyrics had seduced me into seeing the world in new ways, and provoked me to ask myself new questions about art, politics, and all the bits in between. It felt odd to remember being so excited when booking the tickets, yet on that day, it felt like a bit anti-climactic. I was feeling heavy and my thoughts were cloudy from a week of the usual (and not-so-usual) ups and downs of life; I simply didn't have the energy in me, nor the clarity of thought, to get into the mood for 'punk rock's poet laureate'.

Please be with me in this next moment.

I had been taken through my feelings of melancholy to a place full of a different, more upbeat, energy. A sort of transcendence. The room was high. People were listening, and reacting to, what this sixty-year-old punk singer had to say; both in her music, and perhaps equally as challenging, in those wonderful bits in between. The pinnacle of this experience was when Smith acknowledged the demise of the world as we currently know it.

"The world is fucking fucked up, and

I've got ants in my pants"
There was a shared outburst of understanding.
Things just simply aren't alright anymore.
The world is a mess and we have to take responsibility for things. Capitalism. Globalisation. War. Poverty. Injustice. Individual Rights. Collective Rights. Human Rights.

And then, I thought, there was apathy.
And then, I thought, there was The Institution
The Police, The State, The City Companies, The Oil Companies. The Government.

The whole crowd agreed with Patti and we were taken through her songs and a few cover versions, as she addressed the big politics of our time with diligent anger. For the first time in a few days, I didn't feel alone in my thoughts. Even more importantly, I felt a sense of collectivity, as the energy in the auditorium rose to Smith's personal and political discomfort with the problems in our world today. Upon leaving the concert I realised my evening had been transformed quite unusually.

April 07

I met John Jordan, and another friend and colleague, James Leadbitter, to discuss some of their practices as artists, activists, anti-capitalists, friends, environmentalists, anti-globalists, and so on and so forth. We were in an arts centre in Shoreditch discussing some work that had taken place in Vienna. John had led, and James participated in, a Creative Resistance workshop at Tanzquartier as part of a programme of activities, screenings, discussions and performances that addressed the relationship between performance and human rights. The event was, curated by The Live Art Development Agency, where I work.

May 07

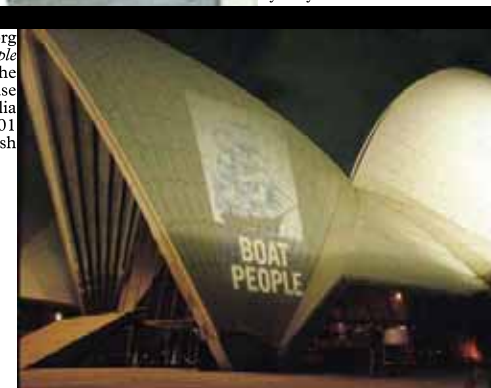
Snap back to last week again for a moment.

I bumped into friend and colleague, John Jordan, while queuing to get my coat after the concert. As I accepted an invitation for drinks, he introduced me to his friends. My friends clearly felt equally energised by the concert. John said how wonderful he thought Smith



Deborah Kelly and Tina FiveAsh
Hey, Hetero!
Sydney, Australia
Photo courtesy
Sydney Start Observer

Boat-People.org
We are all Boat People
intervention at the
Sydney Opera House
Australia
October, 2001
Photo by Tina FiveAsh





Pigeon Condo, 2007
Image courtesy of the artists

FI

First presented in Toronto, Canada, in the summer of 2006, *Pigeon Condo* was conceived of as a freestanding multi-storey structure providing 160 dwelling-units for use by a community of local pigeons. *Pigeon Condo* faced several new high-rise condominium towers currently under construction in an area recently known for the squatting communities of Tent City and the Rooster Squat.

We intended *Pigeon Condo* to serve several purposes at once. It would create safe shelter for the pigeons that live along the central Yonge Street, and educate people about urban wildlife. It would provide an intriguing structure that offered levity to a barren track of land undergoing intense development. Additionally the project would comment on the condo-ization of the Toronto waterfront facing Lake Ontario.

The City of Toronto blocked the construction of *Pigeon Condo* over fears that it would raise awareness of the existence of homelessness in Toronto's waterfront, at a time when the waterfront is slated for 'revitalization'.

Like other cities around the world, Toronto is presently embarking on an ambitious waterfront re-development program. In this context, it is important to reflect upon the process that determines who benefits and who loses. Pigeons provide an ideal way to examine housing issues because of their status as the quintessential 'dispossessed' urban animal. By providing upscale housing for pigeons, the project aimed to not only comment on gentrification and development, but also underscore the dignity of pigeons, and by extension,

all creatures that live in the city.

Despite much support from the employees of the City's Culture Department -- and months of work fundraising and developing logistics for the project -- a few weeks before installation, City employees indicated that it would be unacceptable to build *Pigeon Condo* on the planned site. They suggested that the project be relocated to a distant parking lot, and the reasons given were related to the homeless people who take shelter under the nearby Gardiner Expressway. That is, they feared *Pigeon Condo* would raise awareness of the presence of homeless people in this location.

We later learned that City staff wanted to avoid drawing attention to the issue because they had recently received much criticism over their 'homeless census' - a project social-service outreach workers said had turned them into informants. It also came out that the City employees opposed to *Pigeon Condo* were planning to conduct a sweep of evictions of the people who took shelter under the Expressway, and therefore wanted to maintain the existence of these people as an 'invisible' fact.

As artists, we were in a difficult position. We didn't want to build in an inaccessible parking lot because it would be difficult for people to visit the project, and require significant construction changes. We also felt that the move would distort the value of the project by taking it away from the contested site of urban development. When City employees rejected our final appeals to go ahead with construction on the original site, we decided to turn *Pigeon Condo* into virtual architecture.

We dressed in fabulous pigeon costumes and occupied the original Pigeon Condo site, promoting the project's (now fictional) construction with sandwich boards, an architectural model on wheels, a website, a telephone infoline in English and Spanish, and social activities. We flew kites, watched birds, and invited guests to picnics and public discussions on the contested traffic triangle. We were blessed by the participation of hundreds of people including tourists, shoppers, homeless

Gallery Of Hope

*An intercultural
perspective on
Indigenous Australian
art photography*

Elisabeth Gigler

photographer (b. 1960, Dubbo, NSW – d. 2004) was of the Wiradjuri/Kamilaroi people, grew up with his family on a mission and later lived with his parents in Dubbo. From 1976 on, he lived and worked in Sydney, but retained strong connections to his Indigenous home-communities in Dubbo and Mauree. He received training at Sydney College of the Arts and spent many years working as a freelance photographer. His work has also been exhibited in Europe, including the Musée du Quai Branly, Paris.

Untitled (ghala) is a photograph from the series *Flyblown*. Commenting on his own work, Riley states:

What I was trying to do was show in those images how farmers or graziers or whatever, people have changed the surface of the land, country, but to try and give an idea that Aboriginal spirits – ramadi – is still there within that land, even though the surface has changed. You know, there's still a sense of beauty and a spiritual feeling there. The images [...], they're all shot in and around the Moree area and Narrabri [...]. There's a sadness [...] and that sadness is that sense of loss of country, of culture, of peoples⁹.

The photograph depicts the close-up of a dead galah, a grey-backed, pink-breasted cockatoo bird, which exists in most parts of Australia. Its body is stiff, its feathers have been pulled to pieces, and its head is missing. The background of the photograph features the reddish and very dry earth upon which the bird lies. The earth is cracked due to a lack of water.

The photograph conveys a contradictory mixture of cruelty, brutality, and death versus soft beauty and calm intimacy. This intimacy has been created through the use of a close-up. A very quiet moment is shown, but in a way that is entirely public. The dying bird can be read as a symbol for the unresolved problem of colonialism in Australia. The image seems to tell the denied history of Australia from the perspective of Indigenous Australians: stories of wars and of massacres. It highlights the consequences of the invasion on the land, on nature, and on the people.

The intensely harsh quality of the natural environment featured in the photograph is multifaceted. The environmental extreme relates to the tensions created through colonization and to the scars it left on the people. Nikos Papastergiadis, an Australian art historian, argues:

[t]he images in the series *Flyblown* had a deep effect in me. They made me think of the ways in which the problems of colonialism persist in our contemporary landscapes. The evidence of failure is not just in the burial sites of massacres, or even in the ongoing ecological damage, but rather that we still have no answers to the question of how can we all live together in this place. We may think that we are not as evil as the colonial masters, but we are not as innocent as we may often like to think. Our presence in this place has consequences¹⁰.

Thus, the photograph questions the illusion of a peaceful co-existence of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. The photo can be read as symbolic of failure, in the past, and presently through ongoing damage done to Indigenous Australian cultures today. The dryness of the earth and the body of the dead bird represent a lack of water and lack of energy. Understood symbolically, this infers a lack of serious, forward-moving reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It mirrors the ongoing marginalization and exclusion.

Destiny Deacon Being There, 1998

Destiny Deacon (b. 1956) is a photographer, installation artist, video-maker, performer, broadcaster, writer and teacher from the Erub-Mer-Kuku nation. She began taking photographs in 1990, and her work has toured across Australia and abroad.

Being There depicts the corner of a shabby street (probably urban), a cement pavement and a wall made out of cheap bricks. In the centre of the

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3. Ibid., p 113, 122.

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5. The term terra nullius means 'empty

land' and served as official justification for invading and colonizing Australia. The term asserted a belief that no 'civilized' people, from the viewpoint of the colonizers, were living on the continent at the time of invasion.

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BIOGRAPHIES

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Deborah Kelly is an interdisciplinary artist. Her recent collaborative projects have included graphic civil disobedience on refugees and mass actions on Aboriginal Land Rights. She co-curated and conceived the 2002 exhibition, symposium, and tactical media lab BORDERPANIC and a Performance Space/Museum of Contemporary Art/Next 5-Minutes co-production with Zina Kaye. She has given lectures and workshops around Australia and in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Amsterdam, Berlin, and Ottawa. Her ongoing project, *Beware of the God*, is a multimedia investigation into the intersections of religion and politics, all documented at bewareofthegod.com.

Boat-People.org

In 2001, Kelly sought individuals to collaborate on public interventions opposing official xenophobia and compulsory amnesia. Zehra Ahmed, Safdar Ahmed, Stephanie Carrick, Dave Gravina, Katie Hepworth, Deborah Kelly, Enda Murray, Pip Shea, Sumugan Sivanesan, and Jamil Yamani now comprise an ongoing art gang known as Boat-People.org.

They write:

"We are ordinary Australians who are appalled at the inhumane treatment of refugees by our government. We have decided to get involved and challenge the border panic encouraged by the current rhetoric of fear.

Our goal is to create a shift in the minds and hearts of our fellow Australians who have not seen the truth behind the lies told by the Howard Government and the mainstream media outlets that broadly support its views.

We know that these unjust laws will eventually be changed - and we know that Australians will look back on this period with great shame. However, we must act now with urgency to bring about this change before more people suffer. We believe that this will only happen through constant and increasing pressure from compassionate people like you."

Through interventions, a multi-media action kit shared online, and songs with danceable pop-qualities, they ask others to help spread the word. Their current project is an experimental collective history reclamation wiki (and matching beer!) called *Best We Forget*.

Hey, Hetero!

Kelly's collaboration with photographer Tina FiveAsh uses the tactics and production values of mainstream advertising to question the invisible but omnipresent nature of heterosexuality and to invite heterosexuality into public discourse. It consists of six different artworks highlighting various aspects of heterosexual privilege.

Heterosexuality, of all possible sexualities, is virtually never articulated, per se. Like 'whiteness', its power is everywhere apparent, but named nowhere. Viewers of *Hey, Hetero!* are invited to consider that heterosexuality has a culture with customs, costumes, rituals, and exclusive rights all its own. The project does not suggest that all heterosexuals experience their identity similarly, nor that heterosexuality is monolithic. However, heterosexuality is both common to the majority of the population and entirely undiscussed as a phenomenon. Compare this to the scrutiny aimed at gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities by church and state policies, legislatures, and the media.

The *Hey, Hetero!* project opens heterosexuality to contemplation, while implying the continuing need for gay and lesbian cultural and political activity. By mimicking advertising, the project

And then, I thought, there are the Institutions. The Art Institutions, The Universities, The Academy.

What place do these institutions have in supporting work that operates across the borders of these institutions and across the art and activism?

April 07

This workshop and the resulting action were supported fully by Tanzquartier and The Live Art Development Agency, two institutions that are happy to embrace and support artists and activists working for political, social, and ecological change. Furthermore, artists and activists like James and John seem very aware of the problematics of the institution, in the sense that they have borders, contexts, and agendas that need to be negotiated and navigated.

May 07

Let me take you forward once more to last Friday morning. I am, awake, walking along the river, heading home. Trying hard not to think too much. Trying hard not to be alone in my thoughts.

A moment of clarity as I understand the way in which collective energy is different from the energy of "I". The action in Vienna was driven by collective energy. It offered a support for social change, it had the power to raise awareness, and to change peoples views and opinions. The ideas were able to break out of the institutions and into the real world.

Patti Smith, in her wonderful concert, was almost preaching to the converted. They all knew what she was saying, and they agreed. But she was within the institution, and she chose not to break out in that instance.

Perhaps she didn't need to.

I am happy that she didn't in that moment.

But now I questioned my own use of her energy, and wondered what might have happened.

I'm that kind of person that sits on the fence within these realms. I'm a little bit of an outsider. I'm not an activist as much as I'd like

to be.

Perhaps that's why I took that energy for myself, because like so many others I'm not challenged to think in terms of what "we" can do collectively. Yet I too have ants in my pants. Perhaps it's time that I too began to act.

I also understood, in my moments of clarity on that late walk home, that to have strength outside of the walls of the concert hall, or outside of the walls of the academy, or outside of the walls of the museum, or the theatre, is difficult yet possible. I suppose the action in Vienna serves to highlight how much easier protest can be when we are not doing it alone.

Patti Smith cannot necessarily take the energy and political activism out into the streets, nor is that necessarily her style or intention. But when direct results, changes, provocations can be achieved instantly through direct action, then perhaps we should all be working collectively to protest for changes in our world, whether as artists, activists, or as slippery fish swimming, navigating, between the two.

* * *

"Doing something without permission is what we do as both artists and activists. If we seek for approval from the institution, or those supporting us, then often what we want to achieve can be compromised."-James Leadbitter

"Is it better to wait and act perfectly, or act now?

Art has aesthetic. It has beauty, it has reflexiveness and it has crafting. Activism holds the spontaneity, the provocation, the passion and immediacy. Speed is the enemy of democracy" John Jordan.

Useful Links

www.thisisliveart.co.uk
www.tanzquartier.at
www.weareeverywhere.org
climatecamp.org.uk
www.vacuum.org.uk/ark
www.labofii.net
www.andwhilelondonburns.com
www.pattismith.net
www.platformlondon.org



Boat-People.org
Untitled (Botany Bay), 2005-7
 Image courtesy of the artists

Deborah Kelly

had been, and how he had wished that the political edge and sense of energy created in the auditorium had been taken out into the streets and into the bigger context.

John has an understandable affinity with the streets (think a key player of Reclaim the Streets), and with urban space, with how we interact with the world around us, with how we can collectively possess and use the space that is ours as a means to present critical actions, spectacles, and demonstrations that have highly political motivations.

March 07

Snap to a new moment.

I was with fifty or sixty people in a studio in Tanzquartier, Vienna, in March 2007 as an invited “latecomer” to a workshop of 26 artists and activists from Austria, Germany, UK, Hungary, and Brazil. The aim of the workshop was to draw together artists, activists, and those who occupy the spaces in between, to explore forms of Creative Resistance. Additionally, it was to create a sense of conviviality, collaboration, and collectivity in order to explore the possibilities of direct action and resistance in relation to art and aesthetics, and to build long-standing relationships and networks.

Through a direct action act of creative resistance that was to take place that evening, we were introduced quickly to the notion of consensus democracy. I was unsure about how this might work out. John later told me that the very nature of having to present “a product” had shifted the usual outcomes of this work slightly, and that it raised a focal point for the workshop that would not normally be present.

What does it mean to do something without permission?
 How can one affect radical social and political change?
 How can a statement be made by disrupting and subverting the normal, the seen, the expected?
 I was unsure how such a large group of people would reach a collective decision in the hour-long window left

for this ‘sharing’.

May 07

Fast forward.

The conversation in the pub acknowledged the power of Patti’s words. John described how pleased he was that the handful of flyers for an event he had been organizing, which he tossed into the air in the crowded auditorium, had all been taken from the floor as the room cleared at the end of the concert. There was discussion about Patti’s words, and a couple of people in the group were hungry for more. The conversation shifted slightly. “What if she had taken us onto the streets? I mean, I wanted more. If she has the power to bring that level of energy to a room, then why not do something more and take us onto the streets to protest in direct action?” I guess she had the power to do that. John outlined his agitation about rock concerts and other collective gatherings of this sort, where the politics seemed, in his view, to remain within the confines of the specific context, and quite often within the institution.

The Institution. The Academy. The systems of knowledge and power to be negotiated and upheld. What role does the institution play?

I felt slightly puzzled by John’s statement, and perhaps even a little agitated that, for him, the collective experience was simply not enough, and that the energy created could not be left to exist in that environment or context. I offered to the discussion that my entire day had been a bit of a struggle. That I had come to the concert not feeling altogether great, but that my energy had been lifted, and I felt happier and more energized than when I arrived. I also asserted my belief that I didn’t have the energy within me, in that moment, to exercise a collective outburst into the streets, and that it was important for me to capture and absorb the energy of the room. It was like a tonic. While I enjoyed the collective energy of the concert, I didn’t want to take to the streets; I wanted to take things away with me and to think about them.

Was I being introverted? Was I just thinking about the singular “I” rather

Pigeon Condo

Luis Jacob and Amos Latteier

Twenty- Something

Andrew Mitchelson

people, architects, activists, and artists. We ate snacks in the shade of the expressway and discussed development and urban life in Toronto. In the shelter of *Pigeon Condo*'s virtual structure, we collectively tried to imagine a better city.

Pigeon Condo
Toronto, Canada 2007
Image courtesy of the artists



**Luis Jacob
and Amos Latteier**