PUBLIC GOOD

Itinerant responses to collective space

CONTENTS

Foreword

Paula Booker and Marnie Slater
Wellington 2008

Considering the increasing amount of funds and energy directed towards the commissioning of art sited within public space, and the continual civic development of the urban landscape, we think it is timely to attempt a collected discussion into the obviously political, and forever elusive notion of The Public.

Here in New Zealand, public art has been brought to the fore of contemporary art discourse through an exploration of new contexts and audiences. Local bodies continue to commission permanent artworks to engage their citizens, spread the benefits of property developments and beautify common areas. But recently, a slew of events and projects across the country have been initiated to interrogate fixed notions of public art in an epoch of the dematerialised object and a fragmented public sphere.

The ephemeral possibilities of the traditional sculptural monument and contemporary monumental moment are explored within *Action / Event / Document* by Wellington-based curator and academic **Christina Barton**. Bombay-based artist **Tushar Joag** echoes Barton's discussion of the complications of the subjective and temporal within the historical and the epic in *Looking for Flora*, his project is introduced here by **Chaitanya Sambrani**. Joag's images present what appears to be a permanent civic monument, frozen in migratory crawl of comment across a city.

Harold Grieves discusses the historical and current development of private, rather than public space in Christchurch noting "the willful retreats of future suburban seclusions give new complexity to the anxiety surrounding suburbia as a cultural form."

Any attempt to gather a collected discourse around the public provokes as many questions and generalisations as it does possible answers or statements. In his essay *In the Place of the Public Sphere? Or, the World in Fragments* writer and curator **Simon Sheikh** points out that "just as there is no complete, ideal work there is no ideal, generalised spectator." In their discussion writer and artist duo **Tim Corballis** and **Fiona Amunsden** explore the fragmented spectator or subject present within their ongoing collaborative project titled *Si c'est (if it is)*. For Corballis and Amunsden, creating work is a struggle between the private and the public, with the public sphere forming a framing device that at once complicates representation and renders partially tangible our subjective experiences.

Within our supposed globalised economy, with increasing emphasis on the agency and fluidity of the individual and a climate of apparently fragmented identities, is the discussion offered within these pages timely? Is public space still a site for debate? Wellington-based agitator **Rudolf Hudsucker** charts a passionate trajectory of the public good in the hands of our civic and national decision makers, exposing the underlining structures of power and politics. Embodied within Hudsucker's essay is a call

for collective accountability through education, discussion and action beyond the halls of political power, in public. In *The Barricades* artist **Dane Mitchell** also discusses the activation of common space saying "asphalt may no longer be the political territory it once was for broad political disputes, yet time and time again we see the street employed as a key site of solidarity and dissent."

Kate Newby and **Rachel O'Neill** offer lyrical and personal accounts of action and thought in public space. The visceral sculptural tension of Newby's image series is reflected in the space of expectation and the processes of concealment present in O'Neill's poem. We made the decision to feature prose and poetry alongside the artists' pages and essays to acknowledge multiple methodologies, approaches and voices, interrogating and drawing from notions of public while exploring a sense of place or moment through the building of narrative.

The public as a site and place of imagining personal and private conversations and narratives is located within prose by **JC Borrelle** and text by **Shuddhabrata Sengupta**. Borrelle interweaves a private memory with published discourse as a public form of framing the personal, in a story that is at once intensely intimate and open-ended. For Sengupta, public is an ephemeral surface where a multitude of private narratives clash and interweave, present for anyone who is prepared to sit and listen.

Spiros Panigirakis positions the space of artistic practice and presentation as a site of contention, as a place where visibility is political and where it is possible to not only test but exercise the muscles of public discourse. **Kate Brettkelly-Chalmers** discusses the ways in which artist **Kah Bee Chow** uses visibility within a social sphere of communal spaces – of contemporary art galleries, artist-run spaces and public pavements to "quietly undo (and re-do) some of the knots that bind our preconceptions of familiarity and strangeness, absence and presence, with regards to ideas of place and public."

How can artists use the hallowed public art institution as a communal space, as a site for discussion of public-ness? An influential project, not further discussed in *Public Good*, is Hans Haacke's *PROJEKT '74* contribution at the Museum Ludwig in Cologne. The artist instigated an in-depth exploration of the Nazi-era career of the donor of a Manet painting in the museum's collection. Attempting to hang the institution's dirty laundry out for all to see, he charted a narrative that pulled close, and laid bare, ethically problematic affiliations of the Museum Ludwig. After the museum director removed Haake's work, fellow exhibitor Daniel Buren rebutted by pasting copies of Haake's banished work directly on top of his wall-drawing which was also, in turn, removed from the exhibition. Haake's project was a public playing out of political narratives, where the complete transparency of a public museum was proposed, and the independence of the artist (or more specifically the independence of the artwork) was compromised.

With an eye on the breadth of critical practice playing out the public, this journal sees the coming together of diverse voices and interpretations from practitioners locally and internationally to form a varied thesis, offering a springboard for argument, thought and discussion to emerge.

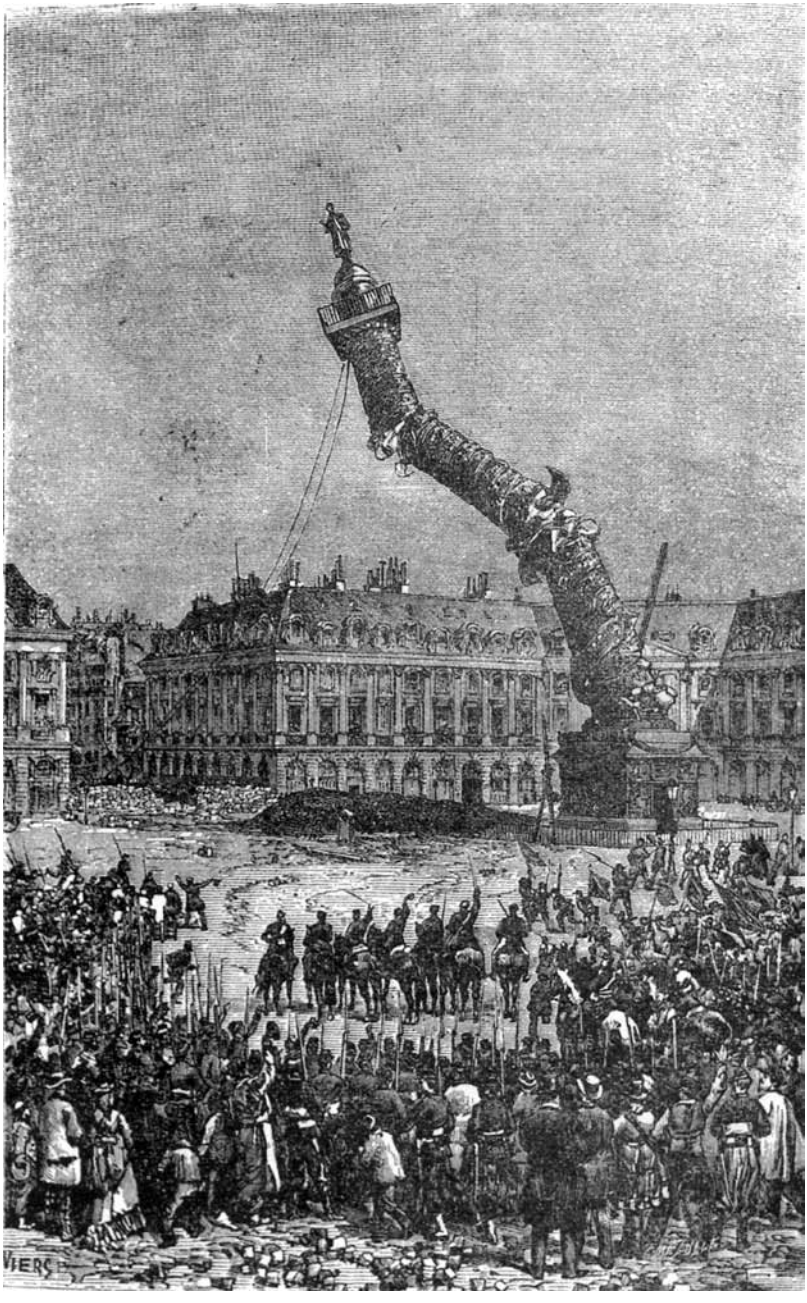
ACTION / EVENT / DOCUMENT

Reconsidering the monument[1]

Christina Barton
Wellington 2008

ROSALIND KRAUSS, IN her famous essay *Sculpture in the Expanded Field* of 1978 conceived a structural diagram to account for post-1960s' sculptural practice that positioned its newest forms in relation to architecture and landscape in a relational grid that justified its expanding formats and, in passing, provided one of the most succinct accounts of an entire history of western sculpture in the public domain from the renaissance to the present. She left out of her equation, however, two crucial dimensions – the social and the temporal – that I think are critical to an understanding of the latest directions sculpture in the public realm has taken.

I want to turn exactly to these two terms, addressing what role they play, to rethink Krauss's model and posit a new set of coordinates, to suggest that what is going on today is as much a condition of the history of the medium as the



9.

formal advances Krauss catalogued exactly 30 years ago. Like Krauss I will invoke a history marked by ruptures rather than seamless continuities, but unlike her I will grant these human rather than purely artistic motivations and consider these in light of political circumstances that are especially inescapable in the world today.

Krauss's definition of the monument as a "commemorative representation ... [that] sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolic tongue about the meaning or use of that place" grants to sculpture a role in re-presenting a past event for a future public which secures its function as a marker in the grand unfolding of historical time.[2] But I would suggest that her account needs to be qualified by an equally pressing realisation that monuments also exist in the humdrum here and now.

To the permanence of the monument we must add its immanent contingency. Just think of a public sculpture and note how its surfaces can be sullied, bits can be broken off, birds can use it as a perch, skateboarders ride it, developers move it, vandals break it, or artists reuse it.

What I am suggesting, then, is that a monument may be defined as a permanent structure serving an historical purpose that can be located within an artistic lineage but it is also a physical object subject to arbitrary circumstance. In other words it is prey to the pressures of every-day time and the actions of ordinary people. To Krauss's concern with sculpture and site we must therefore add (or juxtapose) the notions of action and event.

Nowhere is this more obvious than when we canvass the many occasions when public monuments have been the target of political attacks. This, according to Dario Gamboni, is a little-appreciated aspect of a monument's identity and its relation to history.[3] His study of occasions when art has been damaged or destroyed offers a counter-narrative to conventional histories of art, shifting attention away from art as a separate category and from the artist as originating creator, to take into account crucial questions of reception and context. This has the effect of rethinking the monument as a temporal and contingent device that can be re-deployed by people. Rather than commemorate the past, it can puncture and arrest history, proving a pointed tool in the present.

Tracing the history of iconoclasm and vandalism Gamboni has compiled, one cannot help but note that sculpture in this account no longer embodies eternal values associated with physical permanence and aesthetic quality. Rather it is disassembled in the competition between rival groups in society and skewered on the specific details of particular moments, then dispersed in a myriad of other forms, as news of events is disseminated.

For example, on the 16th of May 1871, French communards tore down the Vendôme Column – a derivation of Trajan's Column erected by Napoleon (who in turn had replaced a royal statue) – in a representational gesture expressly designed to destroy a symbol of tyranny and militarism (Fig 1).[4] This act may be the reverse of conventional artistic production, but the gesture is still symbolic and it survives in visual representations that circulated in the popular media. Thus, attention to the real object that

Previous page
Figure 1, *Fall of the Vendôme Column 16 May 1871* (1874)
D. Vierge, Paris

Published by Victor Hugo in *L'annee Terrible* and reprinted in Dario Gamboni's *The Destruction of Art: Destruction and Vandalism since the French Revolution* (1997).

Above
Figure 3, Video still from *Sugar Water* Eric Baudelaire, New York 2006 72min HD video projection
Courtesy of the artist and Elisabeth Dee

has survived from the past is relocated to the present action and its immediate circumstances. The displacement from singular object to multiple documents that follows is an inevitable outcome of the column's destruction, and a vital component of the temporal and social dimensions I am addressing. So, to our new components of action and event we must add the dis-located coordinate of the place-less document.

If the monument can be re-commissioned as a representational gesture at odds with its maker's or instigator's original conception, then its reproduction and dispersal as image is equally an element of its newly expanded meaning. I want to dwell briefly on a particularly telling and relatively recent instance to bring us to the present as the final framework for my discussion.

Reuters' photographer, Goran Tomasevic was on the ground in Baghdad after the US invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Fig 2). On April 9th he was one of the many journalists who witnessed the dramatic toppling of a bronze statue of Saddam Hussein (completed on commission by artist Khaled Izzat in 1992) in Firdous Square. This was undertaken by Iraqi citizens and assisted by US troops who had only just entered Baghdad for the first time in the conflict. Pictures like his, as well as live TV coverage, instantly circulated the scene, to signal the fall of Saddam's regime after three weeks of intense fighting. To many it became the symbol of American success; events could here be condensed into a single meaningful image, the literal fall of Saddam's statue.

This conforms to that longer history Gamboni has compiled of the many occasions when statues were destroyed to mark traumatic regime change. Tied up here, as well, is an aesthetic subtext that dogs the history of public monuments and offers one reason for the lack of regard we often offer them. This was the sly gratification that accompanied the destruction of one of the execrable statues Hussein had erected to himself; an example of a kind of despotic kitsch that characterised the artistic efforts of his regime: bad art was going along with a bad man.

But no sooner had the images begun to circulate than rumours spread, first among the alternative media active on the internet that have sprung up to counter the one-sided reporting of the major networks like Fox, CNN and Al Jazeira, then even among the more established press, that suggested the whole event was a set-up. On closer analysis of the footage, it appeared that rather than a joyful mass spontaneously taking out their suppressed rage at an oppressor, a small group of Iraqis, assisted by American Marines on order from higher command, took advantage of the square's location just across the road from the two hotels where most of the journalists were stationed, to topple the statue as a managed piece of propaganda. As *Guardian* reporter James Meek has cynically put it, the "real rendezvous on April 9 was between the invading troops and the resident foreign media."[5]

These images still circulate as emblems of the war in Iraq long after the monument itself was destroyed, standing on the one hand for the 'liberation' of Baghdad and, on the other, for the start of American occupation. Both versions suggest the power of representation as it is utilised on the immaterial stage of global media.

It would seem here that the document has surpassed the monument as a meaning device of unrivalled power.

Any artist working in the public sphere today must necessarily take into account the new conditions in which monuments function and images circulate. I shall leave you with one last example of a work which I think draws together the threads about which I am speaking. This is a 72-minute film made by the American-born, Paris-based artist, Eric Baudelaire (Fig 3).[6]

Baudelaire's film is neither narrative nor documentary but shows what appears to be an ordinary action taking place in a Parisian metro station. From a single fixed position we have an angled view of the platform and one of its exits. We witness passengers coming and going, but most especially we watch as a bill poster pastes up a billboard in an ornate gilt frame, one that is typically used for the large-scale advertising that is such a feature of any major city's transportation system. This film is shot in real-time, so what we see takes place as a single sequence of events. Strangely though, we don't watch the single application of an image, but instead follow the continuous posting of four pictures one on top of the other, that show a car on a street in the city which then dramatically explodes into flames and, in the final photograph, is left, a charred hulk, the victim perhaps of a terrorist bombing.

An action such as this, caught as it is on camera would, in my mind, be a perfect "One Day Sculpture." Pitched to invoke anxiety by reminding us of the dangers of city living in places wracked by acts of motivated violence, it casts a pall over our sense of personal security, bringing home

Figure 2, *US Soldier watches as Saddam Hussein statue falls in Baghdad April 9 2003* (2003)
Goran Tomasevic, Reuters

the potential risks associated with contemporary existence. But presented as an image (not the real thing) and witness to the studied disinterest of the station's occupants and the mundane actions of the bill poster who is indifferent to the image he is erecting, our fears of the event are undermined. Seen second-hand as a filmic record of a temporal event that itself is removed by appearing as a series of photographs, we can hardly be sure that anything actually happened; especially as the place depicted is uncannily named "Erewhon", referencing Samuel Butler's fictive utopia formed literally from spelling "nowhere" backwards.

What Baudelaire seems to capture is the double crisis of our contemporary moment: both the real danger that besets us as conflicts multiply in an increasingly divided world, and the disarming effects of our mediated existence, where representations dislocate us from reality and suspend time unnaturally. Baudelaire's work is capable of emblematising this because he uses both still and moving media, real and staged actions, to create a work that is poised uncomfortably between event and document. Here, we too are poised, in a very peculiar place and moment, one that seems to go on indefinitely (or at least for 72 minutes, the film's duration) but which also posits the possibility of tragic arrest: the idea that something happened, somewhere, and we are being asked to serve as its witnesses.

Baudelaire's film is, I think, a charged counter to the deceptions of the mass media, especially because it reproduces their forms. Displaced from the prevailing model of the permanent monument, it is nevertheless a reprise of art in the public realm. It serves then as a fitting example of the new work which is possible if we rethink Krauss's model.

What we are seeing here then, is a set of operations that engage the other coordinates of the monument – action, event and document – which still positions the work within the logical frameworks of a very long tradition. Yet, Baudelaire's decision to work in a temporal mode to track the fake progress of social beings in an everyday situation is the product of a specific historical rupture. In a post-9/11 world, where representations of horrific acts and human suffering are continuously available, and the workings of power to control how we receive them are ever more manifest, it is perhaps telling that an artist should seek a way to operate that avoids the presumptions of permanence and serves as a knowing counter to the manipulations of the mass media, to deliver a visual conundrum that toys with our abilities to remember. In other words, this might be a sculpture for our moment; a new mode of public art that is attuned to its times and aware of its history, that cannily navigates the tricky space between event and document, and which, most especially, is alert to everyday situations where people grapple with their surroundings and circumstances.

1 This is the largely un-edited paper I presented as part of a panel discussion designed to canvass ideas in preparation for the *One Day Sculpture* project, an initiative of Litmus, Massey University, Wellington, conceived and organised by Claire Doherty (Director, Situations, Bristol, UK), which will see a number of artists realising commissioned projects of no more than 24-hours' duration in public spaces across New Zealand in 2008–09. The panel was titled "Between Moments and Monuments: Considering the future of Contemporary Sculpture in the Public Realm", and was held on 8 March 2008 as part of the New Zealand International Arts Festival visual arts programme.

2 Rosalind E. Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field" [1978], in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Massachucetts: MIT Press, 1985), 279.

3 Dario Gamboni, *The Destruction of Art: Iconoclasm and Vandalism Since the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997).

4 Gamboni, pp. 39–40. This is also famous as the radical artist, Courbet, was charged by the authorities for encouraging the column's destruction and forced to pay a fine for its reconstruction.

5 James Meek, *The Guardian*, March 19, 2004.

6 For a discussion of this film see: Tan Lin, "Eric Baudelaire's *Sugar Water*, the Deleuzean Event and the Dispersion of Spectatorial Labour", *Reading Room, A Journal of Art and Culture*, no 2, Transcendental Pop (Auckland: Auckland City Art Gallery, 2008), 8–27.

PEACE OF MIND

Rachel O'Neill

Wellington 2008

We are not even preparing to part for the last time
Socrates from his chickens

instructions for feeding

no will but a note

with an asterisk beside the bird exhibiting
blatant activist
tendencies

in other words knack for public speaking.

He lies flat on his peace of mind
the crowd around his prone hands
the sound of Velcro coming from a stranger's
aorta.

Drifting off
closer a

lone leather shoe-lace spits blood
curls up in an irregular heartbeat.

In the shock of form

a home-made shadow
a Lilo-inflated photograph

quickens the heart.

We are not even preparing to part for the last time
a shiver of parliament

from the organ, the radio

interview that'd put peace
of mind on the map

in the back of his mind
there is no sleep.

Someone else's eyes

What were you doing there so early?

We had driven up from down south. We left plenty of time for the ferry, but in the end we got there much more quickly than we thought. We just had to wait.

Why didn't you go somewhere else?

We were happy enough. The ferry leaves from there, so we didn't need to go anywhere else. We just waited for the ferry.

Were you really happy?

No, well, we started to bicker a bit. I meant we were happy to stay were we were. We had no need to go anywhere else. That's what I meant. But we were both tired. I don't think we'd had any breakfast. We'd just got up early – we didn't want to wake my cousins. Then we'd been driving through the dark. I was driving, like I always do.

Why?

I don't know. I don't like it when someone else is in control. That's all right isn't it?

Yes.

But we would've bickered wherever we were. If we'd gone somewhere else it would have made no difference. I got out of the car. Actually, maybe I'd had a bit to drink the night before. My cousin's terrible like that, he just drinks. So I was feeling really bad. The drink and all the driving, getting up that early. I think we both just wanted to be home. It was annoying having to wait, but B— had wanted to go early so we didn't miss the ferry.

Did you notice the surfaces of things more because you were hungover?

I was tired mostly, and neither of us really wanted to be there. But I did notice the surface of the asphalt. And there was no-one else around. B— stayed in the car. It was like she wasn't there.

As if the inside of the car was another world.

I noticed the tops, the roofs of the fuel tanks. It was really quiet for a minute. It was like time had stopped. I mean it wasn't anything major, just a feeling. It's not logical. I was stretching my legs, and I was outside the car because we weren't really getting on. Sometimes we don't get on when we just sit around. We get bored and start to pick on each other.

What did you say to her?

I didn't say anything bad. She talks too much when she's tired, and I couldn't take it. It's like we become incompatible. Its like in the silence, and with the weight of things on us, we become different people.

– by telephone from Great Barrier Island, 14 October 2009.


Lot 70

SUBURBIA'S BAD RAP

Harold Grieves
Christchurch 2007

LET'S FACE IT, suburbia has a bad rap – and yet isn't it fair to suggest that suburbia is the settlement model most New Zealanders prefer? Hell, look at Christchurch City Council's concession that it's not till 2026 that they can even think about consolidating inner city development by implementing more severe restrictions on the residential development of the city's circumference.[1] Why then do we discuss suburbia like some sort of provincial malaise when we're so ensconced by it? Must we continue to ambiguously deflect our attention from suburbia through such petty indifference and willful aspirations of urban civility? Surely the convenient cache of condescension the term suburbia belies could be put to better use.

One of the first critics to notice that suburban derision was acting as a self-aggrandizing deflection was Herbert Gans. His study of the postwar American suburb of Levittown, New York, in 1967 rejected the "myth of suburbia" which assumed "the suburbs were breeding a new set of Americans, as mass produced as the houses they lived in." Eschewing the widespread assumption that suburbia's homogenous surroundings would produce an alienated and depersonalized citizenry "incapable of real friendship," Gans found much to admire and respect about Levittown's way of life.[2] More recently, Gans' argument has been re-articulated by the American architectural historian Robert Bruegmann. Claiming that the increase in low-density living is directly attributable to per-capita affluence, Bruegmann has argued that suburbia has proliferated precisely because it caters to a sense of privacy and opportunity that was once only "reserved for wealthier citizens."[3] Aligning the growth of sprawl with the three fundamental factors, "privacy, mobility, and choice", Bruegmann maintains that suburbia's decentralized appeal has allowed "a dramatic expansion of educational and employment opportunities."[4] Even the vehement critic of suburban sprawl, the architect Moshe Safdie, concedes that suburbia's success is directly attributable to the "profound cultural and psychological desire" for freedom and privacy.[5]

Closer to home, Bruegmann's argument has been picked up wholeheartedly by the

Christchurch property developer Hugh Pavletich. Rallying against the council's regional growth strategy, which he suggests pointlessly inhibits suburban growth, Pavletich is deeply concerned that such restrictions will "strangle Christchurch and inflate prices, so that people in average-paying jobs cannot afford to live here."[6] Similar anxieties were inflamed by a sensational media focus throughout 2007, which lamented the decline of home-ownership for "ordinary" New Zealanders.[7] Of course, such sensationalism never really appears in isolation and such headlines were no doubt driven by the National Party-led investigation into the crisis of home ownership, an initiative gelling perfectly as a consolidation of their paternalistic concern for that neo-traditionalised mainstream niche.[8] With this democratising impulse in mind, especially given its appeals to a populist New Zealand demographic, I think its worthwhile understanding how New Zealand became so intimately tied to its suburban condition.

Writing in the 1980s, Warrick Roger made a cautious link between New Zealand's colonial underpinnings as a redemptive "better-life" quest and its ultimate culmination in a lackadaisical

Previous page
A typical suburban allotment, carte-blanche and ready to go. Photograph courtesy the author

Above
Knightsbridge Estate, a suburban enclave currently in development on Queen Elizabeth drive, photographs courtesy the author. The site's erasure is the necessary step in the production of the suburban complex which relies on a uniformity and standardised appeal of allotments. Opposite the Travis Wetland reserve, one of the few wetland-swamp areas left in Christchurch'snorthwest corridor, the site demonstrates how obliquely suburban development attends to local conditions. At best, the raised elevation of the complex provides the suburban homes with a view over the swamp-land area but does little to incorporate aspects of the swamp habitat within the carte-blanche design aesthetic which has erased all traces of its wetland origins.

suburban model. Writing an almost poetic ode to the lazy pace of Auckland's various suburbs, Roger hits on a crucial element of the suburban appeal for New Zealand's colonial legacy of privatized space when he suggests "you can't grow cos lettuce or build on an extra room when you're on the eleventh floor." Likewise, Roger's assertion that New Zealanders find their "happiness in back yards and bungalows" is also intimately linked to New Zealand's rite of passage as a colonial entity which offered its citizens that sentimental Arcadian nostalgia for a pre-industrial lifestyle.[9] What I want to suggest then, is that the ongoing soapbox that the decline in homeownership rates is proving to be, is entirely symptomatic of a generational shift, a shift that will no doubt be played out by suburbia itself, especially if it fails to continue to deliver the privatized allotments and domestic dwellings we have long assumed are ours by default. Furthermore, what I also want to suggest is that the anxiety emerging around the decline in home-ownership rates exposes an overt sentimentality for a collective national identity, an identity that will, paradoxically, only be further challenged by the self-referential forms of today's suburban models.

Suburbia's condition within New Zealand nationalism has always presented itself as a complacent and docile lever on which to elevate pretensions of societal aspiration. Writing in 1952, Bill Pearson suggested that the "weekend torpor of the suburbs" was symptomatic of the New Zealander's cultural mindset.[10] Complaining bitterly about the hypocrisy and bland utilitarian culture of New Zealand during the 1950s, Pearson conveniently relies on suburbia's symptomatic homogeneity to act as the symbolic inertia he sincerely wants to provoke. Likewise, John Newton has noted a similar use of suburbia as a convenient lever in the poetry of Allen Curnow.[11] Pointing out that Curnow's writing relies on a strategy of diminution, in which the colonial aspirations of the 1890s politician-poets such as William Pember Reeves, Thomas Bracken, Alfred Dommett, and Edward Tregar are recast as "statist pretensions," Newton has shown how Curnow conveniently deflates such aspirations by "confronting them with the inconsequence of their outcome in the suburban Utopia of the welfare state."[12]

W.H. New has more recently addressed this condescension towards suburbia. Leaning on the over-simplified and necessarily dichotomous bicultural vision of New Zealand, New has shown how suburbia's trappings have come to be read as a homogenous Pakeha weal, upon which Maori culture – complete with "Marae and the rural heartland" –becomes an ornamental augmentation that sentimentally confirms New Zealand as an enlightened body-politic.[13] Suggesting that this convenient binary omits a "multitude of variations" in which such "claims of social uniformity also ignore the power of region", New has instead focused on the way the suburbs of New Zealand, places like Fendalton, Manukau and Karori, are symptomatic and perhaps even identifiably localized sites, "each invested with a politics of attitude and social expectation."[14]

New's suggestion, that the regional attitudes of New Zealand are inflected by its compositional suburban forms, is a direct challenge to the

convenient homogenous wedge suburbia so often assumes. A good example of this continual bias to treat suburbia not as the default model of settlement, but as a peculiar, peripheral contamination, occurred in 2006 when the media vilified a group of home-owners who tried to block a public bus route through Northwood, a millennial suburban enclave in north Christchurch.[15] Following that timeworn path of 'high-brow' despair, this vilification lamented suburbia's general unwillingness to provide or even engage with an open public domain. Chastising the citizen blockade as an insular impulse of a petty privatized order, the condescension leant heavily on that crucible of suburban derision in which its shallow ground conveniently served leverage for an aspirational urban culture blossoming as an open-minded community fête. Never mind that such vilification made no mention of an entirely similar citizen blockade, which only a few years earlier actually denied the establishment of a bus stop along an inner-city suburban street.[16] Of course, such a comparison would have immediately emptied that tendency to treat suburbia as a peripheral condition, always and forever contained to a region's expanding circumference. Such shortsightedness dovetails nicely with Sally McIntyre's suggestion that the continual skepticism towards subdivision estates like Northwood "embody a paranoid ideology" that could just be a "willful head-in-the sand attitude" towards a "well-entrenched home-grown ethic of suburban privacy."[17] With this in mind, I intend, in what follows, to trace out the historical threads of suburbia as a dominating form of settlement within the Christchurch context.

In 1861, Christchurch was home to little more than 3,000 residents. However, from the 1870s to the turn of the century, the town swelled dramatically to 50,000 all of whom largely sought the privatised residences of suburbia. Aided by a network of trams, Christchurch developed much as any developing city would, widening its circumference and infilling its urban core with commercial and industrial ventures. Following patterns entirely similar to the rise of suburbia in London, Manchester and Chicago, the suburban settlement of Christchurch modeled itself on the domestic retreats of the more prosperous members of society. From the 1870s, this social group built and developed spacious garden-villas deliberately removed from the city-centre which at the time was characterised by "small, close-packed wooden dwellings."[18] The most notable of these garden-villa suburbs were the tram settlements of Sumner and Cashmere, which according to Geoffrey Rice, were by the turn of the century the fashionable addresses for professionals and retired businessmen.[19] The suburbs of Fendalton and St Albans also developed according to this model, retaining the air of the country estate well into the next century.[20]

The population growth of Christchurch grew steadily throughout the twentieth century becoming 200,000 by the 1950s. During this period, Christchurch's suburbs proliferated alongside the development of the tram system which, by the advent of World War One, was already an impressive circuit of 87 kilometers. However, following the mass-availability of the private motorcar in the 1960s, Christchurch's

This 1888 photograph shows the early township beginning to spread: Christchurch from the Cathedral tower, showing Colombo Street and Market (Victoria) Square. Photograph by Frank Arnold Coxhead.

suburban development not only dramatically expanded the city's circumference but also rapidly infilled the area between once distant suburbs.

By the 1970s registered motor vehicles outnumbered people in Christchurch and unsurprisingly traffic congestion was a major civic problem. Riccarton Road had already attained its reputation as the second-busiest thoroughfare in New Zealand in 1951, and in 1962 the city council finally implemented a significant traffic management plan. Opting out of public transport, the city council developed instead the now abandoned north-south motorway,[21] a one-way system to synchronize inner-city traffic and an arterial ring-road designed to link the city's increasingly fragmented edge-development. Of the three plans it was the ring road that greatly aided suburban development expanding the city dramatically in the northwest and southwest corridors as people flocked to the new settlements that took advantage of this sudden surplus of cheaper, newly available land. The dormitory suburbs of Hornby and Halswell date from this period and significant growth occurred in the northern suburbs of Bishopdale, Avonhead, and Burwood during this period of expansion.[22]

The era of expansion brought about by the increased mobility of the private automobile is also responsible for intensifying suburban settlement in the eastern parts of the city throughout Linwood, Aranui and Shirley. This era witnessed the consolidation of suburban settlements most notably linking up the once remote seaside tram-suburb of New Brighton. This consolidation also occurred in middle-class areas of the city through the increasing subdivision of the larger villa-estate properties in St. Albans and Fendalton. Frieda Looser has remarked that these new subdivisions reflected the requirements of a new generation of an aspiring middle class who settled for modest houses on smaller lots without the expansive gardens and trees.[23]

The expanding pressure of suburban development in Christchurch throughout the post-war period is probably best expressed by the government's intervention to create the new satellite town of Rolleston on the

southern outskirts of Christchurch in 1973. According to a Ministry of Works representative, Rolleston was expressly designed "to protect Christchurch and keep it the attractive manageable city it is today."[24] Designed to halt the runaway development of suburban sprawl by creating a fully integrated town capable of accommodating 80,000 residents, Rolleston is emblematic of an intervention that failed to account for local conditions and expectations. As Jacqueline Steincamp explained at the time, the local soil conditions of Rolleston would have never allowed it to compete against the garden city conception of Christchurch:

> *It is difficult to appreciate just how poor the soil is at Rolleston until one has seen the parched brown grass in summer and the limited species of trees that manage to survive. Soils are mostly porous clay over bottomless gravel, and combined with extreme heats and fierce winds common to the area, they will present severe handicaps for both home and official gardeners. Topsoil is scarce; water requirements for hosing will be immense. In any case, it is certain that the English style gardens favoured in Christchurch will be an impossibility in an area that is unsuitable for all but a few species of trees.*[25]

That Rolleston was being designed as both an opportunity for first-time property buyers and to curtail the over-development and subsequent harm to Christchurch's picturesque status as a suburban garden city only further compounded the bleak prospects for Rolleston. Marginalised at the city's edge, located in a bleakly inhospitable and windswept area, Rolleston became an indirect segregation; a deliberate quarantine zone thinly masked by its populist rhetoric as equal-rights opportunity for 'first-time' and working class homeowners.

Still predominantly based on green-field expansion, the suburban development of Christchurch over the last decade has been characterised by its congestion on the city's expanded circumference. Driven by the escalating property market and a need to make the most of what are quickly becoming limited available land options, there has also been a trend to build larger houses on smaller lot sizes.[26] This swelling has also been accompanied by a greater emphasis on the thematic organisation of the suburb which is clearly marked by notational ascriptions, like, elaborate entranceways, the thematic naming of roads, or the provision of pristine, 'recreated' scenery reserves. Clear examples of this impulse occur throughout the northeastern corridors stretching between Mairehau and Burwood where suburbia has symptomatically leaned towards enclosed cul-de-sac developments, each thematically tied by notational domain names and purposefully contained by an ominous perimeter fence. Perhaps the emblematic version of this enclosure is the enclave of Travis County whose elaborate entranceway sets it apart from Queen Elizabeth Drive (one of the main ring road arteries developed during the 1960s). Relying on its perimeter fence to contain community orientation, Travis County not only produces a notational but effective enclosure of its shared domestic domain but also creates a visible interruption of the wider public realm. Contained by the perimeter fence, Travis County looks and behaves like

The Pinot Lifestyle, photograph courtesy the author. Currently being developed in Wanaka, McArthur Ridge allows you to purchase not just a home but also allows you to own part of a fully functioning vineyard. A fully serviced and operational vineyard with projected profit earnings, this new suburban model falls back on the landed gentry of yesteryear whose hobby industry acquisitions serve as a model for today's lifestyle indulgences.

a privatized allotment whose thematic naming gives it that cache of secluded optimism.

When enclosures like Travis County are grouped together, like they are throughout Christchurch's Marshland corridor, what one notices is the predominance of the perimeter fence which with its back turned to the city is a deliberate effort to seclude suburbia in its optimistic compounds. This makes for an ominous landscape of deliberated isolation that only further reinforces the compromised idealism people are happy to settle for in their pursuit of suburbia's dream. One can see the problematic notions of this style of suburbia in the currently developing suburban enclave of Westpark on Christchurch's northwest-bound Wairakei road. There, a perimeter fence clusters about a hundred houses into a small cul-de-sac formation, which promises to deliver a "park-reserve lifestyle."

On a recent field trip to Westpark, it was impossible not to notice that the houses were all encroaching heavily on their land allotments. Compounded by the homogenous pine fences – each taller than head height and all set out in a repetitive, curvilinear formation – it became glaringly obvious that there existed a massive disjuncture between the reality of Westpark and the manner in which it had been advertised. Celebrating the content familial bliss of the child being carried on the shoulders of her father through a sylvan setting of mature trees, Westpark advertising turned tables on the negative connotations of cul-de-sac lifestyles as a secluded, entropic formation by promising "it's French for peace & quiet." However, with the houses easily occupying ninety percent of the property allotment and taking into account the sheer homogeneity of the surrounding area it seems quite clear that the majority of this peace and quiet would be sustained within the domestic space of the house itself. This is not to say that the disparity between the picturesque spatial promises of Westpark's marketing and the jarringly desolate and repetitive site was inhibiting sales. Almost every allotment featured sold banners while almost half of the properties in the enclave were already under construction. What such optimism so easily highlights is the manner in which the

psychological desire for the privatised lot of suburbia will often pave over even the most obvious of contradictions.

Writing about the disparity between suburbia's utopian promise and its localized realities Gans pointed out that people often buy into suburbia simply because it allows them to "carry on old ways of family life, neighbour relations and civic activity."[27] Similarly, Westpark's promise offers not so much a radical break from suburban conditions but a wholehearted embrace of it. The very use of the phrase "cul-de-sac living" within its marketing moment, stripped as it is of its negative connotations through a simple re-investment, is designed to attract a specific cultural group. Clustered, as it is, by the perimeter fence and the elaborate entranceway, romanticised by its marketing as a sylvan, family-first setting, Westpark is entirely that commensurate, private-domestic compound its consumers are enthusiastically looking for.

Another symptomatic feature of recent suburban trends at Westpark is the way it reflects the tendency for developers to use an abstract version of nature, which augments the notational domain of its enclosure. Central to this abstraction is the tendency for suburban developments to begin by bulldozing flat any natural amenities the site once contained. Writing about this tendency, Moshe Safdie has lamented the way we continue to deploy by habit "our modern capacity to overcome any formation of nature" and has instead called for a more constrained development that respects the topological features of the terrain's naturalised amenities.[28] What tends to happen though, and Westpark is a clear example of this practice, is that an abstract version of nature is often deployed to offset the site's initial erasure. Moreover, in an odd relay, the erasure also forces the developers to initiate and exaggerate a recreated nature-scene. Often appearing as little more than a token appendage this strategy conveniently paves over the radical restructuring of a once natural topography. This strategy is glaringly apparent at Westpark where the developer's promise of "a park/reserve lifestyle" is blithely catered to by the allotment of miserly landscaped areas deliberately marginalised at the northern edge of the development.

Perhaps the most blatantly commercialised form of nature as an idealised marker of community longing is Northwood's embrace of the pukeko, an indigenous swamp hen. Northwood's attempt to create a community-focused amphitheatre by encircling a small plot of land with a group of garish bronze pukeko sculptures, each totemically placed upon large rustic wooden poles, is a discomforting site of overloaded nature-culture synthesis. Periodically populated by real pukeko, the site is glaringly disconnected from any inter-relationship with the original swamp habitat the pukeko were once used to. Blanched green by its flattened ready-lawn appliqué, this enclosure, contained as it is by a looping road, becomes an ornamental site of community longing which is rarely used by anyone, even the very birds it attempts to celebrate. This site is a good example of the way suburban development deploys nature as a commodity, operating as a fabricated appendage

Entrance to Travis County on Queen Elizabeth Drive, photograph courtesy the author. Today's millennial suburbia is marked by these elaborate entrances, which with the landscape aesthetic, and road paving serve to distinguish the suburban enclave from the surrounding area.

for suburban construction to continue unabated rather than the wholehearted and interrelated vision that Safdie is calling for.

Of course, the manipulation of nature as a cosmetic or aesthetic commodity is nothing new. Matthew Gandy has written about the way New York City's Central Park is a similar collusion of an aestheticised nature operating as a cultural form that is entirely complicit with capitalist urbanization. Arguing that "the park represents a kind of elaborate spatial fix to the economic downturn of the 1850s," Gandy has shown how Central Park not only aided the property market of the 1860s, but also reflects the tendency to abstract nature within the built urban environment.[29] Presented as a fragmented realm reminiscent of a romantic, nature-tradition, Central Park became an exulted appendage that complimented the "promethean" attributes of "a distinctly American nature aesthetic". Boosting property prices from $500 in 1847, to in excess of $20,000 in 1868, Central Park was effective in introducing the idea that nature could be a productive and yet inert commodity within the field of urban capitalist geography. Gandy argues this is less a manipulation of nature than a pragmatic synthesis of urban conditions within which emerged "a sophisticated metropolitan ideology of nature" that "became an integral dimension to the dynamics of capitalist urbanization."[30]

The deployment of nature as an appendage to suburban development has always been a keen tool of social mediation by developers. One of the driving forces of this mediation is the role marketing plays in the promotion of suburbia, which has always relied on a commodified form of nature to imply spacious habitats regardless of whether it actually exists. As Stephen Ward has pointed out, suburban marketing has always preferred to deploy a picturesque nature setting which by default "continues to refer in the main to a world of pre-industrial landed estates."[31] Picturesque and sedate, the appendixes that furnish suburban developments – those estates, gardens, parks and dells – are all symptomatic of the commodification of nature as an appendage which suburbia must rely on. More recently though there has been a considerable trend towards conflating the nature-appendage of suburbia with an incorporated lifestyle

producing the hyper-idealism of places like Westpark, where you can "live were you can always find a park," or Pegasus Town, where one is induced to "live where you play."[32]

John Archer has referred to this conflation as a systematic "theming" in which suburbia is marketed as a socialised "constructive dreaming."[33] Tracing its history through Disneyland's neo-traditional 'main-streets,' Archer is conscious of the way theming has been criticised as a "consumption-based simulacra that divert[s] attention from the realities of the corporate controlled landscape", but has instead focused on the way theming can also entail a "common commitment to establishing and preserving a certain idealized social fabric."[34] As such, Archer views the popularity of theming as a direct response to suburbia's continuing promotion of a "readymade world, ready for purchase, where the buyer could simply move in and begin to live the dream advertised."[35] Examples of this theming occur throughout New Zealand. Whether it is the "Pinot Noir Lifestyle" of Wanaka's McArthur Ridge (where one can buy a home and an "investment" amongst a fully functioning and fully serviced vineyard) or the indulgent "café-lifestyle" of Christchurch's newly proposed "Delamain" which is promising to be a community "with heart – meeting places, a pre-school, corner shop and local bar or café."[36]

Unrestricted by geographical features, Christchurch's growth has been significantly affected by the popular desire for the privatized dwelling of the suburban tract home. A 1992 City Council Regional Plan concedes that "Christchurch has expanded suburb by suburb" but it has also described these residential areas of Christchurch as being "characterised by diversity", a condition they considered a "strength" worth encouraging.[37] In a broad stroke one could say, like David McIntyre has suggested, that Christchurch is loosely divided along economical lines by a north-west and south-east divide, splitting Aranui, Linwood and Hornby, from the more prosperous suburbs of Fendalton and Merivale.[38] Such generalizations, though, do little more than two dimensionally block the regional city and leave out the rapidly growing areas such as the suburbs infilling towards Kaiapoi, where all manner of new precincts are springing to life around varied thematic concepts. The suburban encroachment growing through Prebbleton towards Lincoln, and the odd appearance of suburban tract homes in the predominantly rural Canterbury areas of Loburn and Tai Tapu, would, likewise, all be excluded. It is fair, though, to suggest that Christchurch has become a regional city that has grown expansively from its origins within the four avenues that now signify its city-centre.

Throughout Christchurch, the pull of suburbia has created a vastly layered city, with each suburb inflected with its own political and social make-up. The willful retreats of future suburban seclusions, however, give new complexity to the anxiety surrounding suburbia as a cultural form. Linked, as it is, with the emergence of lifestyle as a marker of community belonging, these new suburban developments will have an enormous effect on the very condition of citizenship within New Zealand. Physically enclosed by its perimeter fence, conceptually

The first electric tram near the terminus on the new line from Papanui to Northcote, along the Main North Road, which opened 28 February 1913.

contained by its appeal to a universalised and often neo-traditionalised resident, these 'self-sufficient' communities look worryingly like those new concentrations that indirectly cause what Matthew Hyland has referred to as the pre-emptive transformation of social life into a form of affective labour.[39] Following out the threads that emerge from these new settlements is the task ahead.

1 Look, for instance, at the recent study about the regional growth of the wider Christchurch area. It was forced to concede that it is not until 2026 that a significant growth will occur within an intensified urbanization zone. Predicting a need to accommodate a future 53,000 households by 2041, the study is quite aware that by 2026, forty three percent of this projected growth will be catered to by the development of green-field zones as 'regulated' suburban settlements. This effectively means that the wider Canterbury region is yet to have a truly urban terrain and that it's not even the hypothetical 2026 that this is likely to occur. This plan was published as a four page supplement in *The Press*, November 6, 2006, C5-8.

2 Herbert Gans, The *Levittowners, Ways of Life and Politics in a New Suburban Community* (New York: Vintage, 1967), xv-xvi.

3 Robert Bruegmann, *Sprawl: A Compact History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 109.

4 Robert Bruegmann, Ibid, 109–110.

5 Moshe Safdie with Wendy Kohn, *The City After the Automobile: An Architect's Vision* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1997), 123.

6 Pavletich is profiled by Matt Philps in, "Backing the 'Burbs'," *The Press*, 16 September 2006, D3.

7 On the 28th March 2007, The Dominion Post led with the headline poster "Impossible Dream, Owning a Home". Its accompanying article related that residential mortgage payments had escalated over a four-year period from 43.5 percent to 73.5 percent of the average wage in the Wellington region. See Bernard Hickey, "Impossible Dream," *The Dominion Post*, March 28, 2007, A1.

8 The National Party trumpeted their concern for a mainstream New Zealander in the lead-up to the 2005 election. Their appeal to a "mainstream" was, however, a divisive tactic largely blending innocuously into New Zealand's so called "Maori problem." With calls to treat every New Zealander equal, mainstreaming harped back to the happy days of the 1950s, brewing a typical neo-traditional look of proprietorial indignation, which (bouncing happily alongside the call for tax-cuts and against bureaucratic mismanagement – "they're spending your money") was that familiar clarion of a self-responsive individualism and family-first Christianised ethic of community longing.

9 Warrick Roger, *Places in the Heart* (Auckland: Century Hutchinson, 1989), 213–15.

10 Bill Pearson, *Fretful Sleepers and Other Selected Essays* (Auckland, Heinemann Educational, 1974), 19.

11 John Newton, "The South Island Myth, A Short History," *Australian-Canadian Studies* 18.1 & 2 (2000), 23–39.

12 John Newton, Ibid, 31.

13 W.H. New, "Folding into Place," *Australian Canadian Studies* 18.1&2 (2000), 195–200.

14 W.H. New, Ibid, 197.

15 TVNZ's *Close Up* programme covered the blockade of the Northwood bus route on December 6, 2006. It was pitched as a heated battle between the high-handed suburban elite who deliberately bought into the removed, private allotment Northwood could potentially be, versus the 'good decent values' of Northwood's elderly residents, who relied on the public bus for daily travels.

16 The City Council conceded, to concerted public opposition, to site a planned bus stop along Heaton Street. Unable to reach a compromise with the residents the bus stop is now situated alongside Elmwood Park causing a considerable gap of almost a kilometer, or at least a good fifteen minute walk between its previous stop on Papanui Road (average spacing of bus stops equate to about five minute blocks). See: http://www.ccc.govt.nz/council/agendas/2005/august/fendaltonwaimairi2nd/heatonst.pdf

17 Sally McIntyre, *Dreaming of a Hand-painted Paradise – Views of the Flat city*, http://www.physicsroom.org.nz/archived/gridlocked/writing.htm.

18 David McIntyre, "Outwards and Upwards – Building the City," *Southern Capital Christchurch: Towards a City Biography, 1850-2000*. eds. John Cookson and Graeme Dunstall. (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2000), 100.

19 Geoffrey Rice, *Christchurch Changing: An Illustrated History* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 1999), 130.

20 Examples of this 'estate' style dwelling range from St Albans' Gragie-Lea, an ornate double-storied with an adjacent turreted wing on an elaborately landscaped four acre block to similar buildings like the Kilburn House, or "Rotorua", and "Abberly" in the Merivale and Fendalton suburbs. See New Zealand Federation of University Women, Canterbury Branch's *St Albans, From Swamp to Suburbs* for photographs of these houses and others like them.

21 The St Albans residents scuttled the northern route linking the motorway from Belfast to Kaiapoi because they opposed it passing through their territory, while the southern link, which intending to bypass Hornby, was simply abandoned before completion.

22 A dormitory suburb is a loose term to describe the commuter suburbs pitched to the working class. They are so-called for their prefabricated and standardised, bare bones look. While most suburbs could be described as commuter suburbs, dormitory suburbs connote the absence of nature-villa synthesis.

23 Frieda Looser, *Fendall's Legacy: A History of Fendalton and Northwest Christchurch* (Christchurch: Canterbury University Press, 2002), 157.

24 Jacqueline Steincamp, "Rolleston – Oasis or Desert of the Future?," *Designscape* 69 (May, 1975): 7.

25 Jacqueline Steincamp, Ibid, 6.

26 This trend also follows similar increases in America. As Bruegmann has noted, the average size of the suburban house in America has risen from 1,000 square feet in the 1970s to 2,500 square feet today. Robert Bruegmann, Ibid, 58.

27 Herbert Gans, Ibid,149.

28 Moshe Safdie, Ibid, 105.

29 Matthew Gandy, *Concrete and Clay, Reworking Nature in New York City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 109.

30 Matthew Gandy, Ibid, 87.

31 Stephen Ward, *Selling Places, The Marketing and Promotion of Towns and Cities* 1850–2000 (London: Routledge, 1998), 141.

32 To date, Pegasus Town is possibly Christchurch's most ambitious amalgamation of the manipulation of nature as an abstract commodity pitched perfectly to coincide with the deliberate promotion of an enviable 'themed' lifestyle. For an elaboration of this nature-lifestyle overlap see my article, "Pegasus Town's model life," *The National Grid* 2, (December, 2006): 56–65.

33 John Archer describes theming as "the most frequently criticized mode of community-making commonly associated with suburbia has been 'theming,' a notion once applied to Disney theme parks but now seen in 'village'-themed outlet and craft malls include some housing, and increasingly found in many types of gated communities". *Architecture and Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690-2000* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 341.

34 John Archer, Ibid, 342.

35 John Archer, Ibid, 344.

36 Gillman Whellans Delamain development in Yaldhurst is covered in a special advertising feature in *The Press*, May 24, 2007; B4.

37 Christchurch City Council, *Planning for Christchurch City, A Discussion of Development and Resources Issues and Policy Options*, (Christchurch City Council, 1991).

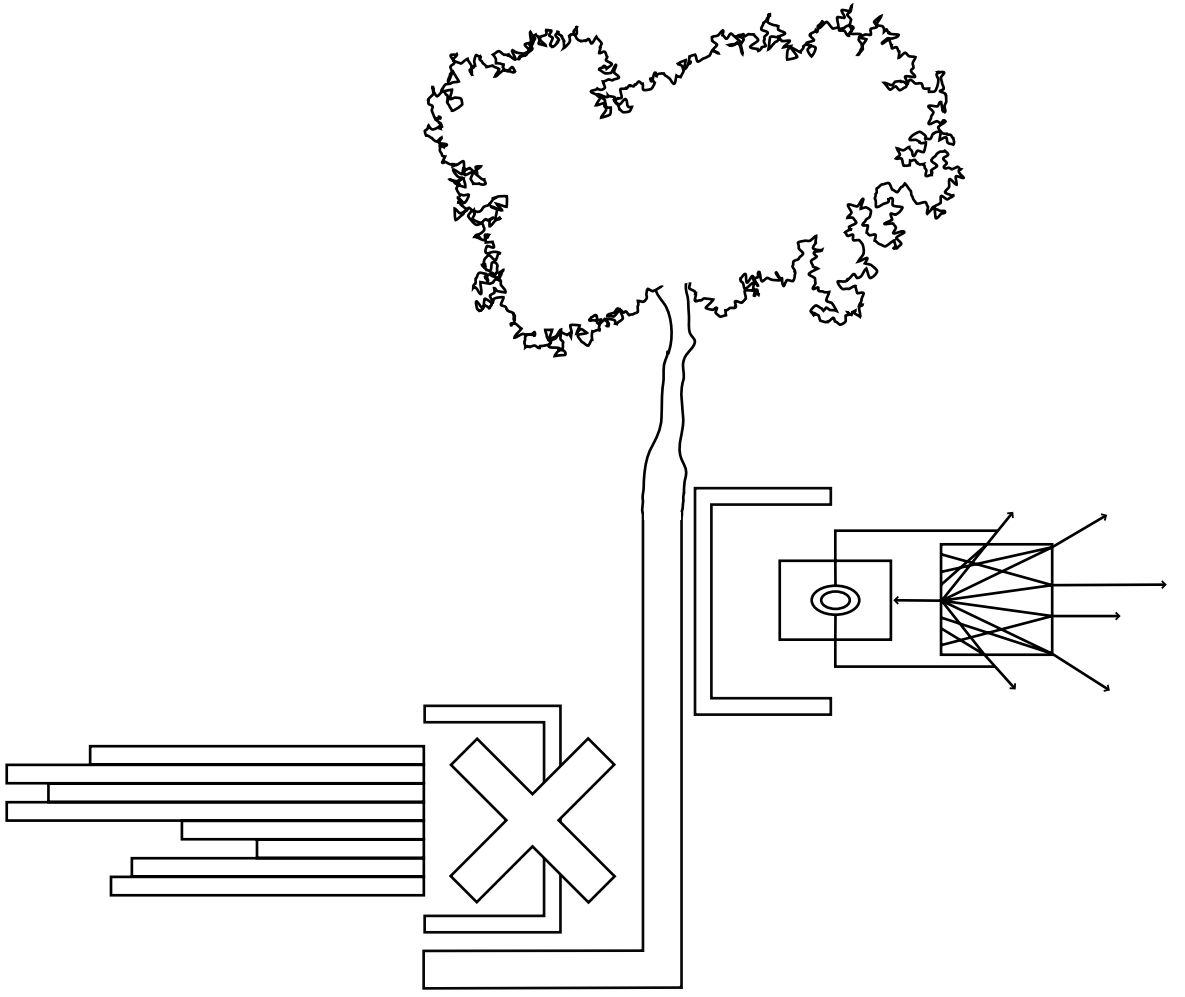
38 David McIntyre, Ibid, 113.

39 Matthew Hyland, "The Teeth of the Underdog's Saw," *Natural Selection 4* (2005): 5.1–7.

A TENTATIVE TYPOLOGY OF ALTERNATIVES

Spiros Panigirakis
Melbourne 2008

SITTING, MINDING AN artist-run space and counting hours between visitors leaves time to reflect on alternative avenues of production, contextualisation and engagement. The received ladder of artistic opportunity, through a hierarchy of artist-run spaces, institutions and galleries offers missing rungs and ego-bruising disappointment to most. Though communities can not be the ideal entities that lie in our collective imaginations, it still makes sense to reflect upon the potential of alternative modes of making our practices public …

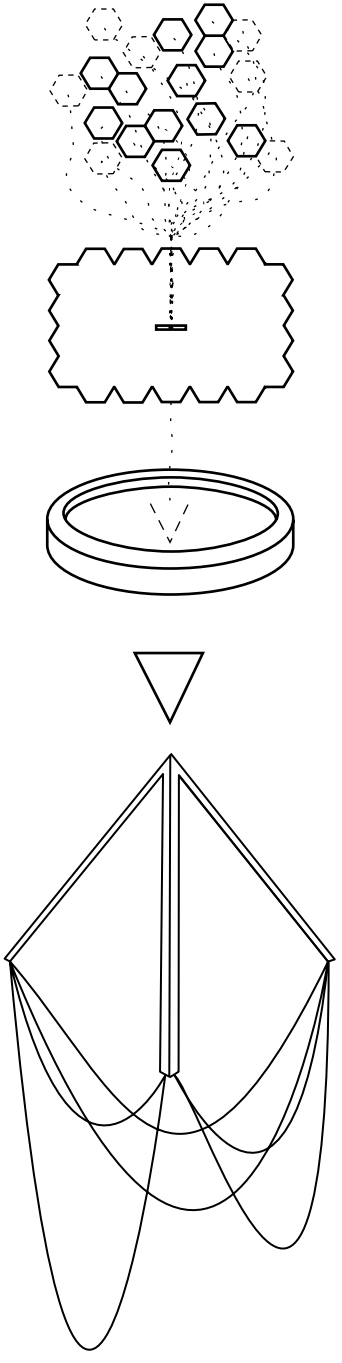


RESEARCH.

The university has a stranglehold on the pathway that leads to a professional artistic career. This isn't a new or unpredictable development, as the shift from art being beholden to a market through production of craft, to it being a manifestation of a concept (which eventually proceeds to a market) is old enough to be traditional. It is also no coincidence that the proliferation of MFA programmes occurred in sync with the dematerialisation of the art object and the increase in production of artist writing in the 1960/70s. What is new (at least in this corner of the world) is the increasing academicisation of this training, which has been colonised by the language of the hosting institute – artists now quantify and qualify their experimentation via the notion of academically sanctioned research.

It is now possible for a star student to enter art school at eighteen and leave with a PhD at twenty-seven. It could be argued that this prolonged university stint presents the artist with the rigour of conceptually framing their own practice, as well as an additional path to finances and audience creation.

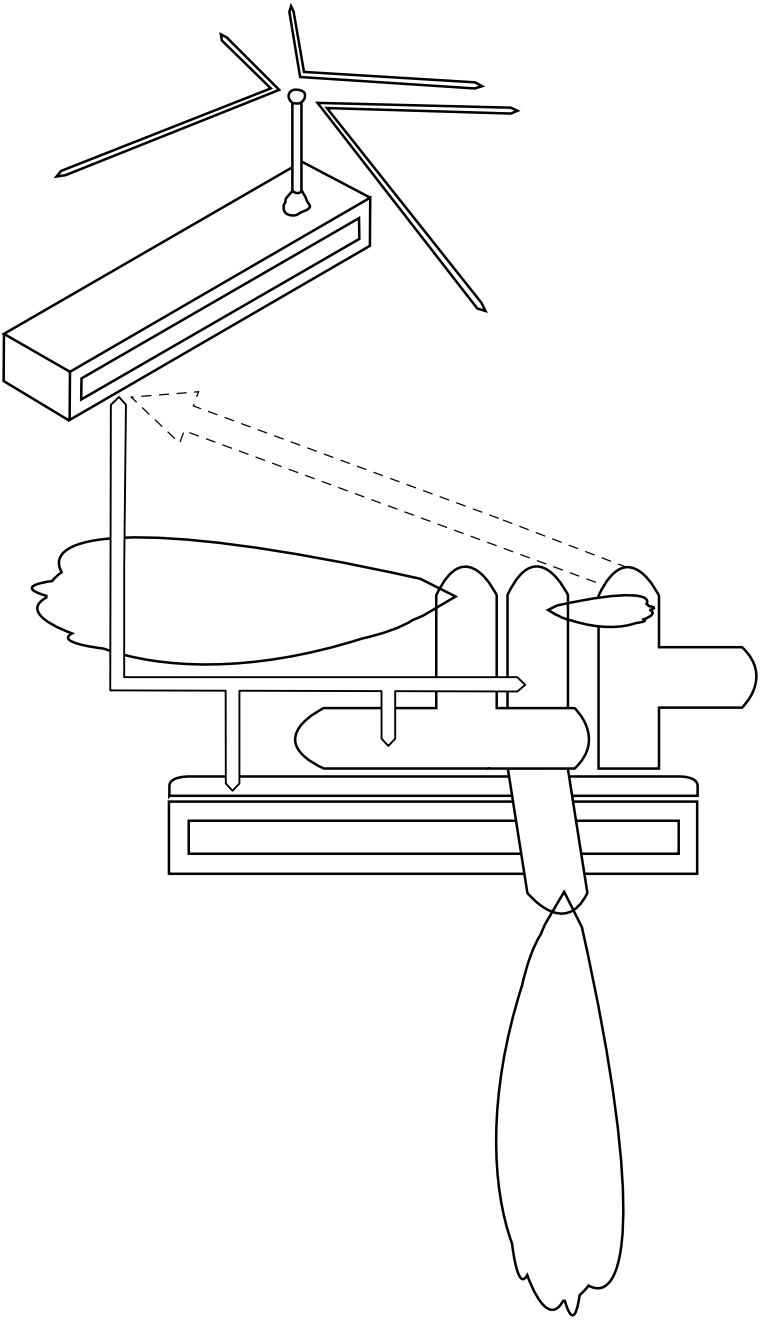
Self and peer framing offers the broader art community an alternative to the dominant framing of curatorial, historical or commercial institutional voices. The academy's alternative expertise can offer a counterbalance to the dominant market's fetishisation of cohesive and stable presentation over all other modes of public outcome. These dominant regimes follow conventions that aren't essentially exploitative but do enact an exchange in values, based upon a calculation of commercial imperative, conceptual convenience and public relations. This is not to say that the four years of a PhD art programme doesn't have the potential to be one long insular psychotherapeutic session in the guise of conceptual self-reflexivity. However, it seems as though, progressively over time, some art schools have chosen to borrow from the university's set of tools that privilege individualism, the sometimes arbitrary markers of industry experience/expertise and the pillaging of other faculties' discourses over collaborative research, peer review, and an interdisciplinarity characterised by dialogue rather than representation.



THE TAUGHT.

The journalised narrative of Tim Rollins and Kids of Survival's (KOS) practice – where an artistic intervention helping disenfranchised kids rode a critical wave; firstly acquired by Saatchi, then dumped by Saatchi and since persisting as a type of artist in schools measure, disregarded by any arts community – is a testament to the fickle nature of the commercial art market. It also demonstrates how critical networks disengage with pedagogical models of art practice. The obvious exception is the graduate show; a time when notions of pedigree and influence derived from educators acquires a fresh lustre. The ritualistic harvest of fresh talent at graduate shows is the acceptable manifestation of the pedagogical within contemporary art cultures. The debutantes are embraced both for their own precocious promise, and for faithfully reflecting and affirming existing constellations of stars.

Two interesting projects that have been fostered out of a pedagogical art environment have been DAMP (having cut its umbilical chord long ago) and the Pedagogical Vehicle Project both emanating out of Melbourne's Victorian College of the Arts (the VCA). This might be like comparing the proverbial chalk with cheese. Rollins's dripping wet paternalistic literacy programme, with over-determined facilitation of young teenagers' collaborative artwork has little in common with the drop in and drop out performative tendencies of the VCA projects led by Geoff Lowe, Callum Morton and Danius Kesminas respectively. What I'm barracking for here is not a particular modality of art teaching, but an open attitude to the proliferation of creative conceptual art education projects that goes beyond the perpetuation of the atelier system. These programmes don't need to be thrown into the fray of gallery presentation, as their worth lies in their educational value to students. Grappling with the power relations that emerge out of teacher-student collaboration, and the sanctimony of the facilitator are issues that should be addressed within the projects. The rhetorical claim that creativity in all fields is equally valuable is not always accepted by the arts community. We can too easily presume that if it is not a wall or trestle table then it's not worth doing.

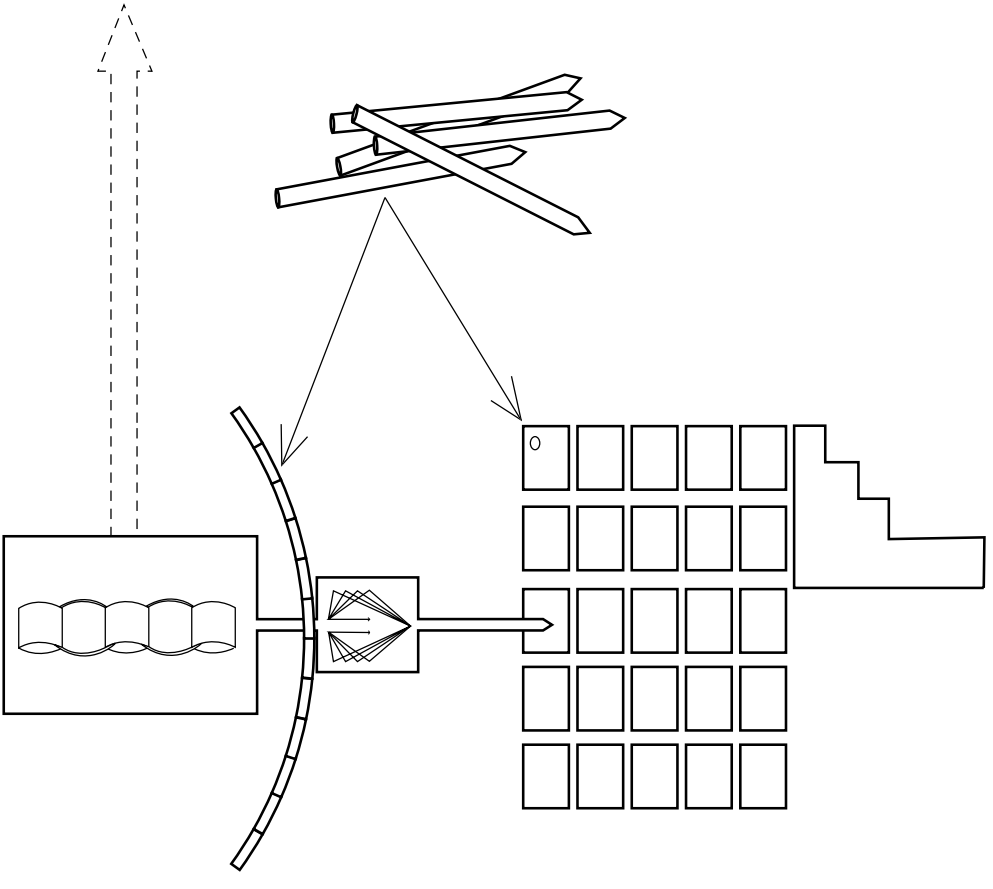


THE SALON.

Over the last few years Melbourne has seen an increase in initiatives that utilise a spare room or some space within a domestic setting for the presentation of an art practice to a 'broader' audience. Dude Space, Apartment and Austral Avenue probably don't have the requisite hospitable conditions that the notion of the salon suggests – although Lyndal Walker's *Springthing* (2005) at the now defunct Dude Space might be an exception. The convivial social space of the backyard barbeque in Walker's project allowed a dialogical quality to infuse the space's decorative representations of abundance, growth and garlands.

Melbourne's Michael Graf has been consistently showing his refined canvas board projects for well over a decade in lounge rooms on both sides of the Yarra River. Shown during single Saturday afternoons to small audiences, sometimes with cake and tea, his paintings can't be separated from the intimate and warm environment they are shown in. Regardless of how esoteric his references are and the clinical and delicate quality of his painted surfaces, Graf's practice is dedicated to the contemplation of a singular moment that shifts imperceptibly across the space of a few panels and in the quiet social space that accompanies it. These spaces replicate the space of the white cube with accompanied conversational launch/opening niceties and make obvious allowances to their domestic infrastructure in presentation.

So while the practical difference between this nouveau salon (with domestic connotations of the private and the exclusive) and the small independently-run space (with its more public profile regardless of the limits of its actual audience size) are minimal, the two models may also be seen as ideologically opposed. The position you adopt will probably reflect where you fall on the fraught question of how accessible you want your art to be. My use of the word "salon" might reflect a dubious romanticisation of the critical dialogue that might have occurred in Gertrude Stein's front room. Not to mention the incongruity between the exclusive class patronage of early twentieth century European cultures and the contemporary Australasian context. If we imagine a domestic space with its implicit associations of nurturing and of the drawn-out supportive feedback session – isn't this the cliché the salon describes? Do these attributes still offer us the rich possibilities a salon might still inhabit?

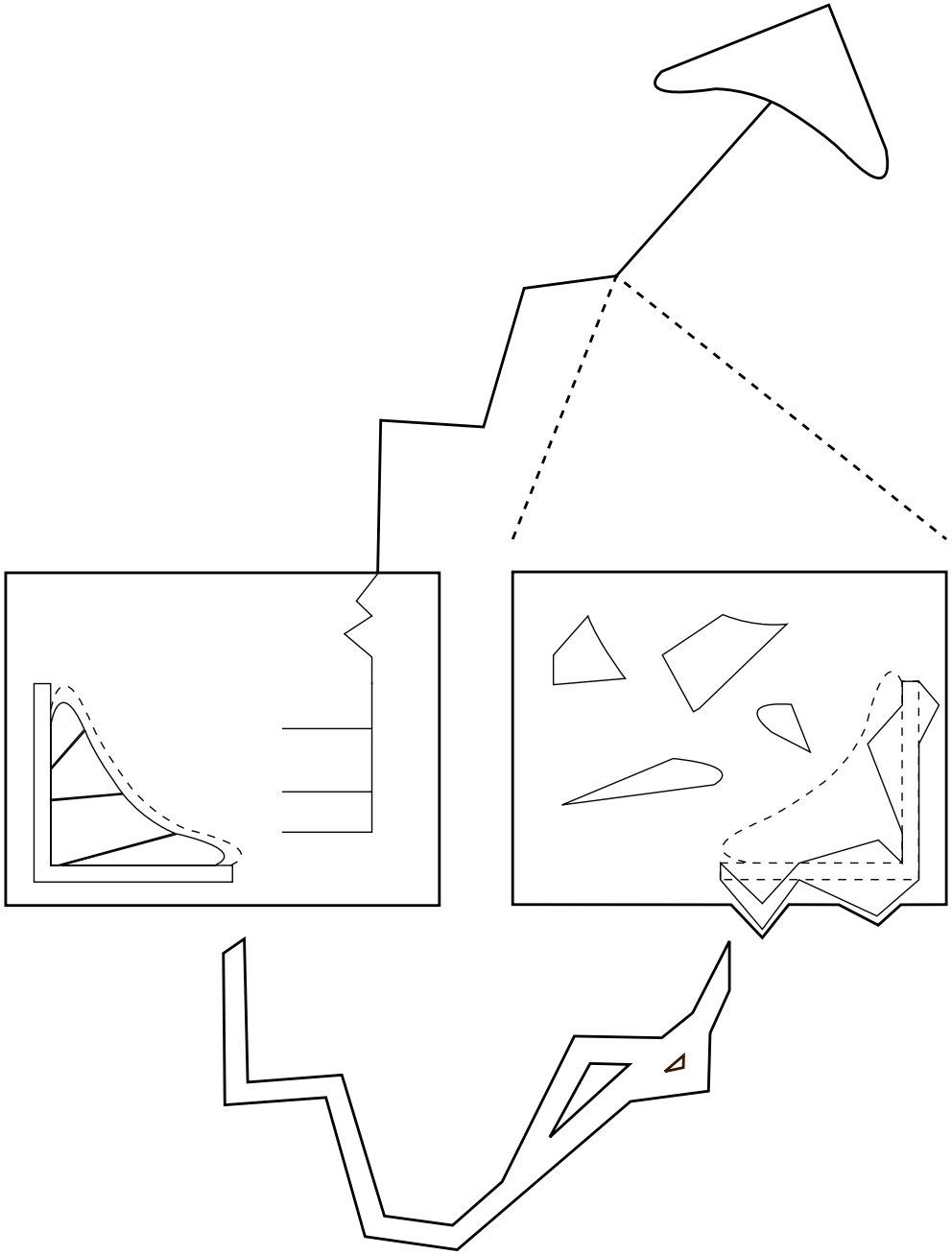


THE COMMUNITY.

On the one hand an artist might engage community via the involvement of colleagues, friends and acquaintances and risk smelling of clique/cognoscenti. On the other hand, if we collaborate with a community outside of our own, there's the potential accusation of contributing to what Maria Lindt describes as a form of "social pornography".

Of course debates among the likes of Foster, Kester, Bishop and Lindt matter very little for practitioners that purposefully inhabit a zone between art and the social ameliorative. Scott Mitchell's *iPod Social Outreach Project* engages this critical zone. His practice works across communities involved with the arts, online modding and a broader public responding to ads in local papers. As a researcher in the field of industrial design, his project sought to work against and around the iPod's integrated obsolescence by "assisting" a public with their iPod woes. Mitchell performed a range of services that included modifying the iPod's use, booting alternative operating systems and incorporating small solar panels into the iPod as a power source. Mitchell used the internet to keep his clients in touch with his service's progress but this communication also established an archive for anyone with net access. It created a point of engagement for anyone brave enough to face the circuitry, and invited the audience to get in touch with existing online communities that Mitchell frequently quoted and linked to.

The question of what art is, and what it isn't, of whether framing the social within an art context engages in the reification of the art object, seem somewhat irrelevant to Mitchell's practice. For practitioners the issues of artistic significance and the ethical dimensions of cultural capital often aren't such a burden. After all, a community mural painter, arts therapist, social outreach worker, youth counsellor or educator is unlikely to be concerned about the public's perception of assistance given to a disenfranchised group, regardless of how conceptually aware they might be. This dimension – along with balancing the nuanced power relations between participants – is part of these professions' core values.



THE COMMISSION.

If there is a place where the commission has an unproblematic position it is in the world of applied design. In this field, the aspect of commercial exchange that is implicit in a commission is considered a publishing path full of potential. The brief, a document that sits between the patron/client and the designer, plays an integral part in the physical manifestation of design practice. It is what Brian Massumi would call an "enabling constraint."

By contrast, artists commonly regard contractual relationships as a hindrance and source of compromise. Commercial representation, on the other hand, is seen as the manifestation of an artist's practice in a different white cube. Emily Floyd's shows at Anna Schwartz Gallery adeptly circumvent these limitations, as her work self-referentially proclaims its status as décor, sold to a middle class that doesn't mind a joke at its own expense as long as it confers cultural capital.

The hidden contract between dealer and artist is different from springboard of the brief. For most designers, the brief is a consultative and shifting contract, requiring dialogue. Artists might benefit from adopting this approach. Instead of viewing the brief as a restrictive boundary, we could utilise it as a chance to pursue unforseen directions and development of our practice by engaging in a dialogue with other voices. Since the art world has fetishised the singular artist's intention as the fundamental interpretive and production tool, any interference with this sacrosanct convention is regarded as a compromise.

As artists, we are complicit in the conceit that generates the myopic relationship connecting the studio bubble to the gallery and back again. Would the trip to a patron, who actually wants a slice of the artist's practice, be such a compromise?

The negative flipside of this – if the commission was the only publishing tool for the artist – might see creativity become hostage to the commercial imperative of user/audience pays. It is from these conditions that the compromise of the commission has been considered a negative condition for the process of art.

The very notion of compromise contradicts many of the deep values of the art world. For example, it opposes the 'my-way-or-the-highway' macho violence of some traditional site specific practices – Richard Serra, Walter de Maria and others – and counters Clare Bishop's call to representational antagonism as a more faithful and critical form of social representation.

Alternatively, the compromise of a commission could be seen as a space to start a conversation with someone about the role and material presence of our practices. We should not allow the cliché of the commission – as the replication of the likeness of a patron in oil on canvas – to limit our thinking.

In the Place of the Public Sphere?

Simon Sheikh
Berlin/Copenhagen 2004

THE NOTION OF public artworks traditionally entails the installation of an artwork in public space, pure and simple. Works installed in this manner and context are thus supposed to be distinguished from art in the private sphere, such as works circulating and sold through galleries. Public art projects entail a different audience and indeed different notions of spectatorship. They are usually also involved in a different (public) debate that takes place before as well as after the installation of the work, and the construction of the piece usually involves a long political and planning process: what can be installed where, and for whom?

In modernism such questions were deceptively easily answered: the form of the work was an answer in itself – it was a synthesis. Architectural and sculptural forms were produced from a similar modernist matrix, and adding a sculpture to a square usually meant continuity rather than discordance. There was, presumably of course, a unity between the conception of the public sphere and the public artwork. Such a unity has, however, been much discussed and criticised. It was, after all, always

a construction, an ideal, rather than an actuality. The public sphere was never entered and used uniformly, and art works naturally had both different conceptions and significations to be read in different ways. Rather, then, we must talk of a fragmentation and differentiation of the public sphere on the one hand, and of an expansion and/or dematerialisation of art works on the other – this in turn, requires different understandings and realisations of public works.

As opposed to high modernism's ideals of a singular, autonomous and formally complete artwork, we would now consider artworks as placed in a heterogeneous field, where the significations and communications of the work shift in relation to space, contexts, and publics. Just as there is no complete, ideal work there is no ideal, generalised spectator. We cannot talk of art's spaces as common, shared spaces we enter with equal experiences – on the contrary, the idea of the neutral spectator has been dissolved and criticised, and the identity of the viewer has been specified and differentiated by both art practices and theories since the 1960s.

This shift also entails, naturally, different notions of communicative possibilities and methods for the artwork, where neither its form, context or spectator is fixed or stabile; such relations must be constantly (re)negotiated, and conceived in notions of publics or public spheres. This means, on one the hand, that the artwork itself, in an expanded sense, is unhinged from its traditional forms (as material) and contexts (galleries, museums etc), and on the other hand, is made contingent on a(nother) set of parameters that can be described as *spaces of experience*, that is, notions of spectatorship and the establishment of communicative platforms and/or networks in or around the artwork that are contingent on, and changing according to, different *points of departure* in terms of spectatorship.

The gaze of the spectator is, of course, not only dependent on the work and its placement, but also on the placement of the spectator socially (in terms of age, class, ethnic background, gender, politics and other factors) or more broadly speaking, experiences and intentionalities. We can, thus, speak of three variable categories, that, in turn, influence

the definition of each other; work, context and spectator. None of which are given, and each of which are conflictual, indeed agonistic. [1]

When thinking about art production and representation, it is therefore crucial to negotiate these terms both individually and in relation to each other. And just as contemporary art practices have shown that neither the work nor the spectator can be formally defined and fixed, we have also come to realise that the conception of a public sphere, the arena in which one meets and engages, is likewise dematerialised and/or expanded. We no longer conceive of the public sphere as an entity, as one location and/or formation as suggested in Jürgen Habermas's famous description of the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas's sociological and philosophical investigation of the emergence of the so-called 'public sphere', most often categorised and criticised for being normative and idealist, is basically a reconstruction of the ideals and self-understanding of the emergent bourgeois class – positing a rational subject capable of public speaking outside of itself, *in* society and *of* society.

A separation has been created between *the private* (the family and the house: property), *the state* (institutions, laws) and *the public* (the political and the cultural).[2] Instead, we have to think of the public sphere as fragmented, as consisting of a number of spaces and/or formations that sometimes connect, sometimes close off, and are in conflicted and contradictory relations to each other. And we have, through the efforts of Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, come to realise that our interactions as subjects with these public spheres are dependent on experiences. There not only exists public spheres and ideals here-of, but also *counter-publics*. By placing the emphasis on the notion of experience, Negt and Kluge not only point to the inequality of access to the public sphere in Habermasian terms, it also allows them to analyse modes of behaviour and possibilities for speech and action in different spaces. In their analysis, both the workplace and the home exist as 'public' – spaces organising collective experience. They attempt to posit a specific, but plural, public sphere that can be termed 'proletarian' in opposition to the normative 'bourgeois' public sphere.

Counter-publics can be understood as particular parallel formations of a minor or even subordinate character where other or oppositional discourses and practices can be formulated and circulated. Where the classic bourgeois notion of the public sphere

claimed universality and rationality, counter-publics often claim the opposite, and in concrete terms this often entails a reversal of existing spaces into other identities and practices, most famously as in the employment of public parks as cruising areas in gay culture. Here, the architectural framework, set up for certain types of behaviour, remains unchanged, whereas the usage of this framework is drastically altered; acts of privacy are performed in public.[3]

"We would now consider artworks as placed in a heterogeneous field, where the significations and communications of the work shift in relation to space, contexts and publics. Just as there is no complete, ideal work there is no ideal, generalised spectator."

According to Michael Warner, counter-publics have many of the same characteristics as normative or dominant public. Existing as imaginary address, a specific discourse and/or location, and involving circularity and reflexivity they are therefore always already as much *relational* as they are *oppositional*. The notion of 'self-organisation', for example, in recent art history is most often employed as an oppositional term, and certainly one filled with credibility and is thus not itself a counter-public. Indeed, self-organisation is a distinction of any public formation; that it constructs and posits itself as a public through its specific mode of address. Rather, the counter-public is a conscious mirroring of the modalities and institutions of the normative public, but in effort to address other subjects and indeed other imaginaries:

> *Counterpublics are 'counter' [only] to the extent that they try to supply different ways of imagining stranger sociability and its reflexivity; as publics, they remain oriented to stranger circulation in a way that is not just strategic but constitutive of membership and its affects.*[4]

If we can, then, only talk about the public sphere in plural, and in terms of relationality and negation, it becomes crucial to understand, place, and reconfigure art's spaces as 'public spheres'. Is the artworld – the public arena in which 'we', reader and writer alike, are presently located – to be seen as one fragment of a generalised bourgeois public sphere, or is there a possibility of opposing spheres within it? And how are these related? If we analyse a particular public sphere called 'the artworld', what are its delimitations, and how can it be employed strategically to engage with other public spheres?

Finally, there is the question of how artworks and the thinking around art can intervene in these different spheres – on the one hand taking its point of departure in the specific fragment the artworld, and on the other engaging in other spheres directly or indirectly.

Just as the modernist conception of the singular artwork and spectator, the idea of the universal, bourgeois public sphere now seems purely historical. The well-ordered bourgeois public sphere is as much a fragment as other formations, and the question is indeed rather whether it has ever existed as anything other than a projection, an ideal at all. This projection does not seem useful in our multi-cultural and hyper-capitalistic, modular society. Perhaps this modulation or division of society into different areas and specialised disciplines should be seen as the foundation for the realisation and fragmentation of the public sphere into different camps and/or counter-publics. These fragmented spheres together form the "imaginary institution of society" as described by Cornelius Castoriadis. For Castoriadis, society and its institutions are as much fictional as functional. Institutions are part of symbolic networks, and as such are not fixed or stable, but constantly articulated through projection and praxis. But by focusing on their imaginary character, Castoriadis also suggests that other social organisations and interactions can be imagined: that other worlds are indeed possible. [5]

When establishing the artworld as a particular public sphere, we must explore this notion along two lines; firstly as a sphere that is not unitary, but rather agonistic and a platform for different and oppositional subjectivities, politics and economies: a 'battleground' as defined by Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke. A battleground where different ideological positions strive for power and sovereignty. And, secondly, the artworld is not an autonomous system, even though it sometimes strives and/or pretends to be, but regulated by economies and policies, and constantly in connection with other fields or spheres, which has not least been evident in critical theory and critical, contextual art practices. [6]

Since the formal, autonomous work is no longer a useful model, we have been witnessing a number of artistic projects that take their point of departure in the notion of different fields, if not down-right in the notion of difference in itself: projects that relate to a specific set of parameters and/or a specific public as opposed to the generalised and idealised. In other words, we are

speaking of works that do not employ the notion of the bourgeois public sphere, but rather different fragments, camps – and/or counter-publics. Or, at least, different ideas of a public, be they utopian or heterotopian. It is a question of to and for whom one is speaking, and on what premise.

"We have come to realise that the conception of a public sphere, the arena in which one meets and engages, is dematerialised and/or expanded. We no longer conceive of the public sphere as an entity, as one location or formation as suggested in Jürgen Habermas's famous description of the bourgeois public sphere."

We see here a proliferation of formats, going well beyond the object based matrix-like artwork of modernism, but rather dealing with models of display and curatorial work in the exhibitionary complex, combining self-authorisation with institutional critique. Tactical employment of spaces other than traditional art spaces, is also part of this proliferation, sites such as the educational facility and pedagogy, alternative publishing, local and public television, street culture and more specifically the space of demonstrations, and finally the new sphere of netculture (for instance list serves and open source networks).

Efforts to construct new models, new public sphere formations can be seen as, if not 'the answer' to such questions, then as attempts at indicating the routes one was to follow if one was to answer these questions. Such platforms must distinguish themselves by not creating single projects or interventions in (a generalised) public sphere, but rather try to constitute a continuous counter-public stream. Such a project must attempt to perceive and construct a specific public sphere *and* a (op)positional and/or participatory model for spectatorship as opposed to a (modernist) generalised one. And it entails a reconfiguration of the (bourgeois) notion of the public sphere into a different arena, into a potential multitude of different, overlapping spheres and formations. It must replace the notion of 'the' public sphere in singular into plural sub and/or counter-publics. The task before us becomes, then, how such practices can conceive of their specific public, their interfaces with it and towards which aims? Relational publics are also always specific ones. We must thus map and define these different arenas and possibilities *and* methods for interaction within and between them. And, finally, question how this should relate to and alter artistic production, art's spaces and institutions, and their 'publics.'

Obviously, we are witnessing not only a different conception of art and its publics, but also, just recently, the emergence of new models for art institutions that involves different conceptions of production and representation, both in the form of alternative spaces as well as in publicly funded art institutions.[7] Historically, the art institution or museum was, of course, the bourgeois public sphere par excellence, a place for rational-critical thought and (self)representation of the bourgeois class and its values. As aptly described by Frazer Ward:

> *The museum contributed to the self-representation of and self-authorization of the new bourgeois subject of reason. More accurately, this subject, this* "fictitious identity" *of property owner and human being pure and simple, was itself an interlinked process of self-representation and self-authorization. That is, it was intimately bound to its cultural self-representation* as a public.[8]

This role now seems purely historical, obviously, partly due to the different spaces of experience of the spectators, but also due to a structural change in the mode of address within former 'bourgeois' institutions themselves. Indeed, funding and political support for art institutions and the production of fine arts in general – even in its more critical and radical forms within the neo avant-garde – was historically sustained through an enlightenment ideal of how the self-representation and self-authorisation of the bourgeois class was maintained through a specific spatial formation, through a specific public sphere, if you will. The modernist white cube is in this sense merely a spatial technique of representation, and it is precisely the constitution of the sphere itself that is crucial rather than the objects, statements and formulations within it. This enlightenment model that, to some extent, was tolerant of avant-garde art, of representing other values than bourgeois values of conduct, order and productivity has now been superceded by a more thoroughly commercial mode of communication, by a culture industry. Where the enlightenment model tried to educate and situate its audience through discipline, through various display models identifying subjects as spectators, the culture industry institutes a different communicative model of exchange and interaction through the commodity form, in turn identifying subjects as consumers.

For the culture industry, the notion of 'the public', with its contingent modes of access and articulation, are replaced by the notion of 'the market', implying commodity-exchange and

consumption as modes of access and interaction. This also means that the notion of enlightenment, rational-critical subjects and a disciplinary social order is replaced by the notion of entertainment as communication, as the mechanism of social control and producer of subjectivity. The classic bourgeois space of representation is likewise either replaced by markets, such as the mall replacing the public square, or transformed into a space of consumption and entertainment, as is the case in the current museum industry. In this sense, fragmentation and different spaces of experience is not a similar deconstructive threat to the culture industry as it is to the historical formation of the bourgeois public sphere. Rather, fragmentation and difference can be mapped in terms of consumer groups, as segments of a market with particular demands and desires to be catered to, and to be commodified. Indeed, fragmentation must be seen as one of the conditions of neo liberal market hegemony. This condition of simultaneous fragmentation and commodification also has direct consequences for art's spaces, be they bourgeois or otherwise inclined, in terms of public funding (always the main tool of cultural policies).

"Certainly, we cannot claim or return to the bourgeois category of the art space and subjectivity, and to its adjacent classical avant-gardist notions of resistance. Rather, we need not only new skills and tools, but also new conceptions of 'the public' as relational, as articulate and communicative."

Interest in the upkeep of the bourgeois public sphere, and its institutions such as the traditional museum and exhibition space, is clearly in decline, from both left *and* right. And in a fragmented and differentiated public, we will have to define, address, and establish both processes of self-representation and self-authorisation, as well as their contestations in different, always specified ways, and perhaps, in terms of singularity and certainly articulation. Certainly, we cannot, nor even desire to maintain, claim, or return to the bourgeois category of the art space and subjectivity, and to its adjacent classical avant-gardist notions of resistance. Rather, we need not only new skills and tools, but also new conceptions of 'the public' as relational, as articulate and communicative.

I would suggest that we take our point of departure in precisely the unhinging of stable categories and subject positions, in the interdisciplinary and intermediary, in the conflicted and dividing, in the fragmented and permissive

"Historically, the art institution or museum was of course the bourgeois public sphere par excellence, a place for rational-critical thought and (self)representation of the bourgeois class and its values."

– in different *spaces of experience*, as it were. We should begin to think of this contradictory and non-unitary notion of a public sphere, and of the art institution as the embodiment of this sphere. We can, perhaps, think of it as the spatial formation of, or platform for what Chantal Mouffe has called an *agonistic public sphere*:

> *According to such a view, the aim of democratic institutions is not to establish a rational consensus in the public sphere but to defuse the potential of hostility that exists in human societies by providing the possibility for antagonism to be transformed into "agonism".9*

In her work on the agonistic public sphere, Mouffe significantly critises Habermas for his separation between the private and public realm, and exertion of politics from the former, just as his belief in impartial public institutions (that is, in effect, impartial positions) amounts to a fundamental inability to deal with pluralism, with difference. Instead Mouffe argues for "conflictual consensus", multiplying the discourses, institutions, and forms of democracy. We can thus begin to think not only of fragmentation and counter-publics, but also of the connections between them. These can be termed chains of equivalence between fragments, connecting different struggles and spheres, and we can attempt to posit the various public spheres or formats of cultural production – the exhibitionary complex, the educational facility, public televison et al. – as precisely the arena for these contestations and articulations.

1 These terms are discussed througout this text, but for a more elaborate theoretical account of the notion of 'agonism', see Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000).

2 See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere – An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962), (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

3 See Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, Public Sphere and Experience – Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere (1972), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

4 George Chauncey, "Privacy Could Only Be Had in Public", Joel Sanders, Eds, *Stud – Architectures of Masculinity*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996).

5 Michael Warner, *Publics and Counterpublics* (New York: Zone Books, 2002), 121-22.

6 See Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), (London: Polity Press, 1987).

7 Pierre Bourdieu and Hans Haacke, *Free Exchange* (London: Polity Press, 1995).

8 Of particular interest here is not only the transformation of 'bourgeois' art institutions by particular agents, but also the current movement of willful self-institutionalisation. These can be seen in such art related platforms as Center for Land Use Interpretation, Center for Urban Pedagogy, Copenhagen Free University, Community Art School, Institute of Applied Autonomy, The Invisible Academy, School of Missing Studies, University of Openness and Université Tangente, that all somewhat mirror and reverse educational facilities. Here, discourses are established and circulated not through a negation of publicness, but through a deliberate and tactical self-institutionalisation. Societal machines for knowledge production become subjective ones – produced through identity rather than producing of identity.

9 Frazer Ward, "The Haunted Museum: Institutional Critique and Publicity", *October 73* (Summer 1995): 74.

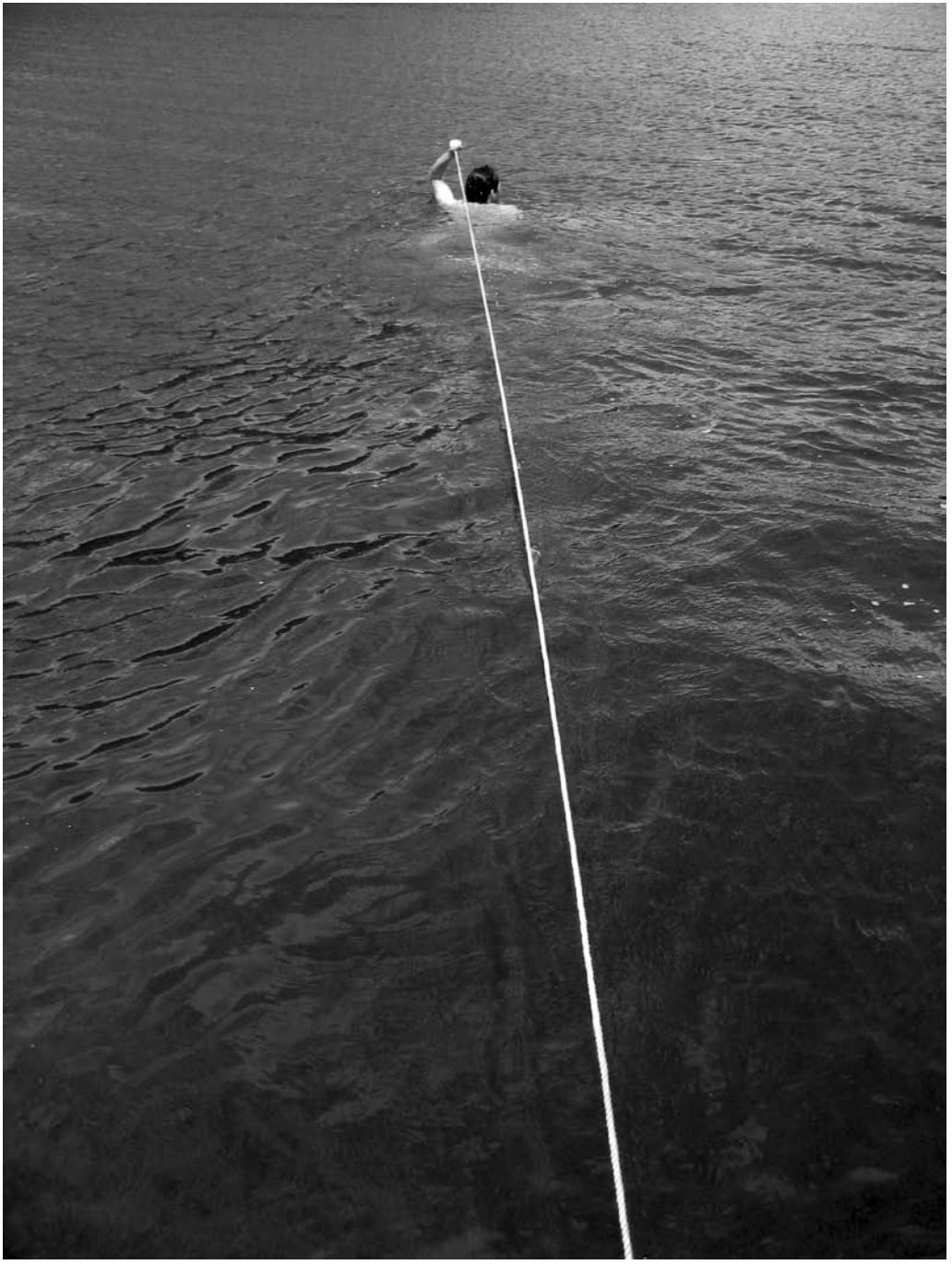
10 Chantal Mouffe, 'For an Agonistic Public Sphere', in Okwui Enwezor et al. (Ed.), *Democracy Unrealized* (Ostfeldern-Ruit: Hatje-Cantz, 2002), 90.

56. I'm so bored

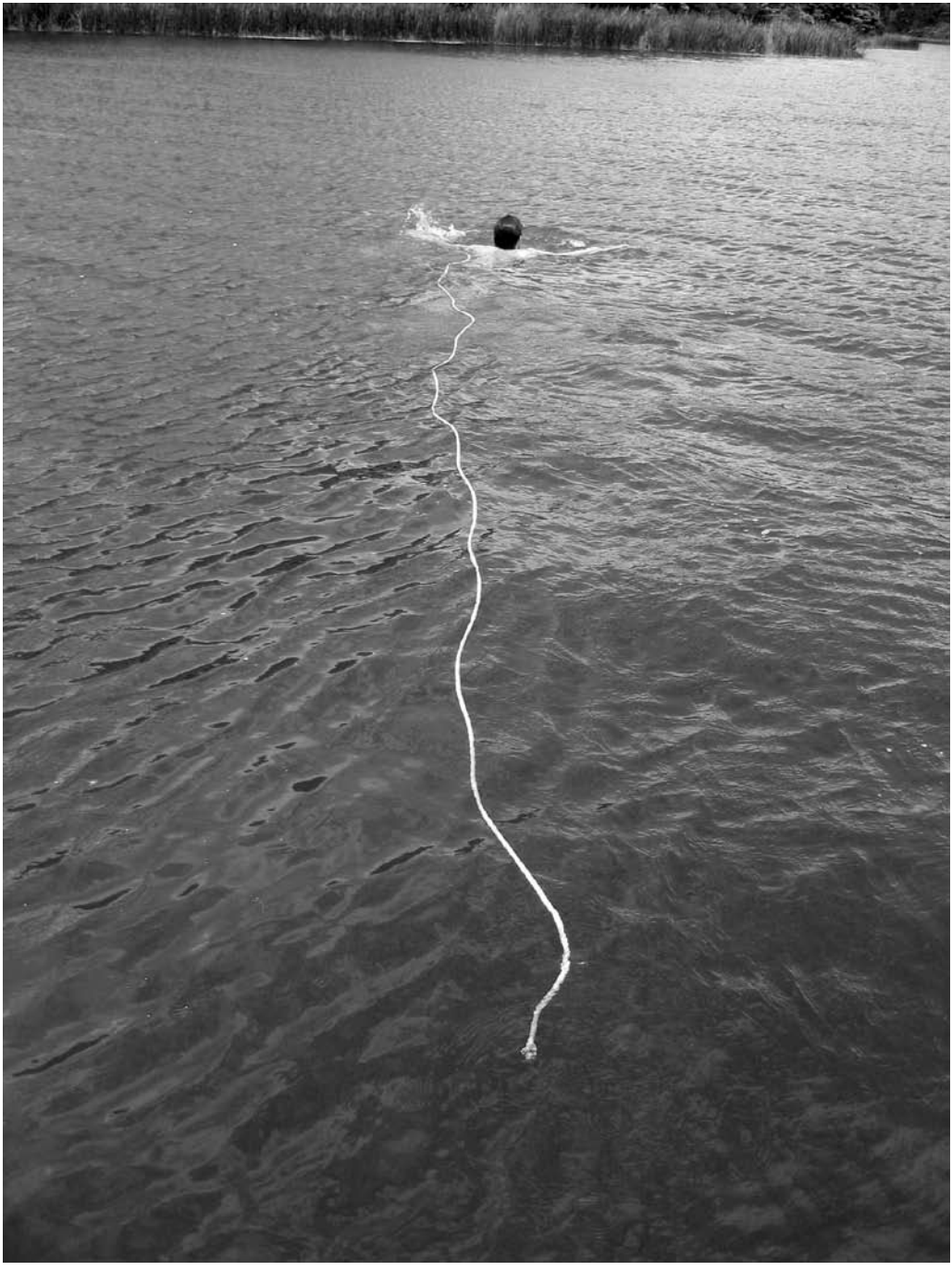
57. Free at last

58. Don’t be tired

59. I don’t intend to stand outside



60. Don’t act all scared like before



61. Don’t act all scared like before

SEE, SAY

Tim Corballis and Fiona Amundsen
Wellington / Auckland 2007

IN 2004, WE began a collaborative project that is now being carried out under the title *Si c'est (if it is)*. This project is an attempt to create a series of works in two different forms – photographs and written text(s) – that relate artistically and aesthetically, avoiding the primacy of one form over the other. If, in the case of photographic illustration the text is primary and, in the case of art writing or exhibition the photograph is primary, then we hope as far as possible to avoid, or at least disrupt, both of these relationships.

The focus of the project is Wynyard Point, Auckland's "Tank Farm", a place whose nature is uneasily public. Photographs taken around this area will be shown together with invented interviews that relate to the site. In these pages we present a juxtaposition of a single photograph and a written piece. These form part of a group of works, not intended to be exhibited as one-to-one pairings of photograph and text (as they necessarily are in the context of this publication).

We have developed a collaborative method that involves the stepwise creation of new work in response to one another's previous work, the whole therefore developing as a 'conversation'. Alongside this exchange another conversation has taken place: the email dialogue necessitated by our living in different cities. This second conversation has been dense with ideas, and as fruitful in developing the theory behind the work as it is in thinking through the practical challenges presented. Following on with this dialogue, we have decided to present what follows in a conversational form that takes its point of departure from the engagement of our project with notions of the public.

TIM CORBALLIS: The challenge for me was to develop something, out of all the possibilities of writing, that would match your photographs: the problem of coming up with a voice that would match your eye, or your photographs' eye. Both voice and eye are aspects of subjectivity, so the challenge seemed to be to match – or alternatively, to contrast – the subjectivity expressed by the voice in my writing with that of your apprehending eye. I liked the idea of an interviewing voice, a voice of authority that questions others without revealing anything about itself. That kind of voice shares something with the camera: recording what's in front of it without revealing anything about itself. Although at first I thought of this interviewer's voice as a kind of anthropological one, an empirical one to match the 'scientific' nature of your photography, other ideas come through: it is also something like a legal voice, a cross-questioning voice and maybe a journalistic one too. All these ideas are to do with authority, the authority to gather information, but also perhaps, to judge and even to punish. The practice of journalism and the law are both tied up with notions of the public sphere – and both combine the most public-spirited (even if unrealised) ideals with the most squalid airing of private lives. So you have a kind of voice that is at once public, or representative of the public, but still with a kind of potential, panoptical view of intimate moments. It's like the public, or its representative voice, is something with a paradoxical right of access to the private.

But what about you? Is there a kind of public-view in these photographs – quite apart from what might be suggested by the writing?

FIONA AMUNDSEN: I'm not sure I would say that I'm attempting to offer a public-view in my images; rather my concern is linked to highlighting experiences of what are essentially public sites. So, what you refer to as public-view is, for me, really about experiences which, far from being universal, are in themselves oddly public: we've all waited for a ferry, or passed through sites just like these ones. What I mean by this is that the sites represented through my photographs, and now your writing, present a contradiction because they are both extremely specific and general at once – they are functional, highly designed, ubiquitous spaces that perform specific jobs. And, precisely because of this our experiences of them are often misplaced or distorted. It's as though, where public

space of this nature is concerned, there is a clash between perception, understanding, experience, and of course, representation. I think what's interesting is how all this is represented, be it visual or written. For me, this comes back to your earlier question around subjectivity itself, and its relationship to content.

"So, what you refer to as public-view is, for me, really about experiences which, far from being universal, are in themselves oddly public: we've all waited for a ferry, or passed through sites just like these ones."

As you say, both voice and eye present aspects of subjectivity, and the challenge for both of us has been to work with and against this in our respective practices. Like I have said before, my curiosity is about how photographs can make experience of particular, in this case public, sites tangible. And, to use your words, photographic representations bring with them a certain kind of authority which becomes intensified by text: both offer information, plain and simple. However, one of the things that has become apparent in the style of your text and its pairing with my images is the difference between what each reveals about the represented place. I think the images reveal something about the kind of public space they depict. This brings me back to the idea of experience, and the stuff we either cannot see or overlook within such sites: the public-view as it were. So, I guess I'm turning your question back on you – does the interviewing voice you have adopted for this project offer a kind of public-view/experience of these sites?

TC: It's interesting what you suggest about the place we're focusing on, about the specific ways in which this sort of place is public. When we're in this kind of place we're functioning, performing our task (such as waiting) and, really, our experience is irrelevant. They're designed spaces, but not designed for experience – instead, they are designed to administer us: we wait here, we park the cars here, we pull in the tankers here for filling, and so on. If there are concessions to experience as such, they're about distraction from this administration, like all the shops and amusements at airports, which are themselves basically big hangars for waiting and administration.

In terms of the public nature of the interviewing voice, I think it really contrasts with the content – or at least its direct content, the *Inhalt* (what is actually shown) as opposed to the *Gehalt* (the thematic content, what

the work is about in a broader sense). That is, the actual stories in my texts are of a somewhat private nature. This really comes back to what I was saying previously about the legal/journalistic voice, that it is public but has an unconditional right to the private. But it also connects to your notion of what we can't see in these places. Because of where they take place, the experiences reported are a kind of private-struggling-to-be-public; they are an impossible attempt to *be* the experience of a place, but because it can't quite be experienced there is a falling back to the private.

But then I think there is a reflection back onto the space itself. There is something intentionally tangential about the reported stories, something irrelevant to the actual location, something about the way they only just touch on it. If this kind of tangential experience is typical here, then that tells us something about the space. To appeal to the useful German distinction again, if the *Inhalt* is a kind of story of private experience, then the *Gehalt* is really the public place. I think the juxtaposition of the photographs and the writing helps here, if only because the photographs anchor the texts nicely to the place.

We should talk more about that juxtaposition – how it works for the text, and how it works for the photographs. But first, could you talk about how your images reveal something about the place, and what can and can't be experienced there? I would assume it is not, and probably can't be, through a tangential strategy similar to that of the writing?

FA: Absolutely, the tangential strategy operating within the photographs works differently to that of the writing. However, I would like to suggest that your construction of voice within the writing is akin to how form functions and directs these images – keeping in mind that what they actually do is quite disparate. For example, in terms of the photography, the composition with, in this case, crowded oil tanks and multiple directional lines, as well as the softly muted morning light, all work to offer a particular view of this specific public place. For me, what these photographs reveal has more to do with the things we cannot necessarily see but are so connected to how we gather a sense and understanding of place. This is where form comes into the equation; it's the little shafts of light, or the direction of the lines on the pavement, or the curves of the architecture that through

photographic representation start to offer us something. These aesthetic traits quite literally point to a different way of looking which then becomes tightly connected to our experience of such a site. We don't see the silver roofs of buildings highlighted by silky morning light and this is because, as you have pointed out, these public sites are not designed with our experience in mind – rather, they have a specific purpose, a job to perform which works to structure them.

"the experiences reported are a kind of private-struggling-to-be-public; they are an impossible attempt to be the experience of a place, but because it can't quite be experienced there is a falling back to the private."

Your relating of the German words *Inhalt* and *Gehalt* is really superb; both provide a solid way of conceiving not only our project, but also the representation of public space itself. This leads me to thinking about your comments on the type of experience that your writing evokes – what you call a private-struggling-to-be-public. As a result, I'm wondering if the photographs might be reminiscent of this too: what happens to experience, knowledge and understanding of this particular site when we see the kinds of associations each representational form makes? So, if the photographs serve to anchor the text back into the specificity of the place, then what happens if we swap this thinking around: what does the writing do to the photographs? Does it also provide a similar kind of security, or does it start to destabilise what we are seeing?

TC: That's a very good question! I think that there are potentially very complicated things going on in both directions – the effect of the photographs on the text and vice versa.

One thing that the text will do is lead us to look at the photographs for evidence. This is partly, but not only, because the text's guiding voice is an interrogating one. It is also implicit in the illustrative relationship, one of the two basic relationships between text and image that we discussed when setting up this project (the other being the caption relationship). Illustration is about a kind of visual support, where the photograph offers something like further evidence for the text's story. I think the text will encourage a particular kind of questioning view of the photographs (in the same way as the photographs might also encourage us to read the texts for caption-style explanation).

I agree that there are formal similarities between our works: the text leads us away from the site into peripheral stories and the photographs, while not exactly leading us away, pull us back from the site in exactly the way you described. Your photographs pull us back – almost literally – to a view that favours the aesthetic reading of formal compositional elements (light, shape). Here both the text and photograph refuse to be caught up in the site.

But I think there is an interesting impossibility here: there's a relationship to evidence, in both text and photograph. We are being asked to look for something, but the object is slippery in both cases. It leads us away to irrelevancies, or it pulls us back to aesthetic forms. Both of them, as you say, are beginnings, attempts to experience the site, but they are also different from each other, and something interesting happens in the gap: in the fact that we can't be pulled back to the aesthetic and led away to the tangential, both at once. Maybe it's by using this kind of strategy that the impossibility of really experiencing such a site is most interestingly articulated?

However, there's a small concession in the writing, in the story itself. At the end of this piece, a kind of aesthetic view is indicated by the interviewee: a focus on surfaces, the dislocating sense of seeing through someone else's eyes. This is quite deliberate. But it's also deliberately different from a kind of studied Kantian disinterestedness. Note that this awareness of the surfaces and so forth is, in his/her case, the accidental result of a petty argument. Maybe, then, this accidental aesthetic view in the midst of 'interested' life can offer another reinterpretation of the photograph, another way to see aesthetically? For all the photographs' deliberate composition and control, does this lend them also something of the accidental? Or is it the contrast as such between the accidental and the deliberate that is most effective?

FA: You're absolutely spot-on with these reflections. No matter how formally deliberate or how compositionally aware these photographs are there is always room for aesthetic accidents – the facets that cannot be controlled. And, as you suggest, it's these random aesthetic views that offer us something different in terms of how we can respond to photographic representations of, in this case, a particular public site. However, in saying this, I don't believe that such formal distinctions

within the photographs are all that effectual when it comes to experience - what they offer will only ever be fleeting before our usual ways of making sense of both photography and public sites kick in. Instead, I can't help but come back to something else you've suggested – the impossibility of really *experiencing* a public site through its representation. Subsequently, thinking back on this dialogue, I realise that I may have cornered myself into a contradiction!

"For all the photographs' deliberate composition and control, does this lend them also something of the accidental? Or is it the contrast as such between the accidental and the deliberate that is most effective?"

If we consider that both the photography and the writing are, as you say, resisting the narrative structures and socio-cultural conventions implicit (and thus amplified through the processes of representation) in such sites – as well as in our respective mediums – then we also need to think about what we are left with. It all comes back to experience, but in a way that avoids established modes of understanding both the text/image relationship and public sites per se. What's more, and this is where the contradiction comes into play, messing with the connotative traits of each discipline creates a different kind of interpretative space: you have also alluded to this. It is in this space or gap – the possible comprehensive moment between what both the photograph and writing are doing – that relates to experience. In other words, these text/image pairing resists telling us how to think, experience or know what they depict. And as a result of this, they accord a different kind of understanding of public sites, one that allows our ideas of the public to co-exist with our potentially as yet unrealised experiences.

The Eel

JC Borrelle
Melbourne 2008

This is the first morning that Charlotte's childhood has visited her in quite a long time. It returned just before the day broke and gently laid its head down on the pillow beside her. The uninvited weight of the childhood, so familiar to Charlotte, sent a tide through the waterbed – waking the thin slimy Eel that lived within the limits of the warm sac beneath the layers of polyester, cotton and girl.

The Childhood stroked her hair and as the night's sleep curdled in her lashes, Charlotte closed her eyes and floated. They lay on their backs for a while and at first her childhood was very polite. It whispered about a quiet time – a chattering creek and a paddock filled with moss-eaten, wagonless wheels. Wheels that had almost completely forgotten they had once known a life filled with wagons and pin-up ponies. *That was pretty nice* thought Charlotte … *in a modest Enid Blyton kind of way*. The Childhood reminded her about the herds of antlered deer, about collecting pinecones and wearing the flowers of foxgloves, like thimbles, on the tips of her fingers.

Then the Childhood wriggled closer, pushing into her limbs. It continued talking, colouring Charlotte in with Kodachrome memories. It reminded her of the Pohutukawas that cascaded down the hill, protecting the bucolic cribs that sat along the main road. It told her that for years the fence had also served as a faithful husband to a dusty and horseless gravel road, married also to the smell of diesel on pebbles.

It was a tiny holiday destination on the Southern-most Island called Kingston. The Childhood carefully described the large mountains that thundered down into a lake so deep no one had ever touched the bottom. And then it clambered on top of her, speaking louder, its voice high-pitched and urgent. Charlotte clenched her hands into fists as the rapid, heavy sentences barreled into her ears.

The Eel became anxious as it performed its slow morning laps around the bladder of the waterbed.

Charlotte narrowed her eyes and watched in amazement as the Childhood became lost in an invective regarding the nature of family snapshots. It sounded upset, irrational.[1] It told her how, over the many years spent with her, the Childhood was slowly captured by her father's single lens reflex Minolta until eventually it was all sliced up like a Christmas ham.

– I was sent into a very thin place.

– How do you mean, a thin place?

The Childhood said it had been like living inside a paper cut. Charlotte shrugged.

– I've never lived inside a paper-cut.

– Count yourself lucky.

– Okay.

The Childhood clearly had a passive-aggressive streak. It breathed insistently onto her neck as Charlotte squirmed underneath it, gasping for air.

The Eel became afraid the commotion would cause the sac to accidentally pop open, prematurely birthing it into a muffled dry world.

Oblivious, the Childhood spoke further. It seemed to have an overtly emotive opinion on the politics of representation, the way it fixated on society's obsession with documenting itself, on the endless ability to manufacture a trillion facsimiles of every artless minute. It cried that it had been cheated when two most important dimensions – depth and time – were stolen away from it.[2]

– And you end up in a paper-cut?

Asked Charlotte.

Her childhood nodded and said that most people could only find meaning in the nostalgia of photo albums.[3]

Charlotte said she was sorry, but that she didn't understand what exactly was being said here.

The Childhood shook Charlotte, snorted and insisted that we all betray Time. We fuck Time up by reproducing arbitrary instants of our lives, cancelling out every other moment before we file them away in motionless picture albums.[4] Then we tuck the albums into bureaus and bookcases with unfashionable placemats, decaying programs from *Phantom of the Opera* and yellowing newspaper articles on Sir Edmund Hillary.

Charlotte's brow furrowed behind her thick black fringe. Was this really her childhood? It wasn't the way she remembered it being when she was little, she'd never heard it use such blue language, it was getting a little embarrassing, awkward. Her childhood was behaving like the lovechild of Julia Price, her art theory lecturer (self-obsessed, over analytical) and her long-since-disowned (sociopathic, unreasonable) Uncle Ray.

She tried to shove the Childhood off. She offered it old favourites – toast with peanut butter and some hot tea, even a game of Monopoly.

The Childhood ignored her generous offer of refreshments and entertainment.

The Eel felt unhappy, a sensation that was quite foreign to it. The Eel tumbled with the waves that crashed against the timber frame of the bed as the Childhood pushed Charlotte deeper into the bed and started shouting at the top of its voice.

– Lake Wakatipu! The Taniwha! A white bathing costume covered in yellow diamonds! The old steam engine! Choo Choo! What about the endless sky and the coloured paint! Choo fucking Choo! The long-term effect it has on you! You were so skinny! You forgot me! Why did you forget me?!![5]

Then the Childhood stopped. Abruptly. And the Eel stopped, and floated, and waited. The Eel did not blink as it hung suspended in the bubbling water for the longest, slowest moment it had yet known. And then the Childhood let go of Charlotte, which was worse, worse than its screaming, worse than its angry grip bruising her arms. As it sank through the bed she pressed her head into the pillow and heard its tiny voice drooping away.

– Why did you forget me.

1 We don't innocently observe photographs as they happen, we make them through a complicity with a process of manipulation, with specific purposes and intentions. Pavel Buchler, *Ghost Stories: Stray thoughts on photography and film* (London: Proboscis, 1999), 43.

2 'Taking a picture' also implies taking a stance in relation to the living culture to which the photographs belong: photographs are suspended events, but they are not suspended in a void. Pavel Buchler, Ibid, 43.

3 We *regard* the photograph, the picture on our wall, as the object itself (the man, the landscape, and so on) depicted there. This need not have been so. We could easily imagine people who did not have this relation to such pictures. Who, for example, would be repelled by photographs, because a face without colour and even perhaps a face in reduced proportions struck them as inhuman.

Ludwig Wittgenstein quoted in *On Photography*, Susan Sontag (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989), 198.

4 The need to bring things spatially and humanly "nearer" is almost an obsession today, as is the tendency to negate the unique of ephemeral quality of a given event by reproducing it photographically.

Walter Benjamin quoted in *On Photography*, Susan Sontag (New York: The Noonday Press, 1989), 190.

5 Photography is dominated by amnesia: not by forgetting, but by the impossibility of recollection. The past, the very matter of the photographic image, cannot be recovered from beyond the horizon of the photographic event – the image is always … a terminus, an exit point, never the point of entry. Pavel Buchler, Ibid, 83.

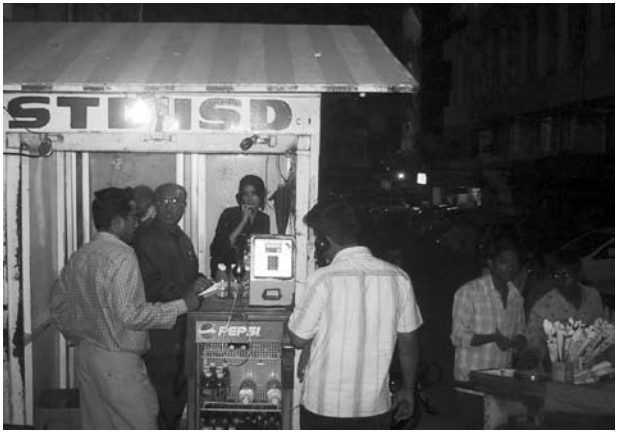
LONG DISTANCE CONVERSATIONS

Shuddhabrata Sengupta
New Delhi 1996

I AM A prisoner of phone booths. STD/ISD/ PCO/FAX/Xerox by Japanese machine, booths. I am enthralled by their darkened glass panes, stencilled signage, and plastic flowers, the late hours they keep, and the stories that gather on their wallpapers. Like an idiot hungry for tales of travellers who idled in the serais of the Delhi sultanate, I waste my time in the phone booths of nineties New Delhi. Even when I have nothing to say and no-one to call.

An STD phone booth is like a caravanserai, where you can alight at odd hours from the journeys of everyday life and hear news of distant places. The phone booths close to where I live host Afghan refugees and Israeli backpackers, Malayali nurses and Gujarati traders in transit. I go there to sit next to travellers and people with faraway relatives, and to listen to strange languages being spoken. I go there to eavesdrop on the world, because the world inhabits phone booths. I go there to whisper in my head the magic of distant place names – Adas, Addagadde and Ahwa, Galagali, Galsi and Gambhoi, Kanjirapuzha, Kalna and Kantilo, Zira, Ziro and Zineboto. Or, I search farther in the book of codes for cities with enchantments – Rosario, Erevan, Chittagong, Oruru, Tenerife, Uppsala, Valparaiso, Leipzig, Hafnart-Joerdur, Zauqa, Dewaniya, Sabh, Sert and Yundum ... and Aqaba ... and Sandnes ... and Los Angeles.

All this is possible in a New Delhi phone booth. But there are other, more serious purposes that justify their ubiquity. Business, family, marriage, news of sudden death, examination results, birthday greetings and homesickness. Love, real



Indian STD phone booths
Images from miscellaneous web sources
courtesy Google image search

estate, births, exports. Arrivals and departures. The distress of stranded tourists, illness and the stock market. In the course of an hour and a half waiting for a clear line to Bombay, I hear snatches of all this. I hear of broken engagements and faulty diagnoses, of mothers-in-law and travel agents, of missed opportunities and the daily grind. I hear the trivial details of everyday lives compressed to save time and money.

There are thousands of phone booths in a city like Delhi, and their numbers grow exponentially. As they thrive, they replace barbershops, grocery stores and milk queues as the hubs of conversation and social life in a neighbourhood. Gradually, each booth builds up a clique of regulars, nodding acquaintances to each other, but well aware of the intricate details of each other's family histories. This tends to happen because it is impossible not to have a fair idea of what people are saying in a phone booth. The most private conversations become public when they are long distance. People still tend to shout down the phone line, both because the lines are bad and because the act of speech traversing the distance, say from Lajpat Nagar to Dhanbad, still seems by consensus to require greater volume, intensity and projective power.

Phone booths also become centres of nightlife, venues for illicit assignations and coy flirtations between students and singles living in one-room bedsits. I have seen a love affair form and then conduct itself, after both its protagonists met at a booth. One travelled to a distant city, and many long phone calls later, betrayed the other, who continued to call long distance from the same phone booth to berate her unfaithful, "has been" lover. Each phone booth has a distinct character, which consists of an amalgam of the people

who manage it and its repertoire of clients. Thus, there are little holes in the wall, which are proof of a panwallah's sharp business acumen. Salesmen and commercial travellers gather here for a late-night cigarette and have abbreviated conversations about money, with their out-of-town partners. Then they call up their wives, perfunctorily.

There are phone booths run by auntyjis that cater to a family audience. Men and women in nightdresses and children come here to talk at length to relatives in the course of an after-dinner stroll. Their conversations are lively and encompass a universe that stretches from infidelity to toilet training. Hi-tech booths with fax machines and the beginnings of e-mail are the arena for the urban professionals, who can't get rid of their mobile phones even when surrounded by so many other kinds of telephones. These are efficient but unfriendly places manned by sharp-looking young men.

Even late into the night, in the quarter-charge hours, this crowd makes it a point to be well dressed, and are a little anxious to be noticed. Here the operators and bosses sit behind an array of the latest in telephony. They transfer calls, co-ordinate conferences between five different callers and exude the kind of power associated with priests, magicians and orchestra conductors. There are STD booths that offer Xerox facilities, which are favored by university students. They come to ask their parents in their hometowns for money and to get their lecture notes and texts photocopied. These are malnourished and often lonely people. Their eyes red with sleeplessness and worries about exams, careers, the rent, and impossible love affairs. They often stand still after their conversations and ask for credit, or painfully part with their very little money. They leave the phone booth just as they came, embarrassed and forlorn.

Then there are the dingy and suspect premises hidden in the basements of commercial complexes. These see little activity, barring unsuspecting tourists trying to call Jerusalem or Amsterdam. The real players here are the owners themselves, the men who sit behind unused telephones and wear dark glasses even when indoors and surround themselves with the musty smell of cheap incense. They crowd their walls with images of the Sai Baba of Shirdi and Jai Mata Di stickers. On hot summer afternoons, when no one ventures out to make STD calls, they dial in to Indore, Bulandshahar, Cuttack and Mogulsarai and rapidly read out a list of numerals: 5, 9, 3, 43, 17 ... Those are the conduits of the satta trade, relayers of the day's lucky digits to number-gambling cartels spread across the underbelly of small town India. When approached to make a phone call they will often tell you with an implacable, greasy and mysterious smile that the lines are out of order.

Phone booths in the city centre, close to railway stations and cheap hotels, are home to a floating population of tourists and travellers in various stages of fatigue and enthusiasm. As they

Indian STD phone booths
Images from miscellaneous web sources
courtesy Google image search

unbuckle their voluminous rucksacks and unzip their hip pouches to take out scraps of paper with phone numbers in Belgium or Germany, they can be seen imagining the prospects of return and mapping their future itineraries. Will it be Ladakh before Goa? Or Dharamshala before Benares? These are the roving envoys of The Lonely Planet, fixing their next destination well in advance, enquiring after jobs left behind, and desperately trying to make friends as they wait their turn. Invariably, they are overcharged by smooth phone booth owners, who hide their racism behind the complicated arithmetic of time and money conversions.

Despite the inherent variety of the people in them, the phone booths have certain common features – such as a big yellow sign with a red arrow, plastic bucket chairs, a calendar image of Shiva or Ram astride the would-be temple at Ayodhya, a statuette of Ganesh or the Virgin Mary, a framed print of a fat baby reading the Holy Quran, wallpaper, Formica tables, aluminium and glass partitions, second-hand air conditioners, plastic flowers and a black-and-white television set at an elevation. Sometimes on the wall behind the manager there is a film star's portrait, or a large poster of alpine Switzerland, or a set of clocks with the hands showing different hours, each neatly labelled with legends saying UK (London), USA (East Coast and West Coast), GERMANY, NEW DELHI, TOKYO, MOSCOW (Russia) and GULF.

The decor of phone booths suggests an imagination which brings together sections of airports, the kitsch of drawing rooms, the aspirations of the office premises of a small business, the comforts of domesticity, projections of the world abroad, and the

trappings of efficiency. These interiors negotiate simultaneously between nostalgia and the desire for a better, more glamorous life. A Protestant Work Ethic, and the rules of use are sternly spelt out in notices in bold type: "Be Brief - Time is Money," "Work-is-Worship," "Wrong numbers dialled will be strictly charged for," "Management is irresponsible for line failure or engage tone" and "Make no love talk here – others are in queue."

A group of Malayali nurses, exceptionally graceful, who answer to the names of Minnimol, Gracekutty and Malathi regularly call up family in their hometown Kalamassery. They ask after nephews and the price of coconuts, sometimes they are worried by the fact that the money order sent for Easter hasn't reached, or the news that a cousin has eloped. Every week on the appointed day, after their calls are made and the change is tendered, the boss of our phone booth asks them searching questions about the Christian faith. Is the Holy Ghost a ghost? Was Jesus reborn after his death? Did the Virgin Mary have a normal delivery? Do Christians have caste? Painstakingly, the Malayali sisters answer these queries in halting Hindi. Sometimes they promise to find out from the priest and clarify a difficult issue. Once they leave, the boss shakes his head solemnly. These exchanges are not brief. The boss doesn't charge them for wrong numbers and he lets them jump the queue. No one seems to mind. Not even the anxious exporter who makes a scene if anyone else redials a number.

Minnimol, Gracekutty and Malathi are the familiars of our booth. When I can't get through to a friend in a city that was once called Bombay, or I get too much interference on the line to Frankfurt, Munich or Sydney, I think of Minnimol's patient "try again, simply one more time only," and sometimes it works. Or at least we all like to think it does.

Not everyone comes away form our phone booth contented. Raminder Kaur breaks down every time she speaks to her son in Vancouver. Her husband, who escorts her out, is always smug. He never speaks – though he helps her dial the long and complicated code number. Each time she makes a collect call, and each time her son disconnects at the other end, and each time she gets hysterical she begs us all to help her dial again. But her husband cajoles her out of the booth and takes her back into the unhappiness she comes from.

A medical representative stops by on his way after a long shift on Wednesdays and Fridays. He deals in drugs for psychiatric ailments, and I have seen him pass strips of pills quietly to Raminder Kaur's husband. Each time he dials a number in Bangalore, he takes out a letter and says something furtively into the phone. Then he steps out of the aluminium and glass cabinet and sits quietly in a corner of the booth, staring at his polished shoes, or carefully examining his fingers. After all the calls are nearly over, at 12:40 or so, there's just me, a Backpacker still trying to get through to Barcelona, and the boss, who is watching cable TV. The phone rings,

TATA INDICOM

Bill Number : 0014
Date : 00/00/00
No:00844386 1753
CALLTO: NEWZELAND
Start Time : 04:04:18
Duration : 0004
Exch Pulses : 0001
Total + S.Ch. : 3.32

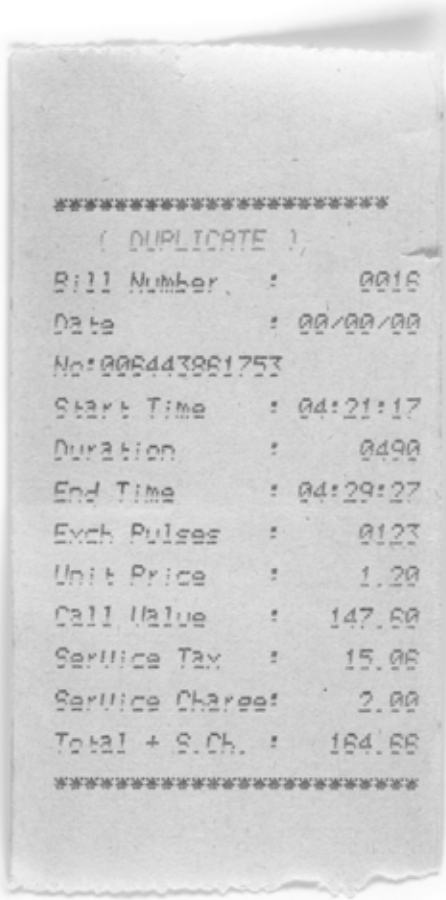
A FRIEND YOU CAN RELY ON
THANK YOU. VISIT AGAIN

12
3.5
5

TATA INDICOM

Bill Number : 0015
Date : 00/00/00
No:00844386 1753
CALLTO: NEWZELAND
Start Time : 04:12:45
Duration : 0009
Exch Pulses : 0002
Total + S.Ch. : 4.64

A FRIEND YOU CAN RELY ON
THANK YOU. VISIT AGAIN



(DUPLICATE)
Bill Number : 0016
Date : 00/00/00
No:00844386 1753
Start Time : 04:21:17
Duration : 0490
End Time : 04:29:27
Exch Pulses : 0123
Unit Price : 1.20
Call Value : 147.60
Service Tax : 15.06
Service Charge: 2.00
Total + S.Ch. : 164.66

International phone call receipts for a conversation between Bombay and Wellington. Courtesy of Marnie Slater

and the dealer in pills for unhappiness rushes in, unloosens his tie and asks: “Husband is asleep?”

The boss and the backpacker are asleep as well by now, and for the next twenty-five minutes the shiny-shoed salesman makes long-distance love to a married woman in Bangalore. Sometimes he breaks off from Kannada, and begins talking about her long hair in English. The peculiar, furtive melancholy of his voice is perhaps the only consolation that she has ever had, and till ten past one on Wednesdays and Fridays he sings her his song. He remembers their days together, promises to write, tells her about Delhi, and about how the mental hospital here is nothing compared to the one in Bangalore. He asks for news of her children, jokes about the sleeping husband, and promises to see her soon. In the end he whispers to her things that are perhaps too intimate to speak out aloud.

The backpacker is awake by now and impatient again, and he wakes up the boss. The drug salesman finishes his call and before leaving offers me some pan masala. The backpacker calls Barcelona and he can’t get through. I try calling a friend in Germany and I can’t get through either. The boss begins counting the day’s takings. One thousand and twenty-seven rupees. Then he begins rolling down the shutter. The boss of my neighbourhood phone booth is a generous quasi-insomniac, but even he locks up his business at one o’clock. The booths that claim to provide twenty-four hour service actually stay open only till midnight.

There are very few places you can go to at the dead of night to call. I offer to drive the backpacker down to the all-night STD phone outside the Eastern Court buildings on Janpath. I still have to make my call and so does he. We drive in silence, we have things to say to the people we have to call – not to each other. Then my companion decides to tell me that his friend is dead and cold in a hospital morgue, that he is catching the next flight back in the morning with her body. He lapses into silence. When we get there, he lets me wake up the operator and get the cards with which to work the phones. He shuts the door tight behind him when he calls and I cannot hear his voice. When he is done, he thanks me and leaves before I can ask him if I can take him to his hotel, or to the hospital. As I dial I can hear a taxi go away into the night.

A phone call is measured in terms of time and money, in red liquid crystal display digits that glow in the dark like malformed fireflies. The backpacker’s call to Barcelona that night was brief and it cost him three hundred and fifteen rupees. He never bothered to pick up his receipt when he left. How did he say what he had to tell his friend’s family? “Flavia and I are coming home tomorrow, but she is not alive,” or “Flavia died this morning at six-forty-five in her sleep“ or just, “Flavia is dead.”

A phone call breaks the pattern of an evening in a Barcelona home. Sudden distant death intrudes upon a family sitting down to supper. They make

more phone calls, arrange for the funeral, find a picture of Flavia taken just before she had left for India and send it to the photographers for enlargement and framing. They wait, and so does the backpacker, and the time and distance involved in the transit of the body make it difficult to mourn. Death, Flavia's particular death, takes on an unreal, virtual mantle, existing only in a phone call made at midnight in the Eastern Court phone booth.

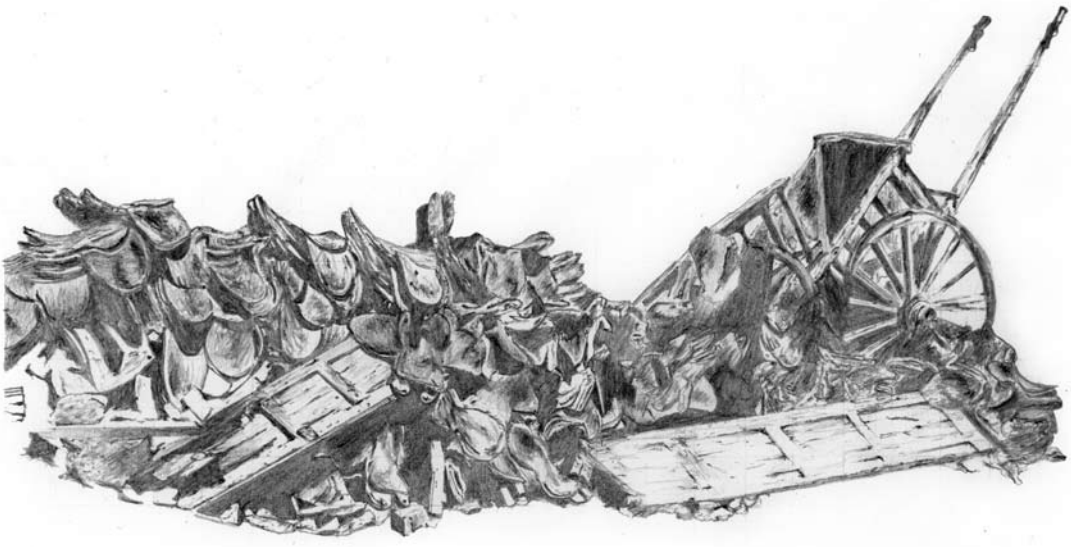
An Afghan doctor and his wife, recent refugees from a meaningless and forgotten war, come to a phone booth I know to ring up Kabul. I asked them once whether they still have friends or relations there. "No," they said, "every one dead, or in exile. We call only to see if the house we left behind is still standing. When the phone rings, it means that the house has not been shelled."

Sometimes I think of all the telephone conversations that criss-cross the earth and all the things that still remain unsaid. Numbers don't match, there is static interference, satellite links fail and even when people get through they don't know what to say, or are unable to say what they mean. Perhaps all that is unsaid collects each night and hovers above us like an unknown layer in the atmosphere until it is blown away on the rare days when people find it possible to really speak to each other. Those are the days on which the STD booths shine, their tin and paint banners gleam as if washed in a new rain. And the quiet hum of phone lines and many ringing dial tones signal the everyday fact of people enjoying the things they have to say to each other, across real and imagined distances.

This essay was first published in the India Magazine *(August–September 1996)*

THE BARRICADES

Dane Mitchell Auckland 2007



I FIRST STARTED collecting images of civilian-built street barricades a couple of years ago during research towards a proposed project at Galeria do Centro Cultural Maria Antonia – part of Sao Paulo University. This never led to an exhibition, yet during this research I came across an image that held my attention long after the completion of the proposal.

It was an image of a civilian-built street barricade erected during the uprising against the military dictatorship in Brazil in the late 1960's. This particular barricade buttressed up against a nearly leafless tree to the right of the image and involved an assortment of precariously positioned objects: a four metre high oversized trestle-like construction, on which a length of timber balanced, leading down to a heavy rectangular form, on which at one end a length of doweling was balanced, stretching above a concrete culvert held in place by two loose bricks. This collection of irregular objects traversed the road and pavement to idly lean against the columns of the neoclassical building in which the art gallery is now housed – at the time home of the Philosophy Department. Somewhat flimsy in construction, the barricade was undoubtedly raised as a blockade – a collection of objects assembled to mark a border, a line, a territory – yet what appeared clear in this particular image was the symbolic function of the barricade. Although it had a solid physical presence, the barricade seemed to function more as an idea than an object. That such a construction would operate in this way is self-evident, yet this particular barricade, built in Sao Paulo in 1968, had forced this fact specifically to the fore.

Barricades materialise in provisional and adaptive forms that seek to force an encounter in the moment – as opposed to the fortress in the truest sense of the word, which offers a permanent/prolonged siege. That civilian-built barricades function as symbol may be an obvious statement, yet there is something interesting in their continuity as both symbol – emblems of social and ideological solidarity – and as physical, practical and adaptable socio-spatial strategies.

Asphalt may no longer be the political territory it once was for broad political dispute, yet time and time again we see the street employed as a key site of solidarity and dissent.

They function as active instruments, intermediaries in real space, billboards, flagpoles and as ideas simultaneously. The urgency and resolve with which they are amassed lend them energy as objects, sites and emblems. They function as a kind of theatre, prepared in advance of confrontation – an artificial environmental condition that forms a stage. Barricades are temporal nuclei around which people, actions, values and ideologies have, at various moments across the globe, come to be and rotate: physical manifestations of collectivity and solidarity.

Engels noted as early as 1848 that barricade fighting had more moral than material significance. This thought is reiterated by Walter Benjamin, through Susan Buck-Morss in her book *Dialectics of Seeing*, in which it is suggested that barricade fighting had become obsolete as revolutionary praxis; to believe that such street confrontations could overturn a state armed with modern weaponry was to succumb to a revolutionary romanticism and nostalgia. This may perhaps be so, yet continually barricades, and the objects associated with such adaptive forms, are employed in urban spaces as ruptures and direct agents, for many causes, in many differing places, now and throughout urban history.

Asphalt may no longer be the political territory it once was for broad political dispute, yet time and time again we see the street employed as a key site of solidarity and dissent. Constantly re-actualised, the repetitive re-enactment of revolutionary modes clearly demonstrates that such forms of dissent are not completely insignificant. Think here of recent claims by the New Zealand Police of unearthing Molotov cocktails amongst other weaponry in questionable raids in the Ureweras on various “weapons training camps” under the Terrorism Suppression Act. Clearly this excessive reaction by the New Zealand Police indicates that such grassroots forms of dissent still have agency enough to rouse state force. Use of adaptive forms for confrontation may have limited direct effect, yet despite this they are no less, and perhaps much more than collective nuclei. Although it may be romantic to consider that such revolutionary forms offer any forceful resistance

today beyond bravado – both here in the reworked/adapted forms they take in this exhibition, or by dissenting groups that employ them, both now and historically – is it not possible that we are perhaps too prone to discard these strategies into the dustbin of history: eager, perhaps, to underline our ambivalence towards contemporary revolutionary praxis? And although in this exhibition there is a risk of the spectacularisation of revolutionary forms, it is possible that looking back on these forms in such a way is a potentially radicalizing act – stirring meaning from their sleep. It is also possible that despite an underlying suspicion about these forms' latent potentiality and their possible use-value here and now, they are more than obsolete and anachronistic.

Romanticisation of and nostalgia for past modes of resistance, as pointed to by Jacques Ranciere, is more than a looking back on obsolete political (or popular) forms. Ranciere affirms that the re-examination of the past is part of the construction of the present – we have to go beyond too simple a connection between past and present – the present being garnered from more than just an historical lesson; the past offers us an open schema: "A topography of the configuration of possibilities … that make up forms of political subjectivisation and artistic invention." Perhaps through the reconsideration of these forms, through representing, repositioning and also renouncing their specificity, they may be reconfigured not just as anachronistic characterizations, but something to be honed and sharpened: configurations of possibility.

In addition to the high rate with which barricades appear in historical painting, there is something undeniably sculptural about these constructions. Although assembled with speed and expediency where it is assumed formal concerns are overlooked, the somewhat arbitrary construction process links them to a particular thread of contemporary sculptural practice prevalent today: in which, to generalize, objects are "never fully resolved as aesthetic objects" and/or sit "between the formal, the relational and the environmental". Unlike these somewhat

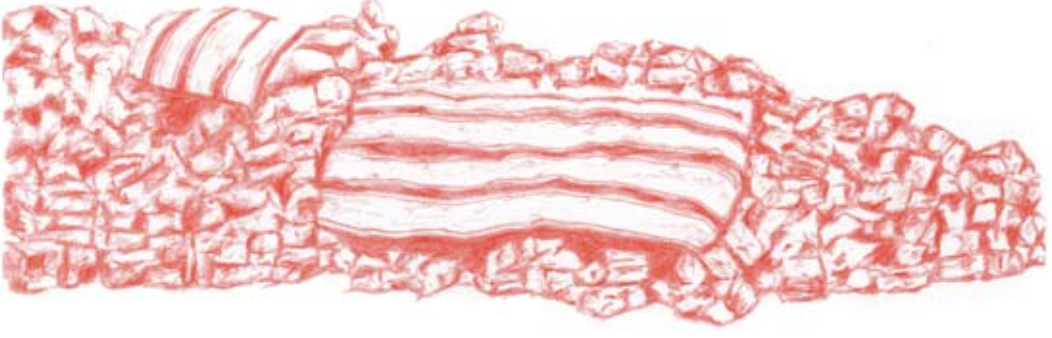
affected counterparts, the barricade's expediency lends it force as a formal object. Moreover, has there ever been a more social sculpture? They additionally share with much contemporary sculptural practice the usurping of technology to create the not-yet-known, through the transgression of the normative function of objects. This transgression assigns barricades an added political weight: doors, pipes, vehicles, fire, tires, bodies, cobblestones/roads are transformed. Toppling the productive logic of this stuff, the act of building a barricade converts these objects from material used in the circulation of capital into popular defenses. They are urban glaciers, operating at a rapid speed – the speed of the city – sweeping up all that lies in their path. They are assaults on architecture; delineating its history and purpose – not architecture entered, but architecture as obstacle. Interestingly, barricades are often similar in construction and material regardless of the time, era, locality and the purpose for which they were constructed.

The *Barricades* project offers a visual, not a linear logic. All the various forms the work takes in the exhibition aim to remove the original context from which these objects and images come – rendering, remaking and reforming them in a detached manner – so that the cold harsh light of the gallery might work towards removing the exactness and authority of their specific history, and allow some breathing room – a respite. The project is unconcerned with dating, naming or contextualizing the barricades or the specific locale in which the related works find their origins, so that they might possibly be blasted out of a historical continuum, to operate as images and objects without specific narratives. Perhaps through this they may, to quote Adorno, awaken congealed life in petrified objects.

The Barricades *was written to support Mitchell's solo exhibition of the same name at Starkwhite, Auckland, November – December 2007.*

Page 82
Barricade #3 (2007) Dane Mitchell
Pencil on paper

Below
Barricade #6 (2007) Dane Mitchell
Pencil on paper



Pages 90–93
Looking for Flora (2005) Tushar Joag, Bombay, India

Looking for Flora

WITH ***LOOKING FOR FLORA*** executed in January 2005, Tushar Joag/UNICELL started their unstable relationship with the monuments and edifices that mark the city. Flora Fountain – a colonial landmark sculpted in imported Portland stone in 1864 – was replicated in set builders' materials with the assistance of Ashrafilal Tanti and Baban Adagale. The figure of Flora at the top of the monument was absent in the replica, as though to suggest both a search for the goddess of flowers, and the impending replacement of Flora (and other) colonial monuments, with those of Maharashtrian Hindu chauvinism. The replica of the base of Flora Fountain was made in pieces that could be easily knocked down and reassembled in true DIY fashion. With the aid of a hired truck, this chimeric replica made enigmatic appearances in several locations in the city for brief periods of time in public places, after unofficial negotiations with police and other authorities. In the course of one night, this phantom was briefly glimpsed outside a shopping mall in Goregaon, opposite the equestrian statue of the seventeenth century Maratha warrior Shivaji at Shivaji Park in Dadar, on the seaface at Haji Ali, at the Chowpatty beach in Girgaum. Finally ending up in the middle of the Kala Ghoda carpark in the city's cultural precinct, it seemed to take the place of earlier statues – one of King Edward VII, and another of Shivaji himself – that had previously occupied the space.[1] Flora's transit through the nightscape of Bombay presented something akin to an icon blinking in and out of existence on a game screen, or a phantasmic manifestation of the desire for place being enacted under the artificial sunlight of sodium vapour lamps.

Chaitanya Sambrani, 2006

1. Equestrian statues of great men, warriors and kings have played a role in urban histories since the first such statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius was erected in Rome during the second century CE. Like all didactic public sculpture, these statues are designed to represent valour and the virtues of benevolent power, and function as machines that help ensure public obedience and cohesion. In this sense, they are the predecessors of the Orwellian Big Brother figure watching over the citizen from on high. A number of Indian cities saw the erection of such bronze behemoths during colonial times, with Indian princes eagerly appropriating this imported technology of propaganda. After Independence, the state of Maharashtra has seen the manufacture of superhuman greatness in the figure of Shivaji Bhonsale (1630–1680). His guerrilla-style resistance against the Mughal empire has made him an apt candidate for apotheosis on part of the militant Hindu Right, especially the Shiv Sena party. The replacement of Edward VII's statue with that of Shivaji is part of a larger programme of renaming monuments (including the fabulous neo-Gothic Victoria Terminus, and Bombay's Sahar airport) in his name.


Trains

Opposite
Nine Dancing Ladies (2004)
Kah Bee Chow, Britomart Station

REMAINING THE STRANGER FOR IT

The public practice of Kah Bee Chow

Kate Brettkelly-Chalmers
Auckland 2008

A TERRARIUM'S HUMID tangle of plants – a mini-forest of horticultural specimens jostling under cover of glass – offers an apt point of reference for Auckland artist Kah Bee Chow's practice. Engaging with Chow's performative and conceptual work is much like peering into an overgrown biosphere. We are met with a jungle of quotations; a garden of entwined images and allusions. Moon-gates, romance novels, fairy lights, Mi Goreng noodles, French modernist cinema, dancing sequences, water features and insidious weeds all make an appearance in the artist's lyrical assemblage of citation and reference.

What is most important for Chow in these horticultural endeavours is the intriguing and somewhat absurd paradox that the terrarium operates. A transparent glass case is needed to achieve its ideal growing conditions; nature's perfection is made ironically possible in its separation from the organic, in its synthetic seclusion from that which lies beyond the pane[1]. This tightly wound knot of contradiction is an example of the kinds of interlocked oppositions that lie at the heart of Chow's work. Her whimsical yet shrewdly conceptual practice bears a fondness for the often dramatic, romantic and emotive qualities of such insoluble contradictions and innate paradoxes.

Chow's interest in paradoxical set-ups also shapes the way in which her works engage with the public sphere or determine participation by their audiences. This play of inverted contradictions offers the artist a mode of destabilising notions of a shared communal space or activity. Furtively shrouded in a somewhat cute and endearing mode of performance, Chow's practice seeks

to quietly undo (and re-do) some of the knots that bind our preconceptions of familiarity and strangeness, absence and presence, with regards to ideas of place and public.

In a practice that is specifically situated within the social sphere of communal spaces – of contemporary art galleries, artist-run spaces and public pavements – an inclination to remain paradoxically remote from these realms is evident. If one were to squeeze the last drops out of the terrarium metaphor, we might conclude that the artist draws on the potential of the unfamiliar by keeping her viewers at a distance and behind a pane of transparent glass.[2] Such dalliances with moments of strangeness and elements of unfamiliarity lend a quietly unsettling quality to Chow's work.

Nine Dancing Ladies (2004) takes Auckland's Britomart precinct as a stage set for a series of performative activities. This previously forsaken downtown area is currently undergoing a process of urban renewal under the auspices of council and commercial groups, and now features a collection of sculptures and newly constructed architectural spaces. Donning a pair of dark sunglasses and matching black attire (a scruffy version of Maggie Cheung's latex cat-suit in Olivier Assayas' 1997 film *Irma Vep*) with portable stereo and pink umbrella close to hand, Chow performed a trio of choreographed dances to the soundtracks of a few 1960s French New Wave films.

Nine Dancing Ladies saw the artist utilize the potential dramatics of Britomart's modern spaces as a backdrop for her whimsical pursuits. The transport hub's giant skylights throw massive circles of sun on its underground passageways offering Chow a perfectly theatrical spotlight for a goofy version of the famous *Madison* dance from Jean-Luc Godard's *Bande à part* (1964). The film's grungy Parisian cafe is replaced with the sturdy burnished concrete and cool modern surfaces of Auckland's downtown area. Like the film's heroine, Anna Karina, who is eventually abandoned by her *Madison* dance-partners, Chow is left alone in these echoing spaces, pattering away to the jazz beats with passers-by and commuters casually ignoring her oddballactivity.

Remaining at arm's length, Kah Bee Chow takes the role of a stranger in the midst of a flux of communal activity. Her performative persona – the sweet kid swinging a suitcase full of instant noodles through the bright lights of the big city – will never really settle down, will never completely curry favour with the metropolis, and will always sustain a kind of theatrical unfamiliarity with her surroundings.[3] Items for travel – suitcase, umbrella and sunglasses – allow for a fleeting engagement with location; she could just pack up and go. The durable permanence of Britomart's urban spaces is placed in distinction to a temporal fragility and the cultivation of an impermanent sensibility.

Nevertheless, contradictory oppositions such as these can be turned inside out, and Chow's practice seeks to reveal how such incongruous elements might inform one another. Does encountering that which is alien and unfamiliar – a fleeting glimpse of a black-clad girl swinging an umbrella through the jets of a city water-feature – solicit a reconsideration of one's own conception of familiarity? Here, the potential instability of place, public and communal, is brought into sharp relief by the artist's

Above
Gallery exterior *Emotional Snack Bar* (2004),
Kah Bee Chow, Canary Gallery

Right
William Hsu in *Emotional Snack Bar* (2004),
Kah Bee Chow, Canary Gallery

adherence to a timbre of strangeness. Chow's work obliges a review of how we engage with the spaces or activities of the modern metropolis, and how the kind of cozy stability brought by familiarity might be subtly undone (and refastened in different ways) by the recognition of an element of foreignness.

Moving from public pavements to public gallery spaces, Chow continues to explore notions of the familiar/foreign in works such as *Emotional Snack Bar* (2004) and *Fall Out* (2006) which celebrate the convivial social environments that artist-initiated projects often develop. *Emotional Snack Bar* involved Chow hosting a noodle eatery from the confines of Auckland's Canary Gallery. Replete with the types of fairy lights often found adorning the windows of the city's Chinese restaurants, for one day only the gallery served 2-minute Mi Goreng meals to its visitors in exchange for a quick photo of them downing the Malaysian snack. Chow's work constituted a documentation of the community that surrounded the gallery – a network of faces and people engaging in the most sociable of activities: eating.

Similarly, *Fall Out* involved the renovation of another artist-run space located in the Britomart precinct, SPECIAL. Foreshadowing the forthcoming refurbishment of the building as part of the urban development of the downtown area, Chow cut a massive circular hole in the wall that separated the makeshift gallery from the artists' studios surrounding it. In effect, this cavity (a nod to Gordon Matta-Clark's 1970s building cuts) amplified the gallery space and allowed it to flow into neighbouring studios. From these chaotic spaces, Chow cleared a horde of wood off-cuts and spare materials, sanded the floors bare and hung plants from the ceiling. The diminutive stature of SPECIAL's infamous half-walls always allowed a glimpse of a frenzied studio space beyond, but now no longer kept the opening night crowds at bay.

Chow's *Fall Out* reminded me of the "haha", a curious eighteenth-century English ditch that encircled a landowner's domestic garden. The ditch did away with the need for an unsightly fence while keeping cattle and other unwanted bodies out of the cultivated grounds. The haha, supposedly named after the exclamation (Ha!) made by the unwary when stumbling into it, allowed an uninterrupted view of the landscape beyond the garden while maintaining important property boundaries.[4] The haha meant that this power structure was physically inverted without reversing its intention. A gentleman could enjoy the unfolding wilderness of the English landscape beyond his fence while keeping its uncultivated chaos at arm's length.[5]

Chow similarly plays with the conventional boundaries separating gallery and studio, artist and audience. As visitors crept into the studio/gallery space on *Fall Out*'s opening night, a feeling of cautious delight, something that comes with stepping 'over the line' or approaching taboos, was evident. It was enjoyable walking through Chow's circular void and into the studio spaces that had supported SPECIAL as a working gallery for the years that it was open, nevertheless these spaces were still in use by the artists and Chow's installation thereby imparted a sense of encroachment.[6]

Such elements of friction always remain in Chow's socially engaged works; interactions between audience and artist are not always smooth affairs. As an artist, Chow is careful not become purely an agent of interaction or to allow her sweet-kid persona to disappear into a flux of social activity. There must be a star of the show, albeit a somewhat reluctant one, and she ensures a kind of theatrical isolation that will allow her to remain distinct from her audiences. Unlike Rirkrit Tiravanija's open gallery meals, we must press our noses at the window awhile before a steaming bowl of noodles gets placed in our hands.

This paradoxical relationship with an audience, a love-hate affair sparked by a bittersweet logic, might be easily aligned to the appeal and repulse of celebrity culture. Slovenian philosopher and theorist Slavoj Zizek describes how a delight in the mundane or trashy activities of celebrities is inextricably bound to their enigmatic appeal: "the thirst for as many sordid humdrum details of their lives as possible – the lowest yellow-press trash secretly sustains its opposite, charismatic dignity."[7] The extraordinary and beguiling qualities of the modern celebrity are made all the more attractive in relation to those intriguingly repulsive ones; we need the trash to experience the charm. Extending this vein of thought, we might conclude that Chow's relationship with her audiences – the way in which public commuters or earnest gallery goers interact with her work – is a liaison characterised by this appeal/repulse, an enchanting mix of fascination and unease.

Such unpleasant twists always emerge in Chow's practice and propagate an uncomfortable pathos that seeps into its reception. We are lulled by a play of appealing and stylish references only to be brought up sharp by an abrasive surface – one of Chow's sandpaper bound books erasing the pages of others as it is pulled from the shelf.[8] A similar sense of shrewd pathos exists in what is perhaps the artist's most poignant work, *Afterlife* (2006). This performance piece involved Chow launching a series of delicate paper parachutes over Christchurch's well-known

suicide sites. Watching the video and photographic documentation of these flimsy, airborne forms fluttering across the location of multiple deaths – a Cantabrian cliff top covered in yellow gorse blooms – reminds us that some public spaces are painfully conspicuous in their absence from public discourse.

Of all the works that engage with the public or communal realm, Chow's *Afterlife* best articulates the suggestion that no space is neutral. Through a whimsical language of entwined contradictions – moments of strangeness and familiarity, absence and presence – Kah Bee Chow quietly examines the histories, idiosyncrasies and mythological qualities of the shared space we inhabit: it's a jungle out there.

Fallout (2006),
Kah Bee Chow, Special Gallery

---

1 Kah Bee Chow, *Terrarium* research paper (2005)

2 Neither the artist nor the author can go past a good garden metaphor. See Kah Bee Chow's catalogue essay in *Sriwhana Spong and Kate Newby: TWONE* (Christchurch: The Physics Room, 2007) and the author's *In One Ear* (Auckland: Crease Magazine, 2006).

3 Tze-Ming Mok. "I AM NOT A REALITY SHOW: FANTASY ISLAND, SURVIVOR ISLAND, EXILE ISLAND AND THE ART OF KAH BEE CHOW" in Victoria Lynn ed. *Turbulence: 3rd Auckland Triennial* (Auckland: Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, 2007),116.

4 Nature's wild expanses were popular in the 18th century Britain following a period of more formal and well-clipped gardens.

5 Catherine Alexander. "The Garden as Occasional Domestic Space", *Signs* (Vol. 27, No. 3, Spring 2002), 860.

6 The gallery was built right in the middle of SPECIAL board members' studios. They covered the rent and forewent extra studio space to allow it to run. Chow's show was also one of SPECIAL's last as the building it occupied was tagged for refurbishment.

7 Slavoj Zizek, Forward to *For they know not what they do: enjoyment as a political factor* 2nd Edn. (London, New York: Verso, 1991), xxxvi.

8 Kah Bee Chow's *Tender is the Night*, 2005 is a book with a sandpaper cover inspired by French Situationist Guy Debord's memoirs. According to the Chow, Debord was interested in a book that would destroy others on its shelf – a metaphor for a modernist supersession of old ideas by the avant-guard. Chow's volume bears a series of beautifully printed excerpts from other books: Fitzgerald (F. Scott and Zelda) biographies, Godard film stills, tsunami newspaper clippings and photographs of the Great Wall of China.

POLITICS AND ECSTASY

The public artist in the world of private Space

Rudolph Hudsucker
Wellington 2008

THE CONCEPT OF the *public*, or by extension, the *public good*, has always been a shaky one. Maori historian Ranganui Walker, writing in his 2001 biography on Apirana Ngata, *He Tipua*, commented on how the New Zealand state has consistently used the public interest as a justification for acquiring or usurping Maori land. So-called 'idle' or 'wasted' land (terrain not being commercially developed or exploited in a westernised farming model) left in that state was seen as working against the public interest of an emerging colonial state and its economic aspirations. The public interest, as Walker understood it, was always code for European interests.[1]

Further, Maori weren't considered part, or at least weren't treated as part, of the public. New Zealand's first public works programmes, including building schools, roads and setting up local governments, began in the 19th Century but excluded Maori. All the money and development went to European settlements. Maori weren't, however, excluded from the taxation system. But these tales are like stories from a gloried and antiquated past compared

to the radical conception of the public we've become accustomed to in today's world of late financial market global capitalism and its accompanying climate of fear, self-projection and expensive flights of fantasy.

Remember Jesus Jones? "*Right Here Right Now, There's no other place I'd rather be, right here right now, watching the world wake up from history*." For the cultural seers of the era, like one-hit-wonder Jones, the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 must have seemed like a pot of gold at end of the rainbow. Released in 1991, Jones's joyous MTV video even featured an image montage of a jubilant Bush (Sr.) and a heroic American military, boisterous after its 'clean' victory – utilising so-called video game precision – in the first Gulf War. The world entered a new age in which the US could now expand its interests militarily and economically without the loss of (US) life in a righteous cause of spreading things they term "democracy" and "freedom" around the world. As for the public, we were entering a new universal democracy in which we would be voting every day with every dollar we spent.

Perhaps there's no better chronicler of our times than British BBC documentary filmmaker Adam Curtis. His 2007 documentary series,

As for the public, we were entering a new universal democracy in which we would be voting every day with every dollar we spent.

The Trap, discusses game theory developed by US military think-tank, Rand Corporation during the height of the Cold War. Curtis supports the thesis that by adopting these radical economic and intellectual theories, Western governments and politicians have created and trapped both them and us in a paradoxical and shallow world, based on a peculiar and narrow idea of freedom.[2]

In trying to free us from the dead hand of bureaucracy, Curtis argues, Western powers have adopted radical economic models based on the idea of the selfish paranoid individual, always acting in his or her rational self-interest. The best solution for society (the ideologues behind these theories believe) is to release the self-interest they believed was at the heart of human nature, and forget altogether about the idea of the public, which they claim was only ever a myth or an illusion. Civil Servants would no longer see themselves as serving the public, but would rather be focused on self-advancement by meeting goals and targets set by a new class of manager, who in turn would be pursuing his or her own goals and targets.

In Wellington, New Zealand, the face of the public and of public space has radically changed. A string of right-wing Mayors, joined at the hip to the city's burgeoning property developers, have all had their turn at building their own little provincial empires. Under Kerry Prendergast, however, the change has rapidly escalated with the Mayor's private interests now extending to America and the Middle East with her business contacts in the US military, not to mention surveillance technology company SURVEYLAB of which she is a major shareholder.[3]

Under Prendergast, Wellington has been sliced-up, remodeled and rearranged to maximize the city's assets. In today's Wellington all public signage needs to be in accordance with the city's new branding and gateway strategy, "designed to reflect the 'Creative Wellington – Innovation Capital' vision."[4]

It seems the vision has no room for the city's old nuclear free sign that formerly greeted visitors from the airport.[5] Removed by the Council without public consultation, the sign was found cracked in a near-empty skip by a member of the public. The sign was retrieved and donated to the Museum of City and Sea, where it was recently exhibited as part of the exhibition, *Tales of Wellington*. An anonymous source reported to this writer that Prendergast stormed out of the exhibition's opening upon seeing the sign, only to return later so she could register her displeasure and disgust.

More in-line with the Absolutely Positively Fantastic vision is the new $480,000 city


WELCOME
TO
WELLINGTON
A NUCLEAR-FREE CITY


N2X 50 4247.0 83
TALENT - ENTRIES NOW
WWW.HITECH.ORG

Western powers have adopted radical economic models based on the idea of the selfish paranoid individual, always acting in his or her rational self-interest.

council funded stock exchange sign. On the old Oldins building, perched above the city waterfront, it features an up to the minute account of values on the commodities market. Private company, the New Zealand Stock Exchange (NZX) was delighted by the new 'public' ratepayer-funded investment. NZX Chief Executive Officer Mark Weldon thanked the council for its support and noted the NZX believed that there was a strong alignment of ideas and visions for Wellington between the NZX and Council.[6] Let the capital flow!

So where does all this leave the artist, in an age in which public galleries are measured on visitor numbers, and their ability to court and consummate a relationship with sick corporate business? We're certainly a long way away from Clement Greenberg's pure and autonomous realm for art, but in today's world is there any public space at all left for art, free of branding strategies and marketing gurus?[7] Is there any recognition for art and artistic values that can't be measured in quantifiable statistics?

The term 'public' would ideally imply that the information flow is not one-way. However, the word 'public' has been abused and mal-appropriated to achieve its inverse aims, to concentrate power of communication rather than distribute it more equitably throughout the society or communities.

Organisations like the Wellington Sculpture Trust (WST) are an example of bodies standing in for the public as reliable arbiters of taste and value with regular art commissions, but are really nothing more than anonymous boards without accountability or vision. The WST has become known more for its corporate waffle than any acute insight into the arts, no brave or bold decision-making to be found here.

Concepts in our language such as 'public' have been abused in the lust towards a world of total private ownership and the usurpation of public discourse into our new definition of free speech; political lobbying as public advertising. Mussolini was the true innovator of Fascism and he described it, primarily, as a usurpation of every individual into a single, functioning, total corporate state.

> *I have a vision of the opium dens of the Renaissance where the almighty lords and the stoned-out dreamers met in the darkness and exchanged a vision for humanity. I see a return of these new secret-meeting places for there is a hunger and we need to share again. Mix with the unknowns; share with each other our humanity. Let downtown come uptown and let uptown come downtown. Let Courtney Place be awash with puzzled faces. Let the lobsters out of their pots. Put the rabbit back into the pie*. Tao Wells

1 Ranginui Walker, *He Tipua, The Life and Times of Sir Apirana Ngata* (Auckland: Viking Press 2001).

2 AdamCurtis
2007: The Trap – What Happened to our Dream of Freedom (BBC Two), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOEB05_3-p0

2004: The Power of Nightmares (BBC Two), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAUDcmaJNWQ

2002: The Century Of The Self (BBC Two), http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Kp24ZeHtv4

(all retrieved February 2008).

3 SURVEY LAB
http://www.no8ventures.co.nz/news/no8_ventures_invests_2million_in_surveylab.aspx

http://www.positivelywellingtonbusiness.co.nz/mainsite/KiwiTechMayHelpUsMarkMines.html

http://www.mycoordinates.org/industry-nov05.php

(all retrieved February 2008).

4 Wellington City Council Website "Wellington's Culture Strategy: The Council has nine Key Achievement Areas (KAAs) which are used to group related outcome statements. It has twelve subject areas. Culture is one of these subject areas. However culture also has linkages with a number of the other subject areas as shown in Diagram 1, such as arts, social, recreation, open space, urban form and design, land use and economic development."

http://www.wellington.govt.nz/plans/policies/culturestrat/pdfs/culturestrat.pdf
(retrieved February 2008).

5 Wellington became a nuclear-weapon free zone on April 14th, 1982 by decision of the Wellington City Council. A sign announcing Wellington as a nuclear-weapon free zone was erected near the airport. In 2004 this was replaced with a sign welcoming visitors to "Wellington – the capital of Nuclear Free New Zealand."

Peace Foundation Website, http://www.peace.net.nz/index.php?pageID=62 (retrieved May 2008).

6 Wellington City Council Website, "2 June 2004, Wellington City Council Planning and Peformance Committee Meeting minutes", http://www.wellington.govt.nz/haveyoursay/meetings/committee/Planning_and_Performance/2004/02Jun0915/pdf/06_02_pdf.pdf (retrieved May 2008).

7 Clement Greenberg *On Avant-garde and Kitsch* (1939), http://www.sharecom.ca/greenberg/kitsch.html (retrieved February 2008).

Other References

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*. Trans R. J. Hollingdale (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979).

Walter Laquer (ed.) *Fascism, A Reader's Guide* (New York: Pelican Books, 1976).

Marxists Internet Archive *Art In the Age of Mechanical Representation* – Walter Benjamin (1936), http://www.marxists.org/reference/subject/philosophy/works/ge/benjamin.htm (retrieved February 2008).

Contributor's Biographies

FIONA AMUNDSEN is an artist whose photographic practice seeks to demystify how photography is culturally comprehended, thereby exposing the discontinuous identity of this complex entity. Rather than attempting to unpick the highly politicised domain of representation, her work theorises photography itself. She is currently lecturing in photography and art theory/history at Auckland University of Technology.

CHRISTINA BARTON is a Wellington-based art historian, curator and writer. She is a senior lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington where she also directs the Adam Art Gallery. Her research and curatorial practice has focused on New Zealand art since 1960, notably the temporal and conceptual post-object art of this era. Barton is one of three editors of *Reading Room: A Journal of Art and Culture* published by the Auckland Art Gallery, as well as a contributor to numerous publications throughout New Zealand.

JC BORRELLE arrived during New Zealand's notorious storm of 1979. In 1992, she was denied the hypercolour t-shirt that would have irrevocably changed her life. In 2004, she gave her BFA the slip and moved to Australia where she now sails the good ship Literature, guided by a sodden map of fictocriticism. She is founder and co-editor of the mobile arts column *Spit & Polish*. Borrelle firmly believes that one day both men and womenfolk will wear culottes, for why not, they're simultaneously trouser and skirt.

KATE BRETTKELLY-CHALMERS lives in Auckland and is a writer and curator of contemporary art activities. She is a graduate of Elam School of Fine Arts (2004) and student of Art History at The University of Auckland. Brettkelly-Chalmers is ARTSPACE Auckland's Curatorial Intern for 2008.

KAH BEE CHOW was born and raised in Penang, Malaysia and now lives and works in Auckland. She recently completed commissions for *don't misbehave! SCAPE Biennial of Art in Public Space* 2006 in Christchurch and the *No Chinatown* project (in collaboration with Long March Project and Daniel Malone) for the *Turbulence Auckland Triennial* 2007. Chow's practice engages with notions of temporality and place; drawing from literary, film, cultural and art-historical references with an emphasis on responsiveness to site and context. Chow is currently developing work for *One Day Sculpture* in Wellington in August 2008.

TIM CORBALLIS is the author of three novels (*Below, Measurement and The Fossil Pits*, VUP) as well as numerous short stories and essays. In 2005, he was awarded the Creative New Zealand Berlin Writers' Residency. In 2008, he will be a judge on the Montana New Zealand Book Awards, and will be starting a doctorate on Frankfurt School aesthetic theory.

HAROLD GRIEVES is a biography.

RUDOLPH HUDSUCKER is the nom de plume used by Ron Hanson and Mark Hanson when writing collaboratively for New Zealand arts magazine *White Fungus*, or for related projects. The text featured here, *Politics and Ecstasy* is a collaboration between the Hansons and Wellington artist Tao Wells. *White Fungus* began in late 2004 as a free photocopied handout dealing with Wellington politics – particularly the building of the city's inner-city bypass and the lack of support given to artists – in the lead-up to local body elections. It is now a printed publication distributed throughout New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the US.

TUSHAR JOAG completed his Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1988 (Sir JJ. School of Art, Bombay) and Masters in 1990 (M.S. University, Baroda). After spending two years at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam, the Netherlands, he returned to India and co-founded the artists' initiative Open Circle in 2000. He has been involved in organising and co-ordinating activities in Bombay and for the World Social Forum in Brazil and Kenya. He has participated in a number of national and international exhibitions, and currently lives and works in Bombay.

DANE MITCHELL, an Auckland-based artist and visual arts lecturer, graduated in 1998 from the former ASA School of Arts at AIT (now AUT). Mitchell works across a variety of media and often explores issues of institutional critique, however, dust collecting has produced fruitful and long lasting areas of artistic investigation. Mitchell has exhibited widely in New Zealand and overseas, including the Sao Paulo Biennial in Brazil in 2004. He was recently selected by a jury for a 2009 DAAD Berliner Kuenstlerprogramm residency. Mitchell's text contribution to *Public Good* was written to support his solo exhibition *The Barricades* at Starkwhite, Auckland in November – December 2007. A work from that exhibition is featured on the cover of this journal.

KATE NEWBY is an artist living and working in Auckland. She has shown extensively throughout New Zealand and internationally, being part of the annual new artists show at ARTSPACE in 2002 and the international site specific project *Very Interesting, Very International* (2004–05). Newby graduated with a Masters of Fine Arts from Elam in 2007 and is a founding and current member of the gallery co-operative Gambia Castle. The curatorial collective Cuckoo has commissioned Newby to be a part of the *One Day Sculpture* series of temporal public art commissions.

RACHEL O'NEILL is currently working on a prolonged comic monologue that is part chronological epic, part lyric unknown. This collection of poetry and prose is being realized for a MA in Creative Writing at Victoria University's International Institute of Modern Letters. She sees an imperative for encampments of itinerants and subsequently is an artist, writer, and impromptu editor. She lives in Wellington.

SPIROS PANIGIRAKIS is a Melbourne based visual artist who divides his time between his art, wood tech. teaching, his Phd candidature and writing. He is currently teaching at Monash University. His art practice involves working with groups in both curatorial and collaborative capacities. Panigirakis is a member of the CLUBSproject Inc committee and is interested in how curatorial frameworks and presentational devices manifest art and discourse. He has a forthcoming solo exhibition in late 2008 at the V.C.A Margaret Lawrence Gallery. Panigirakis has exhibited in numerous Melbourne spaces including Platform, RMIT's Project Space, First Floor, TCB, West Space, and Gertrude Contemporary Arts Spaces.

DR. CHAITANYA SAMBRANI is an academic and curator at the Australian National University from Pune, India. His research focus is on contemporary and modern Asian art. He has an MA in art history from the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, and a PhD in Art History from the ANU. He has been co-curator to a number of international exhibitions and has recently curated the major travelling exhibition *Edge of Desire: Recent Art in India* organised by the Art Gallery of Western Australia and the Asia Society, New York. His writings have been widely published throughout Asia and Australia.

Editor's Biographies

SHUDDHABRATA SENGUPTA is a media practitioner, artist and writer. His work has focussed on new media and digital art practice, interpreting the city and the urban experience and open source models for creativity and networked histories. He is a member of the Raqs Media Collective, a co-initiator of the Sarai Programme at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, Delhi. The Raqs Media Collective's recent work has been shown at *Documenta11* (Platform 5, Kassel), *When Latitudes Become Forms (*Walker Art Center, Minneapolis) and *Emocao Art.ficial* (Itau Cultural, Sao Paulo). As a member of Raqs, Sengupta is co-curator of *Manifesta 07* in Italy 2008.

SIMON SHEIKH is an art critic and curator. He is an Assistant Professor of Art Theory and Co-ordinator of the Critical Studies Program, Malmö Art Academy in Sweden. Sheikh is the Editor of OE critical readers series, published by b_books in Berlin, which includes the anthology *In the Place of the Public Sphere?* He was Guest Curator at NIFCA, Helsinki, 2003–04. Sheikh lives and works in Berlin and Copenhagen.

PAULA BOOKER completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at the Auckland University of Technology in 2000, and has since initiated and participated in various sites and methods for the discussion and dissemination of contemporary art practices. These have included artist's initiatives, publications, curated exhibitions, writing and artworks. Booker was a founding director of artist-run space Canary Gallery in Auckland, extant from March 2004 to August 2006. She is a member of The Association of Collaboration (TAC), an art project currently consisting of five members who practice and critique collaborative processes and frameworks. Booker is Enjoy's Writer and Publications Manager and the curator of Kah Bee Chow's 24-hour artwork for *One Day Sculpture* in August 2008.

MARNIE SLATER is a visual artist, writer, curator and former Enjoy Public Art Gallery trust member based in Wellington, New Zealand. Since graduating from Massey University, Wellington in 2004 Slater has exhibited throughout New Zealand and Australia. Her recent exhibition projects include *The World (will soon turn our way)*, a Gambia Castle off-site project held in a cul-de-sac in Mount Eden, Auckland in 2008 and *Our Moment Together* at The Physics Room in Christchurch in 2006. Recent curatorial projects include *Some Kind of Fact, Some Kind of Fiction* at the Engine Room, Wellington in 2007 and the solo project by Rachel O'Neill, *Hallways of Lives* at Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington in 2006. Slater is currently working towards a new public art project for *SCAPE* 2008.

Public Good Itinerant responses to collective space
Published July 2008 by Enjoy Public Art Gallery
ISBN 978-0-473-13698-7

Edited by Paula Booker and Marnie Slater
Designed by Hannah Ngaei
Typeset by Shane Fairhall
Journal proofread by Liz Allan
Text editing for *Peace of Mind* by Stefanie Lash
Contributions proofread by Gabrielle Amodeo, Kannika Ou and Kristin Wineera
Cover image: *Untitled (Flag)* (2007) Dane Mitchell
Cover photograph by Louise Hyatt

Enjoy Public Art Gallery
Level 1, 147 Cuba Street
Wellington, New Zealand
Phone: 00 64 4 384 0174
Email: enjoy@enjoy.org.nz
Website: www.enjoy.org.nz

Public Good is the first in a series of journals to be published by Enjoy responding to changing themes, to be delivered in different scales and formats at irregular intervals.

The editors would like to thank: All the contributors for their generous work, and those behind the scenes lending assistance and support especially: Liz Allan, Gabrielle Amodeo, Eric Baudelaire, Claire Doherty, Enjoy Trust, Shane Fairhall, Catherine Hammond, Stefanie Lash, Litmus Research Initiative, Hannah Ngaei, Clare Noonan, Rachel O'Neill, Kannika Ou, Printlink and Kristin Wineera.

This publication was made possible by funding from Creative New Zealand.

[Example only: Printed on paper stock sourced from sustainable forestry by Printlink, Wellington. Printlink recognises the importance of, and is committed to, using the most environmentally responsible products and processes available to their business.]

Enjoy

creative nz
Arts Council of New Zealand Toi Aotearoa

Printlink logo

PUBLIC GOOD

Itinerant responses to collective space

Fiona Amundsen (Auckland) | **Christina Barton** (Wellington)

JC Borrelle (Melbourne) | **Kate Brettkelly-Chalmers** (Auckland)

Kah Bee Chow (Penang/Auckland) | **Tim Corballis** (Wellington)

Harold Grieves (Christchurch) | **Rudolph Hudsucker** (Wellington)

Tushar Joag (Bombay) | **Dane Mitchell** (Auckland)

Kate Newby (Auckland) | **Rachel O'Neill** (Wellington)

Spiros Panigirakis (Melbourne) | **Chaitanya Sambrani** (Canberra)

Shuddhabrata Sengupta (New Delhi) | **Simon Sheikh** (Berlin/Copenhagen)

PUBLIC GOOD is a collection of critical essays, artist's pageworks and prose pivoting around an exploration of the public sphere. Considering the increasing amount of funds and energy directed towards the commissioning of art sited within public space, and the continual civic development of the urban landscape, Enjoy thought it timely to attempt a collected discussion into the obviously political and forever elusive notion of The Public.

In gathering this collection, we began by asking both local and international contributors a series of questions: In whose name is the term public used? In place of the singular term, should we be interested in exploring the expanded, the fragmented, the specific, the multiple, the ephemeral, the places where our ideas of the publics and our experience of being publics co-exist? Is "Public", as Parisian artist Claire Fontaine says, now nothing but another word for order and an adjective to describe the audience?

A journal published by Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand
Edited by Paula Booker and Marnie Slater
ISBN 978-0-473-13698-7