If You See Something, Say Something.
Disensus can mean widespread disagreement, a failure to reach consensus or a consensus only among those who dissent. Jacques Ranciere uses the term to describe rare moments of genuine democracy whereby new social actors force themselves into the political landscape demanding that their voices, which hitherto have been silent, are finally heard. While what we consider politics is often a ritualised confrontation between opposing parties, armies, or forces, with a known set of protocols on how this resolution will play out, a moment of disensus allows a reconfiguration of how we understand the concept of politics by opening up pre-existing assumptions of social agency.

If you see something, say something is a discussion, exhibition and publishing project in Sydney and Melbourne in January and February 2007. Principally this will revolve around an exhibition that will involve a small number of international and Australian artists whose work has explored aspects of disensus – by either questioning prevailing notions of consensus or by exploring new possibilities of social agency. Rather than being an exhibition of political art this exhibition will aim to question how we actually understand the connections between politics and aesthetics. The exhibition will be complemented by workshops and this newspaper.

Of particular interest has been the role of the artist as a researcher. In Argentina during the crisis and uprising of 2001 the term “militant researcher” was popularly used to describe an engaged approach to seeking an understanding of reality. As the research group Colectivo Situaciones explains the researcher-militants’ “quest is to carry out theoretical and practical work oriented to co-produce the knowledges and modes of an alternative sociability, beginning with the power (potencia) of those subaltern knowledges.” In engaging with social realities artists have increasingly become archivers, publishers and researchers. This exhibition will bring together some of these research projects which have informed both how these artists have worked and whose generosity and enthusiasm make “another world possible.”

Keg de Souza and Zanny Begg, project initiators

If you see something, say something

“If you see something, say something,” was pasted on bus shelters and train stations around the world in the wake of the 9/11 bombings asking us to view those around us with fear and suspicion. But do we see this government sponsored vision of the world or do these advertisements move us to say something very different? In the state of exception produced by the war on terror we are asked to accept a consensual vision of fear, scapegoating and state sponsored violence. Yet many are moved to dissent from this.

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:
Dmitry Vilenkay (Russia)
Contra File (Brazil)
Etérea (Argentina)
Oliver Ressler (Austria) & Dario Azzellini (Italy)
Taring Padi (Indonesia)
Richard DeDomenici (UK)
Al Fadhlil (Iraq)
Hito Steyerl (Germany)
Arlene TextaQueen (Australia)
David Griggs (Australia)
pvi collective (Australia)
SquatSpace (Australia)
Daniel Boyd (Australia)
Astra Howard (Australia)
Keg de Souza (Australia)
Zanny Begg (Australia)

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2007

We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land this publication was produced on, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation.
On the Question of the Political Exhibition.

Who if not we?: Collective Creativity; First What We take is Museum; How do we want to be governed?: There must be an alternative to Conflicts; The Invisible Insurrection of a Million Minds - 20 proposals for imagining the future; RAF show, Taking the Matter into Common Hands; Disobedience; Ex-Argentina /die Wege von Arbeit zum Tun; An Ideal Society Creates Itself; If I Can Dance - I Don't Want to Be Part of your Revolution, Communism etc.

“A specer is haunting Europe”, the specer of the political exhibition. Once in a while, it appears on traditional terrain, in the space of internationally recognised artistic institutions, but more often than not, it arises in a slew of new places unknown to most, existing in a variety of contexts, without any substantial financial support, but driven by the strength of enthusiasm of its participants.

Some people say that this is yet another trend of artistic fashion, while others speak of the birth of a new avant-garde, but for the vast majority of cultural agents in more traditional forms of exhibition-praxis, this tendency provokes aggression and irritation. This is especially the case in Russia, where we have practically never been faced with the phenomena of the political exhibition in its contemporary Western European sense. In Russia, the political dimension of culture is usually understood as something that either caters to the power of the state or designs some new corporate identity, or engages in yet another “political-technological” game played by spin-doctors and opinion-makers, an “artistic” project to decorate another carded election. True, Russia’s tradition of political struggle reaches back to the 19th century and pertains to an extreme important place to cultural production; true, this tradition remained viable throughout the first post-revolutionary decade, but today, this tradition is perceived as a “relic of the past”, belongs to ancient history. From the mid-1990s onward, politics and culture in the Soviet Union progressively lost their emancipatory character, becoming completely subordinate to the existing order of things, which continued to legitimate itself through the revolution or the political system of soviets on a purely rhetorical level, having lost any and all potential for self-renewal. In this sense, the hegemony of the single-party-state led to the total annihilation of the political and fostered the hegemony of the single-party-state led to the total annihilation of the political and fostered the total annihilation of the political and fostered the 

effectivity of the political exhibition’s actual strategy is defined by local situations, but the true meaning of both approaches lies in the desire to create/invent/imagine new places for the common.

The political exhibition arises in the process of interdisciplinary interaction. This process is not based on pre-determined knowledge, limited by the traditions of pre-existent disciplines (i.e. sociology, economics, philosophy, urbanism etc.). Instead, art becomes the spark and the catalyst for encounters between these fields, presenting them with new challenges and goals. This leads to the erosion of the dogmatism of knowledge (savoir) and the narrow approaches of professional guilds, and brings about a process of knowing (connaissance), a creative cognitive process based in the micro-politics of interdisciplinary dialogue. It is in this sense that we can speak of the production of emancipatory counter-knowledge and aesthetic experience, which is the political exhibition’s main result.

The political exhibition aims at achieving cultural hegemony. However, this striving toward hegemony has nothing to do with the old models of party dictatorship in cultural policy, or the dominance of one political discourse or one unified aesthetic style. Instead, it entails the strategic construction of the hegemony of subjectivity, critical and unaccountable to any and all forms of sovereign power.

The political exhibition produces new models of communication and positions itself as a form of public space.

The political exhibition demonstrates an activist approach to art. In this sense, it continues the philosophical tradition expressed in Marx’s 11th Thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.” In this sense, the political exhibition needs to avoid purely contemplative at all costs; in fact, such passive aesthetisation represents a fundamental danger. Instead, the political exhibition demonstrates the possibility for aesthetic and social change, revealing the difference between what the world is today and what it could become.

The political exhibition strives to address an audience that differs from the traditional audience of an art-exhibition in terms of social origin and class composition. It mobilizes the spectator to find himself as a political subject. In actualizing the political potential of the “prospective spectator”, it approaches everyone with the challenge to become a critical co-author by participating in the actions and discussion it will provoke, calling for active participation and action taken in common.

The political exhibition produces new models of public spaces to undertake its representations. Today, it becomes more evident that in the topic with the most potential is not the infiltration of existing structures but the creation of new spaces, not estrnism but exodus. The tactical

10. The process of creating political exhibitions is self-critical with regard to its possibilities and the legitimacy of its power.

It goes without saying that these points for discussion have a certain ideal quality, but their postulates are little more than an extrapolation of the possibilities that existing exhibition practices already provide. It is this new experience that allows us to speak of realism – and not of utopia – when we talk about the repoliticisation of art. To confirm this idea, I would like to draw the reader’s attention to an important observation by Paolo Virno:

“I have the impression that to speak about utopia today in a positive terms is a little like living beneath one’s means. That is, all of the things are today within arm’s reach, beneath our eyes, and within here and now in which we live. Looking more deeply at the things is as if the elements of this utopia were all visible, but hidden under the slab of ice, for something that participates in some way in our present and that is part of the visible order. The difficulty is rather in acting with a kind of fullness of the times where everything is expanded, where, how-ever, some forces rather than some other prevail. Everything is localized even if poorly guaranteed. In the exodus, you go elsewhere, with actions, praxes, and initiatives. No longer an ideal in itself of unobtainable utopia, in which if we ever collide with an absolute reality of the ideal and its tangibility.”


2. Virno and Marco Scotini, Disobedience (Footnotes)

a) Ivan Dougherty Gallery.

Dmitry Vilenksy is part of the art collective Chito Delata? This article is based on a talk presented at the Sydney Social Forum, September 2005, as part of the Disobedience exhibition (Ivan Dougherty Gallery).

(Footnotes)
Articulation of protest

Every articulation is a montage of various elements - voices, images, colors, passions or styles - which emerge from the present and with a certain expand in space. The significance of the articulated moments depends on this. They only make sense within this spatial and temporal position. So how is protest articulated? What does it articulate and what articulates it?

The articulation of protest has two levels: on the one hand, it indicates finding a language for the personal experience of protest or the visualization of political protest. On the other, however, this combination of concepts also designates the procedures, through which these films are produced. The articulation is not is the foreground there, but rather the analysis of its organization and staging. The comparison between different positions or establish new forms of production - only apparently for a different perception of the corporate media's manner of producing political significance, the procedures, through which these films were made.

Ici et Ailleurs

The film Ici et Ailleurs is an impassioned form of political discourse. It was made for the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. The days of protest and their events are edited in chronological form. The film is characterized by a clear opposition between political and economic concerns. Two film segments - and to address their implicit contradiction and the convergence of both, at different levels. In relation to protest, the question of political significance, the organization of its expression - but also the exclusion of the organization.

National protest movements are articulated at multiple levels: at the level of demands, self-obligean, manifestations and actions. This also involves the political and the exclusion on subject matter, priorities and the perception of political events. These movements are also articulated as concatenations or conjunctions of different individual groups, NGOs, political parties, political movements or groups. Alliances, coalitions, fractions, fraternities, or even the relationship between individuals. The articulation is the result of a political field edited, and which political significances are generated in this way. This requires a considerable logistic effort, and not only for the production, but also for the distribution of the Indymedia office. In an oppositional articulation - instead of a mere concatenation of images. Images, sounds and positions are organized, edited and staged to begin with. They reflect on the stagings of the figures - only to leave everything as it was. Yet we must not only ask ourselves how this voice of the people is articulated, but also why this voice of the people functions here like a blind spot, a lacuna. Does this mean that the empty topos of the voice of the people only covers up a lacuna, specifically the lacuna of the discourse of capital, which is supposed to be legitimized by invoking the people?

Articulation of protest

I would like to discuss these issues on the basis of two film segments - and to address their implicit contradiction and the convergence of both, at different levels. In relation to protest, the question of political significance, the organization of its expression - but also the exclusion of the organization.

Chains of Production

I work on the assumption that such issues on the basis of two film segments - and to address their implicit contradiction and the convergence of both, at different levels. In relation to protest, the question of political significance, the organization of its expression - but also the exclusion of the organization.

I like to discuss these issues on the basis of two film segments - and to address their implicit contradiction and the convergence of both, at different levels. In relation to protest, the question of political significance, the organization of its expression - but also the exclusion of the organization.

Showdown in Seattle

The film Showdown in Seattle is an impassioned form of political discourse. It was made for the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999. The days of protest and their events are edited in chronological form. The film is characterized by a clear opposition between political and economic concerns. Two film segments - and to address their implicit contradiction and the convergence of both, at different levels. In relation to protest, the question of political significance, the organization of its expression - but also the exclusion of the organization.

Godard/Mieville ask: how do the two films confront? How do they relate to the principles of mass culture will blindly absorb? How do they choose an entirely different scene - they show the power of the streets, the power of the crowds. Images, sounds and positions are organized, edited and staged to begin with. They reflect on the stagings of the figures - only to leave everything as it was. Yet we must not only ask ourselves how this voice of the people is articulated, but also why this voice of the people functions here like a blind spot, a lacuna. Does this mean that the empty topos of the voice of the people only covers up a lacuna, specifically the lacuna of the discourse of capital, which is supposed to be legitimized by invoking the people?

The film is shotting up to day, but not in an oppositional, conscious sense. A position in the field of political theory, and art does not mean to be a political artist. The film is shotting up to day, but not in an oppositional, conscious sense. A position in the field of political theory, and art does not mean to be a political artist. The film is shotting up to day, but not in an oppositional, conscious sense. A position in the field of political theory, and art does not mean to be a political artist.
TEXTAQUEEN:
... I like the camera more than the documentarian and it takes me stepping way back or maybe right in to see what I'm doing as more than (objectively) documenting what I see which is the people I ask and choose to draw... But of course the pictures turn out the way they do because its me as the person I am situated as, who I am, meeting who I meet, identifying with who I identify with, and asking them to be the vehicle to illustrate our ideas in naked texta form...

VANESSA:
I know that our particular portraits had the theme of the show in mind, but I can't help but feel that had you asked me to come up with something without there having been any pre-established political undertones, that mine would not have turned out much different... it was representative of so much of what I have been feeling like for the past five to 10 years. It felt natural that it looked just as it did as BOTH a portrait of the person I understand myself to be, in so many ways, and as representative of my concerns for "anyone" living in a similar world as the one I find myself in. And I have been thinking of this show as relating to a "fear culture" of sorts, mine of course being a fear of weakness and dysfunction... which is as personal as it is a political analysis, for me.

FRANCESCA:
... I've regarded, for a few years, the actual portraits that come into existence as just one little symptom or side effect – and the only public manifestation – of a whole special lucky experience of knowing the people I draw and I share. I don't feel like we are finally shouting our voices to the world, I mean haven't we been shouting to each other? and we are the world...
**THE LOYAL CITIZENS UNDERGROUND**

**A message from the l.c.u.**

"you know, history is littered with examples of ordinary people, like us, responding to issues of our time and choosing to not sit back and ignore them, but to actively participate and look out for their country.

In post war germany, the ministry for state security was way ahead of their time with citizens being encouraged by their government to take more social responsibility. They pioneered a ground-breaking plan for ordinary people to keep each other in line, enlisting one in 50 citizens to monitor their family & friends for subversive behaviour in their own workforces & neighborhoods. The stasi succeeded for 39 years, making it one of the longest most famous supervisions of any society in history. really a great effort and one which I’m sure made citizens think twice about committing any offences.

similar things are happening now. America’s government haven’t been afraid to pick up the challenge of social reform by launching their innovative ‘tips’ program. this is a modern day network of 1 million citizen informers who are paid to report on any suspicious activity, they are known as ‘home front’ security and are a great asset to law enforcement, as they behave as the eyes and ears inside their community.

now, its clear to us that our troubled society is dictating a similar service in australia. we can work towards reforming our behaviour in this country, all it takes is a little social responsibility and a progressive program that doesn’t shy away from doing some of the dirty work.

as the crime prevention unit clearly states on their website, ‘tackling crime is no longer a job just for the police, we need our community to get involved and work with us to make our state a safer and more secure place to live.’

and that’s where the loyal citizens underground comes in. we have set ourselves the mission of educating people like yourselves, who are maybe a little socially repressed or unapologetically inclined on the fundamental co’s and don’t’s that are expected of loyal australians.

The l.c.u’s action plan aims to uphold social standards thru regular street patrols in high risk areas. even though we are not law enforcement officers, we have taken it upon ourselves to stand at the front line as agents of social change. our first goal is to seek cooperation, but if other people do not follow the rules, then obviously, we need some ability to do something about it.

and that’s why we are armed with our colour coded codes, [code of conduct cards], which will aid us in reforming behavior. all members of the l.c.u. have a comprehensive knowledge of current state & federal legislation on civil disobedience as well as extensive training in conflict resolution and verbal judo, which is why we feel confident that we are actually making a difference out there.

It is important to be aware of the very fabric of our culture rests upon the commands of others. Our very existence can be threatened by disobedience. if you really want to reform, you need to learn how to comply and remember, together, we can make a difference.

Ben & Jackson - l.c.u. patrollers dec 2006
Secret Pockets

A conversation between AARON GACH, founder of the Center for Tactical Magic and GREGORY SHOLETTE. January, 2006

Somewhere along the border areas where familiar cultural references and recognisable social interactions brush up against tacit systems of power and control, the Center for Tactical Magic (CTM) has carved out a niche for itself. A.C. GACH, the CTM founder, Aaron Gach, describes projects such as the Tactical Ice Cream Unit, the Cricket-Activated Defense System, and the Ultimate Jacket as “opportunities for heightened clarity in communication...even when the audience doesn’t explicitly regard our work as ‘art.’” For Gach, political mobilization and cultural production are part of inhabiting a series of identities that all employ tactical forms of creativity. Having learned from experience that “private investigators, magicians, and ninjas all use secret pockets in their day-to-day activities” Gach maintains that the “secret pocket” not only holds the key to Power but is, in its own right, a key to understanding power.

Gregory Sholette emailed Aaron Gach his thoughts about the concept of “data aesthetic,” and asked him to respond. An edited version of the exchange follows:

GREGORY SHOLETTE:
As far as I know, the notion of information or “data” understood as an artistic medium simply does not arise in classical aesthetics. Perhaps, Kant would have relegated it to the category of empirical knowledge. In terms of a theory of a data aesthetic therefore, one might initially argue that the sheer onslaught of information today — primarily in the form of content-packets we receive from an increasing multitude of sources from email, to internet, to cellular phones, to mp3 players, to public advertising — approaches the Kantian notion of the “empirical realm.” Moreover, the too vast and too variable to be fully graspable and therefore experienced as both thrilling, and simultaneously startling, or even frightening. The philosopher Lyotard, who in The Postmodern Condition, post-modern art itself as a type of aesthetic sublime in so far as it manifests the very impossibility of achieving adequate representation of contemporary life. Returning to this notion of data aesthetic then, it seems a truism that the flow of information today is impossible to fully process. Its volume and its velocity are literally super-human. Nevertheless, there are certain data sets that are inherently legible (though not always meant to be). Of course, by conjuring such characters as Gandalf, Harry Potter, Sarahina, and John Edwards, popular media also adds to the promising narrative of modernity. The popular character, Dumbledore, a demented sorcerer from Harry Potter, is potentially able to make one “invisible.”

AARON GACH:
Like “art” the word “magic” can be very confusing for people. It seems like there are two different streams of trickery, illusion, mysticism, fantasy, and a vast array of products, services, and popular culture references. Many of these notions evoke a dismissive response from people when they encounter the term, partly because they tend to immediately latch onto a single notion of magic – cheesy Las Vegas side show; drenched in Witchy hump; Dungeons & Dragons wannabe; Saturday Night Live; fast food; reality TV; and so forth. Of course, by conjuring such characters as Gandalf, Harry Potter, Sarahina, and John Edwards, popular media also adds to the promising narrative of modernity. The popular character, Dumbledore, a demented sorcerer from Harry Potter, is potentially able to make one “invisible.” In other words, it is designed for intervention of my generation in the ‘70s/’80s, or even that of the previous one in the 60s, in so far as we sought to demystify the mechanisms of the stage itself, or in Brechtian terms to reveal the technology that produced an illusion of reality to be at the service of powerful, anti-humanist interests.

GACH:
If you demystify, do you then assume that the “reality” you expose isarker or more somber than the reality being performed daily? Hopefully not. Gach in “Ultimate Jacket” states origin of the “secret pocket” that harbors useful items for interdiction, but also creates a space where meaningful shifts in consciousness and action can occur.

GACH:
If you see something, say something.
On the first weekend at the beginning of the 34 days of Israeli bombing of Lebanon in July 2006 I’d been eaten up with anxiety for days. Instead of logically hiding inside all day, I felt manic and the need to get up and out, not knowing why and where... and somehow I remembered that I had yet to see the work of Arab artists at the MCA’s Biennale show (a rare and precious opportunity, to have multiple choices of contemporary Arab cultural production accessible in town). I found the Akram Zaatari video work in a dim border-line corridor, between two brightly lit galleries. ... this is what I was meant to do, in the largest city of the country that was obliterating the humanity of our existence, through its support of the catastrophe unfolding in Lebanon... in keeping with its ongoing support of the catastrophes in Palestine and Iraq.

On this day, Zaatari’s video work took on renewed meanings. But it was not Zaatari’s and Zaatari of Lebanon, during the Israeli invasion of 1982; it was not (the first Gulf War / American invasion of Iraq in) 1991; it was 2006. Within his video work, they were literally digging deep into the earth, to patiently locate and gently cradle evidence of our humanity. The work nurtured my love of detail - the split-screen multi-narratives, the visual use of personal documentation, the wrapping of bigger pictures around a smaller, theme-narrative - drawing me in, desiring closure, through the buried handwritten letter, encapsulated in time. And within the experience of uncannily ending up there alone on a miserable day, on the first weekend of incessant bombing, was the possibility of breathing through the paralysis... the evidence of everyday human details of survival and resistance, love and respect, that I needed to believe were hidden within the earth of Lebanon on that very weekend.

If You See Something Say Something, as a title, plays on government media campaigns that encourage a nasty kind of ‘neighbourhood watch’ during this era of “the war on terror”. In reflecting on Zaatari’s work, not only are there references to recent state versus, there are also excursions of what you cannot see and what you often cannot understand or say. For many artists in our communities, the past is very much part of our present, where we feel that we always have to start the story each time from the very beginning. Just ask any Palestinian. As a non-indigenous person born on this land, how could I begin to understand the stories buried within the earth here? Maybe if I acknowledge this, then I can also work to understand some of our stories ... There is a dominating convenience in the language of this era, of placing everything under the umbrella of ‘the war on terror’. As critical artists and cultural workers we can also work outside of this framework and reflect on many cultural / political wars that have operated before, during and after 2001. Some recent cultural production work that I have been involved with does not need to be related to this era of repression and militarisation, since the 2001 attacks on America, in order to be subject to monitoring or censorship. However, this specific context does exacerbate everything.

On a more abstract level, I could reflect on ‘absences’ and ‘invisibilities’ in our historical, cultural and political landscapes that are insidious ‘non-evidence’ of wars on culture and freedom, of expression and representation. So, if you cannot see something, how can you still say something?

In August / September 2006, one way of breathing through initial paranoia about escalations of war on the Arab World, was an intense quick response exhibition of 45 Arab artists at Mori Gallery in Sydney, co-curated by Moura Zayah and myself. It bore the fruits of responses from Arab artists. “T’fouh...” to spit with absolute disgust - and it could have been “t’fouh alaykoum!” or “t’fouh alayhoun!” (“spit on you” or “spit on them”).

Sure, there are fears and concerns amongst some artists in this era of repression - especially if they are non-white refugees or recent migrants – and their experiences often pre-date 2001. The State of NSW in particular has been obsessed with racial profiling (those “OfMiddle Eastern Appearance”) since the mid-1990s, and Islamophobia certainly needed no introduction in 2001. White Australia has historically seen Arabs and Muslims as “aliens”, as they were officially defined through Federation legislation in 1901 - unable to own land or businesses, let alone register a marriage. If I dipped here at this six months, or were even married to an “alien”, you could not get citizenship. Over 100 years ago it was more likely that the political and legal principles of both racism and assimilation were yet to be defined as Syrians or Lebanese on their ID papers.

What did I say earlier about the perceived need to start the story each time from the very beginning? I think I first heard Edward Said say this in an interview too many years ago, and it resonated and remained with me. I will always remember the day that he died. I was working on Arab community cultural projects at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, being suffocated by a disgusting process of ‘design by Soraya Asmar and lighting by Café Hakuwatu, at the time of the first Gulf War / American invasion of Iraq. That old company name resonates with “Australian values”... blah, blah, blah. T’fouh... on that old bag of assimilationist tricks.

Palestine, and the creation of art or writing about the “historical truth” of Palestine, is monitored, vilified, pressured by institutional authorities and often censored – like no other. There are many examples locally and internationally, whether virtual interactions in digital art, or paper and ink presented in public spaces. I will never understand why the parallels with Apartheid South Africa are not blatantly obvious. It would seem a reasonable political strategy to engage in international cultural, academic and economic boycotts. If it is often said that ‘truth’ is the first casualty of war, then these truths have been sacrificed for a very long time, from even before 1948 – and more so by their absence, than by their vilified presence.

At the Performance Space earlier in 2003, an independent show be “of artists as citizens” developed I Remember 1948, a multimedia exhibition and an accompanying cultural programme of events. The vision organically grew from a creative process of oral history documentation, bringing together Palestinian elders and younger Palestinians. The initial dialogues were documented and witnessed by community members and local Arab artists, who subsequently created works inspired by fragments of these stories.

As with T’fouh... three years later, the J Remember 1948 project had international contributions. And within weeks of opening in Sydney, T’fouh... simultaneously had works in a Beirut show (Nadas Beirut, October 2006). Both brought together a diversity of Arab women and men – Palestinian, Lebanese, Iraqi, Moroccon, Egyptian, Syrian, Sudanese... multi-generational in terms of era of migration, age, culture and experience. The J Remember project expresses something about our relatively small Arab arts networks in Australia.

Challenging perceptions of homogeneity – as well as opening up internal differences and dialogues between artists themselves – becomes an inherent outcome of drawing people and work together through interactive processes. In 2005-2006 I worked with Muslim women and girls in a major cultural project based in Auburn, developing a hub of arts workshops and subsequently a multimedia exhibition. Participants were diverse in culture, language, age, politics and personal beliefs. Though government funded – Western Sydney Areas Assistance Scheme funded a project initiated by local Muslim women, developed and managed by Auburn Community Development Network - this was not just a quick-fix project designed to tick policy boxes and to parade outcomes as window dressing with politicians present. Projects such as this are sometimes needed to be part of the linguistic circus – juggling “harmony”, “integration”, “contribution”, “belonging”, “enrichment” and “Australian values”... blah, blah, T’fouh... on that old bag of assimilationist tricks.

The culminating exhibition in May–June 2006, with installation design by Soraya Asmar and lighting by Sarah Davies, transformed an industrial urban space in Auburn into an intimate environment, creating spaces within spaces. Transformation became a key obsession for me, especially during the production phase. My close working relationships with so many of the artists and participants saw a blurring of assumed perceptions of what is “political” and what is “spiritual”. Material and aesthetic transformations of public space, combined with a strong sense of ownership of so many women involved – and the life-changing experiences that some artists spoke about – ultimately reflected a sense of active citizenship.

These days I reflect on the politics of love... raw love that is contextualised politically and creatively. In November 2006, while speaking at the 25th anniversary of Urban Theatre Projects, I reflected that we were speaking to a world that does not need to be part of the linguistic circus – juggling “harmony”, “integration”, “contribution”, “belonging”, “enrichment” and “Australian values”... blah, blah, T’fouh... on that old bag of assimilationist tricks.

Ateeq’oun al afeeya… all strength to you… This longer-term development work does not need to be part of the linguistic circus – juggling “harmony”, “integration”, “contribution”, “belonging”, “enrichment” and “Australian values”... blah, blah, T’fouh... on that old bag of assimilationist tricks.

Inside Out: Muslim Women Exploring Identities and Creative Expressions evolved from a grounded process, just as significant for its intense and open models of cultural work, as for its critical engagement with complex identities and contemporary representations of Muslim women of themselves. This really is the guts of it – active listening and collaboration, working with vision and critical analysis, within the specificities of context and place - always reinventing the models of work. Though on some levels we are still “reacting” – a word I have been using for many years to describe simultaneously speaking in our own terms. Open and critical processes can inspire a particular alchemy, to facilitate the creation of high quality and strong work that can be experienced on many levels.

ateeq’oun al afeeya... all strength to you...
During the summer of 2005, Al Fadhil, who is based in Europe, asked his brother Ahmed to take pictures of their parents’ place in Iraq to document the condition of the people through the habitat of their house. With this project, the artist continues an engagement with Iraq begun in 2003 with the performance I am the Iraq Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale.

The idea of Talking with Ahmed developed from an intensive, internet-based correspondence between the artist and his brother. Ahmed was to be present at the opening to Talking with Ahmed at Cantonale Lugano Museum in Switzerland in May but fate was hiding a tragic surprise: on March 27th, 2006, he was killed in an attack in Baghdad.

The idea of speaking of the existence of people through the medium of their habitat is coherent when speaking of the situation of a family like ours; all the humours of life are fused and reflected in the lives of its members. It takes some time to understand the sense of our way of life: why we have accepted an abode like this, why we have accepted such degradation. Look at the colour of the earth, the bricks, the stones. They seem imbued with suffering, united in a form without identity, but which is at least protective. Let us not cover inside this stronghold of illusion. Let us continue to hope.

In this cruel time, there is not a family in the country that has not lost a son, as has ours, in one of these never-ending wars. In recompense, the dictator gave us some land on which the family built a big house to honour the son’s sacrifice. But conditions worsened and in order to combat the problem of growing poverty, the family had to sell the house and buy another one: the one you see, empty and inhospitable.

With our bundles of belongings, fragments shored against our ruin, we have arrived at the epilogue of our existence. The house is a mirror image of our state: afflicted, disoriented, but alive. Is it still possible to dream knowing that everything has finished in a thousand pieces? Look at our possessions, useful only as witness to the ferocious passage of people and events: they have rendered the earth arid, and to remind ourselves that we once had a garden, we decorate our daily lives with flowers - plastic flowers. Our electrical appliances bear witness too, mute spectators in this sorry place, waiting for a spark, a glimmer of light.

We bear the scars carved into our memory, alongside the inanimate objects, without relief. And when a man comes to resemble the objects he possesses, he ceases to exist.

Look well, dear brother, at these spectral beds in a room separated from us by a distance overflowing with solitude; here our parents lay themselves down to rest.

Our mother, resigned, clutches a portrait of her favourite son, now a long way from home. She hopes for his return, perhaps so she may die in peace.

Our father, who has survived everything, believes in nothing any more, only in his Imam, the redeemer who will come one day to bring some justice and, who knows, maybe some order to this mayhem.

I have always asked myself what the point of having a home is, if this is the result. Believe me, looking in depth into this existence breaks my heart!

Ours is a waiting, a waiting without end.

If you see something, say something.
Aboriginal housing at The Block, community centres, government assets to be sold off, and public housing towers. We also visit locations that are unnoticeable future: a growing commercial art gallery precinct, and new private apartment developments at the eastern end of the suburb. With the tour, the members of SquatSpace draw on their extensive toolkit of aesthetic strategies. We act something like site-specific DMs, mixing the conversation “live” to create an affecting (and sometimes overwhelming) experience for our “tourists.”

It is a commonplace that we cannot direct, save accidentally, the growth and flourishing of plants, however lovely and enjoyed, without understanding their causal conditions. It should be just as understandable that aesthetic understanding – as distinct from sheer personal enjoyment – must be constantly renewable in a way that reflects our contemporary relationship of things esthetically admirable rise.

With this statement, John Dewey deploys a botanical metaphor to connect art with life. Rather than cutting a flower at its stem and throwing it away, I am urged to admire it in the garden, grounded in the earth where it grows. Similarly, aesthetics, for Dewey, is a situated practice in which our senses are stimulated and challenged continuously in the places and spaces we inhabit every day. In his 1934 book Art as Experience, Dewey sought to restore continuity between aesthetic experiences usually thought to reside only in “special” places like museums and galleries, and those that happen in our daily lives. As a result, both spheres might be enriched. Art within museums would be viewed as intertwined with a wider ecology of cultural practices, and everyday life could be equipped with a set of aesthetic tools to make sense of, and enhance, its rhythms, forms and intensities.

SquatSpace’s Redfern-Waterloo Tour of Beauty belongs to a long tradition of art which attempts to connect aesthetic participation with a rhetoric of participatory democracy. In contemporary art, “participation” has often been used by artists and critics to connote a kind of liberating function. The involvement of the audience can be framed as a substitutive move towards a model of idealised social democracy. In allowing the audience to share responsibility for governing their own lives, this relationship between aesthetic interactive and participatory democracy is formalized.

Art within museums would be viewed as intertwined with a wider ecology of cultural practices, and everyday life could be equipped with a set of aesthetic tools to make sense of, and enhance, its rhythms, forms and intensities.

SquatSpace’s Redfern-Waterloo Tour of Beauty takes place in the contested, contested inner-Sydney suburbs of Redfern and Waterloo. These areas, which have for many years housed a large proportion of Indigenous residents and low income public housing tenants, are now seen as potentially valuable land for real estate speculation. In late 2004, the New South Wales state government created the Redfern Waterloo Authority (RWA), effectively excising a slice of land south of Sydney’s central business district from the jurisdiction of the local council, thereby taking control of the entire state. With this legal sleight of hand, the government can now push through commercial redevelopment plans, sell off local assets, and override existing heritage regulations under the pretext that the land is too important to be subject to normal planning laws.

Not surprisingly, this heavy-handed approach to urban planning has generated great anxiety amongst the numerous local stakeholders. Many of the artists in the SquatSpace collective live in the Redfern area. We wanted to “do something” about this alarming situation, but we were wary – what would we intervene in a supposedly democratic process when the proper channels of consultation had been swept away, and where traditional dissent seemed fruitless?

The group embarked on a process of conversational research that began with local community representatives in an attempt to understand, from their perspectives, what the RWA’s actions might mean for life in the area. It became clear that the “locals” felt strongly about their own predicament - we could not do justice to their wealth of knowledge and depth of emotion by utilising second-hand information in the production of an artistic intervention. In fact, we discovered that the more people we spoke to, the more we were referred to others who would report different experiences of their particular situations.

SquatSpace organised its first Redfern-Waterloo Tour of Beauty in September 2005 to investigate the disjuncture between the Redfern-Waterloo Authority’s plans and the current lives of local people. “Tourists” are transported by mini-bus, or travel en masse by bicycle, to each stop. Here they are greeted by a local, who speaks briefly about the place and his/her connection to it, answering questions and facilitating discussion before we move on to the next site. The tour visits several endangered sites in the area: the former residence of Richard DeDomenici, scenes from the 2005 London Bombings, a site of indigenous occupation.

In this, the Tour of Beauty resembles the Western Cape Action Tours (WEACT) in Cape Town, South Africa. These tours are run by former members of the Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK), the armed wing of the African National Congress who fought against the old apartheid regime of South Africa. They visit the Cape Flats – a place “most white South Africans are aware of rising crime rates and a history of unrest, would never dream of visiting.” Heidrich-Granemann-Ralp describes the passionate and conflict-laden stories told on the Western Cape Action Tours as a process of “claiming one’s own memories”. This is impossible in national memorials of apartheid atrocities because of the necessity for the official voice to speak with a certain “propriety” and thus efface individual, messy and contradicting accounts. Similarly, on the Tour of Beauty speakers represent themselves, and not an official, editorially sanctioned position.

After each tour, SquatSpace uploads reports, information, links, and photos onto its website. On the site, “tourists” are able to write about their own experiences, a diachronic process which directly feeds back into the way we carry out subsequent tours. Importantly, rather than exploiting a local political situation for the production of a gallery-based artwork, the group has, in fact, begun to produce a series of relationships. We choose not to instrumentalise these relationships in the production of a commodified art object. Rather, the work–that-art–does is to allow “knowledge” to emerge, through social interaction in contested places. In the process, SquatSpace’s developing network of local knowledge becomes a resource in its own right, feeding back into the very earth from which it springs.

Lucas Ihlein is a member of the SquatSpace Collective.

Footnotes:

1 Dewey, J., 1934, Art as Experience, Capricorn Books, New York, p. 25


Richard DeDomenici

Richard DeDomenici decided to find out in a daring street performance outside Helsinki Railway Station in 2005. He managed to remain in his suitcase for several minutes before beginning to asphyxiate. At no point was he exploded by the authorities.

His work is about risk, but managed risk.

To view footage of the performance, simply cut the accompanying image into 4 equally sized pieces, put them in the correct order, and staple along the left side.

Alternatively, visit: www.dedomenici.co.uk

Unattended Baggage

What happens when you see what you think is a piece of unattended baggage, but, in actuality, the baggage is attended by the person from inside? There’s a potential conflict of interest here. It’s a grey area. Artist Richard DeDomenici likes to work in grey areas; that’s why he lives in Watford.
A week ago I went on the *Tour of Beauty*, a tour of the Redfern Waterloo area organised by SquatSpace. It was a brutally cold day and for ages I couldn’t decide whether to go or not. When I came home that night that indecision seemed faraway and quaint because so much had happened.

The first place we visited was a few minutes walk from my house. The tour bus pulled up near a house that looked about the same as any large terrace in the area. I noticed this place walking home before because there are often kids hanging around out the front. One of the workers there, Lyn Turnbull, gave us a short introduction to the centre and then invited us in. The facade gave no indication of what was inside: a short corridor covered in paint and posters led into a spacious hall big enough for a basketball court and a small audience, with a raised stage at the end. Paintings were hung everywhere, and there were coloured handprints and paintings all over the walls. It was like a shearing shed that had been taken over by exuberant inner-city kids. Outside in the yard was an old upright piano and bits and pieces of furniture.

This set the rhythm for the rest of the tour. We would drive for a while, arrive somewhere and, miraculously, our next speaker would be there waiting for us. I felt like we were part of something clandestine.

By this stage the windows of the bus were fogged up and water was sloshing against them from outside. We drove to Alexandria to pick up one of the speakers from her house, Jenny Munro, from where we would drive back to The Block so she could talk to us about some of the issues going on there. The rain didn’t look good; she invited us inside. Suddenly I was hunched in a kitchen listening to the founders of the 1972 Canberra Tent Embassy talk about Black politics. This was the highlight of the tour. It wasn’t just what they said and the careful, intense way they went about saying it, but the fact they’d let fifteen or so strangers bundle into their house for tea and biscuits without a second thought. It was humbling and said so much about them.

We visited the Waterloo housing towers where resident Ross Smith was waiting for us. One of the stories he told was about the group of old people dubbed “the jury” who sat each day in the lobby of one of the buildings and passed comment on whoever walked by. In this way, he explained, they checked up on each other: they knew which person left at 10:15am every morning to go to the club, and if they weren’t there then someone would have to go and see why.

From here we walked across the housing estate to where Ray Jackson was waiting for us against an old fence around an oval. After drily congratulating us for turning up in the bad weather, he started telling a story. Though it took him a long time to say the name, it was soon clear he was talking about TJ Hickey. Ray walked us through a detailed story of his death and what had happened. The story was complex and detailed and left us aghast, desolate. The couples in the group found each other and started holding. I’d been standing alone but I moved over to Vanessa and put my arm around her. I looked away to two kids playing basketball on the court with the net ripped off. Ray said goodbye and walked across the park home.

We got back in the bus and drove to a new development made of plastic and glass, in the area renamed “East Redfern” - an example of how language can have real effects by segregating communities - or alternatively, “Legoland”. Here Michael King was waiting for us beside a decorative water feature. Because the weather was still bad he climbed in the bus to speak to us about developments of this kind and the impact they have on communities like Redfern and Waterloo. I was glad to hear him criticise the way Redfern-Waterloo is always framed as ‘a problem’. This is true of the public housing towers in Waterloo, which are geographically hidden and people: there’s something shameful. Really these communities are ones to be proud of and to learn from, as Ross Smith had made so clear earlier on. If East Redfern was the future of Redfern the outlook was grim. Michael King refused a lift and walked home.

The Tour of Beauty bus - in a pleasing irony, the same bus that shuttles Sydney Uni students between Fisher Library and Redfern Station precisely so they don’t have to experience Redfern - dropped me off near my house. When I got home I felt overwhelmed by everything I’d seen and it all hit me. On the phone later, Vanessa and I were both lost for words.

A week later I wonder what it is I took away from the tour. I left feeling so surprised at the quiet, intelligent voices of this suburb. They weren’t the shrill voices of politics, and everywhere else; they were voices that moved back and forth, that knew what it felt like to be spoken over. The tour as a whole took about four hours. It’s rare that I spend four hours on any task these days.

When I came home that night that indecision seemed faraway and quaint because so much had happened.
If You See Something, Say Something.

SYDNEY:
FRIDAY JAN 26 • OPENING
Gallery 4a: 6-8pm. Artists: Daniel Boyd, Hito Steyerl, Oliver Ressler and Dario Azzellini's 5 Factories—Worker Control in Venezuela. Mori Gallery, film 6pm, followed by question and answer session with Oliver Ressler. Sponsored by the Bolivarian Circle, LASNET and the Australian Venezuela Solidarity Network (AVSN).
MONDAY JAN 29 • FILM SCREENING
Oliver Ressler and Dario Azzellini’s 5 Factories—Worker Control in Venezuela. Mori Gallery, film 6pm, followed by question and answer session with Oliver Ressler. 7.30pm. Sponsored by the Bolivarian Circle, LASNET and the AVSN.
MONDAY FEB 5 • OPENING
Chrsissie Cotter Gallery: 6-8pm. Artists: Contra Filé. Gallery hours 12-6pm Wednesday to Saturday, exhibition runs until February 17. Phone 9335 2222.
WEDNESDAY FEB 7 • OPENING
Mori Gallery: 6-8pm. Artists: Arlene TextaQueen, Al Fadhil, Etcétera, Contra Filé, SquatSpace, pvi collective, Astra Howard and Keg de Souza and Zanny Begg. Performance by Justice Yeldham. Gallery hours 11-6pm Wednesday to Saturday, exhibition runs until March 3. Phone 9283 2904.

SATURDAY FEB 3 • WORKSHOP
Taring Padi: 3pm, Gallery 4a.
SATURDAY FEB 10 • WORKSHOP
Contra Filé (Portuguese with English translation): Chrisissie Cotter Gallery, 2-4pm.
SUNDAY FEB 11 • WORKSHOP
Etcétera: Mori Gallery 2-4pm.
SATURDAY FEB 10 • CLOSING PARTY
The Chocolate Factory Basement 9pm.
SUNDAY FEB 18 • SQUATFEST: THE ANTI TROPFEST FILM FEST
(text “squat” to 0428 477 128 for venue details)
SATURDAY FEB 24 • REDFERN-WATERLOO TOUR OF BEAUTY
Presented by SquatSpace; meet at the top of Little Eveleigh St, next to Redfern Train Station 2pm.
WEDNESDAY FEB 28 • FEEDBACK
Is it possible to bring political art into the gallery? a wrap up and debrief of If You See Something Say Something, at Loose Projects 6pm, level 2, 168 Day St Darling Harbour.

VENUES:
MORI GALLERY:
168 Day St Darling Harbour
GALLERY 4A, THE ASIA-AUSTRALIA ARTS CENTRE:
181-187 Hay Street Sydney
CHRISISSIE COTTER GALLERY:
Pidcock St Camperdown

MELBOURNE:
THURSDAY JAN 25 • FILM SCREENING
Oliver Ressler and Dario Azzellini’s 5 Factories—Worker Control in Venezuela: 6pm, Trades Hall, followed by question and answer session with Oliver Ressler. Sponsored by the Bolivarian Circle, LASNET and the AVSN. Phone: 0431 720 787.

VENUES:
MORI GALLERY:
168 Day St Darling Harbour
GALLERY 4A, THE ASIA-AUSTRALIA ARTS CENTRE:
181-187 Hay Street Sydney
CHRISISSIE COTTER GALLERY:
Pidcock St Camperdown

SPONSORS:
This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council for the Arts, its arts funding and advisory body.

wwwIFYOUSEESOMETHINGSAYSSOMETHING.NET
Exhibition, workshops and newspaper project. Sydney and Melbourne January/February 2007

**PARTICIPATING ARTISTS:**
- Dmitry Vilenksy (Russia)
- Contra Filé (Brazil)
- Etcétera (Argentina)
- Oliver Ressler (Austria)
- & Dario Azzellini (Germany)
- Tariq Padi (Indonesia)
- Richard DeDomenici (UK)
- Al Fadhil (Iraq)
- Hito Steyerl (Germany)
- Arlene TextaQueen (Australia)
- David Griggs (Australia)
- pvi collective (Australia)
- SquatSpace (Australia)
- Daniel Boyd (Australia)
- Astra Howard (Australia)
- Keg de Souza (Australia)
- Zanny Begg (Australia)

**MAIN IMAGE:** The G20 members, made up of the world’s economic leaders, get down to business at the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Melbourne Nov 18-19 2006.
2016: An archive project

Ray, interviewed Redfern Department of Housing, November 25th, 2006:

‘I have lived in Redfern for 15 years when I was first moved into this Department of Housing apartment in James Cook Building. When I first saw the name I thought, well I am going to change that, but I found out that all these building here are heritage and because they originally started out with the navy they all have naval names of some sort.

...I don’t mix much, I just tend to be here working or I am out of the place, but its reasonably quiet, the sirens go every now and then and we call that the Redfern lullaby... but it doesn’t bother me, it’s a neighbourhood that’s vibrant, we have our crime but then so do other places, we have an over zealous police force but then so do other places, I love living here, thirteen flights up, I only wish I was higher....

The changes will destroy us, they are not only out to remove the Black face out of Redfern/Waterloo they want to move the department of housing out too, they want to move the poor out, for such an area as this to be on such valuable land and its been subsidized so the poor can live here goes against any patterns of what the government understands as the bottom line. This place is valuable, very, very, valuable and they want to make money out of it. Their first push, of course, is to get ‘The Block’, but that is going to be a fight and a half, and I don’t think they are going to win on that, I think it will be a compromise, but it will be loss for us nonetheless. The Block remaining in Aboriginal hands is the only way we is the only way we will see it. What Mickie Mundine wants to do there with the housing company, personally I don’t fully agree with it, but its much preferable to what the government wants to do with it.

Now when it comes to removing the Department of Housing, which covers a huge area, again they are going to have a very large scale fight on their hands. One of the humorous stories, if there is humour in these situations, is that we have a large contingent of Russians here – what is termed the white Russians – and they have been here since the Department of Housing took the units over in the late 70s and they have told Frank Sartor and the respective ministers ‘you leave us alone, we will die here and then you can do what you want with the buildings’. Now that is solidarity for you! They are all ancient mate, they are bloody ancient, and they are not going to last long. So we are here by the grace of their ghosts! But there is a grit and a determination – bugger it we will not be moved.

We will stay here, they can blow the place up around us.

...I would like to put more resources into the neighborhood. They start good they put in a tennis court but when the nets start to rot that’s it, they never maintain it. They say that the community should maintain it – but this is Department of Housing, its poor, the community can’t maintain it. Welfare these days is really a welfare, welfare, its people with mental health issues, addictions, all that sort of stuff. There needs to be a lot more done. I would also like to change how cliquish this place can be – these days there is more emphasis on privacy than community. We had one person in the unit opposite there who was dead for five weeks and nobody found him! Later when people were talking about they said they hadn’t seen him for a while...

I like to think we will still be here in ten years, better managed and better self-managed. I certainly hope that we have a better class of copper, ‘cause the police are brutal here’.

With the rapid width of real estate development throughout Sydney and the high costs of property, the inner-city suburb of Redfern has become a prime target for ‘gentrification’. The suburb is situated between Sydney central and the airport, and is part of the land known as the city-airport corridor. It is not only its proximity to the city that has drawn attention to the area but also the fact that the surrounding suburbs have already been hit by previous waves of gentrification.

In response to the rapidly changing urban and social fabric of the Redfern area we have set out to build a small archive. 2016 is the postcode for Redfern but also indicates the time period we aim to continue this archive project. When viewing the outcomes of the documentation over the duration of the project we will be able to see the changes that have occurred over the last 10 years. Overall, the project will be an archive of the sites studied in the area, the archiving process will not only include photographic documentation of the area, but also a series of interviews with local residents.

The sites we have chosen for this project are the nine key sites, as set by the Redfern-Waterloo Authority (RWA). The RWA, formed in late 2004 is a unique authority, unlike any other in Australia. They have been granted sweeping powers, one major one being to override heritage legislation if they deem it to be of state significance. The head of the RWA, Frank Sartor is also the Minister for Planning, this enables him to essentially request permission from himself to allow new developments to take place.

The complexity of the area means that there are no ideal solutions. Gentrification is a natural part of society, though its effect on residents is part of what we would like to document. The interviews we conduct with the residents will shed some light on the general feeling of the local community as the changes take place.

Redfern is a diverse area with a unique, strong Indigenous community around ‘The Block’. And it also has a large number of elderly residents living in public housing. Generally it is a low socio-economic area. Overall it can be said that Redfern has a strong community which the process of gentrification threatens to fragment and displace.

Keg de Souza and Zanny Begg are both Redfern residents. Keg also works with the SquatSpace collective.

Lily, interviewed The Block, November 25th 2006:

“I lived in Redfern from 1981 to 1984, and I now work here at the Performance Space. I like that I know lots of people here, that you can walk through ‘The Block and talk to people and there are Black fellas from all over Australia - its like an extended family, I have my great niece here with me today and she is playing in the park and now she has wandered across the road and I don’t have to worry because she is talking to an uncle and auntie. I couldn’t do that if I was in the city, it would be too dangerous.

After the disbandment of the missions and reserves a lot of people were coming to Sydney for work; it was after the depression too, and everyone seemed to congregate here in The Block. They were squatting in the old houses, it’s a meeting place, a gathering ground.

The changes that they want to bring in... they may as well round us up and put us on the missions, if its going to go ahead like that. They may as well relocate people again, ‘cause that is what is happening, people are being relocated to other areas, like when they relocated people to Mount Druitt there are everyone here straight to Bidwell in Mount Druitt. There are 11 suburbs that constitute Mount Druitt and Bidwell has to be the worst and lots of Aboriginal and Islander peoples end up there. It fragments the community, you break down family relationships, some have been on a hard journey to find their families and then they break apart again. And that’s grief, and we are already born with 218 years of inherited grief and they are just adding to it. This will affect not just Aboriginal people on ‘The Block, but Aboriginal Australia. This place is the Black heart of Australia.”

The nine key sites identified for change by the RWA:

- Australian Technology Park
- Gibbons Street
- South Eveleigh Precinct
- Eveleigh Street Precinct
- Redfern Railway Station
- Former Rachel Forster Hospital
- Formera Local Court House and Police Station
- Redfern Public School
- MacDonaldtown Stabling Yards

We would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation.
Self-Portrait

1788-2006
CITYtalking
Melbourne City Council Laneway Commissions 2006
4 October – 5 November 2006,
Wednesday to Sunday 10am to 4pm.

CITYtalking is an interactive public art project by the Action Researcher/Performer, Astra Howard. A conversation booth was designed, constructed and then wheeled around Melbourne’s CBD for five weeks. Each day the booth would stop in six different laneways across the city and members of the public were encouraged to enter inside in order to engage in a conversation with Astra. Neither person could see one another throughout the dialogue instead speaking anonymously via an intercom.

By creating non-conventional catalysts and situations for strangers to interact, CITYtalking aimed to reach members of the public express quite profound personal, social and political feelings. The aesthetic experience of the situation appears to disable the reservations associated with most forms of face-to-face communication. These works of communication are carried out in public spaces in response to the increasing privatization of public space in cities due to the commercial development on streetscapes including large enclosed shopping malls which allow very limited types of behaviour by certain classes of individuals only. As well, an increase in transit route functions throughout the city diminishes the number of ‘forum spaces’ that would otherwise facilitate in-person local interaction. Locals and visitors are rendered voiceless and any diasensuous narratives that might potentially exist go unexpressed, unpublished and unheard.

The conversation booth facilitated more stories, new stories, and across days, weeks, and months, an alternate consensus formed by people on the streets. For example Leonie, a local homeless woman approached the conversation booth in a frustrated, hostile manner, assuming the booth was yet another consumer gadget designing her out of the city. When she realized its sole purpose was an intimate story-telling space for people like herself to ‘feel at home’ she became quite emotional, expressing deep feelings about her life. The conversation with the intercom voice continued for more than an hour. Rarely, Leonie was getting priority treatment, and best of all, she knew that for some minutes at least her story would be broadcast like all the rest of the accumulated narratives of the city onto the two LED screens that were positioned on the outside of the booth for all to read and possibly experience. That someone was willing to listen to what she had to say and acknowledge that what she was feeling was not only true but also part of a new diasensus was a revelation.

Many passing pedestrians expressed their genuine enthusiasm for the project’s ability to provide a safe space for dialogue between strangers. They also highlighted the lack of such opportunity for individuals to speak about their concerns for the world around them. This being the case, the booth can act as a community asset, in gaol or in a psychiatric ward, people who have not had a secure place to this day. I have been homeless over 100 times in 36 years. My poor sister was a ward of the state her whole childhood. She was picked up by the police in St Kilda and then ended up suspiciously dying. It was all covered up like she had never lived. Six years later we are still here, playing a mix of traditional folk music from Europe and the Middle East. We all learnt our instruments for the band, the accordion player for example was a guitarist, we have just got less and less crap as time goes on. It is about anarchy for us, not really about virtuosity. That is why we all like playing on the street, because people are ready to respond and it is also quite fleeting. The public can stay for as long as they like and so can we. In this way it feels a lot freer.

CITYtalking was an interactive public art project by the Action Researcher/Performer, Astra Howard that created a new public forum for otherwise unheard voices within the city. A conversation booth was designed, constructed and then wheeled around Melbourne’s CBD for five weeks encouraging members of the public to enter and engage in a discussion with an anonymous ‘voice’ via an intercom.

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People have to stop being hyper crits and judgemental and asking why is someone in the gutter, that hurts me shocking. I am powerless and voiceless and intimidated to say anything. They take your personality. I have got to go on, and at the moment, what is keeping me is my singing, it gives me a release. I pick songs that accentuate what I am feeling. I have come down here with my amplifier lately to start busking.

Howley Place. Sunday 8 Oct 2006. Joseph - I am originally from London. I moved to Glasgow to study and then moved to Berlin. I have been in Melbourne for the past two years. A woman drew me here. Some of the cultural stuff in this city gets me down. Unless you have a dodgy 80s haircut and drive a ute you are not really considered to be Australian. I gave up being a professional musician and worked selling pharmaceuticals.

I sold my house in England, it was all very chicky-mickey, snazzy and sophisticated. I have started working for a chemical company here in Melbourne. I have found that Australians are not very open in terms of expressing their feelings. It takes a long while in any conversation before you can get someone to actually admit to how they are.

Centre Place. Saturday 14 October 2006. Renato - I was just busking down here at Centre Place. The members of our band met at Tafe. We were about 19 years old then, all misfits. Six years later we are still here, playing a mix of traditional folk music from Europe and the Middle East. We all learnt our instruments for the band, the accordion player for example was a guitarist, we have just got less and less crap as time goes on. It is about anarchy for us, not really about virtuosity. That is why we all like playing on the street, because people are ready to respond and it is also quite fleeting. The public can stay for as long as they like and so can we. In this way it feels a lot freer.

Bourke Street Mall. Sunday 8 October 2006. Jean - I am from the Western suburbs of Melbourne. I have been selling the Big Issue in Melbourne for the past two months. I love seeing the time moving by watching the shadows change on the pavement. I also love seeing the different way people dress and how the city moves. There are some incredibly generous people out there with an extra buck to hand over. Some days it is rainy and often very cold, but I can change my pitch and buy lots of hot chocolates. I might start bringing a toaster. At the moment I love living in Melbourne. The only thing I do not like is the horse poop.

Cohen Place. Thursday 5 October 2006. Jackie - I work at Vincents Dom, a barber shop. I have been working there for 11 years. We were merged from the Southern Cross Hotel, that is where I used to work, starting back in 1977. People often ask me whether I get bored, but I have never thought of that, you have to be a character who likes talking and listening. I was born in Melbourne. I have two children and the same husband. My son, Peter is twenty, my daughter is sixteen. My daughter is in year ten.

Liverpool Street. Sunday 15 October 2006. Orriel - I have just been to the theatre, to the philosophical society, a typical type-cast bunch of senile people, philosophising about the meaning of life. I have been going to there for the past eight years. It is full of bored middle-aged people, wearing purple sashes and looking scary as sin. I have tried to take my girlfriend there, but she gets eclectically bored.
It is all too rare that a visit to a museum or gallery leaves me satisfied or stimulated, no less thinking about revolution. I am, to be sure, selective about what kinds of work I seek out. That I am more likely to have a satisfying experience walking to the corner grocer than walking the halls of a well-funded art institution says as much about my own desires and where I see creativity operating in the world, as it does about the concerns that occupy most of the art world. But every once and a while a museum visit actually enriches my life. Every now and then, someone uses media in a way that slices through our heavily mediated existence to take me closer to an experience or a body of knowledge otherwise hidden or not easily accessible.

When I traveled to Berkeley, California for the March 26, 2006 opening of Darío Azzellini and Oliver Ressler’s third collaboration, *5 Factories – Worker Control in Venezuela* at the Berkeley Art Museum, I was hopeful that I might learn something, but skeptical that it might be yet another unsatisfying art project about a pressing social and political situation. I was pleasantly surprised. The exhibition, accompanying essays, and panel discussion left me thinking not only about the social and political changes underway in Venezuela, but more broadly about the role of creativity in social revolutions and the implications of celebrating this creativity within the museum.

The *5 Factories* installation marks the beginning of a yearlong exhibition cycle “Now-time Venezuela: Media Along the Path of Revolution.” As the series title indicates, and as organizer Chris Gilbert’s introductory text makes explicit, the works in the series are “not only or even primarily representations of or reflections on this process but...along the path itself.”

This distinction explains one way in which Azzellini and Ressler’s project—and the exhibition cycle as a whole—is important. Unlike other exhibitions about revolutionary processes or projects this one does not, to paraphrase Henri Lefebvre, turn the effects of a strategy into an aesthetic object. It is a documentary piece, but one that leaves the agency of its subject(s) intact. The fact that the videos take the viewer inside a process and let the workers speak for themselves—that they are not actually subjects, but agents—shifts the dynamics in a way that quelled my usual concerns about agency and representation. Like others who work with the Venezuelan people, Azzellini and Ressler have certainly been selective in their choice to interview workers from five worker-controlled factories. Yet their project succeeds in giving the viewer direct access to the voices, experiences, and insights of workers engaged in struggling for and reclaiming the means of production. It reminds the viewer that what is going on right now in Venezuela is not only—or even primarily—about Chavez.

The six-ten-minute video installations feature interviews with workers from five different factories—a textile company, an aluminum plant, a tomato factory, a cocoa factory, and a paper factory. Each of these factories has been reconfigured under a system of co-management sanctioned by the 1999 Bolivarian constitution. The constitution provides legal basis for returning inactive factories to productivity as cooperatives governed and owned by the workers. In some cases, the state provides start-up loans; in others it helps purchase the factory in partnership with the cooperative.

Through the videos the workers explain decision-making in the cooperative and the role of the factory in supporting the surrounding community. They provide thoughtful reflections on intellectual traditions with which they are engaged and the significance of their efforts. Although the situation in each factory is different, the workers share a commitment to a more equitable production process and a better way of life. The interviews, interspersed with sequences of the production process at each plant, give visitors to the museum direct entry into the process of factory reconfiguration. It is to Azzellini and Ressler’s credit that the film is a clear vehicle for accessing this information. It provides a level of detail and a clear voice from the people—that is not readily available.

But what, you may ask, is particularly liberating about it, or about any form of labor per se? But, in a world where labor is a fact of life for most people, the potential for an otherwise oppressive relationship to be transformed into a liberatory one remains latent until it is brought to the fore. Such a transformation is a decisive step in a larger process to transform social relations. For, as Elio Sayago, an environmental technician and member of the aluminum factory Alcasa’s Board of Directors states, “if we concentrate our workers, our people, into the construction of a new relations, which is for us what it is at stake, we are guaranteeing the destruction of...blocking, up until now, of the potential for human growth.” The electricity behind this vision comes through the videos loud and clear.

Carlos Lanz, president of the aluminum factory Alcasa sums it up well when he asks “How does a company push toward socialism within a capitalist framework?” It is clear they are trying by beginning to establish coherent values outside of capital in practice, and making them law in their constitution. Article 113, for example, ensures “the existence of adequate consideration or compensation to serve the public interest,” in the case of the exploitation of natural resources which are “the property of the Nation.” Article 114 makes “economic crime, speculation, hoarding, usury, the formation of cartels and other related offenses” illegal. For the worker-controlled factories, a commitment to social interest is clear. As social production companies (ESP) they give 10 percent of their profit back to the community in which they are based through a local development fund. In two of the factories, everyone gets the same pay regardless of their position in the company. The five factories featured in this film are among 153 that, according to labor minister Maria Cristina Iglesias, are already being managed by workers cooperatives. They are a start along the path of an important shift in our thinking about industrial production and other forms of labor. For, as Azzellini stated during the opening panel, the point is to “put an economy to work for the benefit of society, not put society to work for the benefit of an economy.”

*5 Factories* provides a detailed look at factory reconfiguration, but it is only one component of the recent changes. The film follows the work of Azzellini and Ressler’s previous collaborations, *Venezuela from Below* (2004), which also uses interviews to illustrate a variety of programs and changes, from the oil substate to farmer/struggles, land reforms, grassroots media projects, and a women’s bank. Here again the strength of the project lies in the approach, as viewers hear the thoughts and stories of the people engaged in each action, in their own voice.

That Gilbert is using museum resources to create propaganda “to support, defend, and promote the Venezuelan revolution and the Bolivarian government of Hugo Chavez” is worth some attention. "Works or exhibitions that advance revolutionary aims," he writes, "are, by virtue of what they connect with and contribute to, quite creative." This exhibition cycle is evidence of Gilbert’s commitment to, as he says, “put the superstructure back on the table,” to acknowledge that the political, economic, and social conditions in which we live are the context in which creativity operates, and the sphere in which art gains its relevance and its urgency.

Gilbert’s curatorial agenda distinguishes his work as a kind of organizing in a field where most curators are selecting. This exhibition cycle is in service of agency for the poor, challenging the notion that art and exhibitions are only ever in service of the upper classes. By using museum resources to make visible the inherent creativity of a social revolution, Gilbert subverts the internal micropolitics of art discourse by ignoring them. He puts the macropolitics of the struggle against capitalism back on the table. That he does this from within the institution—the art museum—that perhaps best epitomizes the architecture of bourgeois legitimacy, shows that it is possible to treat the museum as a vehicle in service of something larger than itself. This exhibition cycle is, thus, more than an important gesture within the world of art. A powerful piece of media has been produced—a piece of revolutionary propaganda—that will travel beyond the institutions walls and back out in the world where new creativities take form. And for a brief moment, the institution is transformed into a safe space in which a visitor can gain direct access to information on a very sensitive topic and come to her own conclusions.

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*Endnote: Chris Gilbert resigned from Berkeley Museum after this exhibition. To read why go to www.metamute.org/*
It was December 20, 2003 in Buenos Aires, the “heroic phase” of the Glorious Argentine Revolution was already over, and the politicians who were all supposed to go without even one remaining had all come back home to roost – including the neoliberal chief, former president Carlos Menem. A movement of young artists had begun making life-sized black-and-white photocopies of the colorful revolutionaries whose effigies, captured on film by innumerable photographers, now formed the folklore of an inexorable return to normal. Mounted on hinged wooden backings with snap-out sticks to prop them up in public, these were the Gente Armada, or “Army People.” But the Spanish title doubles the sense of “armed and dangerous” with the idea of a mechanical trick, so it could just as well be “Phony People.”

Set up on the Plaza de Mayo like a fairground attraction, a group of them featured cut-out up missing heads, so that the passing admirer could pose behind them and become “part of the movement.” The artists, who had participated for years in the illegal, carnivalesque demonstrations against accomplices of the former dictatorship, had a slogan to accompany their satirical creation. In English it goes something like this:

“We put our bodies on the line, you put your face in the picture.”

The bodies on the line were Etcétera, who think of themselves less as a group of artists and more as a movement of the surrealistic imagination. During the heyday of the anti-militarist escraches, from 1998 to 2001, they would stage delirious theatrical events in front of the houses of former murderers and torturers, as part of a larger project of denunciation carried out by the sons and daughters of those who disappeared in Argentina’s “dirty war” (H.I.J.O.S. Children for Identity and Justice, against Oblivion and Silence). Politics has always been at the heart of their concerns, but protest tactics of the usual sort would never be enough for Etcétera, whose story is filled with unlikely inventions and improbable encounters. While seeking to squat an empty building for their activities, the collective happened upon the abandoned premises of the former Argonauta publishing house founded by the surrealist Juan Andraus, filled with dusty books, photographs, images, paintings, sculptures, costumes and old mannequins from the 1930s-40s. It was a turning point, a moment of “objective chance,” just as Marcel Duchamp had described it. They built up a library, a darkroom, a studio and a small theater with seats recovered from an old cinema, and they used the materials around them as the accessories of a unique aesthetic, somewhere between the guerrillas of the 1970s and the “gay science” of a Nietzschean future. Their relation to the public became clear when they created the Niño Globalizado (Globalized Boy), with a hand-pump that the art audience could use to blow the child’s belly into a distended globe of hunger. But that was only one station on a longer journey. The point was to develop an art as poetically unpredictable as a dream, and then hurl it like a football into an unbelievable reality.

One of their early protest pieces was the satirical soccer match, “Argentina vs. Argentina,” held before the home of the former dictator, General Galtieri, in June of 1998 during the World Cup pitting Argentina against England. It recalled the waste of life in the Malvinas escraches that generalized into the major gaff of the 1970s, so the same the shame of the 1998 World Cup, held in Argentina beneath the spotlights of the media, even while torture and assassination continued off camera. The mock soccer match reached its conclusion when a member of H.I.J.O.S. kicked a penalty ball full of red paint into the former dictator’s house, triggering the climax of the public denunciation. Video recordings show the paint splattering onto the hats of police lined up in rows around the building. At other escraches, like the one against Dr. Raúl Sánchez Ruíz, the Etcétera performance served as a lure, a decoy, distracting the attention of the police at a critical moment. It’s impressive to realize that interventions like this unfolded in Argentina at the exact time when groups such as Reclam the Streets were inventing the carnivalesque denouncements of the anti-globalization movement. In this case, the political carnival would culminate in a national insurrection.

After the revolt of December 20 and 21, 2001, the streets of Buenos Aires and all of Argentina became an open theater of action, even as the carnivalesque generalized into the major gaff of political demonstration. Etcétera fulfilled some of their wildest dreams at this time, including Otro realidad es posible (Another Reality Is Possible), in which they dressed up as a kind of medieval trooper of knives and forks with tin-pot helmets and silvery shields, comically attacking transnational corporations like McDonalds, YPF and Shell with the oversized tableware they had made in an occupied aluminum factory. The riot-performance recalled the hunger stalking the provinces; but it also represented a fusion between the pot-banging middle-classes and the militant piqüeretos armed with wooden sticks and shields. Their most outlawish event was the Mierdafox, in February 2002, when they invited people to hurl bags of shit and rotting vegetables at the Congress building and to “crap on the system” during the vote of the 2002 national budget. The action had been approved by due process in the inter-barrio assembly and was destined to a huge popular success, leading to a similar assault on transnational banks like HSBC. Television news clips – often the only trace of Etcétera performances, since the group was more concerned with acting than recording – portray the protest scenario on the congressional steps beneath the caption, “Algo Huéle Mal (something really stinks).” “Is this your form of protest?” asked the man with the TV camera. “Yes, because they treat us like shit,” replied an anonymous woman who spoke the blatant truth for everyone.

Those days of the truth are gone, however, “cleaned up” by the return of the politicians and the police; and now we have all become “phony people,” wandering around the world, connected by wires and whispers, watching, wondering, waiting for the next lucky chance. Maybe Etcétera realised this around the time when they photocopied me like shit, replied an anonymous woman who spoke the blatant truth for everyone.

If you see something, say something.

Play your parts, backwards or forwards, right-side up or up-side down, or leave them behind if you choose. And just imagine what might happen, if the Erristor International washed up by mistake on a beach in Australia.

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Brian Holmes is an activist writer, for more information go to: www.u-tangent.org.
In November 2005, security at the fourth Summit of the Americas transformed a 250-block section of the central coast of Mar del Plata into a hermetic enclave. In this resort town, a place where the vacation fantasies of a majority of Argentines are exercised, local residents could only enter their homes after showing police-issued ID cards.

The morning before the close of the Summit, a governmental march was planning to break through one of the few access routes to the military and police command, that is, the middle of town, where the heads of state were holding their discussions. The conclusion was swift: police deployed a mysteriously moderate repression, some of the demonstrators destroyed stores, there was an arbitrary round-up, dozens of individuals ended up in police stations, and everything was edited and reproduced by the communications media in living colour on the news.

Mar del Plata, cordoned off under the pretext of a global terrorist threat while being shaken by these street mobilisations, gave birth to a new political movement, adept to these anarchisms and promoting a revolution through affect: The International Errorist (IE). Arising from the Etcetera… Errorism arose, in a way, as a continuation of a new political movement, imposed to these street mobilisations, gave birth to a new political movement, adept to these anarchisms and promoting a revolution through affect: The International Errorist (IE). Arising from the Etcetera… Errorism was formed by extension and, in a certain sense, by overcoming the ideas and practices of the bond People, and by organising itself in reticulor cooperation with groups acting beyond the almost transparent Argentine border. The following are some fragments of a conversation in Buenos Aires between Santiago García Navarro and members of Etcetera...

PEDEKIO: Errorism was born because we couldn’t speak about terrorism. When we began to research how the terrorists trained and acted, one of our colleagues, an Argentine called Hotmail, entitled ‘How a suicide (of who knows where) prepares’. However, Hotmail blocked it and we became paranoid. We became aware that strong censorship exists on the subject, because either it appears that you are supporting terrorist methods, or you are denying the entire Muslim society. One day, when a colleague of ours was writing something on the computer, the first word that appeared was “errorism”. This colleague had wanted to write “terrorism”. The spell-check said: “terrorism” doesn’t exist, did you mean “eroticism” or “terrorism”? That’s where the name came from. On one hand, it is an opposition to and denunciation of the stereotype of the terrorist. On the other hand, we had found the right word, one that has its own philosophical discussion on the subject of error.

SANTIAGO GARCÍA NAVARRO: Errorism would be a way of disarming that opposition...

ZUKERFELD: I’m not so sure. Errorism breaks down barriers because it has humour and facilitates debate that would be very difficult to engender otherwise.

GARIN: Errorism emerged, in large part, with this idea of error, which appeared as a totally random objective. This was a time when the English police killed a Brazilian in the subway and said that it was in error, when the CIA had taken a German citizen to a concentration camp and said that it was in error. Then the word “error” began to be used within the discourse on error. When we began to write the Errorist Manifesto, we saw that, on one hand, it opened up the possibility of discussing something that is very difficult to discuss because it is completely blocked, but on the other hand, it makes it relative to such a level that the debate becomes very complex.

ZUKERFELD: The argument for the discussion is that upon reproducing that image you would be collaborating with the system that oppresses the women, and to include the weapons would be endorsing their use. The symbol for the weapon is so strong that the people see it as a real weapon. That’s why we use the “bang”, which is an essential comical element. We integrate the theatrical action with a comedy aesthetic, by the positions of the actors, by the characters, by the makeup, etc. Onomatopoeia serves that purpose. The first declaration we made was: “We are not actors, we are a play on words with ‘we are all terrorists.’”

GARIN: Terrorism has become a form of control of such magnitude that now it isn’t even aimed at those who form part of a given ideology, social class or culture. And the most complex part is that it begins to generate an everyday logic.

NAVARRO: And which type of social configuration believes that it is being defended from a terrorist attack?

GARIN: At the time of the ‘96 coup in Argentina, what they installed was state terrorism, which created a situation of permanent paranoia such that you could denounced your neighbour with the excuse that there were guerrillas who wanted to introduce Communism. Then the concept of “State terrorism” was accepted.

However, when the dictatorship made its defense, it said that it had committed errors and excesses, the same kind of speech given by Bush and his colleagues. Now the next target is Iran, and perhaps the next after that will be Venezuela or wherever. But I believe that this is approaching Latin America.

NAVARRO: In Mar del Plata, I perceived that the people were afraid, above all, of the enormous security apparatus, much more than of the high ideals, the terror threats.

The fear was that, at any given moment, the security apparatus would become the object of discussion, that it would produce chaos right there, which to a certain extent produced the afternoon demonstrations. The strongest image is that of dozens and dozens of federal police in ranks, in the first of three cordons that defended the hotel where Bush was staying, and in front of them, the spectacle of a completely deserted avenue, without one person visible, without one parked car. And so you ask yourself: Which one is the enemy? It became very clear that the enemy was, to a great extent, a fiction created in order to facilitate control and to keep common people away from the “affairs of state”.

ZUKERFELD: We went to the morning march, and in the middle of the show we acted in disguise for the cameras. We are artists, so for us it worked out well. We walked towards the part with Chavez, it all got heavy. We didn’t want to feel like a book being led. We had a police officer performing a kind of pantomime and prepared a for the afternoon march, and that let to an internal group discussion with the 25 Errorists that were there. I took the position that we shouldn’t go, as different sources had told us that everything would turn sour that afternoon, and that we thought that we could fall at the final hour. We discussed this for three hours and decided that we had a responsibility as an organisation. In the end we went, but without the “weapons”. Only with secret, which worked. And handkerchiefs. However, our participation only lasted five minutes, because, as soon as we arrived at the march, the tear gas began and everyone ran.

The next day, four hours before the Summit was due to close, we went to the beach and spent the time filming a scene for the film Operation Bang. Two minutes later, from all sides, sirens were heard. All sides, sirens could be heard. They began to close the beach and a lot of armed police arrived with dogs: ‘Freeze, freeze, freeze, freeze, freeze.’ And we had to say: “It’s an error. The guns are made of cardboard.” And we said: “We’re actors, we’re shooting a movie”, and we showed them a municipal poster which worked. A police officer said: “Who’s in charge?” And one of our colleagues, el Mota, spectator and the two of them went off to negotiate.

They ended up having this big discussion, and then people showed up with cameras, and then our colleague, like an Evangelist, began to ask the people who were there, one by one: “And you, have you never committed an error?” And the answer was: “Yes, error, yes, error, error, honey”, and so on; each of them began to have a cathartic moment. Later, the police arrived to clear the beach saying: “It’s okay. You can carry on now.” And that’s how it ended.

The big error consisted, in this case, of aiming our guns at Bush in error; they came to stop us in error, and also in error, they let us go, because the letter was a fake. And there we said: “This is the heart of the piece, this is the key”. And there also our theory of the spect-actor and the actor-cide was born.
Dressed for success: APEC and free trade.

“‘I’m gonna get dressed for success, shaping me up for the big time, baby.’

Roxette 1989

By 1995, when APEC was held in Osaka and the leaders wore business suits, lauding free trade had become a well-worn theme and one which was embraced with enthusiasm as the Asian region enjoyed rapid economic growth. “The Asia-Pacific is experiencing the most striking economic growth in the world,” the Osaka Leader’s Declaration noted.

“We believe our economic reforms based on market-oriented mechanisms have unleashed our people’s creativity and energy, both enhanced the prosperity and living standards of our citizens in the region and the world as a whole.”

But by 1999, those worst hit by the Asian crisis were entering safer waters and the Asia-Pacific region would lead the way in taking concrete steps to produce the strongest possible outcome for regional trading arrangements, bilateral FTAs have mushroomed.

The organisation’s Early Voluntary Sectoral Liberalisation scheme as well as it’s non-Member Principle, have both improved unmitigated failures in terms of liberalisation, Ravenhill writes.

APEC’s role in the Uruguay Round of talks, which continue to this day.

The revival of this round remains at the centre of APEC’s free trade agenda, with last year’s Hanoi meeting launching an official study on the issue in November last year.

Despite concerns about the political viability of such an agreement, the APEC Leaders Meeting in Hanoi launched an official investigation into the long-term possibility of a regional FTA, noting it was time “for APEC to seriously consider more effective avenues toward trade and investment liberalisation in the Asia-Pacific region.”

The investigation is due to report on its findings to the APEC leaders meet in Sydney on September 8-9.

APEC’s current attempt to breathe life into the global free trade agenda is a familiar role for the organisation.

The first Economic Leaders meeting, which is now famous for its convention of donning representatives in attire associated with the host nation, was called by Bill Clinton and held on Blake Island, Washington in 1993 in an attempt to help bolster the đeraled Uruguay round of General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) talks. The leaders donned bombardier jackets for this important task.

“We pledge our utmost efforts to bring the Uruguay Round to a successful conclusion by December 15. We are determined that the Asia Pacific region will lead the way in taking concrete steps to produce the strongest possible outcome for regional trading arrangements.”

1993 declared.

By 1994 the Uruguay round was completed, resulting in an agreement to form the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The same year APEC’s leaders, clothed in Batik shirts from Indonesia adopted the “Bogor Goals”, declaring their aim of reducing tariffs in the region to between zero and five per cent by 2020 for industrialized economies and 2020 for developing nations.

The Bogor meet congratulated itself on APEC’s role in rivalising the Uruguay round of talks.

“We are pleased to note the significant contribution APEC made in bringing about a successful conclusion of the Uruguay Round. We agree to carry out our Uruguay Round commitments fully and without delay and call on all participants in the Uruguay Round to do the same,” the multilateral organisation’s 1993 leaders statement crowed.

“APEC will for the successful launching of the World Trade Organization. Full and active participation in and support of the WTO by all APEC economies is key to our ability to on all participants in the Uruguay Round to do the same,” the multilateral organisation’s 1994 leaders statement crowed.

“We call for the successful launching of the World Trade Organization. Full and active participation in and support of the WTO by all APEC economies is key to our ability to on all participants in the Uruguay Round to do the same.”

Dressed for success: APEC and free trade.

Agenda as APEC’s ‘top priority’. The faltering Doha round has also revived discussions on the feasibility of an Asia Pacific Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the newly formed Economic Cooperation Council and the APEC Business Advisory Council releasing a joint study on the issue in November last year.

Participation in and support of the WTO by all APEC economies is key to our ability to on all participants in the Uruguay Round to do the same.”

Dressed for success: APEC and free trade.

For the US APEC offers an opportunity for it to play a leading role in the Pacific region, and to assert a free trade agenda within the WTO. APEC’s existence also discourages the formation of pan-Asian economic blocs which could exclude Western nations, thus providing the US with a valuable opportunity to build a free trade consensus worldwide.

The Asia Pacific is now a more important trading partner to the US than Western Europe, and is regarded by it as a regional bulwark against EU advances and as a lever to strengthen Washington’s economic agenda within the WTO, according to John Gershman from leftwing US think tank Foreign Policy In Focus.

The way APEC attempts to influence the outcomes of WTO talks can clearly be seen in the 2001 Economic Leaders Statement and the US-sponsored Shanghai Accord which were issued just before an important WTO meeting.

“In November, a major decision will be taken at the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference. Its outcome will have long-term implications for our future,” the Leaders Statement said.

“Our choice is unmistakably for a stronger Multilateral Trading System with greater opportunities for all. We strongly support the launch of the WTO new round of the conference, recognizing that the current slowdown in the world economy has added to its urgency. We agree that, once launched, the new round should be concluded expeditiously.”

Meanwhile, the Shanghai Accord attempted to more explicitly set out how APEC nation’s would achieve the Bogor Goals as well as strengthening the organisation’s Individual Action Plan Peer Review to encourage stricter compliance with APEC’s Bogor roadmap.

At the November WTO Conference the Doha round of talks, which continue to this day were launched.

The revival of this round remains at the centre of APEC’s free trade agenda, with last year’s Hanoi meeting warning that “the failure of the Doha Round would be too grave for our economies and for the global multilateral trading system” and adding that APEC nations would “spare no efforts to build the current deadlocks and achieve an ambitious and overall balanced outcome of the round with the development dimension being at its core.”

As the Doha talks continue to languish, expect more the same sort of rhetoric to emerge from Sydney’s Drizabone clad (just a guess) Economic Leaders, as they shape up for the big time of the WTO.

Kate Carr is a Sydney based writer and artist.
Selected Highlights

MULTITUDE VERSUS EMPIRE

1994 and beyond

Indigenous Movements

World Bank/IMF Annual Meetings

People's Power

Social Centres

Riots

WTO Ministerial Meetings

The Future Belongs to the Many

SYDNEY
SEPTEMBER
2007

People's Power

Riots

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THE MANY

the centre cannot hold...
Climate change was the best thing that ever happened to proponents of the nuclear industry. What better way to back environmentalists into a corner than with their own arguments? Over the past two years, the Howard Government’s rapid turn around from climate change skeptic to true believer has been remarkable to say the least.

It all began in August 2005, when Minister for Education, Science and Training Brendan Nelson announced that it was time to talk nukes.

Earlier that year the New Statesman magazine had revealed a well-orchestrated public relations push by the British nuclear power industry to make nuclear power the “clean and green” answer to climate change. The campaign resulted in a flood of positive media coverage.

It wasn’t long before Australian politicians were chanting the “clean and green” mantra too.

Nelson’s call for a “debate” on all things nuclear came as a surprise to many in the environmental and trade union movements, who had been actively participating in that very debate since the 1970s – on the winning side. Most Australians have never supported a domestic nuclear energy industry, and many rightfully asked: what more is there to debate?

But the Australian media dutifully took up the baton, as politicians from both major political parties echoed Nelson’s call.

For a few months it was unclear what the debate would consist of – aside from calls for one. There was a lot of posturing about our “responsibility” as one of the most uranium-rich countries to play a lead role in curbing human-induced climate change (from a Government that didn’t believe it existed 12 months before) by supplying the world with yellowcake; there were stacked frameworks and committees set up; and legislation prematurely pushed through parliament. None of which constitute what anyone could consider debate.

The major development in 2005 was the introduction of the Commonwealth Radioactive Waste Management Bill, which strips the powers of the Northern Territory Government, and of Aboriginal Land Councils, to oppose the establishment of a nuclear dump on their jurisdictions. The Bill gives the responsible Federal Minister the power to declare a suitable site and also outstanding all interests – such as Native Title – that the Commonwealth does not already hold on the site.

Despite all of this, it was still unclear what exactly we were debating: domestic nuclear energy production; increased uranium export; or becoming the world’s dumping ground for spent fuel. There was very little detail, in media coverage or from the government. It wasn’t until mid last year that Howard embraced the parish, using a press conference in Washington during a visit to the US President to announce to Australians that an Australian nuclear energy industry was on the table. “I want a full-blooded debate in Australia about this issue,” he told journalists.

There it was again: the D word. This time the “debate” involved the establishment of the Australian Processing and Nuclear Energy Review Taskforce, headed by former Telstra boss Ziggy Switkowski.

In all the debate about debates, one thing seems to have been largely overlooked: a domestic nuclear power industry is actually an anachronism in an Australia where Nuclear reactor cores are not legal under current Federal law and when the Switkowski report was delivered in December last year, John Howard said that going nuclear now makes no sense when it is still significantly cheaper to use coal.

In fact the debate has been staged in order to bring Australian public opinion on side so that the Federal Government can push ahead with increased uranium exports and a nuclear waste dump in Central Australia – most likely to take waste from other countries.

The Chairman of the Federal Government’s Uranium Industry Framework, Dr John White, has candidly admitted that “if we agree [to take waste] for America, we will never again have any say in the future”. That was a rebuff to all those who had thought that once the question of our loyalty once and for all.

And the Switkowski report estimates that Australia could double its earnings from exporting uranium to more than $1 billion a year by the end of the decade. Production in the rest of the world.

In July 1975 a commission was established by the Whitlam Labor government to inquire into environmental aspects of a mining proposal in the Northern Territory. It also needs to be remembered that the known high-grade uranium ores [in the world] could supply the existing nuclear power stations. If everyone went nuclear tomorrow, known stocks would last for approximately five years.

“People are desperate to believe there’s a technical fix to climate change,” says Lowe, “that there’s some bit of wizardry that will turn carbon dioxide into the clean energy does not produce greenhouse gases is false. He says that while the stage of energy production may not, other stages in the fuel cycle do: “Significant amounts of fossil fuel energy are used to mine and process uranium ores, enrich the fuel and build nuclear power stations.” It also needs to be remembered that Australia’s nuclear industry is actually a significant factor in the world’s nuclear fuel cycle.

What is now known as the “Fox report”, after the commission’s chairman Mr Justice Fox, is widely recognised as one of Australia’s most important environmental impact reports. The Inquiry’s reports were presented in October 1976 and May 1977, to the Fraser Government.

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The Fox inquiry was formally an inquiry into the proposal for the Ranger uranium mine, but it effectively became a broader inquiry into Australia’s role in the nuclear fuel cycle. While some of the evidence presented was specifically about the problems of mining uranium in Kakadu National Park, a lot of the submissions, both in favour of and against Ranger, dealt with the broader issue of whether Australia should be involved in the nuclear fuel cycle at all.

The Fox report found that there were two serious problems with exporting uranium. The first was that uranium inevitably produces radioactive waste in nuclear reactors, and there was not – and still isn’t – a solution for storing the waste for the long periods for which it needs to be isolated from the biosphere. The second problem it identified was that if we export uranium we’re inadvertently aiding the development of nuclear weapons by increasing the amount of fissile material available.

It did not rule out uranium mining, but recommended that it be strictly regulated and controlled. Those still opposed to further uranium mining in Australia point out that the problems identified by the Fox report remain unresolved.

The current federal policy with regard to uranium exports which requires recipient countries to sign bilateral safeguards agreements and be signatories to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, is based on the findings of the Fox inquiry.

Federal Resource Minister, Ian MacFarlane, argues that the best way to ensure that uranium does not end up in nuclear weapons is for Australia to be a major supplier of it. According to the Minister’s logic, if Australia does not sell uranium to fast developing countries such as China, another country – with less stringent safeguards — will.

The reality is that if we don’t deal ourselves into this market, we not only miss out on the economic benefit, but we also miss out on the opportunity to set the rules,” MacFarlane told industry heads at the Australian Uranium Conference in 2005. “Australia has some of the most stringent safeguards for the export of uranium of any country in the world.”

But Professor Richard Bronowski, a retired diplomat and author of Fact or Fission? The truth about Australia’s nuclear ambitions, says there is no way of controlling what happens to Australian uranium once it leaves our shores. He says the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty is “dead in the water”.

“You have an Australian government that continues to say ‘we have faith that none of our uranium will enter weapons programmes’, but frankly, that’s just not credible. There are tens of thousand of tonnes of Australian uranium around the world in different countries in different forms in different reactors.”

“Once you take [uranium] away from Australia and start putting it into a very complex industry, you simply can’t keep tabs on it.”

“The Japanese have quite a considerable amount of plutonium. A lot of that would be Australian originating uranium. That’s weapons grade; it’s there, they have it. If the Japanese decided to go nuclear — and they could do so tomorrow — then they would be Australian originating uranium.”

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