

G O N F L A B L E S E T A M U S E - B O U C H E S :
O n t h e m a t e r i a l i t y o f q u e s t i o n i n g

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Amuse-bouches are served for free before the central meal, by the chef's order and not by request. You do not ask for amuse-bouches, they just appear in front of you like a strange little gift. Amuse-bouches preface and prepare your palette for the food ahead. They are a small, aesthetic gesture that is meant to offer an overall sense of the chef's approach to cooking.

In her introduction to this publication, Keg de Souza refers to the inflatable structure she built as the center-piece at the table-setting of the project, *Gonflables et amuse-bouches*. In turn, I would suggest that it is something seemingly immaterial—a series of questions underlying the project and every meal—that serves the purpose of amuse-bouches in the project's food-related events. These questions, printed at the beginning of the publication itself, have consistently provided an entryway into and, I would argue, an exit point from Keg's artistic process.

It seems appropriate (if a bit of a tongue-twister) to start writing about the materiality of questioning with a question: how can the immaterial act of questioning be considered a material-based process?

B U I L D I N G S / B O D I E S

Though I never set out to write about inflatable architecture, it seems like I cannot escape it: it attracts me like static electricity.¹ Throughout the past few months, I was able to watch as *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* functioned and thrived in anticipation of an inflatable structure. During the events, the stages of planning and all the meals, our ideas developed as the inflatable came into being. Sheets of thin plastic tablecloth piled up throughout Keg's studio, rotating between tables, hanging over chairs and couches, steadily growing in size, taking shape as the pieces were sewn together. I couldn't wait to actually sit inside of the structure but also couldn't picture what that would be like. I couldn't fully imagine how it would all come together, much like I wasn't sure how all of our ideas, the very large themes of the project, would cohere in the end.

There is something elusive about inflatable work, about the ways that it shifts in form, circulation and site, which gives it an air of mystery, fascination and tense ambiguity. Inflatable design occupies a unique (and ever growing) place in the history of visionary, political and "outsider" architecture, while also maintaining a relationship with realms such as the military and emergency shelter. Some of the most common connections that are made to pneumatics include, as Ana Rewakowicz points out, "inflatable furniture, gigantic parade floats and sex toys—objects of ultimate consumerism that have little to do with improving social conditions."² Inflatables have been put to work in colonization, war, protest, parties, spectacle, play, and everywhere in between; they have been

¹ Sections of this text are taken from my previous work on inflatables, "Becoming Monuments and Embodying Utopias: The Processes of Inflatable Architecture in the Work of Michael Rakowitz and Ana Rewakowicz" (MA thesis, Concordia University, Montreal, 2010).

² Ana Rewakowicz, quoted in Craig Buckley, "Between Object and Process: An Interview with Ana Rewakowicz," in *Dressware and Other Inflatables*, ed. Gaëtane Verna (Sherbrooke: Foreman Art Gallery of Bishop's University, 2007), 74.

ideologically, technically and formally fluid. While pneumatic technologies continue to advance rapidly in the worlds of both sustainable and corporate architecture, they still preserve a down-to-earth accessibility, a sense of the "well, I could do that" which so characterized their value in the 1960s and 1970s.³

In any case, it is difficult to imagine the inflatable without the body. A series of images comes to mind that speaks to the intimate relationship between bodies and pneumatic forms: bodies kept afloat; shoeless bodies bouncing unpredictably, laughing; bodies cradled in the basket of a hot air balloon, watching as the landscape slips away; inflatables shaped grotesquely like female bodies; tall, featureless balloon-bodies waving in the wind off the highway, advertising for sales at car dealerships; furniture filled with air, designed around the contours and comfort of bodies; bodies filling the streets and plowing forward, costumed, mingling with pneumatic parades and protests; bodies made mobile by inflated tires; balloons tied by a string, held tightly in someone's hand; guests of *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* picnicking in the inflatable, their hair charged and pulled towards the structure itself.

Inflatable forms are acutely, if somewhat unpredictably, responsive to the movements and pressure of bodies. They lean with and wrap around bodies, they draw us near, bounce us back or enfold us in their surfaces. The inflatable in Keg's studio was an art object, an architecture on its own, when it was first inflated. It was slightly static, it filled with air and slowly took up space. I watched it grow, knowing that it was a fan that filled the shape with air, but feeling like it was magic. As soon as it filled with people, as soon as it was occupied with bodies, the inflatable started shifting, moving, breathing. It became something more alive than a static object or structure. Every time someone entered the inflatable or moved over to make space for new guests, the entire structure responded in waves.

The foundation of *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* lies in the potential of the inflatable, as a form of architecture that has a uniquely responsive relationship to bodies, to serve as an affective tool for rethinking the more wide-ranging and fundamental relationships between bodies and buildings. While a good deal of mainstream architectural discourse is devoted to the question of the body, much of this writing discusses the body/building dynamic through either a causal or representational model. As Elizabeth Grosz explains in her essay "Bodies-Cities," both frameworks are problematic. The first approach (causal) posits a one-way relationship in which buildings/cities are the external product or effect of bodies. The second (representational) model suggests that bodies and buildings/cities are parallel entities that reflect or mirror one another.⁴

³ In the 1960s and 1970s, counter-cultural architects and drop-outs produced an array of small press publications and DIY 'zines related to pneumatic design, such as Ant Farm's manual for creating large scale inflatables *Inflatocookbook* (1971) as well as texts in *The Whole Earth Catalogue* published by Stewart Brand between 1968-1972. See also: Beatriz Colomina, Craig Buckley and Urtzi Grau, eds., *Clip, Stamp, Fold: The Radical Architecture of Little Magazines 196x to 197x* (Barcelona: Actar, 2010). In a contemporary context, the accessible nature of inflatables can be illustrated through a simple online search for "inflatable DIY," which pulls up a considerable number of discussions on how to undertake pneumatic design. While I'll assert that inflatables are marked by a legible accessibility, this is not intended to detract from the design, ingenuity, problem-solving and artistry involved. The few times I've tried to build my own inflatables have been overwhelming failures, and I'm constantly blown away by the seeming simplicity and tangible success of Keg's designs.

⁴ Grosz elaborates on the political function of the representational model of bodies-cities by way of historical conceptions of the "body politic," which "serves to provide a justification for various forms of 'ideal' government and social organization through a process of 'naturalization.'" Elizabeth

Grosz calls for a different model of relations that is based on the productive agency of both bodies and building, impacting one another through their interrelations:

What I am suggesting is a model of the relations between bodies and cities that sees them, not as megalithic total entities, but as assemblages or collections of parts, capable of crossing the thresholds between substances to form linkages, machines, provisional and often temporary sub- or micro-groupings... Their interrelations involve a fundamentally disunified series of systems, a series of disparate flows, energies, events, or entities, bringing together or drawing apart their more or less temporary alignments.⁵

Keg's project proposes that inflatable architecture can provide a temporary and nomadic place from which to experiment (in thought, design and action) with this alternative model of bodies/buildings. The inflatable itself hosts disparate but connected events, bringing an array people together in one moment and rushing them away as it deflates. Built around the inflatable itself and the conversation it hosts or stimulates, *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* is an assemblage, a collection, a series of intertwining but disconnected dialogues, a map and a model of potential relations.

In their intimate and often codependent relationship with bodies, pneumatics are capable of providing situations in which buildings do not merely represent bodies or serve as their staid containers or shells, the instrumental product of and for bodies. The inflatable provides something in excess of these conceptual frameworks: a mutually affective dynamic that creates the possibility for change between both sides of the body/building binary. The inflatable has provided a momentary place to instigate questions, to speak from, to be influenced by the space and, in turn, to influence the structure's consideration, reception and future use. The first two events took place in expectation of the inflatable's construction, before it was completed, and situated the imminent architecture as necessarily intertwined with bodies, food, and a series of questions.

The first event, *Food*, became a study in the relationship of bodies to food spaces, starting with the screening of Robert Frank's 1972 documentary about Carol Goodden and Gordon Matta-Clark's restaurant FOOD, founded in 1971 in SoHo. As guests arrived, we found our seating cards, written on the same checkered paper as the cover of this publication and as the placemats around the table, and chose a seat for later. All the guests gathered in the living space, casting looks back at the candlelit table setting, and sat down with our bowls of borscht in Keg's open plan studio, ambiguously delegated between the kitchen and the work space with the first traces of the inflatable in sight.

The film served a few purposes as an introduction to the evening, such as putting forward the possibility that the dinner was "art," suggesting immediate connections between our dinner and the role of art in the cooking and sharing of food. This was particularly striking as we ate the same meals the artists were cooking and serving in that restaurant in 1972. The film also allowed for more casual conversation to start before the formal sit-down meal, on couches instead of at the table. There are many chances to talk during and over FOOD: through the slow shots of the fish market, with voices mingled and strangers stepping up

Grosz, *Space, Time, and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 105-6.

⁵ Ibid, 108.

to the camera to tell their story; through the quiet, lengthy shot of the restaurant's empty kitchen, slowly opening up into the dining space; and through the noisy, smoky shots of the restaurant later that day during serving time, with people sitting on each other's laps, eating and talking over each other. FOOD also brought to mind late-1960s and early '70s approaches to architecture, specifically Matta-Clark and Goodden's participation in the Anarchitecture group, without directly referencing them. Anarchitecture was there, somehow, in FOOD: instead of cuts and voids carved out of pre-existing buildings, the empty open plan of FOOD was consistently filled with people, and spoke to the reciprocal interactions between bodies, food and space.

Our borscht bowls were swapped for gumbo as we sat down at the table, and the conversation became more formal. We had our introductions, and started the dialogue with a question written on our host's placemat: what are the politics of food art? What I found particularly amazing about our dinner discussion was the ability to keep it open amongst sixteen people. There were some assorted pre-existing connections between the guests, but many of them were strangers. The space created across through the table was shared: we shared food, stories, critiques, experiences, occasional disagreements, and a space for speaking. After any lag in the conversation, at any point when we started talking over each other, we came back to the dialogue time and again by asking a new question, found under our bowls in front of us.

The second event, *Feeding the Hand that Feeds You*, brought together members of two radical kitchen collectives in Montreal, the People's Potato and the Midnight Kitchen. Both groups serve daily free or by-donation vegan meals at universities in Montreal, and cater for events that align with their anti-oppression mandates. The event is a material acknowledgement of both groups' work and their strong relationships to food, politics, community-building and radical organizing, an offering of food and a social space in order to recognize and show appreciation for the guests' continuous efforts.

Instead of asking either kitchen to provide food, Keg cooked and hosted a series of food games that would casually (and often ridiculously) pair collective against collective. The focus on food games, such as bobbing for apples, a spoon race, and "yummy or not," provided a parody of corporate team building events and activities. But, as the invitation to the event indicated, the games were truly intended to reveal some of the dynamics within and between the two groups, though not necessarily in straight forward ways.⁶ For instance, several guests immediately took issue with being split up into two collective teams, and many insisted on mixing collectives. At times, guests were competitive, reserved, determined, apathetic, silly, aggressive, social, invested. Some stepped up when no one else wanted to play the game, others took charge to get games started, to organize, to form groups into a circle or a line, to get everyone's attention and read the games' instructions out loud. In certain cases, the games intensified, exaggerated or reversed collective roles, but in an almost absurd context that allowed for a certain distance from whatever dynamics developed.

This distance from the performance of collective dynamics was created by two central elements: the physicality of the food games and the type of space that

⁶ I'm also writing as a member of the Midnight Kitchen collective, which may bias my reading a bit. I personally found the party a chance to comfortably step back from the repetitive, day-to-day interactions between collective members, and to talk with folks from the People's Potato in a laid-back (if strange) setting.

they created and took place in. The games themselves requires a series of bizarre physical movements and actions that are not of the everyday: sticking your face in a bowl of water to acquire an apple with only your teeth; using only a straw to move food from one bowl to another; unwrapping and eating candy while wearing rubber gloves, as quickly as you can; trying to eat a donut that dangles from a fishing rod⁷; touching and smelling food blindfolded to guess its identity. The mode of embodiment required for these games pushed guests out of the everyday, emphasizing the role of collective members as *guests*, hosted in a space outside of the environment that they are familiar with and in which they are familiar with each other.

Keg offered a space that allowed for an acknowledgement of the collectives' everyday labor by offering a relaxation and distance from the daily roles that they play in the kitchen. Guests were not required to cook, coordinate volunteers or clean up, to organize servings, bulk orders or finances, but in many ways similar actions were played out. The questions put forward by this evening were different than in other events, though related, and were not asked outright but permeated its invitation, premise and structure: what does it mean for radical food collectives to be dinner guests, hosted by an artist? What can stepping outside of the everyday, and even going so far as to participate in an art project, offer collectives involved in radical organizing?

After considering these types of spaces, of shared meals, dinner discussions and the spaces of collectivity and play, I'm drawn again inside the inflatable and again to new questions: what does it mean to share a meal and a discussion inside the inflatable? How has the structure impacted our interactions with each other and with a process of questioning?

F O R M / F O O D

From their exteriors, inflatables are slightly bizarre to behold and a little difficult to comprehend. When I first saw the inflatable for *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* fill with air, I was stunned. What type of space is this, that can jump into being in a matter of minutes, after being folded and flat against the ground? The cheap, plastic picnic material became beautiful, layered and vibrant, if strange. But this view from the outside pales in comparison to being inside the inflatable. Once you step in, you find yourself in a different sort of space entirely. The walls flex and sigh, the lighting diffuses, filters and shifts through them. You want to touch the walls, in part because it doesn't seem like architecture in the expected sense. It creates an environment, a distinct place, and this distinction is something that you sense immediately. The inflatable takes you out of the realm of the everyday, and it pushes you to see your surroundings differently, to consider your movement through space in a new light.

Pneumatic design has become a part of the collective imaginary through numerous paths, and is intricately tied to the visionary architectural work of the 1960s and the politics of that time. Through design groups such as Archigram, Utopie, Jersey Devil, Ant Farm and Haus-Rucker-Co, the decade became marked by a fantasy of other architectural forms that were either new or newly considered in terms of the potential they offered for flexible, adaptive ways of living outside of institutional control and monotony. Outside of architecture as it was previously known. Inflatables, along with a number of other forms that

⁷ This game, "fishing for donuts," is a reference to Montreal protestors that dangled donuts on fishing rods in front of riot police at the 2012 May Day anti-capitalist march.

offered cheap and easy to do-it-yourself design solutions, became imbued with political fantasy and desire in a time of immense upheaval. In many ways it was thought that these forms, inflatables included, could change the way we lived and related to society.

Pneumatic technologies have always been intimately linked with utopian dreaming, but have also circulated broadly across geopolitical, disciplinary and ideological borders in ways that allow the form of inflatables to offer up a variety of political goals.⁸ In *Architecture or Techno-Utopia*, Felicity Scott argues that the 1960s and '70s forms of experimental architecture inevitably withdrew from the more radical politics that initiated their use because they became so powerfully iconic, misplacing their potential as an "outside" alternative to both architectural and social mainstreams. Iconic architectural forms such as the dome and the inflatable were emptied of their political content, deflated in part because of the common misconception that form can embody ideology, though evidence to the contrary could be found in their flexible use and nomadic application from the start.

DIY publications and 'zines of the late 1960s and early '70s, such as Ant Farm's manual for creating large scale inflatables, called *Inflatocookbook* (1971), illustrate an increasing focus on form, function and technology, and a move away from politics. Social groups that incorporated experimental architecture into their everyday lives, like the self-proclaimed drop-outs, became weighed down by the technical problems involved in inhabiting alternative architecture, issues which took precedent over the potential for political content or action. For the writers of *The Last Whole Earth Catalog* in 1971, the flawed form of inflatables, their impracticality, seems to have overpowered their political and utopian appeal: "Inflatable are trippy, cheap, light, imaginative space, not architecture at all. They're terrible to work in. Environmentally, what an inflatable is best at is protecting you from a gentle rain."⁹

Felicity Scott discusses the ways in which the reception of and writing on alternative architectural forms became disconnected from their broader socioeconomic contexts. Iconic models such as inflatables became framed as "autonomous object[s] of design that no longer functioned as protest against the capitalist system." Scott references Buckminster Fuller's "revolution by design," pointing to the ways in which it promoted the idea of an inherent connection between spatial and social transformation that did not require "ongoing political or aesthetic struggle."¹⁰

Inflatable design has such great potential to be unexpected, surprising, even out-of-this-world, but also to fail in one way or another, both structurally and ideologically. At the very least, inflatables time and time again resist becoming practical, permanent solutions to architectural concerns. Despite this fact, or perhaps as its consequence, inflatables present a specifically temporary and somewhat fantastical platform from which to consider and work through political issues of spatiality, design and occupation. But any artist or architect working in the realm of alternative spatial design and theory has to keep the difference between form and politics in mind and at the core of their project.

⁸ Felicity Scott, *Architecture or Techno-Utopia: Politics after Modernism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2007), 157.

⁹ Marc Dessauce, ed., *The Inflatable Moment: Pneumatics and Protest in '68* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), 111-112; Scott, 167-171.

¹⁰ Scott, 170.

Architecture cannot do the work on its own, but it can and should facilitate further questioning.

The third event, *A Round (Picnic) Table*, was the first of two events to take place inside the inflatable. An invitation was sent out across gallery, university, activist, food and community-based networks to come picnic inside the inflatable and join in on the conversation at the core of the project, to help map out its themes and ideas. In looking at the meaning of a picnic and its connotations, we considered the historical implication that, for a picnic, everyone contributes something to the meal. While our host provided the food, everyone that came contributed to the content of the conversation and the ensuing thematic map. The space of the picnic took a much different form than a sit-down, formal dinner. People came and left, talked a bit or just ate some cake, played with their children, who ran through and around the inflatable. Before the picnic, we gathered all the questions that circulated throughout the project and wrote them on strips of the checkered paper, placed in a cup at the center of the inflatable. As we ate, guests were invited to choose questions and offer them aloud. As in the first event, this questioning guided the dialogue during the meal.

As we all talked, Keg moved around the inflatable, between and behind guests, stretching to draw dotted lines and writing upside down, asking questions, encouraging guests to ask others, mapping out the responses as well as the new questions that came up. The process is participatory, but was also underlined by the aesthetic, material and conversational control of the artist, which I think had several positive effects. Keg's multifaceted role as an artist, architect and facilitator relieved some of the pressure on guests to perform or talk on cue, and also, as a performance, highlighted the material/immaterial elements of the project and their interrelations. Finally, through her actions Keg embodied a particular model of the artistic and architectural process that was a part of the project from the beginning: acting, designing and thinking based on the input and experiences of her guests, the "users" of the architecture and the "viewers" of the art.

One of the most powerful elements of the picnic mapping was the way in which we were able to unpack the themes of the project, like items in a picnic basket. Perhaps because there was such an array of people coming in and out of the inflatable, who stayed for varying lengths of time, the focus frequently came to rest on the meaning of the key words, the core themes of food, architecture, art, radical space and radical organizing, but also a multitude of elements that tie them together: class, gender, sexuality, race, community, experience, memory, resources, communication, difference, intention, reciprocity, funding, power. Instead of using the questions to reference specific experiences, case-studies or examples, people took apart the questions themselves and looked at their separate elements in more depth, to get at the implications of the questions themselves.

For instance, close to the beginning of the picnic, we discussed the fact that "radical space" was an idea that needed a good deal of unpacking, and it became an ongoing part of the dialogue for the rest of the day. What does it mean for a space to be radical? Can both activist and art events create radical spaces? How does a space become political, safe, communal, or open? What closes off a space, and what makes it normative? Is there such a thing as an apolitical space? What do the politics of a space have to do with its architecture? What role does food play in sustaining a radical space? Can radical space be defined by behavior, movement, difference, or communication? As someone was

leaving the inflatable, they mentioned that they didn't know what "radical space" meant or what it could be, but that they thought the inflatable was definitely a part of it. By the end of the day, there was no concrete definition of a radical space, but a map of words and relationships drawn around the inflatable's occupants and the food they shared.

One idea that we unpacked through the picnic is that food does not, in itself, politicize a project, just as architecture cannot be inherently radical. There has to be work outside of the processes of food or architecture that makes a project or a space radical. The presence of food does not automatically designate a practice of community building, which requires more effort and engagement. Both food and architecture are tangible elements of everyday life that depend heavily on a series of intersecting differences, and on oppression. Both create spaces that require other work, more work, a situation of dialogue and exchange. *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* is not radical because inflatables, or any architectural form, are inherently political or utopian. The project is similarly not radical because it provides a series of meals to a multiplicity of people.

The inflatable is a delicate structure made of extremely thin material, and is not particularly durable. Because of its form and scale, guests must bend to enter, and are forced to sit in a circle, around the food and facing each other. The inflatable is created for portable picnics and is the perfect place for sharing a meal, having a dialogue and participating in a process of questioning, in part because it is not made to last. It's a stepping stone, a temporary forum or platform to host, stimulate and be impacted by dialogue and discussion: it pushed critical thinking, both for the artist and her guests. Like the form of inflatables themselves, the art object in this project is not intended to be "certain," closed off as buildings or structures with discrete boundaries, but "rather to incite, to induce, to proliferate."¹¹ The inflatable did not embody any particular ideology, but provided a responsive, imaginative and material context for the intangibility of conversation.

A R T / P O L I T I C S

*Art is where life most readily transforms itself... art is not the antithesis of politics, but politics continued by other means.*¹²

Whenever I think about inflatables, I come back to a description provided in a set of instructions on building pneumatic structures for political protests: "A space, empty of desire or creativity, is suddenly filled with these and more. The space is just as suddenly emptied, leaving a (more) conspicuous absence, a kind of newness, a sense of possibility."¹³ I appreciate how, in this imagining of the process of inflatable structures, it is not the object or "product" itself that is new or that creates a sense of possibility, but its absence. Like a protest, an inflatable is a fleeting moment, a proposition that remains after its presence is gone.

Throughout the events for *Gonflables et amuse-bouches*, we talked a good deal about the role of food in engaging with local communities, both through activism and art. A recurring sentiment was the importance of projects that plan

¹¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Architecture from the Outside: Essays on Virtual and Real Space* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 126.

¹² Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 76.

¹³ CrimethInc., *Recipes for Disaster: An Anarchist Cookbook* (Salem, OR: CrimethInc. Ex-Worker's Collective, 2006), 322.

to have lasting impact, that take root somehow. I understand the importance of a genuine and ongoing engagement with the local in both art and radical organizing, and have definitely considered it in new ways because of this project and the conversations it facilitated. But I also have come to love the idea of amuse-bouches, this small aesthetic gesture that encompasses something bigger and maybe begs the question, through the aesthetics of materiality, of what will or could be. I think it is equally important for an artist or activist to be aware and honest when their project is temporary, nomadic, and will not be something that physically takes root or has a lasting, material permanence. Not every project can or should be permanent, but there should be something that stays, a possibility or question that arises in the project's absence.

In certain ways, it was difficult to consider the events in this project as *art*. Or "Art." How do these events translate in the art world? Even with the overabundance of art historical lenses like "relational" or "participatory"—which offer up frameworks for this project such as conviviality, interactivity, the encounter, constructed situations, the performance of the everyday, democratic interactions, and social aesthetics—it's difficult to decipher these events as a whole, as challenging as it was to imagine how the inflatable would look when it was completed.¹⁴ We have a transcription of the discussion for the first event, photographs from the second, and a map of the conversation from the third, and this publication will be done by the fourth and final event. These events create a collage of elements that surrounded, influenced and were influenced by the inflatable, that helped to build it and took place inside of it: dinner parties, dialogues, food games, conversations, interconnecting themes, mapping, picnics, meeting new people, forging connections, considering collectivity, and, throughout all of it, the process of asking questions. There is no art object leftover other than the inflatable itself, which comes to stand in its absence for all of the intangible processes, the interrelations of bodies and building, form and food, that it created and is tied to.

I feel like the collage-like aesthetic of these events taken together pushes *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* a step outside of some of the falseness of similar relational or participatory work, in which "everyone finds the illusion of an interactive democracy in more or less truncated channels of communication."¹⁵ While many artworks involving food have looked at the host/guest or server/diner dynamics, or at reciprocity in one way or another, I understand the small, simple gestures of amuse-bouches as a process of aesthetic questioning to initiate a step away from an intense demand for a guest's performativity. By attending a food-based art event, guests did not face a built-in insistence on providing something or becoming a performative participant in return. Part of why these events were successful and enjoyable was that, at any meal, a guest could lean back, listen and just be there; we didn't have to ask questions and we didn't have to answer them; we could disregard the food games, refuse to fill out the feedback form, sit quietly at the table or inside the inflatable, and eat. We were allowed to be guests who were simply given a small aesthetic glimpse or taste of a broader process, and we could contribute to this in any way we saw fit.

¹⁴ That being said, Nicolas Bourriaud's reading of the behavioral economy of contemporary art is relevant to this project. He writes that artists now "create and stage life-structures that include working methods and ways of life, rather than the concrete objects that once defined the field of art...Form takes priority over things, and flows over categories: the production of gestures is more important than the production of material things." The difference that I am trying to point to is that the questions, "gestures" or "life-structures" created through this project are directly tied to the project's materiality, specifically the production of food and the inflatable structure. From *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 1998), trans. David Macey, 2006.

¹⁵ Ibid.

The upcoming event, *A Stone Soup*, recognizes the work, thought and ideas that have been provided by everyone that came to Keg's studio over the past two months; it acknowledges that, even without the project's insistence on an active participation of its guests, so much of the work has depended on it. The soup starts out with an absence, or a false and fleeting presence. The traveler, the artist, the architect, the cook: Keg starts with nothing other than an empty cooking pot, a stone, and an empty inflatable. Through the contribution of guests, locals, other artists, activists, neighbors, and writers, the soup will take a form in which we can all partake.

After this last event, *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* will be completed, the soup will be finished and the bowls cleared away, the inflatable will deflate and be packed up for Keg to bring home to Sydney. For as long as it lasts, hopefully the inflatable will find opportunities to circulate in a few different circles, in art, activism and in whatever spaces these realms find a way to intersect. But here, we'll find an empty space that the project momentarily occupied, without any physical remnants besides these texts. The materiality of the project fades and we can see the immaterial (but not unimportant) qualities it has produced, the possibility it has left with us. I think that people who participated in *Gonflables et amuse-bouches* will have walked away with a recollection of conversing, of sharing meals with strangers, of dialogue, disagreements, creating new meanings and new questions.

Perhaps it is not that art or activism need to always take root, but that these projects can create radical spaces through the process of *questioning* itself, a intangible process that is tied to an eventually absent material process. A process that starts from the material but lasts after the material is gone. A process of "grasping things at the root," grasping for the root but not necessarily reaching it.¹⁶

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¹⁶ As Angela Davis said, "radical simply means grasping things at the root." From her "Let Us All Rise Together" address (Spellman College, 25 June 1987).